

**THE ILLUSION OF PEACE:
THE FATE OF THE BALTIC DISPLACED PERSONS, 1945-1952**

A Thesis

by

VICTORIA MARITE HELGA EASTES

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2007

Major Subject: History

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Chair of Committee,	Arnold Krammer
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ABSTRACT

The Illusion of Peace:

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(December 2007)

Victoria Marite Helga Eastes, B.A., Bethel College

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Arnold P. Krammer

Following the end of World War II, the Allied forces faced an immediate large-scale refugee crisis in Europe. Efforts focused on returning the millions of refugees to their homes as quickly as possible. Though the majority did return home, nearly a million refugees from Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe refused to do so. Reclassified as Displaced Persons (DPs) and placed in holding camps by the Occupational Authorities, these refugees demanded that Allied leaders give them the chance to immigrate and resettle elsewhere.

Immigration historians of this period have focused mainly on the experiences of the Jewish refugees during the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. Other studies depict the chaos in Germany immediately following the war, describing the DPs as an unstable factor in an already unstable situation. While important, these works tend to overlook the fate of non-Jewish refugees who would not return to their homes. Additionally, these works overlook the many immigration and resettlement schemes put in place to solve the DP situation and stabilize Europe, focusing instead on economic forces and growing Cold War tensions.

This thesis looks at the experiences of the Baltic DPs, those from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Beginning with a brief history of the three countries and their

people's experiences during the war, this study also looks at their lives in the DP camps and explores their reasons for not returning home. It also recounts the Allies' decision to promote resettlement rather than repatriation as the solution to the refugee problem by focusing on the immigration programs of the four main recipient countries, Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia. This thesis argues that the majority of the Baltic DPs came from educated, middle class backgrounds and as such, they were widely sought after by the recipient countries as the most suitable for immigration. A final argument is that disagreements over their fate between the United States, England, and the Soviet Union, fueled the Cold War.

*To my family and friends for all their support.
Thanks.*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every home in Latvia once had a garden; it was what Latvia was famous for throughout the European world. Whether by a house in the city or on a farm in the countryside, flowers grew everywhere filling the air with their perfume and the eyes of passerby's with the brightness of their colors. This was at least true according to those Latvians forced to flee from their homes during World War II. Before the war, there were gardens everywhere. But the Soviets, the Germans, and the Allies destroyed the flowers. These are the memories of those forced to leave their gardens behind. When something loved is lost, the memory of it grows stronger.

Similar memories survive among the refugees from the other Baltic nations who, along with Latvia, lost what made them unique to the world. The Lithuanians, for example, remembered with fierce pride their historical independence from the cultural encroachment of foreign nations.¹ The Estonians remembered their music and artistic culture they felt were lost to the brutality of the war. For each of these countries, the independence of the interwar period spurred a flourishing culture and a sense of national pride. This pride would ultimately make the loss of their homelands following the Second World War that more devastating for survivors.

Following the First World War, the Baltic countries took advantage of the chaos of political and social upheaval across Europe and declared their independence as individual countries, separated from the control of their stronger neighbors (namely

This thesis follows the style and format of *The Journal of American History*.

¹ During the time of the Teutonic Knights, Lithuania was the last pagan nation in Europe to hold out against Christianity. For centuries after, they fought a continual battle against Polish encroachment into their physical and cultural boundaries – a battle which did not end until their declaration of independence following World War I.

Germany, Russia, and Poland). Located along Russia's border with the Baltic Sea, the Baltic countries provided a strategic location for sea trade between Eastern Europe and the Western World. The capital city of Latvia, Riga, became a chief trading center for trade with Great Britain (which was among the first of the remaining Great Powers to acknowledge Baltic independence), exporting goods like butter and timber to the British in exchange for further trade and protection. With increasing prosperity in the region came a cultural flowering. Each country promoted their native languages and customs while actively attempting to push out centuries of foreign influence. Though there were struggles along the way towards independence, the Baltic countries enjoyed a relatively prosperous and independent interwar period, however brief.

The events of the Second World War, however, once again placed them under the control of others. Thousands of Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians left their homelands during the war with the thought of returning one day to reclaim and rebuild. The peace, however, did not fulfill these hopes. The Yalta Agreement, signed in the final months of the war by the leaders of the Allied forces – President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin – did not reinstate the independence of the Baltic countries, but instead granted them to the Soviet Union in exchange for assistance in taking Berlin and future help against Japan.

The terms of the agreement were a hard blow to the Baltic refugees. They felt betrayed by those who promised to help them. Feelings of fear, hopelessness, and determination quickly followed. Outrage against the Allies for so quickly forgetting their own promises of independence to all was common among the refugees. With little but righteous indignation to support their pleas for justice, the Baltic refugees did what they

could to survive and preserve their cultural heritage. Refused their independence, the refugees in turn refused to return to their now-occupied homelands instead forcing the Allies to provide them with other options.

When Germany surrendered and most of the estimated eight million wartime refugees began the journey back to their homes, the Soviets demanded the return of those they claimed belonged to the Soviet Union, including those refugees from the Baltic countries, as well as Poland and the Ukraine. Under the management of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association (UNRRA), repatriation (whether voluntary or forced) was the mandate of the United Nations and the Allied forces in charge of controlling and providing for the refugees. Some did return, but more refused to do so. Stories and rumors of the mass executions and deportations of returning refugees made the idea of repatriation into Soviet hands a terrifying prospect. They had fled out of fear of communism and would not willingly return into its embrace. These refugees were nick-named “die-hards,” “un-repatriables” and later officially labeled as Displaced Persons (DPs).

With the ultimate failure of repatriation, the fate of the remaining refugees posed a serious problem for the United Nations and Allied military forces. The cost of caring and providing for them in DP camps established throughout Germany, Austria, and Italy proved a financial and physical burden on the Allied forces. Their continued presence in the camps created a further drain on the already burdened local economies, fostering hostility between them and the native populations. Resettlement into host countries became the only viable option. In 1946, the International Refugee Organization (IRO)

replaced UNRRA and the long process of selection, placement, and immigration from the camps began.

As with any immigration scheme, organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the International Red Cross (IRC) applied political pressure on host nations to accept immigrants on humanitarian principles. Ultimately, the qualifications of the DPs to meet the needs of the host countries determined their acceptance. As this study will indicate, the Baltic DPs were among the most sought after refugees in terms of resettlement. Many factors – including their high level of education, their ethnicity, their status as “victims” of communism, and their youth (a majority of those who fled were of the younger generation) – made the Baltic DPs especially desirable by host countries with the hope that they would easily assimilate and become valuable and productive citizens. By focusing on the postwar situations and recruitment processes of the largest host countries – the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia – this study will present a small part of the restructuring of the world through the experience of the DPs.

Because of society's apparent fascination with the World War II period (as evidenced by the thousands upon thousands of sources that analyze and discuss every aspect of the war and those involved), it is somewhat surprising to find that so little has been written concerning the immediate fate of the many millions left homeless by the war and its aftermath. Most histories of the period seem to end with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and begin again on the domestic front with the beginning of the Cold War. Arguably, the contention over the fate of the DPs was the first “battle” of the Cold War.

During the final years of the DP program, which lasted roughly from 1945 to 1952, several published works appeared concerning the DP camps and their organization written by former aid workers, who (in most cases) helped to manage food and other provisions for the refugees. The focus of the majority of these works was to make the plight of the DPs known to potential sponsors for resettlement in various host countries. These writings largely stopped once the camps closed in 1952. Since then, histories have sporadically appeared over the years which deal with the handling of the refugee crisis by the Allied powers in charge. Of these sources the most widely known and oft-quoted is the work by Malcolm J. Proudfoot. Written in 1959, his study entitled *European Refugees, 1939-1952*, focused on the organization and handling of the DP camps by Allied military forces and the United Nations, and is arguably the most prominently featured work in the field.

Recent interest from historians, however, is proving that rather than remaining an unimportant part of postwar history, the experience of the DPs provides an interesting subject through which to analyze early Cold War history. An increasingly prolific writer in this field is Linda McDowell. The focus of her research is on the experience of the European Volunteer Workers in Great Britain beginning in 1946. Published in 2005, her study *Hard Labour* is an example of the new history which attempts to explain the handling of the DPs as part of the larger political and social experience of the host countries. Another prominent historian of this topic, Michael R. Marrus, broadens his focus to include all European refugees from the end of the First World War through the Cold War. In *The Unwanted*, published in 2001, Marrus offers a comprehensive look at the refugee problem of the twentieth century as a whole.

Other interests in the field concentrate on race, gender, and identity studies. Authors like Kathleen Paul, Colin Holme, Elizabeth Wilson, and Klaus Neumann (to name a few) discuss the resettlement of the DP populations in relation to the varying degrees of acceptance they experienced in their host countries – acceptance which depended largely on their ethnicity, their ability to work, and their ability to assimilate. The importance of the DP experience is in the insight they provide into the cultural and ideological beliefs of the countries that accepted them. These authors argue that the general assumption of the host countries was that as white Europeans the Baltic DPs would most easily assimilate culturally and become new and productive citizens. As will be discussed later, these assumptions proved unreliable as the loss of their homelands increased the importance for the DPs to preserve their cultural heritage and separate themselves from those around them.

From the DPs themselves, information about their experiences immediately after the war is scarce. When asked to relate their stories of survival, most answer that it was not important; they were no different from those who did not survive or who did not get out before the communists came. For them, life in the DP camps was dull and boring, taken up with managing and rebuilding their lives as best they could with the provisions given them. Their memories focus on the war years and their new lives as immigrants in foreign countries – the period in between is of little importance to them. Novice historian, Jane E. Cunningham has written one of the few published biographies available on this period. In *The Rings of My Tree: a Latvian Woman's Journey*, published in 2004, Cunningham relates the story of her friend Mirzda Labrencis, a Latvian DP who left her family in Latvia and eventually resettled in the United States. According to the author,

the book itself is not a history, but “the personal story of a young, working woman who experienced history.”² This explanation conforms to the DP’s view that history was what occurred around them – they merely survived until circumstances provided them with a resting place. The stories of the younger generation of DPs (those who were small children while living in the DP camps) have proved a valuable source by providing a view of the day-to-day survival within the camps through the eyes of its children.

Published in 1999 by award-winning historian Modris Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century*, relates his family’s experience in the DP camps in Germany while fitting them into the larger historical picture of the time.

An abundance of primary sources on the subject are available for those with the ability and the inclination to find them. The annual reports of both UNRRA and IRO provide researchers with official statements regarding the setup, management, and control of the DP camps. They also include statistics of the number of refugees in the different camps, their nationalities, ages, and level of education, ability to work in skilled and unskilled occupations, marital status, and mobility. Within the reports are included recommendations for handling the refugees, including references of the multiple failures and accomplishments of the two organizations and the Allied forces themselves. Still more sources, such as pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, government memos, interviews, and several unpublished works complete the range of sources used in this study.

² Jane E. Cunningham, *The Rings of My Tree: A Latvian Woman’s Journey* (Coral Springs, FL: Llumina Press, 2004), 3.

The relative newness of the research into this topic opens a wide array of related areas. Most written works about this topic deal with the refugee problem as a whole or how it relates to the postwar restructuring of the Allied nations on the domestic front. As of yet, little research has focused on why any individual group of DPs were considered more desirable than others as immigrants and thus potential citizens by the available host countries. As will be shown, each host country established different criteria for what constituted desirability among the DPs recruited as immigrants.

The main focus of this study is the experience of the Baltic DPs in the immediate postwar period and to answer the question as to why the host countries singled them out, among all the nations represented by the refugees, as the most desirable for immigration. The first section will give a brief history of the Baltic countries during the war and the main reasons for the flight of so many from their homes during the Second World War. The second section will then discuss the end of the war itself, the establishment of the DP camps, the Allies' initial push for repatriation as the solution to the refugee problem, and the instigation of resettlement schemes as a permanent solution. The following sections will then deal with how each of the four main recipient countries – the United States, Great Britain, Canada and Australia – handled the issue of resettlement by focusing on the postwar political and social climates of each country, their individual resettlement schemes, and the success or failure of those schemes based on the personal experiences of the Baltic DPs.

Mirzda Labrencis ends the story of her experience as a DP noting that: “During and after the war, the mysteries of life intensified for me. Just because I survived the war does not mean that its effects were over. The aftereffects truly only end when death

comes because living through a war changes your life forever.” The DPs were victims of the war’s end. Peace proved an illusion, but spurred their lives into new directions.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF LOOK AT LATVIA, LITHUANIA, AND ESTONIA

On 28 November 2006, Latvia played host to the NATO summit held in the capital city of Riga. For the former Soviet state, along with its closest neighbors Lithuania and Estonia, this was an amazing event. For natives both at home and abroad this meeting was a proud moment which brought the events of the twentieth century full circle, restoring their independent status and place in the world.

Because of their close proximity to each other and their geographical location between Russia and the Baltic Sea, the three countries share a similar history and experience especially during the World War period of the past century. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each declared their independence from the Russian Empire amidst the upheaval of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and President Woodrow Wilson's declaration that all people should have the right to self-determination. The struggle to maintain that independence continued throughout the interwar period as each nation survived the Great Depression, the continuous threat of Communism, and the rise of would-be dictators among their own leadership. Throughout this period, however, each nation continued to thrive in terms of national pride and fierce loyalty to its cultural heritage.

By the eve of the Second World War, the threat to Baltic independence posed by the rapid growth of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union grew too large to ignore as both desired control over the Baltic's natural resources as well as access to the Baltic Sea. With the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty in 1939, Baltic independence ended enmeshing the region in the back and forth struggle between Germany and the

Soviet Union. The fear and devastation brought about because of this struggle would define the lives of the Baltic Displaced Persons long after the war's end. In order to understand the reasons why thousands of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians fled their homelands to live as refugees, a look at the history of the region is necessary.

Geographically located between Russia and the Baltic Sea, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have existed in one form or another, since the Bronze Age.³ Their languages themselves are relics of the past, with Lithuanian considered by linguists as the closest living language to Sanskrit.⁴ Until the early Middle Ages, the pagan Baltic tribes led a relatively peaceful existence as traders with their Christian neighbors, neither regarding the other as a serious threat. Beginning in the late twelfth century, however, as the Christian nations of Europe grew in numbers and strength they cast covetous eyes on the resources and potential of the Baltic region. Overcome with religious zeal and disappointed with the loss of Jerusalem and failure in the Holy Land, crusaders from Germany began a brutal campaign to convert the last pagan tribes in Europe. In the northern regions, the organization of crusading knights known as the Brotherhood of the Sword successfully created the military state of Livonia, establishing Riga, at the mouth of the Daugava River, as both its religious and trading center. By the thirteenth century, Estonia and Livonia (now present day Latvia) came under the control of the Danes who, in 1346, sold their claim to the region to another religious order, the Teutonic Knights. The Teutonic Knights also campaigned against the Western tribes in Lithuania at the same time that the Brotherhood of the Sword gained control in the north, yet with less

³ Alfred Bilmanis, "Free Latvia in Free Europe," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 232 (March 1944): 44.

⁴ Leo J. Alilunas, *Lithuanians in the United States: Selected Studies* (San Francisco, CA: R&E Research Associates, Inc., 1978), 9-10.

degree of success. By the thirteenth century, the Knights controlled the entire Baltic region and established a German cultural, social, and political hegemony that would last through the events of the Reformation and the chaotic sixteenth century.⁵

Over the next two centuries, the competing powers of Eastern Europe fought against each other to fill the power void left by the fall of the Knights. Although the Swedish empire gained control in Estonia, they fought continually with Russia for control of Livonia, enjoying brief success under Gustavus Adolphus whose period of administrative reform historians sometime refer to as the region's "golden age." In southern Livonia, Lithuania allied with Poland to establish the Duchy of Courland and later the eastern province of Latgale.⁶

The conflict finally ended in 1721 when Peter the Great, in accordance with the Treaty of Nystad, added Estonia and Livonia to the Russian Empire. An admirer of German culture, Peter the Great reaffirmed the rights and privileges of the Baltic Germans, known as the "Baltic Barons," establishing them as pseudo-rulers who were allowed to manage the region under his authority. Extremely loyal to the crown, the Baltic Germans enjoyed their privileged status and promoted German cultural dominance.⁷

Lithuania's early history differed greatly from its northern neighbors.⁸ Whereas Estonia and Livonia fell to other powers without much resistance, Lithuania was the last European nation to Christianize, resisting the change for as long as possible. Its early

⁵ John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Longman, Inc., 1991), 11.

⁶ Hiden, 11-12 and Alfred Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1951), 172.

⁷ Hiden, 12.

⁸ V. Stanley Vardys and Judith B. Sedaitis, *Lithuania: the Rebel Nation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 1.

success against the Teutonic Knights was due largely to its ability to unify against a common threat and place itself under a succession of strong leaders, beginning with the Grand Duke Mindaugas in 1253. In an attempt to ward off the danger posed by the Knights, Mindaugas converted to Christianity and had himself crowned the first (and only) king of Lithuania. The people, however, reaffirmed their pagan heritage and successfully held off the Teutonic Knights, even pushing their own influence into the Russian interior.⁹

When they finally became part of Christian Europe, they did so not by force, but by politics. In order to form an alliance with and ultimately gain control of neighboring Poland, their leader Jagiello married the Polish queen in 1387 and ordered the forcible baptism of all his subjects. In 1569, the official alliance of Lithuania with Poland created a territory which, until the eighteenth century, covered a substantial portion of Eastern Europe. The alliance finally fell when internal feuding among the Polish nobility weakened the nation to the point where they could no longer resist the growing power of Prussia, Austria, and Russia. In 1795, the third partition of Poland gave Lithuania to the Russian empire.¹⁰

As historians John Hiden and Patrick Salmon point out in their history of the Baltic in the twentieth century, once the three Baltic countries became part of the Russian empire in the early nineteenth century it is easy to focus on their “common fate” rather than their continued differences. Even to present day, Estonia and Latvia share a closer connection with each other than with Lithuania. Religiously, Estonia and Latvia are

⁹ Vardys, 10 and Hiden, 12.

¹⁰ Hiden, 12.

Lutheran while Lithuania remains Catholic. Economically, Estonia and Latvia became centers of industry while Lithuania remained largely agrarian.¹¹

Once the Baltic region became part of the Russian empire, little immediate change occurred. Ruling in the name of the tsar, the Baltic Germans retained their feudal rights as landed nobility. During the Enlightenment, many moved to the major cities which quickly became favored destinations for the wealthy elite. Not immune to the influence of the Enlightenment, numerous landowners sought to modernize their estates by cultivating ideals of freedom and intellectual improvement. By 1819, full emancipation of the serfs occurred in the Baltic region forty-two years before the rest of the Russian Empire. The Baltic Germans not only liberated the native populations, but also encouraged them to ‘discover’ their own culture by promoting the study of native languages through folklore and songs.¹² Industrialization promoted further nationalistic growth as landless peasants flocked to the cities eventually creating an educated middle class that would soon challenge the Baltic Germans for cultural dominance.

The greatest challenge to German hegemony came in 1881 with the policy of *russification* under Alexander III. The growth of nationalism throughout Western Europe exemplified by German unification in 1871 soon influenced the tsar to promote the rapid development of a unified Russian Empire. Alexander III feared what he perceived as the potential threat of the large German population in control of the Baltic region.¹³ For those seeking to modernize and centralize the empire, the privileges of the Baltic Germans hindered progress. The introduction of the Russian language as the official language of

¹¹ Hiden, 13.

¹² Ibid 16-21.

¹³ Theodore R. Weeks, “*Russification: Word and Practice, 1863-1914*,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 148 (December 2004): 475.

government and privilege in 1885 deliberately undermined German dominance in the Baltic. Even the German-speaking University of Tartu in Estonia, known as the intellectual capital of the region, was renamed the University of Iurev in 1893 cementing Russian as the new dominant culture and language. In Lithuania, the Russian government even accused German landowners of supporting the Polish uprisings of 1860 and 1863 and confiscated their estates, dividing them amongst their peasants.¹⁴

Ironically, an unintended consequence of the attack against German influence in the Baltic in the mid-nineteenth century was the so-called ‘awakening’ of Baltic nationalism. In urban centers, the growing bourgeoisie began to challenge the status quo by promoting education and instruction in native languages, not just German or Russian. The response was impressive. According to the 1897 Russian census, in Livonia and Estonia, ninety-two to ninety-three percent of the population was literate – this compared to thirty percent in the rest of the empire. Unlike its neighbors, Lithuania remained largely agricultural with low literacy levels – though this fact did not prevent the growth of nationalism. The brutality they experienced at the hands of the Russians encouraged many during this time to immigrate to the United States.¹⁵ Leading up to the First World War, the policies of both the Baltic Germans and *russification* encouraged the growth of a nationalistic fervor in all three Baltic countries.

For much of the First World War, the Baltic served as a battleground between Germany and Russia, each fighting for control over a region both claimed as belonging to them. Preempting them both, the Baltic countries each declared their independence during the first few months of 1918. Following the upheaval of the October Revolution

¹⁴ Hiden, 14-15, 17.

¹⁵ Ibid, 18-19.

and the collapse of the Russian Empire, as well as the defeat of Germany and the general confusion of postwar Europe, their grab for independence became a reality. At Versailles in 1919 after the war, the Balts lobbied for recognition citing President Wilson's declaration of self-determination as validation for their request.¹⁶ Few in the West at the time even knew where the Baltic was located. In fact, astonishingly, the French government offered to make a loan to the city of Riga in *yen*, thinking the city to be an island off the coast of Japan.¹⁷ While working to establish their status within the rest of Europe, Vladimir Lenin moved to secure the region as part of the new Soviet Empire, consequently drawing them into conflict once again during the Russian Civil War.

