SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES
OF WARTIME MIGRATION IN EUROPE

BY
WARREN S. THOMPSON
DIRECTOR OF THE SCRIPPS FOUNDATION FOR RESEARCH IN
POPULATION PROBLEMS, MIAMI UNIVERSITY,
OXFORD, OHIO

AN ADDRESS
BEFORE THE
ACADEMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AT THE
ANNUAL MEETING ON
"EUROPEAN RECOVERY"
NOVEMBER 8, 1945

THE ACADEMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
1946
In order to distinguish between wartime and peacetime migration I shall speak of the wartime migrants as displaced persons to denote the involuntary character of their movement. Furthermore, I can see only one important likeness between normal migrants and displaced persons and even this likeness is lessened by displacement. All migration, no matter under what conditions it takes place, lifts the individual or the family or some larger group, to a greater or lesser degree, out of a community in which he, or it, has a definite status and puts him into a new environment requiring many new mental adjustments both on the part of the migrant and on the part of the people in the community in which he settles. The difficulty of making these adjustments even under the best of conditions leads to much disintegration of personal character among migrants and their children. It likewise leads to a high degree of isolation of migrant from native in many communities and thus increases the difficulty of developing any feeling of unity, of "we-ness", within the community group. It is a serious matter for any community to have individuals and groups living in it which are not of it.

In the case of displaced persons it is probably not serious for the community in which they are temporarily settled that they do not participate in its life to any great extent, but it is serious if such persons are thereby unfitted to reenter the life of the community to which they expect to return. Indeed the very resistance the fugitive or prisoner puts up while forced to remain away from home has an immunizing effect against personal disintegration so that the individual suffering great hardship...
and forced to almost superhuman effort as a displaced person does not crack as quickly or as easily as might be expected. But when the sustaining force of hatred, or patriotism, or the feeling of unity in the suffering group is removed by release, or by return home, the effect may be catastrophic and the disintegration of personality may be extremely rapid. The individual who has been torn out of his community and forced to live among strangers for several years may find that he does not understand his former friends and that they regard him and his behavior with much misgiving. Literally millions of the people displaced by this war are going to return home only to find that they no longer fit and do not seem to be wanted by the people in their former communities. Thus the disintegration of personality which is always one of the most unlovely consequences of migration is certain to be greatly increased by the wartime displacement of peoples.

While we can expect that a much larger proportion of wartime migrants than of peacetime migrants will suffer a serious breakdown of personal character, we should recognize that in war as in peace there will be all degrees of maladjustment to life both during and after the war. Some of the displaced persons will suffer very little and will be able to take up life where they were when the war dragged them away. Their community, too, will accept them at once. On the other hand many will never again adjust themselves fully to the post-war world. They will feel that they are misfits, and their home communities will treat them as misfits. Unfortunately it is not possible to classify these displaced persons in neat categories having certain specific social characteristics. Hence, we cannot foresee the social and psychological problems of individuals and groups with any precision. But since we cannot deal with the readjustment problems of individuals here we must try to divide displaced persons into a few categories of which the members will have a few qualities in common, although we recognize that by and large the intra-group differences are greater than the inter-group.

The first category I would discuss is the homeless group—those who have no place to which they can return with the feeling that they are going home. At present they have nothing but life in concentration camps to look forward to. True, they are not Nazi concentration camps, but any kind of camp is a prison and unfits one for living among free peoples in a normal way. These homeless people belong chiefly in three groups: (a) the Jews, (b) the Volksdeutsche who have been removed from the Baltic states, Poland, Rumania, Italy, Russia and certain other areas, and (c) political refugees, people who are violently opposed to and opposed by the new governments being established in their home lands.

