JEWISH DISPLACED PERSONS

by

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Our newspapers tell us daily of Nazis whom we are prosecuting for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The ruthless execution of American soldiers captured in the Battle of the Belgium Bulge and of American airmen who landed on German soil are typical of the illegal, immoral, and unprecedented manner in which the Nazis waged war. But there were many other devices they used to fulfill their master plan of world domination.

To become the masters of Europe they planned not only to conquer other countries and enslave their nationals, but so to weaken the "inferior" peoples that they could never again rally to the cry of freedom. This plan called for three primary techniques:

1. The conquered peoples were to be decimated by mass executions. The ablest people, who might lead a revolt, were to be killed. The aged, the infirm, and unemployable children were to suffer the same fate.

2. The physically strong were used for slave labor but were to be weakened by starvation and degraded by Nazi bestiality.

3. These enslaved persons were to be removed to other lands to prevent resistance on native soil.
When our victorious armies landed on the continent and liberated Europe, they could not resurrect the dead. But they did free, feed, and heal the survivors. Their sacrifices, sympathy and care wrote a noble chapter in American history and won the undying gratitude of the liberated.

But liberation and sustenance were not enough. The problems of resettlement and rehabilitation still remained. The Nazis had destroyed the families, the fortunes, and the security of many of those people. They had systematically poisoned the minds of native populations against them and had left a heritage of hatred, destitution and chaos, to which many cannot return. Those form the bulk of the 500,000 displaced persons now under our care in the U.S. Zone of Germany.

Among these displaced persons is a special group, the Jews who survived Hitler's pogroms. They share the same general needs and problems of all these unsettled people. But their condition also reflects Hitler's special program against them. He was determined to destroy them, and he almost succeeded. Nearly 6,000,000 Jewish men, women and children were exterminated. Their property and possessions were confiscated. They were robbed of their civil rights. Their centers of spiritual and cultural life were wiped out. So ruthless a program of propaganda was executed as to make the word "Jew" not a name but a stigma. The benefits of a century of emancipation in Europe were cancelled by the brief, black years of Nazi rule.

The Jewish displaced persons are the survivors of this assault. There are over 110,000 in the United States Zone in Germany and another 29,000, approximately, in the United States Zone in Austria. A further 25,000 reached Italy. There are, also, over 18,000 in the British Zone and about 1,700 in the French Zone. The precise situation in the Russian Zone is not known. About half of these Jews are the survivors of Nazi concentration camps. The families of most of them were destroyed in the gas chambers. The balance of these survivors of European Jewry have filtered in from European countries that were overrun by the Nazis. Some fought against the Germans.
or Polish Armies and with the partisans. Some are heroes of the battle of the Warsaw ghetto. Many thousands were driven before the Nazi armies and found haven deep in the interior of Russia. They have recently been repatriated to their original areas but encountered so vicious a heritage of Nazi anti-Semitism as to be unable to return to a normal life.

An increasing number of the recent infiltrates are children. The Nazi exterminated the Jewish children in Germany, but these boys and girls of eastern Europe were hidden in forests or sheltered by Christian families. With few exceptions, their parents are dead. Now, they are being helped to come into the American Zone. When they arrive, they are wizened, prematurely aged, and frightfully undernourished. But with good care and affection, they soon become normal children.

The majority of these Jewish infiltrates come from Poland where anti-Semitism has taken violent form despite the present government's best efforts to eliminate it. Over 3,000,000 Jews once lived in Poland. More than ninety percent of them were killed by the Nazis since 1939 when Poland was first conquered. The Nazis deliberately inflamed Polish anti-Semitism. They promised the Poles the property and jobs of Jews for their help in exterminating them. As a result, Poland has been engulfed by an angry sea of Jew hatred. Frightful pogroms reminiscent of Nazi bestiality continue. The lives of Jews are today not safe. And particularly if a Jew seeks to recover property that once belonged to him, his claim may be settled summarily by a murdering underground. Thus the great majority of infiltrates into the American Zone are fleeing from Poland. A small number have come from the Baltic countries and smaller numbers, varying from a few scores to a few thousands, from her east European lands.