In the spring of 1920, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each established peace treaties with the Bolsheviks recognizing their independence from Russia and granting the Russians access to Baltic ports. On 26 January 1921, the three countries each received official *de jure* recognition by the great European Powers, followed soon after by admission into the League of Nations on 22 September. The following year, the United States government gave full recognition as well. In addition, the United States voiced its appreciation of the Baltic republics' successful separation from Russia, according to the official release, by "the successful maintenance within their borders of political and economic stability."¹⁸ Of note, however, is the reality that the stronger European nations saw little future for the newly formed Baltic countries outside of the Russian sphere of influence. Though the Balts pushed hard to promote their own economic and political growth, critics warned them not to stray too far from the Russian sphere of influence. In

¹⁶ Hiden, 36-37.

¹⁷ Alan Palmer, *Northern Shores: A History of the Baltic Sea and Its People* (London, England: John Murray, 2005), 281.

¹⁸ Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia*, 338.

an analysis of the situation, the head of the Northern Department of British Foreign Office, J.D. Gregory, stated that the economic prosperity of the region was dependent on the “economic union, but cultural independence” of the former Russian states as “the best hope for the future.”¹⁹ Through peace agreements with Russia, the Baltic countries hoped to develop economic security by allowing access to, but not control over their resources.

The experience of the Baltic countries during the 1920s was one of economic growth and political nation-building. Never experiencing true independence before, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania set about the task of creating a working social, political, and cultural structure. Following the democratic model, each country developed a constitution, appointed a parliament, and elected a president. As a whole, the period was one of economic growth and political experimentation. Along with Finland and Poland, the Baltic countries declared neutrality to prevent their involvement in future wars; Estonia and Latvia went further with the promise of mutual assistance should the need arise.²⁰ Both Latvia and Estonia passed the first minority rights legislation in Europe.²¹ Estonia’s Law of Cultural Autonomy, passed in 1925, awarded any minority which consisted of over three thousand people official status and the ability to administer their own cultural and educational affairs.²²

Lithuania passed land reform acts in the socialist model, the state confiscating large landholdings and distributing it among the largely peasant population in hopes of creating loyalty to the new government and desire to help the nation succeed.²³ The leaders of each nation knew they needed to create a functioning state. Trial and error with

¹⁹ Hiden, 45.

²⁰ Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia*, 381-382.

²¹ *Ibid*, 333.

²² Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), 133.

²³ Vardys, 40-41.

official policies, however, would leave each country open to authoritarian regimes by the end of the 1920s.

The economic downturn brought about by the Depression soon changed the face of government in the Baltic. Falling demand for exports and a dramatic drop in Russia's use of Baltic ports caused popular unrest. Seizing the moment, right wing nationalists quickly took control of the governments in an attempt to restore stability. Lithuania was the first to lose its democracy when President Anatana Smetona seized control in 1926. An admirer of fascism and right wing radicalism, Smetona's Nationalist Party promoted an even stronger sense of Lithuanian nationalism, began a strong youth movement under the banner "Lithuania for Lithuanians," and hailed Smetona as the savior of the nation. As historian Alan Palmer argues, "There were strong echoes of Nazi political technique" within the movement.²⁴ Though anti-Semitism became fashionable, it never escalated to the point of the brutality later practiced in Germany.²⁵

Estonia's fall to authoritarianism came because of a bloodless, yet cold-blooded, political coup led by Prime Minister Konstantin Pats. Facing a potential loss of power to the popular para-military group under war veteran Artur Sirk in 1934, Pats declared a state of emergency and suspended all public meetings and elections indefinitely while dissolving parliament leaving him as sole authority. Despite accusations of brutality and even the murder of political rivals, Pats remained popular among Estonians. This was due in large part to the brief economic revival following the takeover of business by the state coupled with subsidies for farmers in order to support growth of resources for export.²⁶

²⁴ Palmer, 305.

²⁵ Ibid, 305-306.

²⁶ Ibid, 307.

An admirer of fascism, Pats created the Fatherland League in 1935, modeled strongly after Mussolini's policies in Italy.²⁷

Of the three countries, Latvia was the only one to remain (if in name only) a democracy. One of the founding fathers of the Latvian Republic, Karlis Ulmanis declared a state of emergency and seized control on 15 May 1934. Electing himself as head of state in 1936, Ulmanis suspended national elections and focused on reviving Latvia's economy. He did this by encouraging a balance of exports over imports, making Latvia less reliant on foreign goods for survival.²⁸ Altogether, his regime was relatively tolerant. Ulmanis campaigned against the rise of communism and anti-Semitism within Latvia, claiming defense of the republic as his motivation. In 1938, he lifted the state of emergency, but remained in power until the first Soviet invasion in 1940.²⁹

In Latvia and Estonia, the regimentation of the laissez-faire attitude had surprisingly little effect on the middle class, which continued to grow until both nations were essentially middle class populations. Latvian diplomat Artur Bilmanis argued that individual drive coupled with the desire to see their nation succeed reconciled the middle class to authoritarianism.³⁰ The threat to internal freedoms from dictatorial policies seemed small compared to the threat of losing freedom entirely to Soviet Russia or the now formidable Nazi Germany. As Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British Minister to the Baltic, wrote in a dispatch, dated September 1934,

There is a 'lives of the hunted' element in the attitude of these small States to their great neighbors; and it would be difficult to decide which in the last resort they fear most – the protective solicitude of the Soviet Union,

²⁷ Hiden, 52-53.

²⁸ Palmer, 307-308. From 1938-1939, five times as much foreign trade left Riga than in the early years of independence.

²⁹ Hiden, 52-53.

³⁰ Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia*, 367.

the clumsy directness of Germany, or the devouring overtures of Poland. Obviously, the intentions of none of the three are strictly honorable, and the question, 'how will it end?' must frequently arise in the minds of Baltic statesmen.³¹

By the eve of the Second World War, the world order that maintained Baltic independence had disappeared under the weight of the Depression. One-time investors now became economic rivals as each country turned inward to solve its own financial problems. The loss of support from one of their largest investors, Great Britain, left the Baltic open to threats from both Germany and the Soviet Union who saw in the region a land of natural resources they coveted for themselves.

The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty on 23 August 1939 in Moscow signaled the end of the Baltic's short-lived independence. In essence, the agreement between Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence marked for either German or Soviet occupation. In exchange for Soviet non-interference when war began, Hitler agreed to give uncontested control over the Baltic region and the eastern half of Poland to Stalin.³² In June of 1940, while the eyes of the world watched in horror as German forces marched first into Warsaw, then later into Brussels, Amsterdam, and Paris, Stalin issued an ultimatum to the leaders of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: "join the Soviet Union voluntarily or by force." By the morning of 17 June 1940, the Soviet army crossed into the Baltic. In this way began what most witnesses and survivors remember as a long year of terror and hardship.

Census records from 1939 estimate that the Latvian population numbered 1,994,506 people, the Estonian population numbered around 1,133,940, and the

³¹ Hiden, 88.

³² Joseph Pajaujis-Javis, *Soviet Genocide in Lithuania* (New York, NY: Manyland Books, Inc., 1980), 5.

Lithuanians numbered around 2,879,070.³³ By 1944, the war casualties sustained by each country numbered in the hundreds of thousands – including those killed as soldiers in battle, executed by occupational forces, deported to Siberia as “enemies of the Soviet Union” or to Germany as “voluntary workers,” or those who fled in 1944.³⁴ The first Soviet occupation only lasted from 1940-1941, but the experience traumatized the native populations who remember nothing but hardship and constant fear. The Soviets held mock elections and established a puppet communist regime in each country. In the summer of 1940, Estonian Prime Minister Konstantin Pats and Latvian Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis, along with their families and military advisors, were the first group the Soviets deported to destinations where their ultimate fate remains unknown. Few deportees ever returned home. Only Lithuania’s President Anatana Smetona managed to flee Lithuania before his arrest.³⁵

Stalin desired to reshape the Baltic region into a model Soviet state. In response to Lithuanian criticism of Soviet actions in June 1940, Soviet Foreign Commissar Vyacheslav Molotov, who signed the Non-Aggression Treaty and would later broker peace with Great Britain, stated “that in the future small nations will have to disappear” as they are incorporated along with the rest of Europe into the Soviet Union.³⁶ To do so, however, Stalin needed to rid the country of its strong bourgeoisie influence. A list of

³³ Walter Dushnyck and William J. Gibbons, *Refugees Are People: The Plight of Europe’s Displaced Persons* (New York, NY: The America Press, 1947), 13, 16, 20.

³⁴ See population tables in Dushnyck.

³⁵ Hiden, 114. “The death of Pats was eventually given by the Soviet authorities as 1956 . . . In 1977, three messages written by Pats, probably in 1953 or 1954, reached the West.”

³⁶ Pajaujis-Javis, 16-17. To the Lithuanian Acting Prime Minister, Kreve-Mickevicius: “You will see that before four months have passed, the people of all the Baltic States will vote for incorporation, which will take place without any disturbances. Lithuania cannot be the exception, and her future will depend upon the fate of all Europe. . . . You would be doing the most intelligent thing if you would accept without any hesitation the leadership of the Communist Party, which is determined to effect the unification of all Europe and the application of the new order.”

twenty three categories of ‘enemies of the state’ targeted members of the middle class including all politicians, police, judges, military, religious clergy, manufacturers, merchant landowners, and prosperous peasants. Had Hitler not decided in the summer of 1941 to break the Non-Aggression Treaty by attacking the Soviet Union along the Eastern Front, these full-scale deportations would have taken place. As it was, before their full evacuation in front of the German advance, the Soviets arrested thousands during the night and deported them aboard cattle trains to Siberia. From there, few returned. According to one estimate, between 1940 and 1941 the Soviets deported or executed 34,250 Latvians, 60,000 Estonians, and 75,000 Lithuanians.³⁷

Files found left behind by Soviet officers fleeing the German army in June 1941, show Soviet plans for massive deportations of as many as 800,000 people in Latvia and Estonia. In Lithuania, the Serov Instruction (named after the Soviet General placed in charge of the deportations) called for the rounding up of all ‘anti-Soviet’ elements. Still other files showed plans for the deportation of 700,000 from Lithuania.³⁸ With the threat of Russia’s return in 1944 and the memory of that year of terror and fear of reprisals against them as Nazi collaborators, thousands fled with the retreating German army to wait out the end of the war.

On 22 June 1941, when German forces entered the Baltic they were initially greeted by the majority of the populations as liberators from the Soviets. As quickly became apparent, Germany had little concern for the welfare or independence of the Baltic countries. After signing the Non-Aggression Treaty in 1939, Hitler had secretly ordered the evacuation of the Baltic German populations in Estonia and Latvia. All

³⁷ Hiden, 115.

³⁸ Dushnyck, 16-18, 21.

together, some 13,700 Baltic Germans from Estonia and 52,583 from Latvia evacuated back to the Reich despite little Soviet effort compelling them to leave.³⁹ Once there, they settled in newly acquired territories of Poland.

When Germany entered the Baltic, they did so as conquerors intent on clearing the region of all undesirables as part of the greater vision of *Lebensraum*. At Hitler's request, Alfred Rosenberg planned the occupation of Eastern Europe. In May 1941, Rosenberg stated:

The General Kommissare of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania will take measures to establish a German Protectorate there, so that it will be possible in the future to annex these territories to the German Reich. The suitable elements among the population must be assimilated and the undesirable elements exterminated. The Baltic Sea must become an inland German lake, under the protection of Greater Germany.⁴⁰

The Germans paired the Baltic with Belorussia in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, under the control of Heinrich Lohse, "a man obsessed with bureaucratic detail who personally insisted on signing 'No Smoking' signs and regulations for garbage collection."⁴¹

Tragically, the Nazis nearly succeeded in their plans for the total extermination of the Baltic Jewish population. Of the prewar Jewish population of 250,000 in Lithuania, only 2,000 remained by the summer of 1944, "by far the largest casualty of the German occupation."⁴² In Latvia, only an estimated 3,000 remained alive by December 1941. In Estonia, although only one to two thousand remained after the first Soviet occupation, the Germans nearly destroyed the few that remained.⁴³ Moreover, because of the area's remoteness and the existing anti-Semitism of the population, the Nazis sent Jews from

³⁹ Hiden, 115.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 116.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Vardys, 54 and Hiden, 117.

⁴³ Raun, 165.

elsewhere in the conquered territories to the Baltic for extermination. In Latvia, the Nazis deported an additional 20,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, and other ‘protectorates,’ to the Riga ghetto. Of those who arrived, less than a thousand would live to see the end of the war. After February of 1942, transports did not even stop in the ghettos, heading instead for the Rimbala Forest outside Riga for extermination.⁴⁴ The level of Baltic participation in the Holocaust is a shameful one.

By the end of the war, this subject would prove an important point as repatriation of refugees back to their Soviet-controlled homes would focus on the level of acceptance and support given the Nazis during their occupation. At his trial in 1946, SS General Friedrich Jeckeln declared that he did not know how many Jews died during the German occupation because the native populations had killed so many before he arrived to assume command.⁴⁵ Yet, according to Brigadeführer Stahlecker, in a report to Himmler dated October 1941, “To our surprise, it was not easy at first to set in motion an extensive pogrom against the Jews.”⁴⁶ The native population, although anti-Semitic, participated less in the actual killings than the Nazis publicly portrayed. Regardless, their participation in the genocide makes them culpable.

During the war, the Nazis conscripted thousands of able bodied men and women into the German war machine as soldiers on the Eastern Front and “voluntary workers” in factories in Germany. Still in Germany at the war’s end, most would choose to remain as refugees rather than return to Soviet control. Though armed resistance against German occupational forces did occur, it was on a relatively small scale and faced fierce

⁴⁴ Gertrude Schneider, *Muted Voices: Jewish Survivors of Latvia Remember* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1987), 15.

⁴⁵ Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization During the Holocaust* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 131.

⁴⁶ Hiden, 118.

retaliation from German troops. In Latvia, the Nazis killed or deported all members of military partisan groups. In Estonia and Lithuania, however, resistance groups struggled to survive throughout the German occupation, but they, too, eventually succumbed to the Soviet's second occupation in 1944.

“For the majority populations of the Baltic countries,” writes Hiden, “the best that could be said of German rule between 1941 and 1944 was that it was less harsh than the periods of Soviet rule . . . and less brutal than the treatment meted out by Germany to the other subject nationalities of Eastern Europe.”⁴⁷ Fear of Soviet reoccupation terrified the populations as the war turned against the Germans and the Soviet army moved closer to the Baltic once again.

By 1944, the Germans began a large scale retreat from the region and with them went thousands of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. The risk of flight soon became apparent. Those who fled by ship to Germany and Sweden faced the very real danger of Soviet bombs destroying their ship. Refugee memoirs, such as Agate Nesuale's *A Woman in Amber*, recount the experience of flight from their homelands. For those who fled overland, fear of capture by Soviet troops was of chief concern, especially for women. Nesaule's horrific account of attempting to flee to Germany on foot and the days she and her mother spent as Soviet prisoners paints a vivid picture of rape, murder, and execution that leaves no question of redemption for Soviet Russia.⁴⁸

Caught between Germany and the Soviet Union by the end of the war, the Baltic refugees hoped that Great Britain and the United States would uphold the terms of the Atlantic Charter and support Baltic independence. Unfortunately, they soon discovered

⁴⁷ Hiden, 119.

⁴⁸See Agate Nesaule, *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* (New York, NY: Soho Press, Inc., 1995), 57-88.

that others had decided their fate before the war had even ended. As early as 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt approached Stalin hoping to form an alliance. British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, later recalled in his memoirs that Roosevelt “proposed to tell Stalin that . . . there would be no need to worry about the Baltic States, since their future clearly depends on Russian military progress and, if Russia reoccupied them, neither the United States, nor Britain would turn her out.”⁴⁹

The final blow to independence, however, was the revelation of the Yalta Agreement. Signed on 11 February 1945 by Roosevelt, Stalin, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the agreement reached at the Yalta Conference guaranteed the return of all Allied nationals located in occupied territories on a reciprocal basis to their respective countries.⁵⁰ With the Soviet Union once again in control of the Baltic countries, Moscow demanded the return of all natives to their homelands. This was a devastating blow for the refugees. The United States and Britain, the champions of democracy, with a single, deceptive agreement signed away the Baltic people’s freedom. With no organized leadership and no means through which to officially communicate their own desires as a people to the Allies, the Baltic refugees chose the only means of protest available to them – they refused to return. This refusal would bring the issue of how to handle a large-scale refugee crisis to international attention.

No matter how proud they remained of their cultural heritage and of their struggle for recognition as independent countries, the postwar reality facing Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians was that they were not especially important to those in power. For centuries, the Baltic countries were subject to the demands and wars of their more

⁴⁹ Pajaujė-Javis, 83.

⁵⁰ Mark R. Elliot, *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America’s Role in Their Repatriation* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 30.

powerful neighbors; their brief period of independence made them even more determined to regain it again. Their refusal to return to their now Soviet controlled homelands was a decision based not only on fear and experience, but was meant to force the Western World to live up to their own ideals of freedom and democracy, for all. If the Allies said they must return, they were determined not to go without a fight.

CHAPTER III

THE DP EXPERIENCE, 1946-1949

Speaking to the American Academy of Political Sciences in 1947 on the postwar refugee situation in Europe, Joseph P. Chamberlain, professor of Public Law at Columbia University, declared, “Never has so great a movement of peoples taken place in so short a time as that which has left a million persons uprooted from their homes and living in foreign lands. They constitute a major problem for the United Nations.”⁵¹ Needing to address a large-scale refugee problem effectively was a new situation faced by the Allied forces at the end of the war. Once the war ended millions displaced by the war would desire immediate return to their abandoned homelands and initial efforts towards a comprehensive refugee plan focused mainly on repatriation. Immediately after the war the majority of refugees did return home, but over a million did not. Mostly from countries in Eastern Europe, these Displaced Persons (DPs) steadfastly refused to repatriate to their now Soviet-controlled homelands. This refusal surprised the Allied victors who imagined a quick, if not easy, return of all refugees to their homes once the war ended. They suddenly needed to re-evaluate their postwar reconstruction plans.

The situation of the DPs from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania proved particularly difficult as early Cold War tensions between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union increased. With no existing form of native government, the Baltic DPs protested the Soviet takeover of their homelands by refusing to repatriate. If the Allies would not stand by their own principles of freedom and democracy, the Baltic DPs would do

⁵¹ Joseph P. Chamberlain, “The Fate of the Refugees and Displaced Persons.” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 22, no. 2 (January 1947): 192.

nothing to ease their conscience. With the failure of repatriation, resettlement became the only viable option for solving the refugee situation.

As early as 1943, the United Nations made far-sighted plans to support the repatriation of postwar refugees in Europe. In Washington on 9 November, the representatives of forty-four countries created the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) to coordinate aid for countries devastated by the events of the World War II. Speaking to the representative assembly, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt claimed that the creation of UNRRA ensured that the financial and physical burden of restoring order in Europe fell on many shoulders, not just a few. There could be no secured peace unless the displaced populations returned home to restore order and rebuild their lives.⁵² UNRRA coordinated the activities of twenty-three voluntary agencies, including the Joint Distribution Committee, the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training, and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.⁵³ The United States was the largest financial contributor, providing seventy-two percent of UNRRA's budgets, followed by Britain, Australia, and Canada. UNRRA became the first, large-scale administrations created solely to deal with the handling of postwar refugees.

By the end of the war, over eight million refugees lived scattered across Europe. Within a year, American and British occupational forces successfully repatriated all but 1.2 million persons. Redefined as DPs, these "die-hard" refugees from Eastern Europe steadfastly refused to return to their Soviet-controlled homelands fearing reprisals against

⁵² Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address of the President in connection with the signing of the agreement setting up the United Nation's Relief and Rehabilitation Administration," *Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe*, (November 9, 1943); available online <http://www.ena.lu>; Internet; accessed 11 June 2005.

⁵³ "United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration," *United States Holocaust Museum*; available online <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId>; Internet; accessed 20 November 2004. First UNRRA director-general was Herbert Lehman, former governor of New York; succeeded in March 1946 by Fiorello La Guardia, former mayor of New York, followed by Major General Lowell Ward in early 1947.

them as “Nazi-collaborators.” In August 1946, UNRRA began full-scale operations in occupied Germany to aid in the repatriation of this remaining group.

UNRRA set about the task of bringing order to the situation, subject to the supervision of the occupational authorities who retained ultimate responsibility for the care and support of the DPs within their zone. Their main function focused on providing the DPs with living arrangements, food, and medical treatment. They established a records office and tracing bureau to help categorize the DPs based on personal histories. This proved invaluable for Holocaust survivors in locating surviving friends and family members. UNRRA also worked with other agencies on the possibility of resettlement elsewhere, although these plans remained preliminary and focused on Jewish DPs. UNRRA provided the DPs with luxury items such as chocolate, cigarettes, and toiletries that often served as currency on the thriving black market within the camp system.⁵⁴ The function of UNRRA was not to physically repatriate the DPs, but instead to persuade them to return by coordinating and supplying food rations for the journey and funds necessary to send them home. UNRRA could not forcibly return any persons “other than intruders” who did not desire to repatriate.⁵⁵ Occupational forces carried out the actual act of repatriation.

UNRRA soon established DP camps, officially labeled “assembly centers,” in order to list and classify each person seeking admission. At least 443 assembly centers existed in the U.S. zone alone.⁵⁶ These centers, mostly former prisoner-of-war camps, army barracks, and concentration camps, became the focal point for thousands of

⁵⁴ “Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947.” *Occupation Forces in Europe Series, 1946-47*. Karlsruhe, Germany: Historical Division European Command (8 February 1951): 7.

⁵⁵ W. Arnold Forster, “UNRRA’s work for Displaced Persons in Germany.” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of National Affairs 1944-)* 22, no. 1 (January 1946): 1.

