German Refugees and Expellees

By GUY J. SWOPE

Special Assistant to the US High Commissioner
Chief, Displaced Populations Division, Office of Political Affairs, HICOG

RELIABLE ESTIMATES are in substantial agreement that there are approximately 12,000,000 German refugees and expellees within the present confines of the four occupation zones of Germany. Of these, roughly 8,000,000 live in the three western zones which comprise the territory of the Federal Republic.

The remote periods of recorded history show that one of the tragic aftermaths of wars is the forcible uprooting of populations and transferring them to new areas. At no time, however, have such expulsions approached the magnitude of those which followed the close of World War II.

The inhuman cruelties visited upon minority groups by Hitler and his followers and the exploitation of foreign slave labor by them set psychological forces in motion which had tremendous repercussions when Germany was defeated. In the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, in Hungary, Rumania, the Baltic states, the eastern German provinces which were to come under Polish administration, lived millions of people of German blood whose roots in those areas had been established for many generations, in some cases as long as 600 to 700 years.

Within those various Germanic islands there were undoubtedly numerous persons who, as Hitler's star continued to rise, became ardent advocates of pan-Germanism. In the Hitler occupation of those areas, at the full height of his conquests, many of those ethnic Germans willingly gave their services as members of his occupying forces.

WHEN THE GERMAN armies were defeated and those conquered territories liberated, the smoldering resentment of the non-German citizens immediately manifested itself violently against the ethnic German people resident there. Millions of these Germans were immediately driven from their homes and the very terror which Hitler's legions had visited on countless others was now directed against them.

The tripartite meeting of the heads of state of the United States, United Kingdom and the USSR, known as the Potsdam Conference, which convened in Berlin on July 17, 1945, took official note of this situation and adopted an agreement thereon in the following language:

Orderly Transfers of German Populations

The conference reached the following agreement on the removal of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary: The three governments, having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner.

Since the influx of a large number of Germans into Germany would increase the burden already resting on the occupying authorities, they consider that the Allied Control Council in Germany should in the first instance examine the problem with special regard to the question of the equitable distribution of these Germans among the several zones of occupation. They are accordingly instructing their respective representatives on the Control Council to report to their governments as soon as possible the extent to which such persons have already entered Germany from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and to submit an estimate of the time and rate at which further transfers could be carried out, having regard to the present situation in Germany.

The Czechoslovak Government, the Polish Provisional Government and the Control Council in Hungary are at the same time being informed of the above, and are being requested meanwhile to suspend further expulsions pending the examination by the governments concerned of the report from their representatives on the Control Council.

GERMANS ARE generally disposed to blame the entire refugee problem upon this accord. It must be borne in mind, however, that the Potsdam Agreement recognized a situation which already existed. Considering the passions in the countries affected it is doubtful if mass expulsions could have been stopped; the Potsdam Agreement at least expressed the intention to halt expulsions until transfers could be effected in an orderly and humane manner.

In overcrowded and congested quarters refugees are often forced to live in groups rather than integrating with the German population of larger towns and cities. This camp is in Munich. The ethnic Germans quartered there — part of more than 8,000,000 now in Western Germany were expelled from numerous areas behind “The Iron Curtain.”
manner. In any event, at present, we face a fact and not a theory.

While these expulsions were largely due to a spirit of extreme nationalism exhibited by the countries from which they were made, it is interesting to note that those countries have virtually lost their separate national independence by having been forced to become satellites of the great Russian Bear whose actions are very similar whether the Kremlin is ruled over by the Czars or by the Bolshevik elite.

While it is erroneous to consider that Germany’s refugee problem is only an economic one, it must be stressed that the social and political dangers connected with it will be immeasurably increased if these people are not given a fair share of the economic benefits available. Western Germany, which suffered tremendous losses of domestic housing and industrial potential through war action, is faced with a population increase of more than 20 percent.

Because war damage was greatest in the cities, many of the refugees have been housed in rural areas, which have more housing available, and consequently employment opportunities for these people are greatly diminished. To a large extent they have actually been quartered upon existing households, and this has brought about much misunderstanding and friction which has militated against a smooth integration of the newcomers. Since they had to leave their former homes without money or substantial property, practically all of them fall into the welfare group whenever they have no employment.