The flow had not ended, but increased during the summer of 1946 when they began to come at the rate of approximately 10,000 a month. This heightened movement was the product not only
of the greater ease of travel during the summer, but also of fear, desperation, and the hope of migration from the American Zone to Palestine.

How many will yet come? There are 160,000 Jews in Poland, of whom perhaps 100,000 will wish to emigrate. There may be some additional immigrants from east European countries but their number will be few. It is likely that most of these refugees will settle in the U.S. Zone in Germany, although efforts are being made to find haven for some in other countries.

These Jewish infiltrates present not only problems of physical care, but, also, difficult problems of understanding and adjustment. The American G.I. finds it hard to understand their language and their psychology. He has always lived in freedom. These people have never enjoyed his advantages. The way they think, their manners and their conduct are strange to him, and he may, consequently, be tempted toward unjustified generalizations. Let us look at some of them.

Black marketing is one of the gravest problems faced by the Government. Seeing a displaced person exchange some cigarettes for eggs, the soldier may get the impression that these people are responsible for the black market. However, on thinking it over, he will realize that no one group creates the problem. For the black market involves all elements of the population, since it is produced by the general scarcity of commodities. In actual fact, the responsible leadership of the D.P. camps is as rigorously opposed to the black market as is the Theater Commander.

Or he may think these people devious, tricky, compensating for physical weakness by mental unscrupulosity. Even if true of some, his sympathy should inform him that this would be the inevitable product of years of the most frightful persecution. For example, one prominent leader of the D.P.s was forced to chloroform his own child and carry it away in a bag of potatoes in order to save its life. But the generalization is far from true. In every D.P. camp there are former partisans—strong,
brave fellows, who are prepared to meet the world on its own terms. In or near most camps are "kibutzim", settlements of splendid young people training in agriculture and industry for life in Palestine.

Is it true that displaced persons won't work? There is little work incentive at present. Most of them refuse to labor to build up the German economy. Can they be blamed for declining to participate in the upbuilding of a nation which murdered their families and stole their possessions? Payment in German marks offers little inducement. What can they buy with them? Most of these people probably will be ready to work if they remain longer in the Zone, provided that a program can be devised which will give them some worthwhile compensation. That they are capable of working is clear to all who have visited the farm colonies, the workshops, and the vocational training schools in many of the camps.

Were the best of the European Jews destroyed? This is almost true, but not quite. The Nazis deliberately sought out and murdered the leaders, the intellectuals, the scholars and rabbis, but they did not entirely succeed. In these camps are gifted men and women. In one large camp, the chairman is a former Court of Appeals Judge of Lithuania. In another, the doctor was the head of a hospital in Poland. Academics of learning have been established by able scholars. Newspapers, concerts and drama flourish. The children show signs of great promise.

Are these people ungrateful to their American benefactors? Of course, they are a frustrated, discontented group of human beings. Lack of stability and security in their lives expresses itself in criticism and complaints. But these reflect temporary discontent, not disloyalty. Anyone who understands these Jews knows that they are eternally grateful to their American emancipators. The letter of one little boy to his family, still in Poland, sums it up.
"Dear Mother and Brother,

I can tell you that we now find ourselves in the American territory of Berlin. Everything is very good for us and could not be better. We receive meals three times a day with the best of food. By the third meal, we cannot eat everything. We receive white bread, which we have never seen before—as much as we want, three times a day—and also chocolates. All of this is from the Americans and much even comes from "black" Americans. The Americans do everything for us and of the best.

Your son and brother,

Ruvin Mugg."

There is no generalization about their attitudes or characteristics which will sustain investigation. Whatever abnormalities individuals may display are the results of abnormal life and are likely to disappear when they will be permitted to live normal lives in the countries of their ultimate settlement. No right-minded person should start, believe or spread rumors about them. It was Hitler's trick to disseminate lies about the Jews among the democracies in order to disunite them. We must not be suckers for it now.