⁵⁶ “Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947,” 10.

refugees besieging UNRRA for aid and support. Screening took place to determine whether any of the persons were SS personnel, Nazi Party Affiliates, on CIC wanted lists, criminals, collaborators, or imposters posing a security threat to the camp system.⁵⁷ Those eligible for UNRRA assistance included former prisoners-of-war, victims of enemy prosecution based on race, religion, or other factors, stateless persons, and internally displaced women and children.⁵⁸ The purpose of these categories centered on ensuring that only those displaced by events or actions out of their control receive aid and support. The fear remained that willing Nazi collaborators would slip through as DPs rather than face charges for war crimes. By December 1945, UNRRA supported an estimated 855,000 DPs from Central and Eastern Europe.

Technically, the Baltic DPs did not qualify for this assistance. According to its charter, UNRRA could only assist those foreign nationals whose country of origin gave UNRRA permission to do so.⁵⁹ Claiming the Baltic DPs as foreign nationals, the Soviet Union invoked the Yalta Agreement and demanded their return (voluntarily or forced) to the Baltic countries. The Baltic DPs, refusing to acknowledge that they now belonged to the Soviet Union, flooded the UNRRA camps. The principle that UNRRA should act “on a purely humanitarian basis, without political bias” allowed UNRRA officials to accept the Baltic DPs regardless of their legal standing.⁶⁰ UNRRA’s Central Headquarters in Germany reported that 27,000 Estonians, 86,000 Latvians, and 54,000 Lithuanians

⁵⁷ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. *Displaced Persons: Report of Central Headquarters for Germany* (Washington, D.C.: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, April 1947), 117.

⁵⁸ Forster, 1-2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

claimed DP status by the end of 1945.⁶¹ According to U.S. Zone Administrative Order No. 43, although UNRRA should make all efforts towards repatriation, it “must observe its charter responsibilities not to force anyone to return to his or her home unwillingly.”⁶² For those unwilling or unable to repatriate, UNRRA could provide temporary care until it was decided what to do with them.⁶³ According to Audrey Duchesne-Cripps, an UNRRA welfare worker, officials sent those deemed ineligible for UNRRA aid to camps directly under military control with no UNRRA participation.⁶⁴ Without UNRRA assistance, the DPs had little chance of avoiding repatriation and little hope for resettlement elsewhere.

A more serious problem presented by the Baltic DPs was the difficulty of distinguishing war criminals among them. During World War II, the Nazis conscripted thousands of young, able-bodied men into native SS Legions sending them to fight on the Eastern Front. Although the level of voluntary participation in the Legion is still a contested issue among historians and survivors, identification as a former SS officer at the time meant arrest and deportation back to Soviet-controlled territories. The majority of the DPs seeking admission into the camps carried no identity papers with them, either lost or discarded. These chaotic circumstances made it easy for guilty parties to pose as DPs.

As Cold War tensions increased, the problem of DPs became a serious point of contention between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union refused UNRRA permission to carry out its operations within their territories, citing

⁶¹ Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees, 1939-52: A Study in Forced Population Movement* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1956), 291.

⁶² United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 17.

⁶³ Forster, 11.

⁶⁴ Audrey Duchesne-Cripps, *The Mental Outlook of the DPs As Seen Through the Welfare Work in the Camps* (Cambridge, England: A.M. Duchesne-Cripps, 1955), 14.

UNRRA's practice of aiding Soviet nationals refusing to repatriate. Soviet allegations that UNRRA and its supporters allowed war criminals to escape prosecution became commonplace. In spite of these often justified complaints, UNRRA carried out operations as well as possible.

Many UNRRA and volunteer workers arriving at the DP camps were astonished at the sheer size of the centers. Katie Louchheim, a UNRRA relief worker, remembers her first glimpse of the camp at Weisbaden as an enormous barracks housing 75,000 DPs composed of "seven or eight different nationalities."⁶⁵ One observer characterized the outside appearance of the average center as "a depressing conglomeration of bomb-scarred, burnt-out buildings." Camp officials and volunteer workers worked to repair roofs, broken windows, and to supply heat and electricity to make the camps inhabitable for the typically three to four thousand DP residents. Several families commonly shared single, large rooms due to limited living space. For most, privacy proved non-existent.⁶⁶ In May 1946, *The Times* reported that the average DP camp presented "a spectacle of complete neglect" owing to the failure to induce the displaced persons to become useful "by cultivating lands or maintaining roads" rather than "preying on the German population."⁶⁷ This was hardly the popular image UNRRA officials wanted the world to see.

U.S. President Harry S. Truman sent the dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Earl G. Harrison, to get a complete picture of the rapidly deteriorating conditions within the camps and their administration and assess the situation. Harrison presented Truman with his findings in August 1945. The report reflected numerous

⁶⁵ Katie Louchheim, "The DP Summer," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 61, Issue 4 (1985): 693.

⁶⁶"Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947," 10.

⁶⁷*Times*, "Displaced Persons in Germany: Measures to Speed Up Repatriation," 29 May 1946.

interviews conducted with UNRRA officials, volunteer workers, and the DPs themselves along with Harrison's own observations.⁶⁸

Harrison's final report was critical of UNRRA, but even more so of the United States' and Britain's handling of the DPs. Harrison called for immediate changes in the administration of the DP problem. According to the report, UNRRA was focusing attention on quick repatriation rather than on long-term care and resettlement which caused "considerable resistance" to the entrance of voluntary agencies better qualified to handle the needs of the DPs.⁶⁹ He continued with the hope that since the "worst of the pressure of mass repatriation is over . . . the next and perhaps more difficult period for those who have suffered the most and the longest be given first and not last attention."⁷⁰ He called particular attention to the sharp contrast of the DPs lack of clothing, shelter, and food while the Germans lived well in rural areas surrounding the camps. After observing these differences firsthand, Harrison dryly stated that the German people remained "the best dressed population in all of Europe."⁷¹

Harrison recommended that UNRRA receive full administrative authority over the camps, reasoning that the United States should use its influence to take immediate action in order to prevent more chaos. This would, in turn, allow privately funded voluntary groups the ability to help the DPs directly instead of dealing with government bureaucracy.⁷² Truman called for drastic change from UNRRA and military personnel in

⁶⁸ Earl G. Harrison. "Report of Earl G. Harrison (August 1944)," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Online Archives*. Available at <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/dp/resource1.htm>; Internet; accessed 22 November 2004.

⁶⁹ Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2002), 7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Harrison, 14.

⁷² "Displaced Persons: Administration." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Available at <http://www1.ushmm.org/wlc/article>; Internet; accessed 2 November 2004.

response to Harrison's report on the abuse and deteriorating conditions in the camps. Change did occur, but not to the hoped-for extent. The continued existence of the camps, despite efforts to improve the DPs' lives with more food, better clothing, and improved housing, illustrated the failure to solve the DP problem. Though improved, the refugee situation continued.

More criticisms from financial supporters and the international press soon leveled at UNRRA for the failure of the repatriation scheme. Lack of centralized control resulted in UNRRA enjoying less authority because of the need to seek constant approval for its actions from contributing countries.⁷³ UNRRA ultimately failed through lack of authority and inability to act on its own initiative resulting in mismanaged voluntary aid and funding. Voluntary religious groups met resistance from UNRRA officials who lacked the ability and resources to coordinate the transportation and assignment of volunteer workers. For example in *By the Rivers of Babylon*, Margaret McNeill described her work as part of a British Quaker volunteer group sent to help in the Baltic DP camps. McNeill relates the confusion of finding out who was in charge, where they were supposed to go, and the quick turnaround of workers to and from the camps.⁷⁴ Historian W. Arnold Foster reported to the Royal Institute of International Affairs that UNRRA's authority was "completely surrendered to the Army." The organization of the was camps so inadequate, Foster continued, "that the liaison officer did not know where many of the UNNRA teams were, and was not consulted or even informed when teams were broken

⁷³ Robert H. Johnson, "International Politics and the Structure of International Organization: the Case of UNRRA." *World Politics* 3, no. 4 (July 1951): 532.

⁷⁴ See Margaret McNeill, *By the Rivers of Babylon: A Story of Relief Work Among the Displaced Persons of Europe* (London, England: Bannisdale Press, 1950).

up or when UNRRA officers were in effect relieved of their jobs.”⁷⁵ UNRRA, though criticized for its failures and increasingly seen by financial supporters as a waste of time and resources, had little authority to change and so kept working to achieve their objective of repatriation.

In autumn 1946 and spring 1947, UNRRA made one last attempt to convince remaining DPs to return home. As part of “Repatriation Drive,” UNRRA offered incentives such as free transportation, financial support on their arrival, and a 60 day ration supply for repatriating DPs.⁷⁶ However, the Baltic DPs numbers for repatriation remained low. In a letter to the Britain’s Refugee Defence Committee on 25 February 1947, the permanent secretary of the Control Office in Germany and Austria wrote that of the eighty thousand Baltic DPs living in the British Zone of Germany only forty-three repatriated.⁷⁷ Fewer than three thousand of the remaining Baltic DPs voluntarily repatriated back to Soviet control by 1949.⁷⁸

Between 1946 and 1947, contention over repatriation between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union escalated. The fate of DPs from Eastern Europe emerged as a hotly contested issue where emotions ran high. Historian Malcolm J. Proudfoot, in one of the first studies on mass repatriation and the postwar refugee crisis, found that over 250,000 DPs living in the occupied Western zones of Germany and Austria did not claim Soviet citizenship. These DPs refused to acknowledge their nationalities fearing Soviet

⁷⁵ Forster, 6.

⁷⁶ “Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947,” 55.

⁷⁷ “Letter to the Refugees Defence Committee on the Subject of Baltic Displaced Persons,” in *The Latvian Legion: Selected Documents*, ed. Mirzda Kate Baltais (Toronto, Canada: Amber Printers and Publishers, 1999), 147.

⁷⁸ Proudfoot, 416.

retribution against them as Nazi sympathizers should they return home.⁷⁹ Yet UNRRA officials could not ignore the Soviet Union's position as one of the major postwar powers.

Officially, UNRRA recognized the Soviet Union as “the government concerned” with the repatriation of the Baltic DPs.⁸⁰ UNRRA officials, however, refused to give them the names of individuals unless those DPs claimed Soviet citizenship.⁸¹ On 11 November 1946, UNRRA issued an order providing for Soviet “liaison officers” to visit the DP camps to distribute newspapers, propaganda films, and other emotional devices to attempt and persuade the Baltic and other Eastern European DPs to repatriate. The Soviet Union set up repatriation centers to serve as transport site for DPs returning home under the supervision of the United States Army.⁸² UNRRA personnel soon received accusation from anti-Soviet groups claiming the organization followed too closely the Soviet practice in handling refugees, so obsessed with repatriation that all their efforts went into pursuit of that goal. In *Refugees are People*, Eastern European affairs specialist, Walter Dushnyck, described the “skillful repatriation officer” as one who overcame the DPs’ fear of repatriation. Rather than dreaming of emigration, the officer persuaded the DPs to plan in terms of “calm consideration of alternatives and acceptance of repatriation.”⁸³ However, the Soviets often tried to influence the DPs’ decision. The *New York Times* even made accusations of espionage, reporting at least one Soviet spy found on UNRRA’s payroll.⁸⁴ The presence of Soviet liaison officers increased tension within the DP camps.

⁷⁹ Proudfoot, 214.

⁸⁰ “UNRRA Proposes to Recognize USSR as ‘Power Concerned’ with Latvians,” in *The Latvian Legion: Selected Documents*, ed. Mirzda Kate Baltais (Toronto, Canada: Amber Printers and Publishers, 1999), 117.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Dushnyck, 55.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 54-55.

The DPs grew concerned that the Allies meant to forcibly repatriate them as they had Russian prisoners-of-war and political refugees. In March 1947, Baltic DPs in Berlin led protests after UNRRA denied assistance to 300 Lithuanians and forcibly evicted them from the assembly center.⁸⁵ In Alenstadt, Germany, a mob of DPs attacked UNRRA officials and American soldiers to protest repatriation, and only the use of tear gas and displays of military force restored order.⁸⁶ In certain camps, conditions deteriorated to the point that U.S. Military officials enlisted the help of the German police to gain control.⁸⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Jerry M. Sage of the U.S. Army once asked the Baltic DPs why they so adamantly opposed repatriation. They replied that they would rather die than return to the hands of the same people who took everything away from them in 1940 and 1941.⁸⁸ The memories of lost freedom and deported loved ones never heard from again remained fresh in the minds of the Baltic DPs. Their steadfast opposition to any effort to send them back gained them the sympathy of the occupational authorities who viewed Soviet actions with growing suspicion.

Acting on this suspicion, U.S. President Truman looked to remedy the DP situation. After reading Earl G. Harrison's report, Truman contacted General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Chief of Staff and Military Governor of the U.S. Occupation zone, apprising him of the report's findings and of the changes needed in the administration of the camps. Truman acknowledged the delicacy of the Baltic DPs' situation and the vehemence of their refusal to repatriate. Although return to their homelands remained the ultimate

⁸⁵ "Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947," 59.

⁸⁶ Haim Genizi, *America's Fair Share: The Admission and Resettlement of Displaced Persons, 1945-1952* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 20.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Department of State, "Statement by Lt. Col. Jerry M. Sage," *The Displaced-Persons Problem: A Collection of Recent Official Statements*. Publication 2899, European Series 26 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1947): 13.

ambition of the Baltic DPs, until a change in the political situation occurred they refused to repatriate.⁸⁹ Since the Truman administration supported the right of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians to refuse repatriation, this left the United States government and its allies with the problem of what to do with those thousands not repatriated. It was becoming apparent that no further change would occur under UNRRA's continued supervision.

The Baltic DPs' refusal to return home caused tension between the three great powers. In December 1945, the British liaison in Moscow stated that the faith placed by the Baltic DPs in the United States' and Britain's ability to save them from Soviet control seemed "not only pathetic, but dangerous."⁹⁰ Nevertheless, sympathy for their plight grew considerably. By 1946, occupational authorities in the western zones viewed the Baltic DPs as "innocent or at worst misguided" rather than Nazi supporters and war criminals.⁹¹

As per the Yalta Agreement, the Soviet Union demanded the return of all refugees belonging to countries now under Soviet control. Growing Cold War resentment, however, and distaste with the repercussions of forced repatriation, influenced American and British actions. They responded to Soviet demands with a re-interpretation of Yalta. Though the United States and Britain agreed to continue repatriating all citizens who had belonged to the Soviet Union before the war, both reinterpreted the agreement concerning citizens of those countries gained after of the war. Unless those persons from countries gained by the Soviet Union after September 1936 claimed Soviet citizenship,

⁸⁹ Steve Neal, *Harry and Ike: the Partnership that Remade the Postwar World* (New York, NY: Scribner Books, 2001), 56.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Sylvia Best, "The British Foreign Office, the UNRRA, and the Displaced Persons Problem in British Occupied Europe, 1944-1947," (Ph.D. diss., London University, 1991), 331.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 333.

occupational forces treated them as DPs and not as Soviet citizens. On 12 February 1946, the United Nations Assembly passed a new resolution stating that no refugee or DP expressing “valid objections” to repatriation would be compelled to return to their country of origin.⁹² For those labeled as Soviet citizens this was a cruel twist of fate. Many Russians had fled the Soviet Union during the Stalinist purges in 1937 and 1938 and feared for their lives if returned to Soviet control.⁹³ For citizens of the Baltic countries the reinterpretation of Yalta meant a chance to start again.

The Soviet government took the resolution as a sign of Western aggression and took on the role of a wounded martyr prevented by evil bureaucrats and fascist sympathizers from returning its native children back home. In a letter to the editor of *The Times*, printed 12 June 1947, Soviets in Estonia claimed that DP camp authorities and former Nazi collaborators of Baltic descent waged propaganda campaigns to persuade Baltic nationals from returning home. “Those [DPs] who wish to return home are terrorized,” they wrote, “and if this does not help they are forcibly restrained.”⁹⁴ With the end of the threat of forcible repatriation, the Baltic DPs waited in the camps while others decided their fate.

Nearly a year passed before that decision came. With repatriation no longer an option, resettlement seemed the best alternative. According to Michael R. Marrus in his definitive work on European refugees, *The Unwanted*, the approval of the International Refugee Organization (IRO) on 15 December 1946 was the culmination point of a year of tense political situations between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union.

Continued Soviet opposition delayed the IRO from assuming UNRRA’s responsibilities

⁹²Chamberlain, 192.

⁹³Marrus, 138, 316.

⁹⁴J. Nuut, et al, “Baltic Displaced Persons,” *Times*, 12 June 1947.

until 1 July 1947. Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Andrei Y. Vishinsky, attacked the creation of the IRO claiming that it provided fascists a place to hide and the ability to spread propaganda against their homelands.⁹⁵ On gaining control, the IRO took the stance that the occupational forces should resettle unrepatriable DPs as quickly as possible.⁹⁶ Unlike UNRRA, the IRO functioned outside UN supervision allowing more specialization among personnel and direct control over the thousands of DPs under their supervision.⁹⁷ Under its authority the supervision of and conditions within the camps improved considerably. By the time IRO operations were underway, Soviet actions during the Berlin Blockade and the invasion of Hungary put an end to all but minimal efforts at repatriation by the IRO.

The IRO set about the business of opening the doors of viable host countries to receive the DPs as immigrants. Given control of forty ships for transport, the IRO formed agreements with countries like Australia and Canada to accept large numbers of DPs through sponsored work programs.⁹⁸ Ironically, though the chief financial supporter of resettlement efforts, the United States would refuse to accept any DPs as immigrants until the passage of the Displaced Persons Act in 1948. To help the IRO make a proper assessment of the type and qualifications of the DPs in the assembly centers, the U.S. War Department issued the ceiling order of 21 April 1947, which directed officials to refuse admittance to any DPs entering the U.S. zone following 21 April, “except for hardship cases and persons about to be processed for repatriation or resettlement.”⁹⁹ UN countries praised the IRO and its mandate for working to provide the DPs with the

⁹⁵ Dushnyck, 50.

⁹⁶ UNRRA not officially disbanded until 18 November 1949.

⁹⁷ Marrus, 340-342.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 343.

⁹⁹ “Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947,” 88.

chance to start over again. Yet in matters of international politics, words and actions often prove hypocritical.

In spite of their protestations of goodwill and sympathy for the DPs' situation, the immigration policies in almost all the countries approached for resettlement centered on their own economic and practical needs. Functioning "as an international employment agency," the IRO quickly adapted itself to sell the DPs to host countries as immigrant workers. Through medical examinations and background checks, the IRO set about recording the physical and mental capabilities of each DP seeking resettlement. The organization also established classes to teach the languages of the host countries to better prepare them for acceptance and immigration. Within a year, the IRO could provide a comprehensive list of information concerning language and occupational skills, physical and mental health, as well as marital status and family of each registered DP. Whether all the information given by the DPs was wholly accurate proved less certain.¹⁰⁰ Once they passed the rigorous exam and interview process, DPs became free to travel to various recruitment centers throughout the occupational zones to apply for resettlement.

In an effort to organize the DPs, UNRRA and later the IRO grouped them into camps based on nationality. Officials generally placed the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians together in "Balt camps." The tendency for the middle-class and educated Estonians and Latvians to set themselves apart from the more agrarian Lithuanians was common. All three peoples, however, banded together through their common fear of repatriation. The constant transfer from one camp to another by military officials exacerbated the situation. In her memoir, Estonian DP Elin Toona remembers listening as

¹⁰⁰ Proudfoot, 418-419.

a child to talk about the fear of repatriation, the likelihood of resettlement, and the bittersweet memories of home.¹⁰¹

Constant animosity between the DPs and the surrounding German population became a common experience of life in the DP camps. Accusations traveled back and forth as to which population received better treatment, more food, and better overall care. In their report on the DP situation given in April 1947, UNRRA's Central Headquarters for Germany stated that the DPs did not receive an equivalent standard of housing and clothing as the Germans. The food situation, however, seemed "reasonable in view of the low ration now imposed on the German population, and the difficulties in procuring a sufficiently diversified supply of food stocks to avoid monotony in diet."¹⁰² This was not acceptable for those who believed that since the Germans began the war, they should support the DPs in a standard equal to or better than their own. This preferential treatment made the DPs targets for aggression of the surrounding population. Their continued presence in Germany served as a visible reminder of the war, focusing the anger and resentment of the native population on their shoulders. Toona recalls the constant tormenting of local German children towards her and her friends. On one occasion, a German teenage boy went so far as to kill her pet cat in front of her by striking it against a wall.¹⁰³

Regardless of the uncertainty of their situation, the Baltic DPs struggled to reconstruct some sort of normal life. Balizar Radkins, Latvian DP and former National Secretary of the Latvian YMCA, wrote that need and misery brought people together in the camps. He describes at length how social and class differences seemed to disappear,

¹⁰¹ See Elin Toona, *In Search of Coffee Mountains*. (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1977).

¹⁰² "Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947," 32.

¹⁰³ Toona, 158.

bringing the DPs closer together. In the camp where he lived, “the girls prepared curtains from paper bags; artists donated pictures,” people established gardens, libraries, sports clubs and other facets of “normal” life with determination.¹⁰⁴ Latvian historian Modris Eksteins remembered how his family covered the walls of their room in the camps “with magazine pictures to hide its decrepit condition.”¹⁰⁵ At the camp in Hanau, Lithuanian DPs converted a former riding school into a theater capable of seating up to three thousand fellow DPs. By 1950, Lithuanian DPs had established sixteen publishing houses in Germany. In total, twenty-seven Baltic newspapers and thirty-five magazines existed in the camps.¹⁰⁶ Life in the camps, though monotonous, provided the means for nationalities to rebuild their cultural heritages.