Great numbers of them, of course, were upper-level members of business and the professions, and this enforced reduction to a lowly and menial station has been destructive of spirit and morale. Moreover, it has created a feeling of resentment, which in many cases reaches to dangerous depths. The German states have provided un-

This inmate of the refugee camp at Dachau, Frau Frisch, an expellee from Karlsbad, Czechoslovakia, does her laundry in the single room where she lives with her husband and two children. Frisch had to perform forced labor in a coal mine in Czechoslovakia for five years.

(Phot by Jacoby, PRD IICOC)

employment compensation and social welfare benefits which have kept these people from starvation, and private welfare organizations in and out of Germany have contributed great sums of money and thousands of tons of relief materials for their use. Also the German states, in varying degrees, have appropriated funds for use in guaranteeing approved loans to refugee industries.

In addition, the German federal government, in its first series of requests to the ECA Mission in Germany for the release of counterpart funds, has included a number of projects for the specific benefit of refugees. Countless small communities have, through the action of some of their enlightened members, both natives and refugees, found ways of bringing about substantial alleviation of the problem as it exists in their particular community. Giving full credit for these constructive efforts, it must still be said that the German government has not yet produced a comprehensive plan for the solution of this problem on the basis of absorption and integration.

Recent declarations made by four federal ministers of state have alleged that most of Germany’s present ills, especially the alarming increase in unemployment, are traceable to the Allies for the action which they took at Potsdam. They have stated that the refugee problem is one which the German nation alone cannot hope to solve, and that it behooves those whom Germany holds responsible for it to bring forth international assistance.

The pattern of these statements matches too closely to make one think that they are merely coincidental. It would appear that some central purpose inspires them. Unemployment in western Germany is approximately 2,000,000 as of Feb. 1, 1950. Of this number, about 700,000 are refugees. On a relative basis there are more than twice as many refugees unemployed as is true of native Germans. Even those who are employed are forced to occupy positions several grades below those of native Germans on the basis of comparative skills.

It should not be considered unnatural for many Germans to place partial blame for the present worsening of the economic situation upon the refugees, and consequently, to hold the United States partially responsible because of her participation in the Potsdam accord. It is another matter, however, when a series of statements
by cabinet ministers during the last 10 days of January, conform so closely in specific criticism of the Allies, holding them responsible for the present unemployment situation because of their agreement to the mass expulsions at the Potsdam meeting.

IT MUST BE POINTED out that in none of these statements was any credit given to the United States for the approximately $3,000,000,000 to $4,000,000,000 of American taxpayers’ money which has been poured into Germany since the end of the war and used largely for economic rehabilitation. It is hardly likely that Germany can possibly draw upon the good will and social conscience of the rest of the world for assistance in solving the refugee problem by having its official leadership take such a position on the matter.

The principal economic impact of the refugees at present would, therefore, appear to be a heightening of the unemployment problem. It can hardly be denied, however, that it is unduly pessimistic to conclude that the presence of these 8,000,000 refugees in western Germany is bound to result in permanent unemployment.

During the early 30’s in the United States when the depression was at its worst, there were probably 13,000,000 to 15,000,000 persons out of work. Using the logic which seems to be prevailing among the German leadership, one could have said that there was no hope for the American economy while these surplus millions of people were there. Nevertheless, as the result of positive measures which were taken these millions of people, who might formerly have been considered surplus, were turned into an almost incalculable asset in terms of production.

If the German leadership resolutely took the position that the refugees, who are, it must be remembered, of German blood and therefore should be easily assimilable on that score, can be converted into a strong asset through establishing conditions under which they can add to German production, it would be an indication of sound and sensible planning. If such an attitude were assumed and the problem still remained partially unsolved, it would then be far easier to appeal to the world at large with a reasonable hope that international assistance would be forthcoming.

ONE OF THE BAD social consequences of the refugee problem is group separation. The refugees tend to withdraw from the current of normal German life, and in turn the native Germans develop the feeling that the refugees represent a social and economic threat to them, and therefore, the latter also unite, either formally or informally, against this threatened danger. The refugees, by and large, are ill housed, with the public health dangers which such a situation brings. The bare subsistence level upon which they are forced to live also tends to keep the refugee children from having normal schooling which young people are entitled to have. Probably the worst social consequence is the growing feeling of hopelessness which is gradually overpowering many of the refugees and the consequent bitterness of spirit which results therefrom.

The one-room “home” of a family in a Munich refugee camp combines bedroom, kitchen and storeroom. Sometimes two and even more families are compelled by the dire shortage to occupy one such small shack.

