T 212090

The Unwanted

European Refugees from the First World War Through the Cold War

MICHAEL R. MARRUS

With a new Foreword by Aristide R. Zolberg

"The most comprehensive description of the European refugee problem.... [W]ell written and rich in references."
—*The American Journal of International Law*

agreement with the Soviet authorities regarding further emigration. Emigdirect cleared the way for overseas travel and explored settlement possibilities, notably in South America, Canada, Australia, and South Africa. The latter activity was especially important after the restrictions on immigration to the United States in 1924. Together with the American-based Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Emigdirect and the ICA joined together in 1927 to form HICEM, taking its name from the initials of all three: this was an international Jewish body for pursuing immigration and settlement, with its headquarters in Paris. Six years later, with the rise of Nazism, this organization was to cope with a new flood of refugees.

Empires in Ruin: Refugees and the Peace Settlements

To the diplomats and statesmen assembled in Paris in 1919, perhaps the most important task was redrawing the map of Europe—a terribly complicated process, both in strategic conception and in tactical detail. Weighing on the draftsmen were not only the political, economic, and military considerations commonly associated with the negotiating process, but also a set of ideals. Broadly speaking, the peacemakers hoped to produce a just, stable, and lasting peace, consistent with the interests of nationalities. They believed that national rivalries and frustrated national aspirations had done much to generate prewar tensions and that the new arrangements had to be in the interests of the peoples concerned. Harold Nicolson, then a young member of the British delegation, remembered his own intoxication with such notions: "We were journeying to Paris, not merely to liquidate the war, but to found a new order in Europe. We were preparing not Peace only, but Eternal Peace. There was about us the halo of some divine mission. We must be alert, stern, righteous, and ascetic. For we were bent on doing great, permanent, and noble things."[34]

Notably, the leading thinkers of 1919 hoped to avoid some of the more egregious assaults on particular group interests and thus preclude the precipitous flight of refugees that sometimes occurred when territory changed hands. Geopolitical changes in general, it was assumed, would satisfy national aspirations to the greatest possible degree. Frontiers of states would run along the lines of nationality, and inhabitants would accept the jurisdiction

of their compatriots. Inevitably, some people would find themselves on the wrong side of the ethnolinguistic divide; for such as these, strenuous efforts were required to prevent the kind of refugee situation that, for example, plagued the Balkan peninsula during the previous decades. To address this problem, the Paris treaties included a very old provision in international regulations permitting those living in affected areas to choose their subsequent national allegiance. If they identified with another state than that to which the territory in which they lived was assigned, individuals had twelve months in which to leave; and if they did so, they could retain their property. On the other hand, in some cases people were allowed to choose the nationality of the annexing country even if they were not living there at the time of annexation. Against the primitive claims of *raison d'état*, therefore—the contention that governments had the right to dispose of entire populations for political purposes—the peacemakers generally accommodated the claims of individuals, who could define their own national allegiance and choose where they wanted to live.[35]

For example, by the provisions of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, signed by Austria, a former Austrian subject living in land assigned to Italy could normally claim Austrian nationality, move to the new Austrian state, and assume full citizenship rights there. According to the Treaty of Versailles, people of Polish or Czech background from territory remaining part of Germany could, nevertheless, opt for Polish or Czechoslovak nationality. Germans in Poland or Czechoslovakia born within the new Polish or Czechoslovak republics, on the other hand, could choose the nationalities of those states irrespective of the wishes of those governments—which were understandably nervous about acquiring large German minorities. Across Europe, people now had choices to make to a greater extent than ever before according to elaborate rules written into treaties and given the force of law within signatory states.