Each DP camp largely ran itself. Camp officials encouraged the DPs to organize themselves along national lines. Each nationality within a camp selected representatives for a “camp advisory committee.” These committees made suggestions to camp authorities, established cultural programs and events to promote each heritage, and worked to solve mutual problems of camp life.¹⁰⁷ One aspect of camp life that did not receive official approval was the existence of a thriving black market dealing in food and other luxury items. The keeping of livestock and pets, strictly forbidden in the camps due to disease control, led to frequent raids by camp officials. Life in the camps, though bearable, was not the life most DPs wanted.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Walter S. Kilpatrick, “Ministry to Displaced Persons and Refugees, 1945-1954,” in *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Association*, by Clarence Prouty Shedd (London, England: SPCK, 1955), 593.

¹⁰⁵ Modris Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 179.

¹⁰⁶ “Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947,” 46.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

In many ways, life in the DP camps proved easier for the young than the old. A Latvian woman described how years later she realized just how much her youth protected her during that time:

We had our social life there in the camps. So it wasn't bad and when you are young, too that is different. It is just an adventure. But when I think about my parents, they had to leave everything behind, all their life, what they have saved and all they had, they had to leave behind. We only took a few silver spoons to exchange later on in Germany for food. They lost everything . . . maybe that's why some people felt they could not leave.¹⁰⁸

For eighteen-year-old Helena, a Latvian DP, the monotony of daily life in the camps made the younger generation of DPs grasp whatever chances they could to enjoy themselves. American GIs, she recalled, although forbidden to fraternize with German girls, often came to the DP camps to pick up girls to take them to dances and other social events.¹⁰⁹ Evenings spent dancing, coupled with the chance for romance, provided an escape from the camps if only for a few hours.

Along with the social aspects of camp life, the DPs together with voluntary agencies established schools within the camps, providing teachers, used textbooks, and other supplies for thousands of DP children. By 1947, reports claimed that ninety percent of children aged five to sixteen among the DPs attended school in the U.S. Occupied Zone alone. In early 1947, the British established the DP University Center in a former Luftwaffe School in Pinneberg, to provide the means for former university students to continue their education while living in the camps. Later efforts to transfer the university

¹⁰⁸ Linda McDowell, *Hard Labour: The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant Volunteer Workers* (London, England: UCL Press, 2005), 80.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

to the United States failed. Official reasons given by British authorities in charge stated curiously that there were too many of “that type of person in the world already.”¹¹⁰

Military occupation authorities also recruited DPs as workers to help with various projects throughout occupied Germany. In the British Zone, for example, over one thousand Baltic DPs worked at dismantling German munitions factories. UNRRA began farming projects, serving the practical purpose of vocational training for the DPs.¹¹¹ Some DPs worked as administrators and clerks within the camps, serving as liaisons between military authorities and the DP groups. At one time, the U.S. Army employed almost 40,000 DPs in construction, vehicle maintenance, and trucking. With increased demobilization, this number dropped to 3,400 by July 1949.¹¹² An employment service office in each center made sure that every employable DP received the chance to be useful, even helping some to establish barber and beauty shops to cater to camp populations.¹¹³ An occupational survey taken in 1947 in the U.S. zone found 150 occupation skills among the DPs. The Baltic DPs were among the largest number of medical professionals, teachers, lawyers, artists, and construction workers.¹¹⁴

Resettlement began in earnest by 1947. The Baltic DPs now looked to their future without losing sight of their pasts. They attended classes to learn about the languages and customs of their future resettlement countries. To make themselves more attractive to recruiters as prospective immigrants, they lied when necessary about their pasts, occupational skills, and families. Healthy DPs substituted themselves for unhealthy

¹¹⁰ McDowell, 84 and Christine Reinhard, “Inside World War II Displaced Persons Camps,” (bachelor’s thesis, Texas A&M University, 1995), 38.

¹¹¹ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 43-44.

¹¹² Reinhard, 34.

¹¹³ “Displaced Persons 1 July 1946- 30 June 1947,” 11.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 19.

friends in order to help them pass medical exams with clean x-rays. Medical personnel regularly rejected those who showed signs of tuberculosis or dysentery, common diseases in the camps. Singles got married while couples pretended to be single, all to fit the requirements for immigration to their country of choice. Nearly every DP desired to leave the camps and begin a new life.

Initially following the war, the Baltic DPs placed their hope in the Western Allies to restore their countries to independence. Yet, with no government-in-exile to speak for their rights, the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian DPs remained powerless. Determined not to return to Soviet control, they refused efforts at repatriation and by their physical presence within the UNRRA assembly centers forced the UN to address their situation. Ultimately ineffectual due to lack of centralized control or authority, and the need to constantly justify every action taken, UNRRA failed in its objective of returning many DPs to their homes. Unwilling to use force against those whom their own actions placed under Soviet control, the United States and Britain reinterpreted the terms of the Yalta Agreement, allowing the Baltic DPs the chance to resettle elsewhere and begin again.

As early as 1946, Britain became the first country to recruit workers from the DP camps. Though the United States was the first choice of the majority of the DPs for resettlement, their doors remained closed in spite of President Truman's best efforts until the passage of the Displaced Persons Act in 1948. Benefiting from U.S. reluctance, Australia and Canada both signed agreements with the IRO to establish large-scale work sponsorship programs to fill labor shortages in industry and boost population numbers. Among those first chosen for resettlement, the Baltic DPs took their cultural heritage and national pride with them.

CHAPTER IV

BRITAIN AND THE BALTIC DPs, 1946-1949

At the end of World War II, Clement Attlee and the Labour party persuaded British voters that they would transform England into a utopia – a type of “New Jerusalem” founded upon their sweeping welfare plan commonly known as the Beveridge Report. In this utopia, the government would provide for the welfare and security of each individual – defeating unemployment, hunger, and want, providing free healthcare, and restoring British culture. Part of this transformation was the maintenance of Britain’s role as a world power, a role damaged by the war. While focusing on these issues Labour faced another pressing problem – that of caring for the estimated 16 million refugees displaced by the war and now under Allied control. Ultimately, Britain’s handling of the refugee crisis involved the resettlement of thousands to the United Kingdom as immigrant workers in an economic and humanitarian effort to rebuild the nation’s economy, restore the population, and end the financial burden of supporting postwar occupied Europe.

The ultimate failure of repatriation to solve the DP problem (due to the unwillingness of DPs from Soviet occupied countries to return home) forced Allied leaders to reevaluate their image of the DPs. While repatriation was still the most viable option, most viewed the DPs as merely trapped by circumstances, eager to return home and rebuild their lives no matter the dangers they faced in doing so. But for many these dangers proved far too real. Return was no longer an option for many of the Baltic DPs. Having survived the first Soviet occupation resulting from the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, the postwar DPs in occupied Germany would not

willingly return to an occupation now given the victor's legal sanction. Their determination forced British and American forces to act accordingly. Rather than view the DPs as victims, leaders now saw the potential of resettlement as the solution to their own economic, defensive, and humanitarian problems.

As one of the leading occupational forces in Europe, the British government was the first to realize the potential of the DP camps to ease domestic troubles. By offering the DPs resettlement as immigrant workers, Attlee's government sought to accomplish several things – ease the acute labor shortage in industry and domestic service in Britain; end the financial burden on British taxpayers of supporting UNRRA; and rebuild the British population based on racial and ideological beliefs of British identity. The Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians best met these criteria and their experiences exemplify Britain's solution to the refugee problem. The Balts viewed living in Britain as a temporary exile and not permanent resettlement. The Labour government, on the other hand, expected the DPs to eagerly accept British citizenship. Although the British government favored the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians as potential citizens, the need for workers forced immigration officials to expand the criteria for resettlement. It would not be until the failure to fill recruitment quotas that the British Foreign Office would broaden the immigration criteria to include DPs of other nationalities.

After the war, the era of Britain's imperial greatness came to a slow end – a fact that the nation's political leaders and ruling figures steadfastly, but understandably, refused to acknowledge. In *The Audit of War: the Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation*, historian Correlli Barnett argues that the British refused to give up on their childhood fantasies of their role as the head of the great nation-states. Government

leaders thought their nation suffered from short-term weaknesses in the wake of wartime sacrifices and resolved to restore Britain's traditional world role.¹¹⁵ Restitution of Britain's former greatness relied heavily on the maintenance of its role as a great power abroad supported by a quickly resuscitated society and strong economy at home.

As part of their 1945 election campaign, Attlee and the Labour Party promised the people of Britain that their government would provide for all their needs. It became quickly apparent, however, that campaign promises of a return to traditional social roles for workers on the domestic front and soldiers overseas clashed with the reality of postwar needs. In her study on the role of gender in this period of postwar reconstruction, Elizabeth Wilson argues that "from the beginning, the Attlee government was attempting a weird juggling feat, trying to promote ideals of family life [by encouraging women to leave the workforce and become mothers and homemakers] while simultaneously desperately in need of labor for the work of peacetime reconstruction."¹¹⁶

Sectors of the economy hardest hit by the labor shortage included the production of raw materials such as steel, iron, coal, as well as food production, transportation, the newly established National Health Service, and domestic service in private homes.¹¹⁷ In 1947, *The Times* reported the government's assessment of the situation as "extremely serious," quoting Sir Stafford Cripps's pronouncement of an overall labor shortage of 750,000 people.¹¹⁸ The same report proposed bringing women back into the workplace through recognition of their social and economic value – recognition that the

¹¹⁵ Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: the Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London, England: Macmillan London Limited, 1986), 304.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain, 1945-1968* (London, England: Tavistock Publications, 1980), 43.

¹¹⁷ Linda McDowell, "Workers, Migrants, Aliens, or Citizens? State Constructions and Discourses of Identity among Post-War European Labor Migrants in Britain," *Political Geography* 22 (2003): 866.

¹¹⁸ Violet Markham, "Displaced Persons," *Times*, 1 Feb 1947.

International Labor Organization described as “serving the cause of democracy” and “promoting the general welfare [of the nation].”¹¹⁹ Historian Linda McDowell, however, found that in spite of these efforts, the working population in the United Kingdom fell by 1.38 million from 1945 to 1946. This drop was due largely to the withdrawal of wartime laborers from the workplace and the emigration of workers to Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.¹²⁰ Another solution considered far more useful was the recruitment of workers from the DP camps in the British occupied zones of Germany.

The recruitment of DPs as foreign workers was a practical solution to a fast growing problem. Attlee’s government was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain its financial support of UNRRA and the DP camps.¹²¹ Concerned for its reputation as a leading world power, the Attlee government withdrew its support from UNRRA when faced with their inability to support the international organization. Fortunately, opportunity arose in Germany as more and more officials turned their attention to the untapped labor supply available within the very camps causing so much difficulty. In 1946, the Ministry of Labour established the Foreign Labour Committee (FLC) to “examine, in the light of existing manpower shortages, the possibility of making increased use of foreign labor, particularly in essential industries which are now finding special difficulty in recruiting labor.”¹²² Hasty plans for the recruitment and resettlement of the DPs were underway once officials such as the FLC chairman and Lord Privy Seal Arthur Greenwood announced their commitment to the incorporation of large groups of immigrants to fill the labor deficit. The need for haste came from Minister of Labour,

¹¹⁹ Wilson, 43.

¹²⁰ McDowell, “Workers, Migrants,” 866.

¹²¹ Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1997), 71.

¹²² McDowell, “Workers, Migrants,” 872.

George Isaacs, who desired to begin recruitment quickly before other host countries “skimmed off” the “cream” of the refugee crop.¹²³ As one writer at the time put it, “Britain was crying out for labor and here it was at her door, ready and willing.”¹²⁴ Britain now had the chance to help others while helping themselves.

Government officials argued that the best way to aid the DPs was to follow the ancient dictum and help them to help themselves. By providing the DPs a way out of the camps, the British government would not only ease the financial burden on the nation’s economy, but also provide the refugees with the chance to build new lives and begin again. According to Sir William Sholto Douglas, Marshal of the Royal Air Force and Commander-in-Chief of the British Occupational Zone in Germany, it would be impossible to expect the DPs to rebuild their lives without allowing them the opportunity to work for themselves. Not only was this enforced laziness “bad for them” given the “scarcity of labor in the world,” it was morally wrong. In short, Douglas concluded that the “time had come for [the DPs] to justify their existence.”¹²⁵ In this line of thinking, honest paid labor provided the means for those with nothing to regain their dignity as human beings and thus their place in society as useful citizens.¹²⁶

Ideologically, Britain wanted to give hope to thousands by providing them with the promise of a new and secure life. DPs were recruited as European Volunteer Workers (EVWs) – a term that “created the impression of a hardy citizen offering his or her

¹²³ Paul, 71.

¹²⁴ *Times*, “Work for Displaced Persons: Plans in British Zone,” 21 Feb 1947.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ John Benson, *Affluence and Authority: A Social History of Twentieth Century Britain* (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2005), 161.

services to help Britain in its time of need,” rather than that of a wartime refugee whom no other country would take.¹²⁷

The FLC introduced the first resettlement scheme, known as the ‘Balt Cygnet’ (the English term for a young swan, meant to denote purity and grace) in April 1946.¹²⁸ The initial provision of the scheme was to allow for the recruitment of 1,000 young, unattached women from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to work in understaffed TB sanatoriums and in other areas of domestic service. Host countries often singled out Baltic DPs as the most desirable for immigration among the different nationalities within the DP camps. According to Vincent E. Slatt, the Balts consisted of “intellectuals, professionals, and highly skilled persons” compared to the largely peasant population of Polish refugees.¹²⁹ A survey of occupations in the camps showed “four times as many former professors from the Baltic nations as from Poland, and nine times more than from the Ukraine.”¹³⁰ The Balts establishment of numerous study centers and universities in Germany including the UNRRA University at Hamburg favorably impressed visiting officials.¹³¹ Here was the very type of industrious and hardworking people that British officials hoped to recruit as future citizens.

The initial recruitment through the ‘Balt Cygnet’ scheme of only single and unattached Baltic women reflected Labour’s ideals of female and British identity. The very term, ‘Balt Cygnet,’ was carefully chosen by recruiters to portray the vulnerability and beauty of the women recruited – “a vision of young swans, redolent in purity, sailing

¹²⁷ McDowell, “Workers, Migrants,” 867 and Paul, 86.

¹²⁸ Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (London, England: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), 213.

¹²⁹ Vincent E. Slatt, “Nowhere to Go: Displaced Persons in Post-V-E-Day Germany,” *Historian* 64 (Winter 2002): 202.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

across the water” towards the new lives that awaited them.¹³² As well as being young and single, women who were potential EVWs had to pass several medical examinations – including questions of menstruation cycles (in large part to determine if they were pregnant at the time) and, in some instances, gynecological exams. If diagnosed as unhealthy, they were not accepted. Several former EVWs shared instances where the medical personnel examining them nevertheless passed those who were not fully healthy. One even recalled the doctor, to whom she listed the various illnesses she had while living in the camps, passing her anyway and telling her to deny she knew anything about being sick.¹³³ First and foremost, these women were to be workers, and needed to be physically as well as mentally fit to meet certain standards of acceptability before they would be welcomed as naturalized Britons.

Ministry of Labour officials traveled to the DP camps in the autumn of 1946 to assess firsthand the qualifications of the potential laborers. Following their return, the FLC issued a memorandum that included the officials’ review of the camps and listed in “unambiguous terms” the advantages of Baltic women as proposed immigrants.¹³⁴ The memorandum declared the Baltic women of “good appearance” and “scrupulously clean in their persons and habits.”¹³⁵ The report further assured government leaders that there was little doubt that the women selected for immigration would be an “exceptionally healthy and fit body ... and would constitute a good and desirable element in [the British] population.”¹³⁶ They openly acknowledged the superiority of the Baltic women over other nationalities in the camps and foresaw their quick assimilation into British society.

¹³² McDowell, “Workers, Migrants,” 873.

¹³³ Ibid, 873-874.

¹³⁴ McDowell, *Hard Labour*, 111.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 99.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Once in Britain, these women found themselves scattered across the United Kingdom, sometimes in small groups, other times by themselves. The goal of placement was not only to bolster the falling number of domestic workers, but also to force the DPs to assimilate through contact with other Britons.

The British public soon learned of the scheme. Acceptance of the incoming refugees as both people in need and future neighbors was actively encouraged by the government, the press, and many employers who saw the promising opportunity of hiring cheap labor. Numerous sympathetic stories ran in *The Times* describing the dismal conditions of life in the camps, the helplessness of the displaced persons, and the cruel fate that awaited them if they returned home to Soviet control. One correspondent described a crowd of hopeful immigrants at one of the many recruitment centers in British-occupied Germany as “overjoyed when they heard that the British Government” decided to “offer some of them employment.”¹³⁷ By establishing that the Baltic immigrants represented the *intelligentsia* of the Baltic countries, journalists assured readers that Britain would accept only the brightest and best-educated of the refugees as immigrants. Journalists also mentioned that only after passing a thorough examination by a selection board and medical personnel were DPs accepted as immigrants.¹³⁸ All of these measures were taken to reassure the British public that the admission of the displaced persons would cause no harm, but instead benefited the nation above all else.

As for the choice of recruiting DPs in the ‘Balt Cygnet’ for domestic service, this was not only a vague attempt to revitalize a profession which modern household conveniences were making obsolete. It also served as a type of bridging occupation to

¹³⁷ *Times*, “Displaced Persons for England: Women of Baltic States,” 24 July 1946.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

introduce the DPs into British society through its most important members – the middle and upper classes.¹³⁹ In her study of domestic service and the middle class, British historian Nicky Gregson points out that prior to 1914 and the outbreak of the First World War, domestic service was one of the chief occupations open to those in the working class. Domestic service provided not only a source of income, but also the possibility of advancement for ambitious servants who could learn how to act in both high and low social environments.¹⁴⁰ By working as maids in the cultured households of British society, the belief followed that the women recruited to fill these positions could quickly learn through imitation how to be good Britons. One goal of resettlement was the quick assimilation of immigrant workers into British culture. In promoting the ‘Balt Cygnet’ scheme, however, recruiters failed to realize that the same reasons which caused declining numbers in domestic service before the war – the demanding reality of life in domestic service, the increasing availability of jobs outside of service, and the production of labor-saving devices for the home – would also influence immigrant workers whether to stay in service or leave to pursue other employment.

By January 1947, it was becoming clear that the ‘Balt Cygnet’ scheme and the relatively small number of immigrants it succeeded in bringing to Britain were not enough to solve the labor shortage. There were simply not enough foreign workers under such a limited scheme to make any real economic contribution.¹⁴¹ The *Economic Survey of 1947* recognized foreign labor as “the only substantial additional source of manpower” available for Britain. Prejudices and arguments against foreign workers were “no

¹³⁹ Nicky Gregson, *Serving the Middle Classes: Class, Gender and Waged Domestic Labor in Contemporary Britain* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 66.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Paul, 69.

longer valid” as there was “no danger for years to come that foreign labor ... [would] rob British workers of their jobs.”¹⁴²

Then there came another plan. The aptly named ‘Westward Ho!’ scheme targeted “men aged between eighteen and forty-four and women aged eighteen to forty-nine.”¹⁴³ Recruiters focused on not only Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, but also Ukrainians, Poles, Rumanians, Bulgarians, and Yugoslavians. The new scheme recruited men primarily for hard labor in mining, clay pits, steel, and agriculture. It recruited women for work in the textile industry as well as in agriculture, ceramics, wool, hosiery, domestic work, midwifery, and nursing. This scheme alone would bring 78,500 workers and their families into Britain.¹⁴⁴

As with any government scheme, with supporters also came detractors. Opposition in political circles grew out of fear of uncontrolled immigration and the consequent permanent resettlement of thousands of foreigners. Opponents of the scheme rejected the idea that the continuance of permanent and unchecked immigration would solve Britain’s labor problems. In an independent report released in 1948, the Political and Economic Planning group concluded “there was not so much a shortage of manpower as an urgent need to redistribute it: new labor-saving techniques should be introduced, and immigration should be used merely as a temporary and flexible expedient.”¹⁴⁵ The group feared that the continuous influx of immigrants would result in the loss of jobs for native British workers in favor of cheaper labor, as well as lower wages. This would ultimately result in too few jobs for too many workers.

¹⁴² Quoted in Paul, 69.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 71-72.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ann Dummett and Andrew Nicol, *Subjects, Citizens, Aliens, and Others* (London, England: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 175.

More persuasive, and potentially damaging, opposition came from public opinion – in particular, from among the working class and the labor unions. With the victory of the Labour party and the creation of the welfare state, coupled with the acute manpower shortage which allowed laborers to make demands on employers, the power of the labor unions increased. Union membership reached a record 8.8 million by 1946.¹⁴⁶ According to a leading article in the January 1946 edition of the respected *The Economist*, the consequence of this increase was “the universal reluctance [of workers] to do a hard day’s work.”¹⁴⁷ With too few workers and for too many jobs, laborers could easily afford to work on their terms and not their employers’. The influx of new foreign laborers as competition for jobs challenged this scenario and consequently did not sit well with many members of the working class. The Attlee Government knew that the support of the working class public was necessary in order for resettlement to be a success. They also knew that in order for the government to remain in power they needed the continued support of their principal backers.¹⁴⁸ British workers needed assurance that the immigrants posed no threat to their jobs. The government campaigned to win them over to this idea.

The Times ran articles assuring their readers that on arrival, the European Volunteer Workers would “be used only for work for which suitable British workers” could not be found and that their pay rates and working conditions would remain the same as for British workers.”¹⁴⁹ Other articles described the recruitment process in detail, paying close attention to the poor conditions of the DPs camps (described most often as

¹⁴⁶ Paul Addison, *Now the War is Over: A Social History of Britain 1945-1951* (London, England: British Broadcasting System, 1985), 171.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Addison, 171.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 171-172.

¹⁴⁹ *Times*, “Displaced Persons from Germany, First Volunteers for Work in Britain,” 20 April 1947.

