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Migration Miracle

by George Murray

(This is the second of a series of articles written for the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association by the editor of the "Pictou Advocate")

Aboard USAT General J. H. Makke

This United States Army Transport, one of 36 ships chartered by the International Refugee Organization, is bound for Bremerhaven, Germany, to take on another thousand or more displaced persons to be resettled in the United States.

Listening to IRO officials and others, I have learned more about the migration miracle.

One interesting source of information is J. A. Swettenham of the British Foreign Office, attached to the Maintenance Branch, Land Commissioner's Office, Hannover. This former major of the Royal Engineers spent four years with the Control Commission for Germany. He is returning to his post after having arranged for publication in New York of a book entitled "The Case for DPs."

Mr. Swettenham described the problem of assisting about 1,500,000 displaced persons who refused to go back behind the iron curtain.

What was to be done with these people? They could not be returned forcibly against their will, and it was soon realized that the only solution to the problem lay in resettlement, that is, migration to other countries where in the fulness of time they could become naturalized citizens of such countries as the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Western European countries, and in the case of the Jews, Israel. These countries did not wake up to the fact all at once, and in the meantime the DP's still had to be supported.

To carry out this task, the Displaced Person Division of the Control Commission had taken over from the army in the British zones of Germany and Austria in 1946 and, in July, 1947 the Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization (PCIRO) succeeded UNRRA. The PCIRO was in turn succeeded by IRO after 15 mem-

ber nations and a firm subscription of 75 per cent of the operational budget had been found and IRO was firmly established, with its headquarters in Geneva and branch offices in Germany, Austria and Italy and many other parts of the world where DP's are likely to resettle.

You may ask, who pays for IRO. The answer is, you do, as a taxpayer of one of the member nations. And how — is your money being spent? In the early days, mostly in care and maintenance, transport, the provision of food, clothing, amenities, accommodation stores such as beds, chairs, tables and blankets, in medical supplies and the upkeep of camps and buildings. Education had to go on, schools and even vocational training and agricultural leaping search through the International Tracing Service to find or determine the fate of millions of missing persons was conducted.

And now, when resettlement is in full swing, your money helps maintain the world's largest mass civilian transportation fleet in history which carries more than 30,000 DP's monthly to overseas destinations.

It was in 1947 that resettlement really began to get under way as by the time at least seven-eighths of the DP's who were found in Germany, Austria, and Italy after the close of hostilities had returned home, and it was clear that no further large scale repatriation movements could be expected. However, repatriation remained the top priority job of IRO, and although no DP was forced to return to his homeland, information about his country of origin furnished by the government of those countries was passed on to him to encourage him to reach an independent decision.

IRO was willing and able to provide repatriation services and transport to everyone who wished to return home. It still is.

National repatriation missions were allowed to visit the camps, even the Russians, and in the beginning they could address massed

gatherings. The camp inhabitants were so hostile to the Soviet representatives that later this was stopped, but they still had access to any part of the camp under supervision, and any person who expressed a wish to see the Russian officers was enabled to do so. But Ivan sat for hour after hour to no purpose. All kinds of ways were found by the DP's to annoy the Russians, from showers of rotten eggs to more subtle schemes. One little plan was to ask them to send greetings to Captain So and So (some prominent IRO official), shall we say, Riga whom they had known in 1940 — he had always been so kind to them. They knew full well that this would be channelled back and that the unfortunate captain would have some very awkward questions to answer. Soviet literature was distributed in the camps but usually found its way into the garbage pails. Repatriation in general was a wash-out.

Resettlement now provided the outlet and the opportunity which the majority of the DP's were waiting for. Great Britain was one of the first nations to open its doors.

As early as October, 1946, scheme "Balt Cygnet" was announced which provided for a hundred Baltic girls to work as domestic servants in British hospitals. From this modest beginning the scheme developed into the "Operation Westward Ho" which between 1947 and 1949 had absorbed more than 82,000 persons.