The number of these truly homeless people can only be guessed at now. Like all of you I have seen guesses to the effect that out of possibly five million Jews in Germany and Poland in 1939 only a few hundreds of thousands have survived the persecutions of the war years, and that out of more than nine million in Europe only four million survive of whom several hundred thousand are homeless. The total number of Volksdeutsche moved into the enlarged Reich, chiefly into western Poland, is not known but it may easily amount to a million, practically all of whom will already have been or soon will be forced to flee within the diminished Reich where they are strangers. The much larger group of Germans driven or to be driven from territory taken from Germany and from Bohemia and Moravia will be discussed later. The third group mentioned above, viz., the people whose political activities and beliefs led them to migrate and now make them reluctant to return to their native lands, is probably the largest of the three but I have never seen any guess regarding their numbers in which even the guesser had any confidence.

The problems of these homeless people, both the personal and the economic problems, are obviously quite different from those of most other classes of displaced persons. So far as I can judge, new areas of settlement must be found for all these homeless people and at present it appears that no country wants to take any of them. The Jews seemingly do not want to return to the countries from which they have been driven and these countries do not want them. The Volksdeutsche are not wanted in Germany and, as will be pointed out below, will almost certainly not be permitted to return whence they came. The political refugees, the great majority of whom are probably
Rightists, would apparently endanger their lives by going home and are not wanted in the western democracies, where they would be physically safe, because of the fear that they will create difficult economic problems. If these homeless peoples are kept in concentration camps for any length of time we can with certainty predict that they will suffer a high degree of moral disintegration and that many of them will become both moral and economic liabilities wherever they may go later.

It certainly should not be an impossible economic task to care for these people in the lands of the United Nations. The atmosphere, however, is so charged with mistrust and fear, and the economic situation is so much worse in most of Europe now than in 1919 that one has to be optimistic to the point of absurdity to predict that these people will be allowed to settle where they may wish in Europe. Nor is the outlook much more hopeful for finding homes for them in the Americas, or Australasia, or the Soviet Union. Our own attitude at present is distinctly opposed to admitting any considerable number of immigrants. Great prosperity might change this attitude in a year or two or three, but at present I cannot see any hope that we will relax our immigration restrictions. As for Australia and New Zealand, they have long had the most exclusive immigration restrictions of any people of European origin, and there is as yet no evidence of any intent to admit other than British immigrants in any significant numbers. Finding homes for these people without a country is not primarily an economic matter, it is rather a matter of not wanting immigrants at all or of wanting only our own kind of folks, our own kind being very narrowly defined.

* * * * *

The largest group of displaced persons in Europe undoubtedly consists of the fugitives who fled from the advancing enemy armies. I have calculated that the German territory east of the Oder and the Neisse which is to be given to Poland and the Soviet Union had about ten million people in 1939. I have never seen any estimate of how many of these people fled before the advancing Russians and Poles, but they will all have to go, as well as the Volksdeutsche referred to above as homeless and the 500,000 Reichsdeutsche sent in to consolidate German con-

control in the annexed Polish provinces, to which must be added the three fourths of a million or more Germans who lived in Poland in 1939. Perhaps these Germans should be put in a class by themselves. But if we consider them war fugitives, it is not difficult to believe that thirty million or more persons were driven or may yet be driven from their homes before advancing armies of whom about two thirds will expect to return home.

When the Germans began to fall back in defeat most of the non-German fugitives were no doubt free to move back to their homes as fast as the territory was reclaimed and transportation could be made available if they were not engaged in essential work elsewhere, as was probably the case with many of the Russian evacuees. Moreover, in most of the countries, aside from Germany, there was little, if any, diminution of the basic economic resources available for the support of their people, although there have been and will be numerous boundary changes. As nearly as I can calculate with the data now available, Poland has lost about 75,000 square miles in the east and has gained about 40,000 in the west, for a net loss of perhaps 35,000 square miles. However, it is probable that, from the standpoint of the support of population, Poland has gained more than she has lost. As yet there is no basis for estimating the effects of changes in boundaries on the capacity of most of the countries in western or southeastern Europe to support their people, but it seems likely that there will be comparatively little change although Holland, Belgium and France may receive small fragments of Germany when the final settlement is made.