“unbearable,” “filthy,” and “confining”) in order to gain sympathy for the EVWs. Still more stories served to show the supposed effortless adaptability of EVWs into their new homes and workplaces. Also prominently featured were their contributions as new members of British society and the level of acceptance they received from their employers and fellow workers. Articles painted the labor unions as selfish, “vigilant [only] in their members’ interest,” and detrimental to Britain’s continued growth and success in the government’s effort to shame the unions into a more charitable frame of mind.¹⁵⁰

In general, male immigrants appeared a greater threat to job security and peace of mind than female immigrants, whom most viewed more as potential wives and mothers.¹⁵¹ Though many British workers continued their resistance to the EVWs, the Baltic immigrants tended to receive a greater degree of acceptance in Britain than Poles or ethnic Germans who also came over through the ‘Westward Ho!’ program. In some cases, the Baltic immigrants actually helped build and strengthen the labor unions, but overall acceptance was slow.¹⁵² As late as 1959, the government received letters from across Britain complaining about the “displacement of ‘British’ workers” and “the preferential treatment given to foreigners.”¹⁵³

Immigrants who applied for resettlement and were accepted did not, of course, fully know what opportunities awaited them in Britain. Rather than recruit workers for specific jobs, the FLC decided to speed up the process and accept applicants based on general qualifications of education, physical health, and labor skills rather than whether

¹⁵⁰ See *Times*, “Displaced Persons in the Mills, A Successful Scheme,” 13 Jan. 1948; Harold S. Smith, “Refugees and Displaced Persons,” *Times*, 20 Oct. 1947; *Times*, “The New Immigrants,” 22 May 1951.

¹⁵¹ McDowell, *Hard Labour*, 119.

¹⁵² Holmes, 290.

¹⁵³ Paul, 85.

they would have a place to work once in Britain.¹⁵⁴ According the British historian, Kathleen Paul, in her study of race and gender in postwar Britain, “At its smoothest, the whole process from interview to placement could be completed in a month.” It was the coordinated effort of several government departments “ranging from the Home and Foreign Offices, the Ministries of Labour, Transport, and Health, through the National Service Hostels and the National Assistance Board.”¹⁵⁵ The new arrivals had everything provided and paid for by the government, from their transportation and job placement to food and clothing. The Ministry of Labour also encouraged British employers to visit the camps to recruit laborers themselves. The European resettlement schemes imported an impressive 91,000 foreign workers by the end of 1947.¹⁵⁶

Upon arrival, the European Volunteer Workers settled into their assigned jobs. Most found their work difficult but at first remained grateful for the opportunity and tried to make the best of their situations. Within months of their arrival, however, many felt dissatisfied with their employment and few stayed once the option to leave opened to them. Often sent to small villages and towns in sparsely populated regions, they soon grew bored with the tedium of hard and repetitious work. Few interacted with their British coworkers and neighbors, preferring the company of others like them to mingling with people they saw as strangers and, in some cases, beneath them.

The Baltic workers, who came from largely middle class, highly-educated backgrounds, found little common ground with their British neighbors. Their own view of themselves as “political asylum seekers” unlike the state’s view of them as “economic

¹⁵⁴ The United States only accepted those displaced persons with an American sponsor who would pay the majority of costs for their transportation, food, and board (in most cases the immigrant repaid these debts either through money or labor).

¹⁵⁵ Paul, 73-74.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

migrants” further separated them from the British working class.¹⁵⁷ For those in areas with no other immigrants of similar backgrounds to talk to, the loneliness and isolation could be unbearable. One worker later recalled living “completely on [her] own” while working in a small rural hospital in Scotland as incredibly lonely.¹⁵⁸

Other immigrants recalled feeling socially marginalized with little to no understanding of Britain’s laws or their rights as workers. In one such case, a worker described how her ignorance of her rights allowed others to take advantage of her. Working from seven in the morning to nine or ten o’clock at night, she was given few breaks or time alone to herself – as she states, in “domestic service in those days there were no trade unions. People could ask you to work any hours they like[d] and they did.”¹⁵⁹ Legally bound to remain in their new occupations for at least two years, most wanted to leave and find new employment elsewhere. Some could not wait so long and simply left. The Ministry of Labor did little to those who reneged on their agreement to remain for the full two year period. The law required each EVW desiring a transfer to another position or another town to register under their new residences in a nominal effort to keep track of them. The Ministry of Labour concluded that since the EVWs were not slave laborers, they had every right to leave situations they found miserable.¹⁶⁰

Though each immigrant signed a contract agreeing to remain a full year at their place of employment, lack of enforcement and the fact that records of their movements were not strictly kept made leaving one situation for another relatively simple. One

¹⁵⁷ McDowell, *Hard Labour*, 110-120 and Linda McDowell, “Cultural Memory, Gender and Age; Young Latvian Women’s Narrative Memories of War-Time Europe, 1944-1947,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 30 (2004): 704.

¹⁵⁸ McDowell, *Hard Labour*, 111.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 113.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 121.

Latvian worker recalled the guilt she felt when, in order to get permission to move to another county with a large community of Latvians, she told her employer she had a fiancé in the place where she wanted to go and wished to join him there: “I felt awful really, I should have stayed at least a year [...] I almost died really, from shame. I thought they will find out and I’ll be put in prison. But no one said anything and I started to work.”¹⁶¹ For the EVWs living with others of similar backgrounds was important not only for cultural reasons, but for simple companionship. Her obvious shame at deceiving her employer and her fear of arrest for leaving on false pretences shows how the EVWs were largely ignorant of their own rights and still feared deportation either to the DP camps or back to Soviet control.

Because of volatile British-Soviet relations regarding the Baltic people, the Ministry of Labour worked to avoid any Soviet accusation of the resettlement schemes being little more than government sanctioned slave labor.¹⁶² To do so, official government policy determined that the EVWs should become full British citizens, not merely asylum seekers or temporary workers. To this end, those who applied for resettlement had to meet the qualifications of what the government believed it meant to be British. These racial and ideological stereotypes favored white foreigners over dark-skinned immigrants from India and the Caribbean as better suited for and more easily assimilated into British culture and society.

The persuading of average British laborers that new immigrant workers were no threat to them, while simultaneously combating Soviet accusations of Britain’s recruitment of slave labor, was a formidable exercise in public relations for the Labour

¹⁶¹ McDowell, *Hard Labour*, 121.

¹⁶² Paul, 83.

government. Yet for all their difficulty in making the public accept the EVWs as fellow countrymen, the immigrants themselves thwarted Labour's efforts. The simple fact of the matter was that the majority of the EVWs viewed their lives in Britain as a type of temporary exile, rather than permanent settlement. From interviews with former EVWs, such as those conducted by Linda McDowell for *Hard Labour*, and personal memoirs, one can assume that the Baltic EVWs viewed British citizenship warily. The idea of citizenship implied not only access to the rights and privileges enjoyed by the native population, but also the assumption of a new cultural and national identity.¹⁶³ Though this assumption of identity was encouraged by the government, the Baltic EVWs had no desire to intermarry with the native population, instead keeping to the company of others like them. McDowell argues that "stripped of their citizenship rights [by their countries' loss of independence] and mourning their vanished homelands, the reconstruction of a national identity in exile was the central aim rather than assimilation into an unknown, and ... unchosen, nation."¹⁶⁴ With the hope of soon returning home, they formed a cultural world separate from Britain's by marrying, raising children, and preserving their common heritage. As the years passed, however, it became obvious that for the time being no move against the Soviets to free the Baltic countries would soon occur.

By the late 1950s and 1960s, the immigrants realized that further resistance to citizenship seemed, as one EVW later put it, "a bit silly."¹⁶⁵ The main reason for finally accepting citizenship was practical rather than ideological. When it was evident that they would not be returning home any time soon, the Balts had to look towards their more

¹⁶³ Zig Layton-Henry, "Citizenship or Denizenship for Migrant Workers," *The Political Rights of Migrant Workers in Western Europe*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry (London, England: SAGE Publications, 1990): 186.

¹⁶⁴ McDowell, "Migrants, Workers," 877.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 879

permanent futures. The only way to advance in their careers and in society was to blend in, to officially become Britons. Speaking of the event over half a century later, one EVW recalled when she and her husband became citizens on the advice of their banker. She remembers how her husband initially refused, saying that he would not “sell his citizenship” for the sake of advancing his career. However, things became much better for her and her husband once they did apply and looking back at the situation, it seemed childish that they refused as long as they did. As she put it, “you can’t change yourself; nobody is going to change you when you are a British subject.”¹⁶⁶

Overall, British reactions to the refugee crisis in Europe following the Second World War were based on several factors – the maintenance of Britain’s role as a world power (however declining), the rebuilding of society and culture based on widespread methods of reform, economic need and financial concerns, and ideological values. The acceptance of displaced persons from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as European Volunteer Workers exemplified Britain’s handling of the refugee crisis, while resolving the domestic labor shortage. The ‘Balt Cygnet’ and the later ‘Westward Ho!’ immigration schemes illustrate the process through which Europeans who had lost everything received the chance to start again as new British citizens. To the Attlee government, they represented a people who would quickly assimilate into British culture.

The British government viewed European immigrants as the best solution to their population problems, often portraying them as highly educated, hard-working individuals whom circumstances forced from their homes. Government leaders placed themselves in the role of benefactors, making efforts to persuade the British labor unions and public to accept the EVWs as new Britons. However, the Baltic EVWs themselves viewed their

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in McDowell, “Migrants, Workers,” 879-880.

situation much differently. Rather than assimilate, they desired to retain their cultural heritage by rebuilding exile communities within Britain, always with the hope of soon returning home. The passage of time made this idea unrealistic and after many years, those who remained in the United Kingdom accepted the citizenship they had resisted for so long.

CHAPTER V

AMERICA AND THE BALTIC DPs, 1945-1952

In a message to Congress dated 7 July 1947, President Truman emphasized the responsibility of the United States to aid in the rebuilding of Europe including the resettlement of the Displaced Persons. Facing strong opposition from nativist politicians, veterans' leagues fearing competition with returning veterans over jobs, and a suspicious and weary American public, Truman urged congress "not [to] forget that our Nation was founded by immigrants many of whom fled opposition and persecution." Extolling the overall virtues of accepting the DPs as immigrants into the United States, Truman described the DPs as "hardy and resourceful" survivors of persecution and fate. "These are people," he declared, "who oppose totalitarian rule and who because of their burning faith in the principles of freedom and democracy have suffered untold deprivation and hardship. Because they . . . are opposed to Communism, they have staunchly resisted all efforts to induce them to return to Communist-controlled areas."¹⁶⁷ President Truman appealed strongly to America's love of freedom and democracy by portraying the DPs as courageous in the face of hardship, and by playing on growing fear of communism. It would take three years until a comprehensive immigration law, known as the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, allowed mass immigration from Europe to the United States. The so-called 'Baltic Preference' within this act once again placed the Baltic DPs among the most sought-after immigrants.

¹⁶⁷ Harry S. Truman, "Special Message to Congress on the Admission of Displaced Persons." John T. Wooley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]; Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted); Gerhard Peters (database); available online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12697>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2007.

The reason for delay in passing immigration measures to deal with the European crisis stemmed mainly from America's nativism, the belief that Europe's problems should not become the United States' problems. Though experiencing the greatest economic growth in its history, the American public still remembered the hardships of the Great Depression. Americans would send money and aid, organize relief groups, support UNRRA and the United Nations, but inviting immigrants in was asking too much.

Although Truman wanted the United States to lead the rest of the Allied countries by its words and actions, the passage of the new immigration law by Congress was an embarrassing uphill struggle. Replacing the restrictive policies of the 1920s and 1930s proved such a slow process that, according to one writer for *The New York Times* in October 1946, the possibility of emigration from the DP camps seemed to be "constantly dwindling."¹⁶⁸

It should not have been a surprise to the American public. The United States government made plans for a postwar refugee crisis as early as 1943, when President Franklin Roosevelt helped coordinate the creation of UNRRA in an international effort to handle the inevitable refugee crisis following the end of the war. Roosevelt also took early measures at home to supply assistance, on a limited scale, to refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. The Roosevelt Administration slightly relaxed immigration policies following the fall of France to the Nazis in 1940. He also instructed his Advisory Committee on Refugees to compile a list of prominent intellectual and highly placed refugees, instructing the State Department to issue visitor visas for those important

¹⁶⁸ Eksteins, 138.

individuals. Ultimately, these refugees used only a third of the 3,268 visas issued.¹⁶⁹

Roosevelt even went so far as to establish a temporary haven for these refugees in Oswego, New York. Run by the War Relocation Authority, the same group in charge of the Japanese-American internment camps, Oswego provided only temporary shelter, not a permanent solution.¹⁷⁰

Roosevelt saw the need to act towards a solution to the approaching refugee problem, but the rest of United States remained unconvinced. The fear of losing one's job or livelihood to foreigners pervaded American thinking. A report by the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe, in 1947, noted that from 1933 to the end of the war, the U.S. accepted only a quarter of a million immigrants from Axis-controlled countries.¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, Roosevelt's concessions to Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin as part of the Yalta Agreement in 1945 created an even greater postwar refugee crisis than originally planned. By handing over control of Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union in exchange for their help against Japan, the United States betrayed its own principles, leaving thousands unwilling or unable to return to their homes.

Following Roosevelt's sudden death in April 1945, Truman's decision to drop the Atomic bombs on Japan brought the Pacific war to an abrupt close. He now faced the difficult process of restoring order. As decided at Yalta, Stalin demanded the immediate return of all refugees belonging to those countries annexed by the Soviet Union. Faced with caring for the nearly seven million refugees in Europe, the U.S. initially complied.

¹⁶⁹ Roger Daniels, "Changes in Immigration Law and Nativism since 1924." *American Immigration and Ethnicity* by George E. Pozetta (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1991), 79.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 80.

¹⁷¹ Maurice R. Davie and Samuel Koenig, "Adjust of Refugees to American Life," *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 262, *Reappraising Our Immigration Policy* (March 1949):160.

The majority of refugees returned willingly, but it quickly became apparent that nearly a million “die-hards” would not return to their now Soviet controlled homelands.

The U.S. military forcibly repatriated thousands of captured Soviet soldiers, Russian citizens captured fighting for Germany, and Russian refugees. Rumors of their fates, however, soon took its toll on American soldiers and served to strengthen a growing distrust of the communist government. Witnesses reported stories of the mass execution, deportation, and imprisonment of those repatriated. In *Ruins of the Reich*, historian Douglass Botting recounts the despair of those sentenced to repatriate. Many committed suicide, others seized weapons and fought back, still more tried emotional appeals sent directly to the Allied commanders. Eventually the sheer volume of human misery witnessed by the Allied soldiers took its toll.¹⁷² Allied commanders soon began refusing to send Soviet prisoners-of-war and other refugees back by force. General Dwight D. Eisenhower formally questioned the policy and ended the practice in the American zone of Germany by September 1945.¹⁷³

The disorder in Germany, exacerbated by the DPs who attacked their former oppressors or fought to remain free of Soviet control, created a disturbing coldness amongst American soldiers and leadership towards the DPs. According to historian Roger Daniels, “a desire for order and efficiency . . . produce[d] among Army officers and other American officials unfeeling if not downright callous actions and re-actions towards the DPs.”¹⁷⁴ Their continued presence hindered rebuilding efforts and stabilization. The DP

¹⁷² See Nicholas William Bethell, *The Last Secret: The Delivery to Stalin of Over Two Million Russians by Britain and the United States* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974).

¹⁷³ Douglas Botting, *From the Ruins of the Reich: Germany 1945-1949* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985), 168.

¹⁷⁴ Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2004), 100.

situation grew desperate as thousands of refugees from Eastern Europe poured into the American Occupational Zone of Germany to escape the Soviets. The DP camps, established by UNRRA, quickly filled with “die-hard” refugees refusing to return home and demanding resettlement elsewhere.

Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, creator of the, later, famed Marshall Plan, claimed that America’s “responsibility as victors” included the resettlement of the DPs. Alternatives to resettlement included continued forcible repatriation or the closure of the DP camps and “turning those victims of the Germans back to the Germans.”¹⁷⁵ The continual maintenance of the DP camps, Marshall continued, would degrade the DPs in their own eyes as well as in others: “To continue to hold these people where there is no opportunity to help themselves and without hope of such opportunity is contrary to that American Tradition [of self-improvement].”¹⁷⁶ According to Marshall, the United States was in the best position to help the DPs and should set an example for others by resolving the issue quickly.

Military commanders and relief workers in Europe grew increasingly frustrated with America’s refusal to act. Earl G. Harrison, in his report to President Truman on the conditions of the camps, concluded that if the United States would take action towards resettlement, other countries might “be willing to keep their doors reasonably open for such humanitarian considerations.”¹⁷⁷ Harrison urged Washington to set an example and secure its position as a world leader. The camps provided no permanent solution to the DPs.

¹⁷⁵ Department of State, “Concern Expressed on Resettlement of the DPs: Statement of Secretary of State Made July 16, 1947,” *The Displaced Persons Problem: a Collection of Recent Official Statements*. Publication 2899, European Series 26 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 5.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Harrison, 14.

The real difficulty, Truman found, was getting the traditionally isolationist American public to share his point of view. The politics of immigration during the 1920s and 1930s were strongly conservative. Far right-wing politicians succeeded in passing the first restrictive immigration laws in American history in 1924, considered by some historians as the peak of nativism in American politics. This law limited the number of immigrants to set quotas per year from each European country. In 1945 a number of congressmen went so far as to introduce legislation that would cut the 1924 immigration quotas in half for the next ten years to prevent the massive immigration of wartime refugees.¹⁷⁸

The American public in 1945 appeared to side with the nativists on the issue of immigration. A 1945 Gallup poll asked three questions: should America allow in more European immigrants, the same number, or less than before the war. Thirty-seven percent said fewer; thirty-two percent said the same, while only five percent said more. Fourteen percent had no opinion.¹⁷⁹ The issue of resettlement could not, however, be ignored. Not only was America's humanitarian reputation at stake, but also its position as one of the two emerging superpowers in the world.

The continuing debate with Britain over the fate of the Jewish DPs revealed America's hypocritical stance as long as it continued to close its doors to resettlement. Truman wrote to the newly elected Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, supporting Jewish immigration to Palestine and urging the PM to act accordingly. The British responded by pointing out that America's refusal to aid the DPs by allowing them access to its shores. Yes, America accepted a select number of prominent refugees, according to the British

¹⁷⁸ Beth Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2007), 11.

¹⁷⁹ Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 103.

newspaper *New Statesman*, referring to President Roosevelt's wartime directives, but when it came to "the broken human wrecks" left behind, they made little effort to help.¹⁸⁰ The British could afford to make such criticisms since they accepted refugees on a limited scale beginning in 1946.

At home, many in the popular press joined the call for action. According to an editorial in *The Washington Post* on 9 September 1946, the fact that Americans, committed themselves to caring for the DPs as long as they remained in their camps and while exhorting other countries to accept them as immigrants, set a "precedent dangerous to . . . [her] cherished values" by refusing resettlement.¹⁸¹ In the 1 February 1947 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, the writer appealed to the public's sense of pride and reason to persuade them to favor immigration.

If our efforts to protect these people in their right to asylum in Europe are anything more than wind, we are bound to consider whether or not some of them could come to our shores without evasion of immigration quota restriction. Careful screening would of course be necessary, but surely a nation whose population is mainly composed of immigrants and their descendants cannot logically maintain that the only 'good' immigrants are those who are already here.¹⁸²

Still others tried 'shame tactics' to spur action. *Life Magazine*, in its 23 September 1946 issue, editorialized that the "most shocking fact about the plight of these displaced persons is not that they are interned. It is the fact that the United States Government and people have the means to open the door for many of them but have not done so."¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Amy Zahl Gottlieb, "Refugee Immigration: the Truman Directive," in *American Immigration and Ethnicity*, vol 20, *Contemporary Immigration and American Society* by George E. Pozzetta (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991): 149.

¹⁸¹ United States Displaced Persons Commission, *Memo to America, the DP Story: The Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Publishing Office, 1952), 10.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

Although these appeals reached their audience, resistance to immigration remained stubborn.

President Truman took firmer action. From September to October 1947, the Subcommittee of the House of Foreign Affairs visited 150 DP camps in Europe to evaluate the situation and make recommendations for further action. They returned in agreement that repatriation had indeed failed and resettlement provided the only solution.¹⁸⁴ “The immensity of the problem of displaced persons and refugees,” Truman declared, “is almost beyond comprehension. This period of unspeakable human distress is not the time for us to close or to narrow our gates.”¹⁸⁵ With this statement, Truman announced a new immigration plan, the Truman Directive. This plan established an emergency measure for 40,000 visas per year issued to select DPs. Ultimately the Directive issued 35,515 visas.¹⁸⁶ Though failing to reach its visa quota, the Directive did accomplish some procedural changes by allowing cultural and religious charities the right to provide affidavits for DPs, a right previously given only to an immigrant’s relatives.¹⁸⁷

The real accomplishment of the Truman Directive, however, was to force Congress to formally address the issue of resettlement and the need for new immigration laws. The introduction of the Stratton Bill on 1 April 1947 placed the issue of the displaced persons squarely before Congress for the first time.¹⁸⁸ The Stratton Bill proposed that, for four years, 100,000 DPs be allowed into the United States. Inherently, the bill was simple. According to historian Robert Divine, the bill required only that the DPs meet the existing immigration requirements while giving preference to the close

¹⁸⁴ United States Displaced Persons Commission, 18.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Cohen, 12.

¹⁸⁶ Cohen, 3; Gottlieb, 145-158.

¹⁸⁷ Cohen, 3; Gottlieb, 157.

¹⁸⁸ Robert A. Divine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1957), 115.

relatives of war veterans and American citizens.¹⁸⁹ As expected, the bill met with immediate opposition as well as support.