The conscience of the United States was also being pricked into activity. A good many citizens who hailed from Eastern Europe were asking "What about our kinfolk in the DP camps in Germany? What are we doing to help?" And in July, 1947 President Truman sent a message to Congress to the effect that the strength of the U.S.A. was vested in various nationalities from many lands, that there was room for more, and that the fate of Europe's homeless lay very largely in his country's hands. All this led to a target being set for the immigration of 200,000 persons before June 30, 1950, and by July, 1949 almost 69,000 had actually been resettled.

It had been seen to take the Jews out by the month of 1949 almost 122,000 were installed in the new Jewish homeland.

France, Belgium, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, New Zealand and Norway all layed their part, but it was to the large open spaces of the world towards which every eye was turned.

Canada and Australia did not fall. Their selection missions were soon functioning in Germany and resettlement material in English and German. German is the "esperanto" of the DP's soon assumed a prominent position in the resettlement rooms of the camps.

It was not long before the IRO chartered ships sailing from north German ports were crowded with track workers, hydro electric workers, metal miners, garment workers, farmers and domestics all bound for Canada. In addition, Canada has already accepted more than 25,000 persons under schemes which permit close relatives of Canadian citizens and dependents of workers already in Canada to emigrate. By taking these dependents, Canada has made a significant contribution to the reestablishment of DP's with limited resettlement opportunities.

In October, 1948, IRO undertook to move 100,000 persons to Australia by June 30, 1950. Up to June 1949, exactly 44,137 people were chosen by Australian selection teams and transported to Australia. To keep the eleven IRO vessels allocated to this program filled, six Australian selection missions are now operating in Germany and Austria, and together they select and issue visas to an average of 2,000 DP's each week.

There has been a good deal of relaxation in Australian selection. Families are interviewed as a unit and are moved together. In February, 1949, the Australian government agreed to accept unaccompanied girls and youths between the ages of 18 and 20. Hostel accommodation or placement in foster homes is provided for the young immigrants and legal guardianship is vested in the minister of immigration as long as they are minors. Other difficult categories, widows and widowers with young children, are also acceptable now.

Opportunities are given for older relatives to follow the younger workers to Australia, and while shortage of shipping space at first meant that only the urgently needed workers could go, that difficulty has now been overcome and the older persons are following. It is very hard for families to agree to split up again, when it has possibly taken years for them to re-unite in Germany, but the "pioneers" agreed to do so, and it is to the credit of the Australian government that no time was lost in fulfilling its promise, which is one reason why the scheme is so popular.

Every opportunity is given for DP's to learn English before departure, and linguaphone classes are held both in the camps in Europe and on the ships.

A great deal has been done, but much remains to be done in the year which IRO has to complete its vast and complex program.

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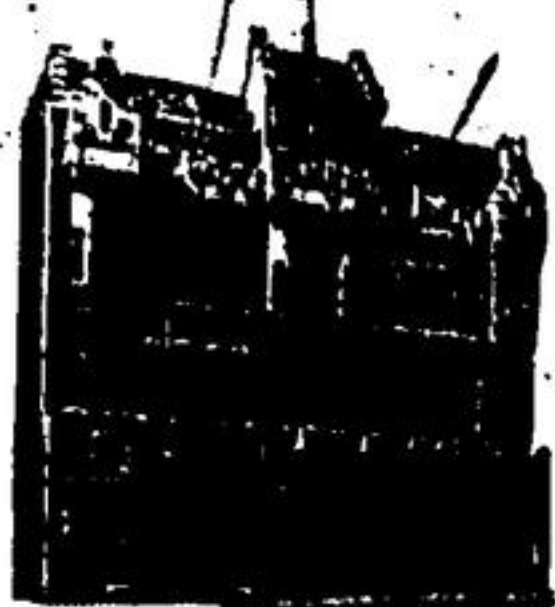
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