Furthermore, it would appear from the reports which have trickled through that Poland, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Greece have suffered heavy losses in population during the war, while some of the other Balkan states have also lost but in lesser degree. Whether Holland, Belgium and France have actually lost numbers remains to be seen but seems rather probable. In any event there is as yet no basis for assuming that any of the European countries, except Germany, will come out of the war with diminished capacity to support their population so far as land and basic mineral resources are concerned, unless certain of these resources have been depleted by the unusual amounts used during the war.
The immediate economic problem of caring for the fugitives who return home arises primarily from a lack of transportation, implements, tools and machines to re-create the economy which the war destroyed. These problems, of course, differ greatly from country to country just as do the longer-time economic problems. But the differences between the ability of governments to marshal their nations' resources to meet urgent needs will probably play the most important rôle in determining the speed with which war fugitives may be readjusted economically, and this in turn will determine to a large extent the speed and completeness of their social and psychological readjustment.

Russia will probably be able to relocate her refugees and to start them on the way to self-support more quickly than any other country. The two chief reasons for this belief are the still predominant place of agriculture in the Soviet economy and the strong central government which can immediately direct a large part of the national effort to providing these refugees with the tools and implements they need to begin reconstruction. No other country with a large occupied area has the organization to move so quickly and so decisively in this field of the rehabilitation of fugitives.

Although I believe the Soviet Union to be the best prepared to undertake the economic rehabilitation of her fugitives, I would not for a moment want you to think that I regard Russia's task as easy. The area ravaged by Germany probably contained over 70 million people and it is estimated that actual destruction of property amounted to about 130 billions of dollars (probably much exaggerated) or to nearly one-half our war debt. It will probably take a generation of strenuous effort to rebuild this area. But the Soviet Union has the organization with which she marshaled her resources for war intact to direct the resettlement of her refugees and to find a place for them in the national economy. This is the fact of first importance in estimating how quickly she can care for her fugitives.

In contrast with the Soviet Union there was no unoccupied part of Poland and there was no functioning government by Poles in the country for about five years. Hence, there were no factories ready to turn out implements for rehabilitation when peace came and no experienced administrative organization to take hold of resettlement and reconstruction.

In addition, the great and constant danger involved in any patriotic activity, the undernourishment, the anxiety of scattered families and the imminent threat of devastating disease, frequently actualized, must have had a disintegrating effect on personality quite beyond our power to imagine. The one saving element in the situation of the Poles who remained in Poland, as most of them did, was the intense loyalty and patriotism which seem to have drawn all classes temporarily into a thoroughly united people. This may have prevented much of the disintegration of character which would otherwise have occurred. But even when full allowance is made for the stabilizing effect of this intense unity of purpose during the war, it seems to me that to expect from the Poles a quick return to "normal" ways of thinking and acting, to expect objectivity of them in dealing with their economic and political problems and with Germany, is too much. Finally, in Poland the problems of caring for fugitives are complicated beyond measure by the social revolution which appears to be in process.

The situation in Poland which I have tried to describe is repeated in much the same form in the Balkans. In the inevitable turmoil of revolution the fugitives from the invasion are bound to be neglected and to suffer greatly. The peasants will probably find their way back to their homes and because of their rather simple agricultural practices will soon be able to provide for themselves if they can get a few implements and a horse and a cow. The upper classes have probably been or soon will be
"liquidated" by way of civil war, or will be found in the camps for displaced persons where they constitute a considerable part of the homeless persons discussed above.