The press favored the bill as the first positive step in solving the huge European refugee problem, while living up to America's wartime pledge. Organized labor, by supporting the bill, surprised the isolationists. William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) believed that the situation of the DPs "justified a temporary departure from . . . [the] quota policy."¹⁹⁰ Although still supported by major veterans' organizations and numerous patriotic societies, the loss of union support made isolationist politicians seriously consider the bill's proposals.¹⁹¹ Forced to acknowledge the need for a new immigration policy, they resolved to fight long and hard to make that policy as restrictive as possible. The Cold War and growing fear of communism aided these efforts. Continuous debate and opposition stalled the passage of the bill for nearly a year until the Senate pushed through an even more restrictive bill on 2 June 1948.

The new Wiley-Revercomb Bill, presented by Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin and Senator Chapman Revercomb of West Virginia, allowed for only 50,000 DPs per year for two years. Of those admitted, the bill demanded that fifty percent have agricultural backgrounds with preference given to those coming from the Baltic region. But the bill established a cutoff date for eligibility. Only those DPs who arrived in the camps by 22 December 1945 could apply for resettlement. This prevented the majority of Jewish DPs, who fled from the pogroms in Poland in 1946, and those from largely Catholic countries such as Poland and the Ukraine from applying. Opponents immediately condemned the bill as blatantly anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic, which it was.

¹⁸⁹ Divine, 115-116.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 115.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

The Baltic preference solidified this idea as they made up the largest group of Protestants among the DPs.¹⁹² The result of both bills was a compromise in the form of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948.

Revercomb chaired the committee in charge of writing the act. As historian Steve Neal points out, Revercomb viewed it as his duty as an American citizen to create a policy designed to keep all “undesirables” out.¹⁹³ Regarding this position he stated, “We don’t want any security risks – anyone who is a Commie or Nazi – coming into the United States under the DP program.”¹⁹⁴ To this end, they continued to press for the proposed cutoff date and agricultural preference as the best means to curb the rush of potential communist sympathizers from Eastern Europe and former Nazis fleeing the Eastern Front from entering the United States.

The Senate eventually reached a compromise in June 1948. However, the resulting legislation, the Displaced Persons Act, combined some of the worst features of the two competing bills.¹⁹⁵ The Act authorized the admission of 250,000 DPs over the next two fiscal years. For immigration supporters, this number seemed too low considering that nearly a million DPs remained in the camps. The Act also required that thirty percent of entrance visas issued be reserved for agricultural workers (down from the earlier fifty percent) and up to fifty percent for those from the Baltic countries.¹⁹⁶ The cutoff date stubbornly remained fixed at 22 December 1945 – those who arrived after this date were ineligible to come to the United States.¹⁹⁷ In what was an “essentially face-

¹⁹² Cohen, 14.

¹⁹³ Neal, 274.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Neal, 274.

¹⁹⁵ Cohen, 14-15.

¹⁹⁶ United States Displaced Persons Commission, 80.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

saving measure,” the law kept the 1924 quota system, but allowed for quota mortgaging to increase the numbers allowed into the country.¹⁹⁸ Mortgaging allowed the government to ‘borrow’ against future yearly quotas in order to admit as many DPs as possible within the time limit allowed by the DP Act. For instance, in one extreme case, the government mortgaged the Latvian quota of 286 immigrants per year up to the year 2274.¹⁹⁹

President Truman and the liberal supporters of immigration responded with indignation, anger, and dismay over the stubbornness of the Senate to present a more open policy. Both the cutoff date and the Baltic preference led to calls of discrimination with respect to Jews and Catholics. Those who proposed the Baltic preference acted on the assumption that the majority of these DPs came from agricultural backgrounds, which they did not. Although they comprised only twenty-five percent of the DP population, the Baltic DPs included the majority of Protestants.²⁰⁰ The isolationists accepted the idea of the Protestant, white farmers represented by the Baltic DPs as closest to the American ideal as established by the founding fathers. This ridiculous assumption added weight to the liberal argument that the DP Act embodied the backwardness of American politics in the postwar world.

Earl G. Harrison, the American representative on the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (established to deal with the situation in Europe), became one of the more vocal critics of the DP Act. Having witnessed first hand the aftermath of the Holocaust and the desperate situation of the Jewish survivors, he criticized the Act as the first discriminatory provision based on religion ever placed in U.S. Immigration law.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 85.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Davie, 163.

²⁰¹ Slatt, 289.

The blatant anti-Semitism in the provisions of the bill, to Harrison, shamed not only those who proposed it, but the United States as a whole in the eyes of the world.

Unfortunately, the liberals had no other choice. With the congressional session about to end, a frustrated Truman reluctantly signed the Act, reasoning that he would rather pass some form of DP legislation than none.²⁰² Echoing the President's sentiments, the Kentucky Representative, a supporter of immigration, explained, "We had a gun barrel at our heads. That gun barrel was the element of time. . . . I repeat, it was either this compromise or nothing."²⁰³

The result was a policy so restrictive that it was almost impossible for the DPs to enter the country in a timely manner. Paperwork, health inspections, visas, and other measures confused both recruiters and the DPs. Mr. E.E. Swanston, director of war relief services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, related that the group's submission of 50,000 job opportunities . . . [to] Washington failed due to administrative red tape. To gain admittance under the DP Act, each DP had to submit upwards of thirty different documents and get clearance from six different governmental agencies in order to gain a visa.²⁰⁴ Such security measures prompted the *New York Times* to report, "it is easier for a former Nazi to enter the United States than for one of the Nazis' innocent victims."²⁰⁵

To help manage the process, Truman established the Displaced Persons Commission giving it authority to work with and authorize voluntary agencies in the transportation and settlement of the DPs. The Commission, chaired by three presidential

²⁰² Milda Danys, *DP: Lithuanian Immigration to Canada after the Second World War* (Toronto, Canada: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986), 70-71.

²⁰³ Joel S. Fetzer, *Public Attitudes Toward Immigration in the United States, France, and Germany* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge UP, 2000), 127.

²⁰⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, "DP Program Said Blocked by Red Tape," 23 February 1949; available at <http://omfpweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive>; Internet; accessed 11 February 2006.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Eksteins, 138.

appointees, each with a background in immigration affairs and sympathetic to the refugees, worked to smooth the way for DP immigration. They passed further legislation allowing voluntary agencies to issue visas and transport DPs, provided the refugees gave assurance that they would not become “public charges” and thus a burden to taxpayers.²⁰⁶ Truman hoped to speed up the immigration process by smoothing the way for volunteer and charitable organizations to directly recruit and sponsor the DPs.

For the DPs, the selection process and the acquisition of American sponsor proved a difficult task. Like Britain, Canada, and Australia, the United States emphasized that only the best qualified DPs would be eligible for immigration. American health inspectors conducted exams throughout the DP camps checking for any signs of illness or handicap. A little girl, Marite Zidermanis, a Latvian DP, recalled how her mother made her put on her nicest clothes, checking her over for signs of lice, and braided her hair with ribbons before taking her to the health inspectors to get clearance for immigration.²⁰⁷ By all accounts, the Baltic DPs made a favorable impression on the recruiters due largely to their tidy appearance as well as their polite and well-educated manner. In general, inspectors did not accept DPs who did not appear healthy and clean, although there were numerous exceptions where doctors passed DPs for immigration out of pity.

The DP Commission prioritized the issuance of visas based on economic need and occupation. Farmers, laborers, physicians, dentists, nurses, household domestics, clothing or garment workers, and aliens “possessing educational, scientific, or technical qualifications”, received first priority. Aliens with blood relations already in the United States received second priority, while all others classified as DPs received final

²⁰⁶ Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 107.

²⁰⁷ Marite Eastes, interview by author, 11 September 2007, Georgetown, TX, conducted by phone.

priority.²⁰⁸ Above all, to qualify for immigration to the United States, the DPs had to prove themselves useful and that they would not become burdens on society. The U.S. government required the DPs to provide assurance that they could acquire housing and employment without taking them from any American citizen.²⁰⁹

According to historian Beth Cohen, in order for the DP to obtain the coveted visa they first needed a sponsor (individual or welfare agency) who provided an affidavit to the government promising that the DP would not become a public charge. The DP could receive the affidavit through one of three ways: “an individual affidavit (for a named relative); an agency or corporate affidavit [such as from the Lutheran Church for a named individual]; or, least common, an employer affidavit (unnamed).”²¹⁰ Sponsors carried four responsibilities for each eligible DP:

1. Assurance of suitable employment at not less than the prevailing rate of wages for like activity in the community where employed without displacing some other person from employment.
2. Assurance of safe and sanitary housing for the person and members of his family who will accompany him and who propose to live with him without displacing some other person from such housing.
3. Assurance that the displaced person and members of his family who accompany him and propose to live with him shall not become public charges.
4. Assurance that the displaced person and members of his family will be properly received at the port of entry in the United States and transportation and en route expenses from such port to the place of destination shall be provided.²¹¹

The government placed heavy emphasis on the DP not displacing the job or home of any American. Unlike Britain, where the government assumed responsibility for the EVWs

²⁰⁸ Davie, 30.

²⁰⁹ Slatt, 288.

²¹⁰ Cohen, 32-33.

²¹¹ Ibid.

and required knowledge of their whereabouts, the DPs in America could move about freely so long as they paid their debts and provided for their own support.

Thanks to the efforts of the DP Commission, volunteer organizations helped coordinate the necessary paperwork required to gain a visa as well as locate sponsors for the DPs cleared for immigration. The Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, American Quakers, the Christian Committee for Refugees, and the American Joint Distribution Committee worked to match individual sponsors with DPs. Other organizations, such as the International Red Cross, the National Refugee Service, and the International Rescue and Relief Committee, provided care and clothing bundles for the DPs and new arrivals. The Red Cross also served as a tracing bureau with a large central database to help European DPs find American relatives and other family members.²¹² The work of these charities became one of the most important means of bringing the DPs to America.

These organizations made every effort to help the DPs, but always with the understanding that they were to begin helping and supporting themselves as quickly as possible. On this point, most of the Baltic DPs were in complete agreement. They did not want charity, many claimed, only the chance to start again. Efforts were made even for those ‘hard cases,’ mostly young mothers with children, the elderly or the handicapped, to help them bypass health inspections (if necessary), or to find sponsors willing to accept the burden of caring for them. Leida Sorro, an Estonian DP, was one of these ‘hard cases.’ While living in a DP camp, her husband died unexpectedly leaving her with four young children and little chance of finding a sponsor willing to support her and her family. Eventually, someone told her to seek help from the Methodist Church, known to take on difficult cases. “I visited the lady who was in charge of the Methodist office,” she

²¹² Slatt, 290.

relates, “I knew so little English that I had to use sign language, but I had a good feeling about her. She said, ‘I would like to see your family.’ So I ran to the camp again . . . and made the children just so and came back with them. The lady looked at them. She had a beautiful smile. She said, ‘Of course we can help you.’”²¹³ Determination, a good appearance, and a great deal of luck aided the Baltic DPs to take advantage of the preference given them through the Displaced Persons Act.

The success and ease of individual sponsorship varied from person to person. The situation of Helga Zidermanis, another “hard case” DP from Latvia, illustrates the uncertainty involved in migrating to America from the DP camps. As the mother of five children under the age of twelve, Helga’s prospects for immigration to any of the resettlement countries, much less the United States, seemed small. When an American journalist who befriended her in one of the camps revealed that he had found her an American sponsor she was euphoric. She quickly wrote a letter to the sponsor, a Midwestern farmer, thanking him for his generosity. She received a chilling reply several weeks later. The farmer had been led to believe he was sponsoring six adults who could work as laborers on his farm and angrily withdrew his sponsorship. He would not support a large family who could do nothing for him in return.

Desperate, Helga sought the help of her journalist friend, relating to him her letter and the reply. Rather than sympathize, however, he belittled her naiveté and stupidity. Of course, he had lied to the sponsor in order to get her to America. How else did she think she could make it? “You’ve ruined your chances of ever getting to America,” he told her, “I can’t help you.” Later remorseful, the journalist agreed to find her another sponsor

²¹³ Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky, *American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1980), 252.

once she arrived in Dallas, Texas, where he lived. Within weeks, they crossed the Atlantic to begin again in the United States.²¹⁴

Individuals who chose to directly sponsor DPs rather than work through a volunteer agency sometimes faced criticism from their local communities. Mirzda, a Latvian DP, recalled the kindness of the couple in Oklahoma who sponsored her and her husband to work for them on their farm in 1950. Through their correspondence, she learned that her sponsor's local community criticized them for “taking steps to place DPs in their employ,” but chose to sponsor them nonetheless. Their kindness was not lost on Mirzda and her husband.²¹⁵

For its part, the US Government made efforts to prepare the DPs abroad for their migration to America and also to ease the assimilation process by starting a propaganda campaign aimed at “introducing” the DPs to the American people. American propaganda films at the time showed DP children in makeshift schools learning English for a normal life in a welcoming country. The films emphasized the charity and goodwill of the American people by portraying them as a prosperous and happy, always willing to help others.

As with any campaign, however, the effects of propaganda could prove damaging by raising expectations too high. A common complaint among recruiters in the camps was that the DPs held too rosy a picture of America as the Promised Land they saw in pictures and read about in stories. The hope of migrating to America even prevented numerous DPs from accepting offers to resettle elsewhere. According to Lieda Sorro, immediately after her husband’s death she received an offer to move to Sweden, but

²¹⁴ Helga Zidermanis, interview by author, 22 November 2006, Honey Grove, TX, conducted in person.

²¹⁵ Cunningham, 132.

turned it down. Though considered a “hard case” for settlement in America, she chose to remain in the camps and wait for her chance. “I had such a picture of it as a wonderland,” she said, “and I wanted to see it.”²¹⁶ Attitudes such as these forced the continued existence of the camps and placed more burdens on the occupational authorities to provide for the DPs.

Stereotypes about America were difficult for the DPs to comprehend. This often led to amusing, sometimes bitter experiences once they reached their destinations. Anton Tamsaare, an Estonian DP, recalled his family’s first reactions on hearing that the Norwegian Lutheran Church was sending them to Moorehead, North Dakota. Thinking that North Dakota was an arctic region, the family prepared for the worst. “We thought we should take along everything we had,” Tamsaare recalled, “because they wouldn’t have anything – they would be underdeveloped, they would be moving by dogsled. So we took along a great deal of stuff, including our mattresses and bedding and furniture.”²¹⁷ On the other side, many Americans thought of the DPs as coming from underdeveloped, backward countries because of images portrayed in tracts and films produced by organizations such as the Catholic League and Lutheran Relief which showed images of the DPs as peasants from the previous century.

Regardless of their stereotypes, the first DPs arrived aboard *The General Black* on 21 October 1948 carrying close to 700 DPs, a large percentage of whom were Balts. They were greeted by the Attorney General on behalf of President Truman who welcomed them as the “pilgrims of 1948 entering the historic gateway of freedom as did the

²¹⁶ Morrison, 252.

²¹⁷ June Namias, *First Generation: In the Words of Twentieth-Century American Immigrants* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1978), 142.

Pilgrims of 1620.”²¹⁸ The DP spokesman responded, “Today we are liberated from every misery of existence in Europe and we thank you very much. We are born today the second time in our lives to a new life of freedom and new life of democracy. We thank you very much.”²¹⁹ The sheer size and obvious material wealth of American culture overwhelmed the DPs. The number of skyscrapers and the countless automobiles on myriad highways awed them, but they remained appalled by the urban squalor. According to Algridas M. Budreckis, the vice president of the Lithuanian-American Community Incorporated, “the first impression was that America was sloppy and wasteful.”²²⁰ Leida Sorro recalled what she amusingly remembered as her first encounter with American culture while on a train to her final destination in the Midwest.

I remember being on that train and seeing these kids, a few seats in front of us, playing with play money. We didn’t know it was play money. I’ll never forget that scene. There’s all this money falling around, and all we had for the five of us to eat with on the train for three days was twenty dollars. Finally, [my daughter] picked up a piece of the play money and we looked – twenty dollars! We thought it was real and here were these children, playing with all that money. We thought, “My God! It really is true; Americans really are rich.”²²¹

It was an abrupt change coming from the DP camps where nothing was wasted.

Those DPs sponsored by individuals went to their final destinations immediately on their arrival. Those sponsored by agencies, however, were taken to welcoming centers where they remained until they found work and a permanent residence, although many DPs had the opportunity to refuse certain sponsors or placements in favor of others. One such couple from Latvia refused an immediate opportunity in Nebraska in favor of a

²¹⁸ Davie, 65.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Algridas M. Budreckis, “The Lithuanian Displaced Persons,” in *Contemporary American Immigration: Interpretive Essays (European)*, ed. Dennis Laurence Cuddy, *The Immigrant Heritage of America*, ed. Cecyle S. Neidle (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982): 189.

²²¹ Morrison, 252.

small town in upper New York State. There they were welcomed by a “welcome wagon hostess” and a “home prepared for them in every way,” filled with furniture, clothes, and food.²²² Although the location of placements varied, the majority of the DPs ended up in the Midwestern and Southern states.

While some met with the hospitality and charity most expected from Americans, others experienced a more sobering reality. One Latvian woman assumed that everything was free, including food, clothes, and lodging, until she found a job. To her astonishment one day the pastor she stayed with gave her a bill for a thousand dollars for the three months she had lived with him and his wife. Fortunately, the man did not make her pay him right away but let her pay when she could.²²³ Others experienced the same situation, expecting free provisions when in truth they went into debt immediately upon their arrival. Their sponsors, they discovered, were willing to provide for them but not necessarily pay for them. Other DPs received a government loan to pay for transportation to their destinations, and to pay for food and other expenses until they began to work. These loans would be repaid as soon as possible.

Every eligible member of the DP family worked regardless of professional background. Both husbands and wives typically worked one and two jobs in order to save money to repay their debts and achieve financial security.²²⁴ Finding well-paying jobs and good housing proved difficult for some. It was common in larger cities for several families to live crowded together in tenement houses until they could afford something better. In Indianapolis, Agate Nesaule, a Latvian DP, and her family, lived with a

²²² Joyce Kushinka, “A Summary of the Assimilation Experience of Jewish, Latvian, and Ukrainian Displaced Persons.” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1979), 184.

²²³ Nesaule, 144.

²²⁴ Alilunas, 181.

minister and his wife until they found an apartment in a nearby tenement. The apartment building was dangerously over-crowded, but the landlady warned them against revealing that to any authorities unless they had somewhere cheaper to go.²²⁵

Nevertheless, the DPs were eager to work, even if only at menial labor. Physicians, clergymen, and engineers fared better from the beginning, according to a study on contemporary immigration. While practically no teacher or lawyer avoided manual labor, physicians and engineers generally could start at white-collar jobs, prepare for and take state Medical Board exams, and eventually resume professional work.²²⁶ Other DPs worked at undesirable jobs while taking courses to improve or develop skills in other more lucrative fields such as nursing, bookkeeping, and mechanics.²²⁷ Occupational adjustment varied depending on the profession and knowledge of the English language and American social and political systems. According to June Dreening Holmquist, in her study on the various ethnic groups in Minnesota, two factors helped to diminish the “adverse impact of occupational adjustment” for professionals. Firstly, most DPs viewed any occupation as preferable to life in the DP camps. Secondly, the “higher standard of living in the United States and the rise in the individual’s economic status tended to compensate for a decline in social or occupational status.”²²⁸

The former occupations of most professional DPs no longer existed for them. This included most of the Baltic DPs. Though the majority had professional backgrounds, they could not find professional work. The very preference given them under the DP Act was based on the mistaken idea that they were farmers and blue collar workers. Tamsaare

²²⁵ Nesaule, 153.

²²⁶ Budreckis, 195.

²²⁷ Ibid, 195.

²²⁸ June Dreening Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 330.

recalled how his father, a highly placed political official in his native Estonia, found work only as a janitor because his political knowledge could not translate into American politics. This move from upper middle class to lower middle class disappointed Tamsaare's parents a great deal, but they learned to deal with the reality of their situation.²²⁹

As can be expected, the stories of the Baltic DPs varied from those who felt taken advantage of and those who had only kind words to say about their sponsors and experiences. Common features of the DPs' initial experiences included working multiple jobs in order to save money to buy a house, car, or education for themselves or their children. Mirzda experienced her "first hand look at American generosity" with the death of her newborn son. Knowing that she and her husband had little money of their own, the people in their community paid for the funeral expenses and did what they could to help them through their grief.²³⁰ In other communities, local organizations helped the refugees assimilate, offering assistance in finding work, accommodations, friends and family members, even financial loans and job training. The DPs, for the most part, returned the kindness by being hard-working and reliable employees. Though this caused occasional complaints from American workers, employers seemed generally eager to hire DPs. On at least one occasion in Minnesota, a labor union complained that an employer was hiring too many non-unionized DPs and displacing union workers. The employer responded that the DPs proved better and more reliable. Providing the DPs with union cards, thus

²²⁹Namias, 144.

²³⁰Cunningham, 135.

assimilating them into the American working class, simply and logically resolved the matter.²³¹

The DPs sent to the Southern states fared worse than those in the Midwest. Living and work situations were generally poor. Ignorance of the DPs backgrounds enabled many farmers on secluded farms to feel superior to their well-educated workers. According to one Latvian DP, the one thing he would have changed about his situation on arrival was he would have learned English before he came. In the South, he stated a person's accent would always separate him from the crowd and cause him to receive a "little bit different treatment."²³² Just as "blacks were outcasts and poorly treated," so too were DPs with "strong accents or little English . . . rejected as acceptable white citizens."²³³

Experiences varied from person to person. Some found acceptance, while others did not. Many sponsors took advantage of the DPs' situation, paying them little while charging them high prices for food and shelter. As Nesaule explains, it was difficult for the DP to reconcile the America they dreamed about in the camps with the reality they faced on their arrival. "The camps," she states, "had been full of wonderful stories about the reception in America." Stories of welcoming committees stocking the homes of DP families with food, clothes, and other essentials free of charge circulated among the DPs. All the stories promised that America had streets paved with gold. No one had "yet heard of the other stories of middle-aged former professors working in the cotton fields of Mississippi and being threatened with jail and deportation if they tried to leave."²³⁴

²³¹ Holmquist, 330.