The only general statement which can be fairly made is that all of them show the effects of what they have suffered. In one camp, the doctor insists on not removing the Nazi concentration camp number from his arm as long as he lives. He says he wants it to be an eternal reminder of the wife and child, the parents and brother, whom the Nazis killed.

In the workshop of another camp a woman sits all day knitting size two woolen dresses. She refuses to accept any compensation or to knit any other size. This is her memorial to the two-year child whom the Storm Troopers had torn from her arms.

A member of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews is from the Kovno Ghetto. Can he ever forget how the Nazis broke into his home and seized his three children? His crazed, frantic wife ran after the truck carrying them to the gas chambers. The Nazis set their dogs on her, killing her before his eyes.

In one D.P. Center, the blaring of sirens in the early morning, associated with the beginning of Nazi pogroms, drove
the people to a frenzy. In another, some horseplay started a
rumor which spread like wildfire through the camp, "They are
slaughtering Jews." When two Jewish boys disappeared from a
large camp (It was later found that they had voluntarily gone
elsewhere.), the entire populace gave credence to the cry, "The
Germans have killed them."

These illustrations could be multiplied by a thousand. They
tell the story of a people decimated and dispossessed, living
still in the graveyard of memory, fearful, frustrated, tragica-
ally unhappy.

Considering all that these people have been through and
remembering our war and peace aims, the good American will seek
to help, not to hurt them. He should try to understand them.
He should, where possible, visit the camps and meet these people
in the company of Jewish soldiers who speak their language. In
their desire for friendly contact with Americans, many of them
are studying English and would be glad to converse with their
liberators. The soldier might arrange for parties to hear their
concerts or watch their dramatic performances. Gifts to the
orphans children establish a link of sympathy and fellowship.
Many of our hospitalized soldiers have used the workshops to
make toys for these boys and girls.

These people have suffered torture at the hands of the
uniformed Nazi. And this has naturally created the fear that
any one in uniform is against them. This should be taken into
consideration by the military in their handling of this problem.
Particular care should be taken to avoid procedures which they
associate with Nazi pogroms. If these are not already known,
any Jewish chaplain, the UNRRA Camp Director, or the responsible
D.P. leaders themselves can readily explain - or they can be
referred to higher headquarters.

What is to be their future? Emigration is the only hope.
For, under no circumstances, do they wish to remain in Europe.
Most of them are sustained by the hope that they will be included
among the recipients of the 100,000 immigration visas to Palestine proposed by President Truman and recommended by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. In Palestine they hope to establish a normal, free life of their own. A small number would like to enter the United States. However, the reestablished pre-war quotas allow for a very small immigration from those east European countries from which most of the D.P.s come and a relatively large quota to the people of national German origin, of whom there are very few survivors among these Jews. A lesser number may ultimately find haven or be reunited with their families in England, Australia or South America.

In the meantime and for the benefit of those who may not quickly migrate, it is necessary to make adequate provision. The Theater Commander continues in the established American policy of granting haven to these persecutees and of assuring them the necessary accommodations. If many will remain for a time, there should be more land for them to work on, more tools for them to study and use, more opportunities and incentives for productive labor. Cultural and spiritual programs should be fostered to prevent demoralization. Increasingly, these Jews should be regarded as a community and given an ever greater measure of self-government. Certainly, if the Germans, who have been our enemies and who have not released as yet sustained capacity for democracy, are being encouraged in the establishment of autonomous procedures, how much more should this be applied to these Jews who were the first and worst victims of the Nazis and who love democracy and freedom with all their hearts?

If it be feared that the acceptance and care of these uprooted persons will impose hardships on the German economy, then let
it be remembered, first, that the total number of such Jews will constitute only a fraction of those whom the Nazis murdered and despoiled in Germany alone, and second, that Germans are for the most part in their own homes, reestablishing their lives on their own soil and still remain the beneficiaries of the Jewish property which they confiscated.

In the final count, the treatment of these Nazi victims will be the measure and the symbol of the continuing character of our war and peace aims. Elementary justice demands that we regard them not as burdens to be tolerated, but as comrades to be cherished and to be helped toward a speedy rehabilitation.

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