Certainly the political dangers seem to be so apparent as to need very little amplification. Ever since 1946 the refugees have been forming themselves into organizations, and this is a perfectly natural consequence of their desperate situation. By 1948, in the local elections these groups had become so well established as to make it possible for them to run independent candidates for various offices. It appears that they elected candidates in a proportion generally as great or greater than their number is to the total population.

In 1949 for the first federal election to name members of the new Bundestag (federal assembly), there were some indications that these groups were possibly in position to federate into a larger organization and thus partake of the nature of a national political party. The Occupation laws in the three western zones at that time still required licensing of political parties by Military Government, and in all three of the zones permission to compete as a refugee political party was refused. Nevertheless, independent candidates, representing refugees, were successful in a number of places, but the refugees lost the benefit of proportional voting which they could have had if they had been a recognized political party.

Under the German Basic Law, the right to form political parties is guaranteed and the American High Commissioner has recently repealed the Military Government regulation which required political parties to be licensed in the American zone by the American Occupation Authority. The British and French licensing laws in their zones are also to be repealed shortly.

WHILE IT IS difficult at this date to appraise the wisdom of the Military Governments’ denial of political party status, it is certainly true that the decision further embittered many refugee leaders and confirmed their determination to find ways of making themselves felt politically. It is a fact that a well organized group will eventually find ways of getting full political expression.

In a county election held on Sunday, Jan. 28, 1950 (Ziegenhain, Hesse), a strictly refugee party, known as the Independent Democratic Voters League, polled 23
percent of the total vote and secured seven of the 30 county assembly seats. Since the leading party won only 13 seats, it is seen that the refugee party holds the balance of power in this community. It is a further matter of interest that in a small 100 percent refugee settlement called Trutzheim, the refugee party polled 163 of the 204 votes cast.

One can hardly draw conclusions on a nation-wide scale from the results of an election in one county. However, it would hardly be daring to predict that if and when a single refugee party is formed on a national basis to represent all the thousands of small refugee community groups that party would very likely gain enough votes in a national election to hold the balance of power in the federal government. This might not be a matter of serious consequence if the possible effects of such amalgamation were confined to internal political matters in western Germany.

It is a definite possibility that if a strictly refugee party won a commanding position in the German political area, it could have serious international political repercussions. The question of Germany's borders, not only with respect to Poland but also with respect to Czechoslovakia, is so completely associated with the German refugee problem that if they, the refugees, came into considerable political power, the pressures for border realignment would become exceedingly great. Furthermore, by that time the refugee psychology would undoubtedly be quite ripe for the acceptance of militant radical leadership of the extreme right if not of the extreme left.

While the economic status of refugees might make them good prospects for Communist propaganda, the fact that a great many of them blame their present luckless situation upon the Communist militates against the likelihood that they will quickly fall victims to Communist promises.

**CAREFUL EXAMINATION of the political situation at present would seem to indicate that there are many obstacles in the way of early amalgamation of the refugee organizations into one single national unit. There are many points of difference between the various refugees, depending principally upon their places of origin. Those from the Sudetenland have certain grievances and objections, those from Hungary and Rumania have others, those from the Baltic states have still others, and the Germans from the eastern provinces and those still coming to western Germany from the Soviet Zone have fairly different objectives again.**

One must also keep in mind the difficulty of consolidation because of the jealousies of various leaders of the smaller groups. However, weighing all these factors, it is a proper and logical conclusion that sooner or later most of these obstacles will be swept away and a substantial consolidation will be achieved unless in the meantime this perplexing problem can be solved. This can only be accomplished if the German leadership decides honestly and sincerely to seek the means by which the refugees can become absorbed and integrated into the social and economic fabric of western Germany.

It must be borne in mind that at present almost 100 percent of these people are living on a standard usually far below that which they enjoyed in their former homes. Approximately 750,000 of them are completely without work. If this discrimination continues for any length of time there is very little doubt that most of the associations which represent refugees will sooner or later get together upon one significant platform and that is the platform of common misery which so many of them are forced to share. This problem, the German refugees, has not yet been adequately considered either by the native German population or by the world at large.

---

**Queckenborn Keeps Eye on Councilors**

The citizens in at least one Hessian community are telling their legislatures exactly how to vote. Raymond O. Didle, US resident officer for the Gießen area, disclosed that all the 1,100 citizens of Queckenborn, a farm town near Gießen, are invited to attend each session of the town council. An open discussion is held on each problem and question, and the local citizens state their opinion on the issues before the council.

When the council members vote, after the discussion has been closed, they do so in the presence of their constituents.