²³² Kushinka, 183.

²³³ Cunningham, 148.

²³⁴ Nesaule, 144.

Feelings of isolation and depression were inevitable given the situation of many DPs. For this reason, many moved to larger cities once they repaid their debts in the hopes of more opportunities and the presence of other former DPs who shared similar experiences.

Despite these difficulties, the DPs soon adapted to American life and assimilated into the culture. This happened, in large part, through their children who were educated in American schools and grew up as Americans. The loss of status and wealth for the parents often translated into high expectations for their children to do well and succeed. For these parents, a college education for their children symbolized acceptance and success in America. Tamsaare remembers that he and his parents had “an understanding” that he was to be the best at whatever he chose to do. This he viewed as not only forging his own identity, but also repaying his parents for what they had experienced and the sacrifices they had made.²³⁵

What the Baltic DPs desired in the United States was the chance to work and provide a life for themselves and their families. They hoped to preserve their cultural heritage while assimilating into American culture and be accepted as Americans and not as charity cases. In Minneapolis, the Latvian and Estonian communities established religious and cultural centers where special celebrations, music festivals, and other activities took place to keep the memories of the past alive and give the younger generation a solid cultural foundation.²³⁶ In Chicago, the Lithuanian DPs created their own communities after clashing with older established Lithuanian groups. The settled Lithuanian community, whose families arrived in America the previous century, could not understand why the DPs chose not to return home when given the chance. The DPs,

²³⁵ Namias, 143.

²³⁶ Holmquist, 331.

on the other hand, could not communicate the horrors of Soviet occupation to those who had never experienced communism.

America's involvement in the DP situation in Europe took another step forward in 1950. Five years had passed since the end of the war, yet the DP camps still existed in Europe. Congress passed an Amendment to the DP Act that suspended the quota system to solve the immediate problem of removing the large numbers of unsettled refugees. The presence of so many unstable people in Europe, proponents argued, might prove a destabilizing force in securing countries vital against the threat of communism. To quickly empty the camps, the Amendment also liberalized requirements by removing any trace of discrimination against Jews and Catholics caused by the early cutoff date.²³⁷ The DP Act expired in 1952 in favor of other immigration laws. This coincided with the closing of the final DP camps in Europe. In all, over seventy percent of those admitted under the Displaced Persons Act came from countries annexed by the Soviet Union.

According to author John Higham, in a study of American attitudes towards immigration, by 1924 with the establishment of an immigration quota system "the old belief in America as a Promised Land for all who yearn for freedom had lost its operative significance." Only after months and years of debate and persuasion did the situation begin to change. The Displaced Persons Act was the first "refugee" act in American history – written from necessity and the threat created by the Cold War. It was originally set to terminate in 1951, but Congress extended the deadline until June 30, 1952, to ensure the use of all authorized visas. In four years, America accepted 337,244 DPs as permanent residents. In all, 308 ships and 284 flights entered New York, New Orleans, and Boston carrying DPs and other refugees to their new homes.

²³⁷ Divine, 141-143.

In the study of the DPs and the resettlement schemes, of note concerning those who settled in the United States was their desire to assimilate rather than hold onto the belief that they would one day return home. They established cultural communities in many of the larger cities, although this proved more to create an emotional support system rather than a serious attempt to re-establish their homelands in America. Holding onto heritage was important for many parents who established weekend schools to teach their children their native languages and customs. However, the children were not generally discouraged from becoming American. The DPs who came to the United States were expected and often assisted to assimilate, unlike those DP communities in other resettlement countries which remained segregated from the native population. Experiences varied and disappointments abounded, but the majority of the Baltic DPs did not regret their decision.

CHAPTER VI

AUSTRALIA, CANADA, AND THE BALTIC DPs, 1947-1952

In 1945, neither Canada nor Australia seriously considered the plight of the Displaced Persons in Europe. Like other members of the United Nations, both felt that repatriation would successfully solve the refugee problem by allowing everyone to return to their homes, happily and willingly. Of greater concern to leaders in both Canada and Australia was the severe labor shortage immediately after the war. Both countries looked to immigration for answers to dire predictions that at their current rate of population growth neither country would have enough people to fill the postwar labor shortage.

Initial schemes involved the resettlement of British ex-servicemen and women as the best means to boost population. The recruitment of British immigrants seemed natural to both Canadians and Australians who identified themselves through their British ancestry. The British government, however, began to actively discourage this migration fearing the effects of population loss in Britain. The failure of these initial schemes forced a re-evaluation of both Canadian and Australian national identity to combine the needs of the nation with the realities of the postwar situation.

To deal with the postwar crisis, both Australia and Canada established similar immigration plans. Based, in part, on their moral and financial obligations to the United Nations, both countries planned to take part in the resettlement of European refugees. Some had no homes to return to, while other refused to return to their Soviet-occupied homelands. Both countries turned to the DP camps to solve their population troubles when immigration from Britain alone could not meet labor demands. As with the British immigration schemes, Canadian and Australian officials turned to Baltic DPs as the most

desirable and the most easily assimilated among the refugees. Their interest was one-sided, however. Neither Canada nor Australia ranked high on the majority of refugee's list of desirable places to immigrate. Both had to present themselves in ways that would appeal to the DPs. This proved a difficult task for both. Although Australia presented itself as a spacious land of opportunity, the distance from Europe deterred many DPs who hoped to one day return home. Canada's reputation as nothing more than "a few acres of snow" did nothing to boost its popularity among immigrants. Both Australian and Canadian Immigration officials promoted their countries as new lands of opportunity far away from war-torn Europe. Once there, the DPs would no longer need to worry about food, disease, or another war. With hard work, they could start again. In reality, with the United States still silent on the issue of resettlement the DPs had few choices in terms of resettlement. By 1947, the desire to leave the camps made Australia and Canada more appealing.

In the 1930s, Australia faced a national population crisis. This was true at least according to those in parliament who debated the need to address the inevitable decline in the number and virility of Australia's population. Arthur Calwell, future director of immigration, estimated that at its current rate of growth, Australia's population would peak in 1970 and enter a long decline eventually dropping from seven to three million people.²³⁸ In his words, Australia's enemies "need wait only a generation or two until we are so reduced in numbers that they will be able to walk into Australia in much the same way as Captain Cook did 150 years ago against the boomerangs and spears of the

²³⁸ Egon F. Kunz, *Displaced Persons: Calwell's New Australians* (Sydney, Australia: Australian National University Press, 1988), 11.

Aborigines.”²³⁹ With a population of only seven million, it was impossible to protect Australia’s twelve thousand miles of coastline. To combat this, newly elected Prime Minister, J.B. Chifley established the Department of Immigration naming Arthur Calwell as the first Minister of Immigration of the Commonwealth of Australia on 13 July 1945.

In his first address to the Australian House of Representatives on 2 August 1945, Calwell stated that Australians needed to overcome their xenophobic fear of foreigners and press hard for immigration if they were to succeed in a postwar world.²⁴⁰ He further argued that with their present economy, the nation could absorb up to 70,000 immigrants annually.²⁴¹ Initial immigration focused on the recruitment of British subjects under the Free and Assisted Passage Scheme, resulting in the resettlement of over 170,000 ex-servicemen and women from Britain by 1952.²⁴² Though British immigrants provided Australia with its largest immigration numbers until the 1970s, by 1946, too few immigrants had responded to Australia’s offer forcing them to seek elsewhere to meet their immigration quotas.²⁴³

Chifley was the first to realize the potential for immigration among the DP camps in Germany. In the summer of 1947, Chifley authorized Calwell to explore the possibility of establishing a European immigration scheme. As a result, the Immigration Office signed an agreement with the Preparatory Commission of the IRO on 21 July 1947. According to this agreement, Australia would initially accept four thousands DPs

²³⁹ Quoted in Kunz, 11.

²⁴⁰ “Arthur Calwell: Ministerial Statement on Immigration to the House of Representatives, 2 August 1945” in *Bold Experiment: A Documentary History of Australian Immigration since 1945*, ed. John Lack and Jacqueline Templeton (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17-19.

²⁴¹ Klaus Neumann, *Refuge Australia: Australian’s Humanitarian Record* (Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press, Ltd., 2004), 28.

²⁴² Charles S. Blackton, “Australia’s Immigration Problem,” *Far Eastern Survey* 22, no. 12 (November 1953): 164.

²⁴³ John Lack and Jacqueline Templeton, *Bold Experiment: A Documentary History of Australian Immigration since 1945* (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1995), 74.

(followed by one thousand per month) and agreed to pay ten pounds towards the passage of each immigrant. Calwell further promised that after their arrival, the DPs would “enjoy exactly the same living conditions and wages as Australian workers performing similar work.”²⁴⁴ He authorized Immigration officers to begin recruitment of 12,000 DPs before the Australian government even ratified the IRO agreement. Justifying his actions to Chifley, Calwell stated that the interest of securing DPs shown by other countries made the move “the most speedy and economical method of securing best types of migrants required for Australia’s economic rehabilitation.”²⁴⁵ Under the direction of Calwell and the head of the Australian Military Mission, recruitment began in the British occupational zone.

Though Australian officials showed preference for single, unattached men and women, the immigrations scheme encouraged the recruitment of married breadwinners so long as they were physically fit and willing to work. Once in Australia, immigrants were encouraged to sponsor other relatives and friends for immigration. The IRO greatly appreciated what was essentially a family migration scheme and acknowledged Australia as a model for other governments.²⁴⁶ The most pressing immediate challenge to immigration was the securing of ships to transport the DPs from Europe to Australia. The greater challenge of preparing the xenophobic Australian population to accept the new arrivals still lay ahead. In 1946, after attending the International Labor Conference held in Paris, Australian representative, L.C. Haylen drew attention to the need to educate the

²⁴⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, “Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization regarding the Migration to Australia of Refugees and Displaced Persons,” 21 July 1947, *Australian Treaty Series*, no. 3 (electronic), pt. 8. Australia was the only host country to grant the DPs full health and social benefits immediately upon their arrival.

²⁴⁵ Kunz, 35 and Wendy Webster, “Transnational Journeys and Domestic Histories,” *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 54-55.

²⁴⁶ W.D. Borrie, *Immigration, Australia’s Problems and Prospects* (London, England: Angus and Robertson, Ltd., 1949), 28.

Australian public about the DPs and assure them that they posed no threat to their livelihoods. At the same time, Haylen warned that “the greatest danger to successful settlement of migrants in Australia is a tendency for them to group together in national units,” a tendency which proper introduction to Australian culture could help prevent.²⁴⁷

The government launched a media campaign both at home and abroad to encourage immigration. The Immigration Advisory Committee recommended that if Australia “wants immigrants, Australia and Australians must do something vigorous about preparing to receive them.”²⁴⁸ The fear was that opposition from Australians to the influx of new migrant workers would make assimilation and acceptance of the DPs impossible. The Department of Immigration worked hard to shift the focus of labor unions and native Australian workers away from viewing the new immigrants as competition for resources, but rather as the means to increase the number of jobs and material goods available through an increase in consumer demand. The new arrivals, they further argued, would do Australia a favor by filling those occupations native Australians did not want.²⁴⁹

Department of Immigration officials showed concern that the DPs not receive a view of Australia that showed the country and its people as anything less than true to life. They determined that information given to the DPs must be “strictly correct” and not aim to attract immigrants “by presenting a glamour picture of the Commonwealth.”²⁵⁰ The immigrants were to arrive with no delusions, knowing what to expect and eager to

²⁴⁷ “Haylen Report: ‘The Need for Publicity at Home and Abroad,’” in *Bold Experiment: A Documentary History of Australian Immigration since 1945*, ed. by John Lack and Jacqueline Templeton (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1995), 21.

²⁴⁸ Borrie, 23.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 85.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 23.

assimilate. To this end, the Australian Information Office published a booklet for dispersal in the DP camps. Officials claimed that in simple language, the booklet gave a description of the historical and cultural values of Australia. This would help prepare them for the physical conditions of Australia as well as instill in them an appreciation for the native way of life.²⁵¹

Calwell, realizing the importance of first impressions of the Australian public to the success of the immigration scheme, ordered that recruiters allow only those DPs accepted under the strictest guidelines to immigrate. Calwell's own impressions of the Baltic DPs (formed during his initial visit to the German camps), the Immigrant Advisory Board's recommendation that they receive immigrant status, and the regard of other resettlement countries of them, made the Balts the ideal refugee.²⁵² On 28 November 1947, the former US warship, the *General Stuart Heintzelman*, arrived in Fremantle carrying 843 single men and women from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as Australia's first DPs.²⁵³ The welcoming reception given to the new arrivals, coupled with the good impression these DPs made on those around them, convinced Calwell of the need to preserve their image as the ideal DP for future media campaigns.²⁵⁴ From that point on, Calwell, the media, and the public commonly referred to the DPs as 'Balts' regardless of their nationality. This fact would later annoy the resettled Baltic DPs who wondered how many years had to pass before they ceased being 'Balts' and became Australians.

Immigration officials took the DPs by train to former military camps now designated as reception and training centers immediately upon their arrival. Calwell

²⁵¹ Borrie, 28.

²⁵² Kunz, 42.

²⁵³ Neumann, 30.

²⁵⁴ Kunz, 42.

selected these sites to segregate the DPs from the rest of the population and allow them time to adjust to their new homes. The largest center was at Bonegilla in Victoria, between the cities of Adelaide and Brisbane. Here, the new arrivals received “survival” training in the English language and Australian culture while waiting for Immigration officials to establish job placement and living arrangements. The entire process normally took four weeks. As part of the initial assimilation process, teachers with the Commonwealth Office of Education (COE) developed a scheme of “assimilation through education” focused on teaching English to the immigrants. The COE later developed radio programs in simple English so that the DPs could still learn after they left the reception centers.²⁵⁵ During this time, the DPs remained generally optimistic, as evidenced by positive messages sent to friends still in Germany as they waited in anticipation for their new lives to begin.²⁵⁶

Under the direction of the Department of Immigration, the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) placed the refugees in jobs and arranged for their transport between the centers and the place of employment. Codified by the Department of Immigration in January 1948, the guidelines for job placement focused on one basic issue – that no immigrant should deprive an Australian of occupation or accommodation. The types of work considered suitable placed women in domestic service while sending the men to rural, often isolated areas as manual and industrial laborers.²⁵⁷ The purpose of the two year contract was to keep the DPs at undesirable occupations long enough to do some good for Australia and gain acceptance from Australians. The Department of

²⁵⁵ Lois Carrington, *A Real Situation: the Story of Adult Migrant Education in Australia 1947-1970* (Canberra, Australia: Lois Carrington, 1997), 2-3, 6.

²⁵⁶ Kunz, 141.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

Immigration carried out a concentrated media campaign to convince Australians that the DPs posed no threat to their personal livelihood. According to historian Egon Kunz, they were to be “depicted as intelligent, educated, clean-cut and appreciative, not at all the feared foreigner . . . seen as cheerfully accepting the worst jobs, arriving in endless shiploads to man public utilities, break labor bottlenecks, and generally help the war-tired economy recover.”²⁵⁸ The Department of Immigration declared the media campaign a success among Australians, who proved willing to accept the immigrants on these terms.

Complaints about the scheme focused on Calwell’s insistence that regardless of previous occupations or skill, the DPs remain in their places of initial employment for the full two years of their contract. In the case of Apalonia Sapalis, a famous Latvian singer placed to work as a kitchen maid, not even the plea of the chorus master of an opera company in Melbourne could persuade Calwell to relax his stance. “Australia has a right,” he argued, “to expect that these people – no matter what their skill or attributes – will give their services for a period of up to two years in some branch of the Australian economy in which labor is scarce.”²⁵⁹ The Department of Immigration launched a publicity campaign in magazines and newsletters portraying the DPs as more than happy to perform menial labor. Former lawyers, doctors, professors, and artists smiled cheerfully for the cameras while working at their new blue-collar jobs. The national media fired back with cartoons and stories portraying Calwell as unyielding to change even for the benefit of Australia.²⁶⁰ Little change occurred until the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing, short of engineers, architects, and draftsmen, contacted the Department of Labour and National Services about recruiting from among

²⁵⁸ Kunz, 144.

²⁵⁹ Quoted in Kunz, 145.

²⁶⁰ Kunz, 145-150.

the DPs. To their pleasant surprise, the Baltic DPs especially showed a high concentration of professional training. After some political wrangling with the Department of Immigration, the Department of Labour and National Services finally passed a resolution on 11 August 1949 to the effect that recruitment from among the DPs was necessary for relieving the shortage of labor in certain professional occupations.²⁶¹

Calwell's media campaign proved quite successful among Australians; whether it was as successful among the DPs is a matter of some debate among historians, politicians, and the DPs themselves. A two part study, conducted by Jean Martin, Professor of Sociology at La Trobe University in Melbourne, provides the most comprehensive look at the social impact of the "New" Australians.²⁶² Conducting interviews with the DPs, first in 1952 and again in 1962, Martin reveals the intense feelings of isolation experienced by the DPs after their arrival. The isolation of their jobs, occasional clashes with native workers, and for many the inability to understand English, all served to increase loneliness and make them feel further set apart. The ultimate goal for the DPs was financial security. To this end, they deprived themselves of luxuries, such as vacations, going to the movies, eating out, and buying "frivolous" goods, to raise enough capital to buy their own home and security.²⁶³ Martin recalls that some of the interviewees feared she was a Soviet spy and at first refused to speak with her; others, that she was an Immigration official who could help them improve their situation; still others simply saw her as a sympathetic ear in which they could confide. Re-interviewing the same DPs ten years later, Martin found that little had changed. Though more

²⁶¹ Kunz, 151-153.

²⁶² Lack, 92.

²⁶³ Jean Isobel Martin, *Refugee Settlers: A Study of DPs in Australia* (Kingsport, New South Wales: Halstead Press Pty, Ltd, 1965), 7-21.

comfortable living in Australia, the former Baltic DPs remained socially and mentally separate from Australians.

On the other side, there are numerous examples of DPs who came to accept and enjoy their new lives in Australia. In 1960, *The Saturday Evening Post* published an article about John and Ilsa Konrads, a brother and sister team of Olympic hopefuls and former Latvian DPs in Australia. The article talks at length about their family's flight from the Soviets and the reasons for their eventual resettlement in Australia. The family chose resettlement in Australia over the United States, quoting the promise of "fresh, free and big, open country" and the desire to get away from countries "talking about and preparing for wars."²⁶⁴ After fulfilling the terms of their work contract, the family saved money to purchase their own home and the father got work as a contract dental mechanic constructing dentures and other artificial dental work. By 1960, the family enjoyed a relatively successful middle class existence and their children fully assimilated into the Australian way of life. In essence, the Konrads were the ideal immigrant family conceived by Calwell in 1947.

On the other hand, the work of people like Jean Martin indicates the high degree of failure of the assimilation process. "At best," stated an unknown DP, "Australians are kind to [DPs] as they are to animals. They want us to keep our place on the lowest rung of the social ladder."²⁶⁵ The Baltic DPs felt themselves culturally superior to Australians. A land full of laborers and businessmen, they deemed Australia a land of low culture.²⁶⁶ Desiring refinement, the Baltic immigrants promoted the rebuilding of cultural ties based

²⁶⁴ Will Grimsley, "Speediest Kids Afloat," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 7 Sept. 1960, 70.

²⁶⁵ Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia: The Post-war Immigration Experience* (Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books Australia, Ltd, 1984), 57.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

on nationality within the Australian community. In all, Australia resettled 182,159 DPs under the auspices of the IRO, second only to the United States.²⁶⁷

On the other side of the globe, postwar Canada faced similar population concerns. Even before the end of the Second World War, public pressure mounted against the Labour government, led by Prime Minister Mackenzie King, to find the means to maintain the booming wartime economy. The postwar solution involved the boosting of population numbers to ease the industrial labor shortage. Notoriously isolationist during the Depression years, the Canadian government and public found the benefits of importing migrant workers a difficult task. Canada soon succumbed to international pressure and accepted their responsibility as a member of the United Nations to take part in the resettlement of the DPs. Modeling their policies after those of Britain, Canada's migrant worker schemes placed the Baltic DPs among the most desirable types of immigrants for Canada.

Depression era policies greatly restricted immigration to Canada, allowing in only those immigrants with enough capital to support themselves.²⁶⁸ Instituted in March 1931, the era's most important piece of immigration legislation, Order in Council P.C. 695, permitted only the following categories for admission into Canada: British and American citizens able to financially maintain themselves while seeking employment; any farm laborer or individual working in industry with assured employment; and the wives and children of legal male residents in Canada. Because of these strict provisions, immigration plummeted from 1,116,000 in the 1920s to 140,000 in the 1930s. With nearly a quarter of the Canadian labor force unemployed in 1933, Canadians everywhere

²⁶⁷ Neumann, 105.

²⁶⁸ Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1940-1997* (Toronto, Canada: Dundurn Press, 1997), 115.

took a dire view of immigrants. Deportations under the auspices of the Department of Immigration and Colonization occurred frequently if the immigrant was unemployed or a known social or political radical.²⁶⁹

During the Second World War, immigration was restricted even further. Adhering to P.C. 695, Canada refused to harbor asylum seekers including the Jewish passengers aboard SS *St. Louis* all of whom, on returning to Europe, perished in the Holocaust.²⁷⁰ In response to these restrictions, the Canadian National Committee on Refugees (CNCR), organized by the League of Nations tried to raise awareness of the European refugee situation in 1938.²⁷¹ In spite of these attempts, the public remained largely hostile to immigrants.