In addition to these provisions, the postwar treaties directly addressed the issue of national minorities. Millions of people, it was recognized, would continue to live in a culturally, linguistically, or religiously alien environment. Of course, the treaties reduced their numbers. The migration expert Joseph Schechtman estimated that some sixty million Europeans were ruled by an alien jurisdiction before the war; after the peace settlements, he claimed, this number fell to between twenty million and twenty-

five million.[36] In the past, the persecution of these minorities had caused many of them to seek refuge in neighboring states and had been a source of international instability; henceforth, it was hoped, special minorities treaties would guarantee elementary rights to such people and thus eliminate a historic injustice. Overriding vigorous objections from the governments concerned, the great powers obliged Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Rumania to sign treaties providing minorities with basic human rights and, in the case of Poland, specific protections for the Jewish minority. The newly established League of Nations took responsibility for supervising the enforcement of these treaties and was empowered to receive petitions about real or prospective violations.

The immediate postwar period, therefore, saw an international climate apparently conducive to the resolution of refugee problems. Long-range difficulties appeared, of course. The entire framework of guarantees to minorities was only as strong as the postwar settlements themselves; the enforcement machinery involved an experimental leap into internationalism, requiring for success a measure of agreement among the Great Powers. Nevertheless, in formal terms, the peacemakers seemed to have done well.

In practice, however, severe refugee problems arose from the beginning. Despite the careful attention paid to minorities and to the status of persons whose country was transferred to a new state, some people still found themselves made homeless by the settlements. Notably, with the dissolution of three multinational empires, there were some individuals who would not or could not assume the nationality of a successor state. If there were no other state to accept them, these became stateless persons, known as *apatrides* or *Heimatlosen*. Usually, such people had been buffeted about the continent in the course of recent upheavals and finished the war far from their place of birth. One such case reported to a Quaker relief worker in Spain was of a man born in Berlin, but of Polish origin because of his Polish parents, who was technically designated *apatride;* he claimed Ukrainian nationality, but was claimed in turn by the Russian government for repatriation and service in the Red Army.[37] According to Hannah Arendt, for whom the experience of people thrust outside the boundaries of legal protection was particularly ominous, these *Heimatlosen* were mostly Jews who "were unable or unwilling to place themselves under the new minority protection of their

homelands." But there were many others. Polish workers in Belgium, to take another example, sometimes found themselves made stateless when they failed to acquire Polish nationality according to the terms of the 1921 Treaty of Riga, which settled the Polish-Soviet frontier. Such cases illustrate the appearance before the international community of large numbers of people who simply did not fit into the legal and political categories negotiated after the war. At any moment these stateless persons could become refugees, and many defined themselves as such from the moment the war ended, given the reluctance of any state to accept them.[38]

Throughout Central Europe, moreover, the postwar era saw a new generation of refugees resulting directly from territorial changes. The humiliated Weimar Republic, for example, received close to a million refugees. Germans poured across the new frontiers from Alsace-Lorraine, now reattached to France; from northern Schleswig, which went to Denmark; from Eupen and Malmédy, now joined to Belgium. In the east, nationalism and the turmoil of postwar politics forced about half a million Germans to move. Polish nationalism prompted a series of economic boycotts against German shops and businesses in the western part of the country. Ethnic Germans left the former provinces of Poznan and Pomerania, now part of the Polish Corridor, and the port of Danzig, also separated from Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. From Upper Silesia, where a Polish uprising and civil strife followed a 1921 plebiscite supporting a return to Germany, refugees moved westward to the Reich, and more followed when this area was partitioned in 1922, giving Poland a substantial portion. Other German refugees came from the new Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Within the former Russian empire, ethnic Germans from these regions, some of whose families had settled there centuries before, had been among the fiercest opponents of self-rule by the local nationality; in 1920, when the independence of these states was assured, their nationalism was often accompanied by intense anti-German feeling. German aid to these refugees, known as *Flüchtlingsfürsorge*, was a mammoth undertaking and signaled official state involvement in refugee matters on a previously unimagined scale. The government maintained camps and placement offices, looking both to the initial care of the refugees and to their eventual resettlement in Germany. At the same time, the Germans faced massive problems associated with the repatriation of some two million Allied

prisoners of war and hundreds of thousands of forced laborers who had been deported to Germany during the conflict.[39]