In the west of Europe the return flow of fugitives is probably pretty well completed. Here there are two rather distinct problems. The farmers who have gone back to their land need seed, animals, tools and equipment for farming, and materials to repair or rebuild their homes, barns, etc. With a relatively small amount of help they can at least feed themselves and begin to rebuild their lives. The industrial and urban fugitives, on the other hand, cannot make much progress toward rehabilitation until the entire economy of western Europe is reestablished and begins to function in a manner approaching normal. The difficulty of reestablishing the economy of France, Belgium and other countries is perhaps the chief reason for the demand for a strong central government of leftist tendencies. Certainly powerful groups believe that without such a government the fugitives can never be fully integrated with the life of the nation.

The next group of displaced persons, and in many respects the most important, is the "slave labor" imported into Germany and occupied countries to assist in war production. The size of this group like most of the others is not known accurately but is quite commonly placed at 10-13 millions, including most of the prisoners of war. Practically all of these people lived under very harsh conditions, many of them for four or five years. The largest groups were the French, the Poles and the Russians but there were relatively large groups from all the countries occupied by Germany and also from her so-called allies. It appears that every means one can imagine was used to make docile slaves of these people. Any insubordination, particularly on the part of the Poles and Russians, was treated with a ruthlessness which is almost beyond our imagination. Little care was taken of their health, except as disease among them might endanger the health of the German people and as their excessive weakness might interfere with war production. Even these elements of self-interest seem to have been small deterrents to the brutalized police entrusted with the task of maintaining order and of getting work out of them, since until well into 1943 in

the East and D-Day in the West new "slaves" could be readily secured to replace those who died.

In spite of the transportation problems involved in the repatriation of these "slaves" it appears that most of them have already gone to their homes. Their economic problems probably are not much different from those of the fugitives described above except as they have been weakened by more inhuman treatment. It would be amazing, however, if there were not a great many of these slave laborers who would be utterly unable to readjust themselves to life in their former communities. This would be especially true of those whose families have been scattered or killed so that they have no intimate group to which to return. Here again the Poles appear to have been weakened by starvation and disease more than any of the other nationalities with the possible exception of the Russians. Hence, they probably have greater personal handicaps to overcome than most other groups and they have greater chaos at home to contend with than any other people. All this should be borne in mind when we are trying to evaluate the problems faced by the Poles in rebuilding their personal lives and in re-creating their national life.

Finally, another word should be said about the displaced Germans who are to be crowded into the smaller Germany. About 600,000 Volksdeutsche were settled in the annexed provinces of Poland by 1943. There were perhaps 700,000-900,000 Germans in Poland at the outbreak of the war. There were also several hundred thousand Volksdeutsche in occupied Russia and in the Balkans who became refugees before the advancing Russian armies from 1943 to 1945. In addition to these, the former German territory allotted to Poland and the Soviet Union at Potsdam contained about ten million people in 1939 and there were three million Sudetenlanders in 1939. The future of these Sudeten Germans has not been definitely decided but it seems reasonably certain that many of them, probably a majority, will be expelled from Bohemia and Moravia. Thus the post-war Reich, which contains only a little over three-fourths the territory of the Reich before the annexation of Austria (1938), will apparently have to support several million more people. Its population, of course, will not be increased by the 13-15 million
fugitives just referred to, because of heavy German war losses, but the net result would appear to be that the territory of post-war Germany, which had a population of about 59 million in 1939, would have a population of 64-66 million in 1946. Besides, the loss of Silesia and possibly of the Saar will reduce Germany's coal supplies materially and make her less able to provide industrial jobs for her people; while the loss of the area east of the Oder and the Neisse will substantially reduce her food supplies. This area contained, as already indicated, only about one seventh of Germany's 1939 population but almost one fourth of her total area. I do not see why we should expect that the social and economic problems of these German refugees will be much different, except in degree, from those of the displaced persons of other nationalities. It may be easier to harden our hearts against them and allow them to starve and die of disease wholesale because they are Germans, but we should recognize that in doing this we are following in the footsteps of the Nazis and must expect the same crop of bitterness and hatred they harvested in the countries they occupied and must govern our long-time treatment of them accordingly if we would not soon again have a strong military clique in control.