As a major wartime industrial manufacturer, Canada's economy placed it among the strongest in the world by the end of the war. Hope for a more liberal immigration policy grew when the postwar industrial boom fed a growing demand for skilled and unskilled labor which the Canadian labor force could not meet on its own.²⁷² In spite of growing labor needs, King was slow to act. Citing the possibility of a postwar recession and the lack of ships available for transporting refugees to Canada, it would take two years for him to act on immigration.²⁷³ At this point, Canada was a major financial supporter of UNRRA and the UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and was well aware of the refugee situation in Europe. On 7 November 1946, King announced Canada's intention to cooperate with international refugee organizations to provide emergency aid and assistance towards the resettlement of DPs and other European

²⁶⁹ Knowles, 115-116.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 116.

²⁷¹ Danys, 69. This committee reorganized in 1943 to deal with all types of postwar refugees.

²⁷² Knowles, 125.

²⁷³ Ibid, 126.

refugees. Speaking in Parliament, King stated that while its membership in the United Nations did not oblige Canada “to accept any number of refugees or displaced persons,” there remained “a moral obligation to assist in meeting the problem, and this obligation we are prepared to recognize.”²⁷⁴

Pressured by the international community to accept at least a token share of DPs as immigrants, however, the Canadian Parliament revamped the Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour in 1946 to revisit the issue of immigration.²⁷⁵ According to historian Valerie Knowles, the committee’s first witness, A.L. Joliffe, director of the Immigration Branch, “made it quite clear that the government did not intend to reopen immigration offices in Europe until they brought the remaining Canadian servicemen and their dependents back to Canada.”²⁷⁶ Though the government acknowledged broader immigration policies as a concern, they would have to wait.

Many public figures, especially among the Canadian press, campaigned to raise awareness of the DPs’ situation in Europe in order to gain public sympathy and moral outrage for their plight. In favor of increased immigration, famous Canadian editor, B.K. Sandwell portrayed the plight of the refugees as “prisoners in a great, dark, airless room which [had] fifty different doors, the doors of admission to fifty different countries where they could build their lives afresh; but every door locked, barred, and bolted.”²⁷⁷ The obvious plea remained for Canada to give the refugees the chance to start again.

Opposition to proposed immigration came from all sides. Arthur Lower, well-known Canadian historian of the time, and a staunch anti-Immigration advocate, derided

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Knowles, 132.

²⁷⁵ Danys, 69 and Knowles, 128.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Quoted in Knowles, 128.

those who predicted the growth of population and immense benefit to Canada the allowance of immigrants on a mass scale would bring. Questioning the idea that immigration spurts of the past two centuries ever played a part in Canada's economic growth, Lower warned that the DPs would hinder rather than aid population growth. Still active in his stance several years after immigration began, Lower wrote an article in 1949 entitled "The Myth of Mass Immigration," for *Maclean's Magazine*. In it, he declared that "Despite the fact that you can hardly pick up a newspaper without being told Canada should bring in 500,000 immigrants a year, or that she should double her population in the next few years, I'm going to argue that mass immigration is both unwise and unpractical."²⁷⁸ Immigrants, anti-Immigration advocates argued, threatened the livelihoods of native blue-collar workers by providing cheap labor for industry. Fear of another depression drove anti-Immigration campaigns to keep foreign labor at bay.

Pro-Immigration, however, called on the government's need to act quickly to secure the best refugees for immigration. Competition among the host countries for immigrants from the DP camps pushed the CNCR to again lobby for increased immigration. They recommended that officials make a distinction between general immigrants and political refugees and the Displaced Persons, giving top priority to the latter. On 28 May 1946, the cabinet took its first step towards the development of a new immigration policy. The passage of P.C. 2071 allowed Canadian residents "who were capable of caring for them, to sponsor the admission of first-degree relatives in Europe plus orphaned nieces and nephews under sixteen years of age."²⁷⁹ Broader individual sponsorship schemes soon followed. Religious sponsorship allowed churches and

²⁷⁸ Knowles, 127.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 130.

ministries to sponsor displaced clergymen to come as pastors for churches throughout Canada. The Baptist Union of Western Canada, for example, sponsored Rudolf Eksteins, a Latvian Baptist minister, to immigrate with his family. According to his son, noted historian Modris Eksteins, his father's first assignment "was to travel the farmlands of the West, visiting local churches and talking about the situation in Europe in an attempt to find sponsors for refugees."²⁸⁰

After attending the Interdepartmental Committee on Immigration Policy in December 1946, Harry Hereford of the Department of Labour, reported to deputy minister of the Canadian Department of Labour, Arthur MacNamara, the need to act quickly to secure the best of the DPs: "We might get some good people [from among the refugees] . . . particularly those from the Baltic States."²⁸¹ Once they decided in favor of refugee immigration, the Canadian government moved quickly and established a plan to accept DPs before reaching an international agreement. With Britain as the first host country to offer resettlement, Canada followed London's example in developing its own immigration plans. As the chief architect of DP immigration policies, MacNamara oversaw and controlled nearly every aspect of the immigration schemes.²⁸² In 1947, he received a full report of Britain's migrant worker schemes, including their rate of success and failure.²⁸³

Rather than agreeing to a plan similar to Australia's (based on recruiting for numbers rather than specific occupations), MacNamara proposed to secure DP women for domestic service, similar to Britain's 'Balt Cygnet,' and a large-scale sponsorship

²⁸⁰ Eksteins, 87.

²⁸¹ Quoted in Danys, 75.

²⁸² Eksteins, 80.

²⁸³ Danys, 71, 80. According to Danys, files kept by the Immigration Branch and the Department of Labour document the entire development of the Immigration Scheme.

program to recruit DP men to fill specific requests filed by individual industries and factories throughout Canada. The only similarity to Australia's scheme would be the encouragement of family immigration followed by later sponsorship of friends and relatives.²⁸⁴ Before officially recognizing the IRO agreement, Canada passed legislation on 6 June 1947 authorizing the initial entry of up to 5,000 sponsored displaced persons (subsequent orders raised this number to 45,000 refugees, plus any dependents).²⁸⁵ In addition, the list of admissible relatives of legal residents of Canada expanded to include spouses, parents, children and siblings, orphaned nephews and nieces under the age of 21, and fiancées.²⁸⁶

By late 1947, five mobile teams composed of medical, Immigration, security, and Labour personnel traveled to Germany to begin recruiting for immigration to Canada. According to Canadian diplomat, John W. Holmes, the government sent these "head hunters" to select the best from among the DPs "like good beef cattle, with preference for strong young men who could do manual labor and would not be encumbered by aging relatives."²⁸⁷ Ethnic origin was a central part of Canada's screening process. Relying on the favorable impressions of figures such as Vincent Massey, the High Commissioner in London, screening officials routinely rejected Jewish immigrants in favor of those from the Baltic and other parts of Eastern Europe.²⁸⁸

Other than the obvious preference shown for them by recruiters from other host countries, reasons why the Balts ranked so highly for Canadian immigration stemmed

²⁸⁴ Danys, 76-77.

²⁸⁵ Valeria Knowles, *Forging Our Legacy: Canadian Citizenship and Immigration, 1900-1977* (book online) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2000): 20.

²⁸⁶ Joseph Kage, "The Challenge of Peace and the Displaced Persons," *Studies on Jewish Immigration to Canada* (Montreal, 1958): 5.

²⁸⁷ Karl Aun, *The Political Refugees: A History of Estonians in Canada* (Toronto, Canada: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 24.

²⁸⁸ Knowles, *Stranger at Our Gates*, 133.

largely from Canadians' ignorance of who they were as a people and culture. Although IRO reports indicated a predominance of professionals among the Baltic DPs, Canadian officials seemed to regard them as illiterate, but polite, peasants.²⁸⁹ Since the Department of Labour discouraged the recruitment of well-educated professionals among the DPs, preferring "brawn over brains," many of the Baltic DPs lied about their backgrounds on immigration applications in order to gain admission from recruiters.²⁹⁰

To speed up the process of selection and to make matters of transportation and expense easier to arrange, the Department of Labour finalized the Bulk Labour Scheme. According to this plan, individual industries (particularly mining and forestry) could request a specific number of DP immigrants from the Department of Labour to work for at least one year. The fact that these jobs were generally located in remote areas, or were otherwise unappealing to Canadian workers, made the scheme appear the best way to boost population while posing no threat to native workers. C.D. Howe, Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, as well as acting Minister of Mines and Resources, processed the requests for both skilled and unskilled immigrant labor. According to Knowles, these included "craftsmen for the clothing industry, woodworkers, and men suitable for work in heavy industry, lumber camps, and construction, and people for domestic work in homes, hospitals and similar institutions."²⁹¹

Soon, however, opposition to the Scheme came from both Human Rights advocates, who claimed the plan lent itself to a form of semi-servitude that placed the

²⁸⁹ Milda Danys, "The Emigrant Experience: Contract Hiring of Displaced Persons in Canadian Domestic Employment, 1947-1950," *Lituanas: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 29, 2 (Summer, 1983): 2.

²⁹⁰ Eksteins, 102-103: The following excerpt is from a Department of Labour directive to recruiters in Germany: "Apparently, many girls we are passing fail to disclose the fact that they have a higher education. While it is agreed that we will pass up to 10% who disclose having superior education, wherever it is suspected that any girls possess such qualifications, but are concealing them, please reject."

²⁹¹ Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 135.

DPs completely under employers' control. Indeed, the Canadian press reported numerous instances where industries treated immigrant workers no better than slave labor. The constant bad press caused concern among the public. In the House of Commons, Gladys Strum, a Saskatchewan schoolteacher, voiced her concern: "I do not think it improves our standing in the United Nations to have appearing in our daily papers reports which sound like descriptions of scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which reminds one of the old slave market where girls were put up to auction with someone looking at their muscles and someone else looking at their teeth."²⁹² Even Labor groups, such as the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation, accused the scheme of undercutting wages and threatening to displace Canadian workers in favor of cheap labor.²⁹³

Nicknamed "Mr. Mac's DPs," the new immigrant workers began arriving in 1947 at the Pier 21 processing facility in Halifax. Media attention surrounding their arrival meant to paint the DPs in a positive light. Pictures and articles depicted the arriving DPs as grateful recipients of Canadian generosity. As one Estonian immigrant, Ernests Kraulis, remembers, onlookers lined the pier to greet the DPs with open arms. Reporters wanted to conduct interviews and politicians wanted to shake their hands, all under the lights of news cameras.²⁹⁴ Their reception was a calculated effort by the media and the government to reassure the Canadian public that the DPs posed no threat to native workers.

For male DPs brought over by forestry companies like Spruce Falls Power and Paper Company in Northern Ontario, the trip from Germany to their new homes was one

²⁹² Quoted in Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 136.

²⁹³ Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 135.

²⁹⁴ "Displaced Persons – Ernests Kraulis," *Pier21's Online Story Collection* (Pier 21 National Historic Site, 2006): 1.

long, seemingly endless journey. Almost immediately after landing, the Department of Labour transported the DPs to their new homes in the remote regions of Canada. For most men accommodation proved little better than the former prison and concentration camps they left behind in Germany, yet they noted that the quality and quantity of the food was considerably better. Although the remoteness of the work sites made assimilation difficult, there existed a high level of acceptance in industry for DPs amongst their Canadian peers. Worker unions, always looking for new members, proved especially accepting of the DPs.²⁹⁵ By the end of the year, the Department of Labour declared the choice of the Baltic DPs a success. Despite this cheerfulness, the pitfalls of the Bulk Labor Scheme soon caused problems for MacNamara.

Chief among these was the renegeing on contracts, not by the DPs, but by Canada's industrial sponsors. Forestry companies became notorious for dismissing DP workers before their contracts expired (most often due to the end of the cutting season) or refusing to accept them as workers altogether, often while they were in transit from Europe. The general solution was to send the DPs elsewhere to fulfill their contracts, most often to work in the mines. This drew protests from the DPs who argued that they signed their contracts in good faith believing they would be working outdoors, not underground in the hazardous mining conditions. MacNamara's response to their protest was the clear implication that immigration to Canada was a privilege, not a right. In other words, the DPs should be grateful, not particular.²⁹⁶

Forestry was the most population occupation, although gold mining had the highest number of contracts and offered the highest wage to their workers. On the other

²⁹⁵ Danys, *DP*, 94.

²⁹⁶ Eksteins, 100.

hand, the hazardous health and safety conditions in the mines made that work most unappealing. Living up to their promise of sending the DPs to occupations Canadian workers did not want, the Department of Labour sent contract laborers to fill the shortage. Though safety measures at the Pickle Down Mine proved so antiquated that even unionized Canadian workers refused to work there, the Department of Labour sent them forty Lithuanian workers whose forestry contracts had fallen through. By the end of the contract year, all but one of the workers quit.²⁹⁷

Department of Labour officials viewed domestic service as the most promising migrant worker scheme in terms of population absorption. Estimates placed the need for ten to fifteen thousand immigrants to work in sanatoriums, hospitals, and private households. Baltic women, because of their “tidy” and altogether “attractive” appearance, remained preferable to other nationalities among the DPs for these jobs. Ill treatment by numerous employers, however, soon caused a great deal of dissatisfaction among the Baltic women. Elena Zubrys, a dentist from Lithuania, recalled her annoyance at doctors and nurses constantly approaching her and her friends, asking why they always sat together and did not speak English.²⁹⁸ Many of the women were dissatisfied with their positions and requested immediate transfers. Because these requests occurred on an individual basis and such transfers posed little threat to the system as a whole, it mattered little to MacNamara where the domestic DPs fulfilled their contractual year of service. He graciously made it policy that any DP domestic could transfer upon request.²⁹⁹

By 1950, however, Canada had to abandon the Bulk Labour Scheme in favor of one more liberal and open. U.S. President Truman’s passage of the Displaced Persons

²⁹⁷ Danys, *DP*, 115.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 146.

²⁹⁹ Danys, “The Emigrant Experience,” 5.

Act in 1948, which opened America to the refugees, led to a quicker emptying of the DP camps in Germany. The increased competition with other host countries to secure the best of the DPs forced the Canadian government to act. The P.C. 2856 of 9 June 1950 rescinded all former immigration legislation. The order gave preference to those immigrants from Britain, US, and France, while allowing for the admission of any European refugee of good health and reputation with the skills necessary for work in Canada.³⁰⁰ Labor shortages in certain technical occupations led the Department of Labour, to succeed in helping one third of professional DPs – mainly architects and engineers – to continue their careers, in spite of opposition from professional organizations in Canada.³⁰¹ The medical profession, however, jealously remained closed to professional DPs, citing incomparable training between Canadian and European medical schools.

Once they fulfilled the terms of their contract, the majority of the Baltic DPs moved to urban centers where they soon developed their own cultural communities. In an effort to re-establish their national identities within Canada, the Balts tried to portray themselves in the sincerest way to their Canadian neighbors. Appalled by what they believed was an apparent lack of cultural refinement in Canada, the Estonian DPs established theatre groups, song festivals, and opera houses throughout their communities, inviting their Canadian neighbors to participate.³⁰² As Mrs. Irene Lukosevicius explained, “We had this idea that we had to be our country’s ambassadors, to tell people what our country really was [like] and how it was suffering. We felt a very strong responsibility to

³⁰⁰ Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 136 and Knowles, “Forging Our Legacy,” 7.

³⁰¹ Aun, 46.

³⁰² Ibid, 58-60, 90-96.

represent our people and to represent them really well.”³⁰³ The Baltic DPs in Canada seemed determined to maintain their own identity, adjusting and refining it to face the reality of life in Canada.³⁰⁴

In need of able workers to fill labor shortages in key areas of industry and domestic service, both Australia and Canada established DP resettlement schemes. Among the nationalities represented in the DP camps, both countries showed preference for those from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. For Australia, Calwell’s media campaign promoted the Baltic immigrants as the ideal DP – intelligent, of good appearance, willing, and grateful. Canada placed the Baltic DPs among their first choice for immigration based largely on the good opinion of other resettlement countries. To a much lesser extent, the presence of Baltic minorities, which had earlier already settled in Canada, provided a model for what Immigration officials could expect from the DPs. Overall, the DPs enjoyed a greater level of cultural acceptance in Canada than in Australia. The presence of an already well established Baltic community in Canada eased the transition for the new immigrants. Establishing cultural centers in the major cities of Toronto and Montreal, the Baltic immigrants desired to visibly maintain their identities while establishing a connection with the Canadian population. Between 1946 and 1952, Canada accepted 163,984 DPs.³⁰⁵

In Australia, Arthur Calwell’s intense media campaign to gather support for immigration among native Australians often contradicted the push for quick assimilation

³⁰³ Quoted in Danys, “The Emigrant Experience,” 4.

³⁰⁴ Pamphlets like John Murray Gibbon’s *New Colour for the Canadian Mosaic: The Displaced Persons*, published in 1951, attempted to bridge the gap between native and immigrants by showcasing the cultural uniqueness of the DPs

³⁰⁵ The Applied History Research Group, “The Peopling of Canada, 1946-1976.” The University of Calgary (1997); available online at http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/canada1946/chapter1.html; Internet; accessed 29 September 2007.

amongst the DPs. Although Immigration officials encouraged the newly arrived DPs to enter fully into Australian society, Calwell's publicity campaigns continually set them apart by depicting their cultural differences. Continual reference to them as 'Balts' and 'New Australians' annoyed many of the DPs who wondered when they would cease being 'new' and simply be Australians. Weekend festivals and parades to showcase the national costume and colorful cultures of the DPs clashed strongly with Immigration's demands that the DPs leave behind all traces of their past in order to fully assimilate. In essence, they could not leave their cultures behind although Australians told them they should. Both Australia and Canada based resettlement of the DPs within their countries on economic need as well as a moral obligation as members of the United Nations to aid in the rebuilding of Europe.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The IRO closed the last remaining DP camps in 1952, leaving 174,000 refugees deemed ‘unfit’ for resettlement to fend for themselves in Germany. The United States Displaced Persons Commission called the scheme “largely successful.” Politicians, such as the Texas State Labor Commissioner, could only remark, “I’m glad it’s over.”³⁰⁶ The Allied victors considered their obligations to the DPs fulfilled. For good or ill, this marked the official end of the postwar refugee situation in Europe. Later that year, the United Nations replaced the IRO with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, a permanent entity established to deal specifically with the handling and treatment of refugees in the troubled parts of the world.³⁰⁷

The political, cultural, and social upheaval following World War II created a new and frightening world. The Yalta Agreement between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union revealed the darker side of international politics. In most wars, the strong often decide the fates of the weak, regardless of peacetime principles. This reality struck a devastating blow to the Baltic DPs. Their hopes for the future centered on the belief that the democratic Allies would uphold the terms of the Atlantic Charter and their own principles of freedom and democracy. The revelations of Yalta, however, revealed that those nations on which they had built their hopes had exchanged their freedom for Soviet assistance in the Pacific, halfway around the world.

³⁰⁶ Richard Moorehead, “Many ‘Misplaced’: Official Cheers End of DP Flow,” *Dallas Morning News*, 21 September 1952.

³⁰⁷ Slatt, 276, 292.

As this study shows, nearly a million refugees from Eastern Europe refused to return to their Soviet-controlled countries. The refusal of these “un-repatriables” to return home forced the Allies to deal with the moral repercussions of their wartime actions. If not for growing Cold War sentiment, it is likely that the Allies would forcibly have repatriated many more of the refugees. However, fear of growing Soviet influence in Europe gave the United States and Britain the excuse needed to redefine the Yalta agreement. Resettlement to various host countries became the only viable option, especially considering the Allied world’s desperate need for labor. Ultimately, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Great Britain accepted the greatest number of DPs as immigrants and the Baltic DPs placed first among those sought for resettlement. They fit the image of the ideal immigrant held by the main resettlement countries as well-educated, white Europeans. Yet, the qualifications which made them so attractive were often overlooked in terms of the occupations assigned them as new immigrants. Professors became janitors, artists became domestic helpers, lawyers became farmers, and former government officials became coal-miners.

The level of assimilation and acceptance experienced by the DPs varied from country to country. Evidence suggests that the Baltic DPs sent to those countries that promoted quick assimilation by placing the DPs in direct contact with the native population experienced greater levels of acceptance. Other factors that influenced the transition from immigrant to citizen focused on how a country’s ideals differentiated between the two, whether along religious, cultural, or racial lines. In the United States, for example, the Baltic DPs found themselves in immediate and daily contact with American citizens, forced to learn the language and customs in order to fit in. This policy

differed from Australia's where the government segregated the DPs away from the native population in a mistaken attempt to ease their transition into society. Propaganda campaigns and educational programs in the DP camps and on the home fronts helped prepare the DPs and the natives, but inevitably, expectations of both parties often clashed with the reality. This frequently led to friction between the two groups although many DPs found quick acceptance and kindness from their new neighbors.

The lives and experiences of the DPs is an often overlooked part of post World War II history. It is as if the refugees simply returned home once the war ended. The fact remains that nearly a million refugees refused to return home, fearing Soviet control, forcing the Allies to adhere to their principles of freedom and choice. The normal passage of time as the participants slip into History has prompted a new interest in collecting and preserving their stories before they are lost. The past few years have seen an increased interest in the immediate postwar period.

The DP situation in Europe represents the first time that the world powers recognized the plight of refugees as an international problem. Since 1952, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees continues to provide aid and shelter to the estimated 30 million refugees throughout the world. DP camps are in operation in many war torn countries providing shelter, food, and medical care for these refugees. As after World War II, resettlement remains a contested issue among the leading countries of the world. The camps provide only a temporary solution to the refugee problem by providing the most basic needs for the refugees, but no chance to rebuild their lives and start again. The debate over resettlement focuses on the extent of the moral obligations and responsibilities of stronger, wealthier nations towards those forced from their homes by

events beyond their control. The case of the Baltic DPs suggests that given time and opportunity, resettlement provides a means for refugees to escape their situation and start again. But the issue remains as to how far a nation should go to help the people of another, whether the promise of aid solves the problem or exacerbates it further. The simple fact is that refugees will continue to exist as long as there is war and conflict in the world. They present a complex problem with no simple solution.

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