Nowhere were the issues posed by postwar refugees more acute than in the truncated Hungarian state that emerged from the Treaty of Trianon, signed in 1920. With the collapse of Hapsburg authority, the Austrian and Hapsburg components of the former empire went their own ways. Hungary emerged from the peacemaking process a shrunken, landlocked remnant of former glory, one-third of its previous size, with one-half of its prewar population. This imposed settlement triggered a massive exodus of Magyar-speaking loyalists from the sizable areas lost to Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. In Budapest, the Hungarians considered the new borders an unpardonable affront, and each Hungarian refugee a grievance to be nursed in the cause of revising the hated settlement. The National Administration for Refugees, created by Hungarian authorities in 1919, carefully kept track of the fugitives as they crossed the frontier.

In 1921 the Hungarians announced that about 234,000 had come: 139,390 from Rumania, 56,657 from Czechoslovakia, and 37,456 from Yugoslavia. The exodus from newly Rumanian Transylvania was particularly important and followed an active campaign by Bucharest to integrate this huge new province into the Rumanian kingdom. Sharp debates over this issue ensued in Geneva, where the League of Nations Council rang with accusations from both Hungarian and Rumanian sides. Meanwhile, as we have seen, refugees moved to the rhythms of civil war in Hungary itself. The advent of Béla Kun in the spring of 1919 prompted a wave of emigration escaping communist revolution; the crushing of that experiment sent a current of implicated commissars in the same direction, spurred on by the White Terror of the nationalist right.

In an effort to stem the tide and put pressure on their neighbors, the Hungarians closed their frontiers to new arrivals in 1921 and 1922. Battered by the war, Hungary labored to absorb tens of thousands of disgruntled refugees. These ranged from the cream of Magyar society—former Imperial officers, administrators, and estate owners—to far more humble fugitives, swept up in the bitter turmoil of the Hungarian nation. Hundreds of immigrants remained for months and even years in the railway stations where they arrived. Reports reached the capital of refugees stranded in frontier towns, preying on orderly communities and a heavy charge on charitable services. Three years after the ar-

EUROPE
After William F

mistice of 1918, 18,000 refugees still camped in Budapest and its vicinity, unsettled after their original flight. Among these people embers of irredentism glowed brightly into the 1930s; demagogues continually addressed their grievances, and by the latter part of that decade many had found their political home in fascism, notably with the Arrow Cross movement of Ferenc Szálasi.[40]

These were the most important, but not the only refugee movements within Central Europe following the postwar treaties. In addition, the Austrian Republic received many thousands of displaced wanderers, often German-speaking former Imperial civil servants and military officers from various parts of what used to be the Hapsburg domain. Some came from Bukovina, once ruled from Vienna but now part of Rumania, or from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. As in the case of Hungary, imperial notables frequently reached Austria penniless, with their political worlds destroyed and the social fabric of their existence torn apart.

Attentive as the treaties were to the needs and wishes of individuals caught in an alien geopolitical environment, they could not address every anomalous situation, every combination of circumstances. Inevitably, some people fell between the stools—born in the wrong village, speaking the wrong language, naturalized at the wrong date, finishing the war in the wrong part of Europe. Many such people became fugitives, joining those who found the carefully drafted political arrangments an intolerable affront to their national sensibilities: Yugoslav minorities, for example, who could not accept the centralist constitution of 1921 and its concomitant Serbian hegemony, or Germans from Czechoslovakia, who preferred Austria or the Weimar Republic to life under the Czech president Thomas Masaryk. But Central Europe was basically able to deal with these refugees, to feed, shelter, and resettle them, however great the difficulties in doing so. In the Balkans, on the other hand, or in the poverty-stricken Transcaucasian republics, refugee catastrophes of unprecedented magnitude were unfolding without any prospects of effective short-term relief.

Armenian Refugees

The end of the First World War brought the peacemakers face-to-face with the Armenian question, an issue that for Westerners