

Migration Miracle - -

by George Murray
(This is the fourth of a series of articles written for the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association by the editor of the Pictou Advocate, now touring Europe.)

Lemgo, Germany — Policy with respect to displaced persons in Europe is formulated by the International Refugee Organization (IRO), Specialized Agency of United Nations and with funds of its own for meeting expenditures incurred.

In the British Zone, the control of camps is vested in D.P. Division, a branch of the British Control Commission. The chain of command is as follows: D.P. Zonal H.Q., Lemgo (who work hand in hand with IRO Zonal H.Q.), Regional H.Q. (now, in process of closure due to the run-down in the D.P. population), Relief Detachments, down to Displaced Persons Assembly Centre Control Staff H.Q., of DPACCS for short.

The system works like this. The whole zone is divided into areas, and in each area is a Relief Detachment responsible to Regional H.Q. which in turn is responsible to Zonal H.Q. Under the Relief Detachment are a number of DPACCS depending on the number of Assembly Centres in that area. Each DPACCS should have four British staff, the commissioner, a supply officer, a supervisor and a clerk, but often has less owing to shortage of British personnel, and the APACCS controls a DP population of approximately 2,000 persons.

The job of the Relief Detachment commander is to pass on policy received from higher up, and to inspect the DPACCS to ensure that policy is being carried out and that a suitable standard is being maintained.

Following is a routine of a Relief Detachment commander on one of his periodic inspections of a DPACCS, as described to me by a British official at Fallingb.ostal.

The DPACCS office is situated on the ground floor of a block just inside the gates of a large German barracks which previously housed a unit of the Wehrmacht.

The DPACCS commander is a retired major bluff and hearty, wearing on his Control Commission uniform the ribbons of the two world wars and the MBE. He is interested in his work and the human problems with which he has to deal every day to keep him busy.

The supply officer, assisted by D.P. clerks, is working out the ration.

In the clerical office, the British clerk with spectacles perched on the end of his nose, is toiling at the statistical report, assisted by a most attractive fair headed Estonian girl in her early twenties. The camp population is accurately recorded, and it is interesting to note that there have been 19 births since the last monthly report. Thus the DP problem grows!

The employment chart shows that many DP's are working in local industries. Approximately 50 per cent are employed. This might seem a good percentage and could be misinterpreted as evidence that the DP's are being absorbed economically into their present German refuge, but this is not the case. Many are employed in the maintenance of the camps, while others are working on temporary projects for the army.

A glance at the electricity consumption chart shows that the camp ration is underdrawn. Electricity has to be paid for and is therefore severely rationed to keep the operation costs of the camp as low as possible. This reveals that the camp police, of whom there are a dozen to keep out unlawful entrants and to maintain discipline, are doing their job and ensuring that no unwarranted consumption of electricity is taking place.

At the camp leader's office we find a white headed Latvian in his middle fifties. He was formerly a professor at the University of Riga, and was democratically elected by the camp inhabitants to represent them. With him, we collect the DPACCS doctor, an Estonian paid to safeguard the health of the camp inhabitants, and start on the tour of inspection.

Outside the office is an IRO car, and the IRO eligibility officer is in the camp to screen the population from the point of view of eligibility for aid under the IRO constitution. She is Polish. She sits behind her desk with two assistants and an interpreter. In front of the desk stands an old Latvian woman whose wrinkled face is lined with suffering. She appears to be of peasant stock and her gnarled hands fillet nervously with a string bag which she holds protectively before her. Questioning elicits the fact that her husband, a farmer, was killed by the Russians, she herself had fled to Germany with her daughter and son-in-law, a chemist.

Had she worked in Germany? Yes, she had, as a kitchen helper in a canteen of a factory manufacturing aeroplane parts near Berlin. At length comes the fateful question:

"When did you come to Germany?" Her whispered reply is barely audible but the interpreter passes it over firmly enough, "1940".

The head of the old woman is slightly forward, her wisping hair

straggling, grotesquely down one side of her face. Her eyes, misty with hope, never leave the face of the IRO official. Her mouth is slightly open and the underlip trembles spasmodically.

"Not eligible."

She turns to the reporter, her face still alight with hope, but on hearing the interpretation a look of bewilderment and entreaty succeeds for a brief moment. Then her face crumples up and tears course down her shrivelled cheeks. She trudges slowly to the door, and no doubt remembers the long trek to Germany with her pitiful few possessions, the dreary toll of the long years which had been spent in Berlin, the air raids and the long probing fingers of the searchlights above the bursting bombs, the liberation, and the thrill of reunion with her daughter here in the camp. Now she must leave to be thrust into some German refugee camp, sharing a miserable existence with persons with whom she has nothing whatsoever in common.

True, her daughter and son-in-law will be there to help but life would be grim for them all, and she can see no ray of hope in all the dark future. What has she done to deserve it? At her age after a long working life surely she can expect a little comfort.

The IRO official dabs her nose with powder: "Next, please."

The major appears totally unmoved. All his life he has carried out orders, some more unpleasant than others, but he has his duty to do and if this old woman must leave the camp, she must leave. He is no student of Baltic affairs and if the eligibility officer who knows all the answers screens her out, then there is no more to it.

And actually, as the IRO constitution is framed, there is very little that can be done.

Here are some specific classes of persons who are declared to be ineligible:

1. Victims of Nazi, Fascist or Quisling regimes.

2. Persons who were compelled by Nazis, Fascist or Quisling regimes to undertake forced labour or who were deported from their countries for racial, religious or political reasons.

3. Persons outside their country of origin or former habitual residence who are unwilling or unable to avail themselves of the protection of the government of that country.

NOT eligible. Specifically barred from IRO assistance are:

1. War criminals, Quislings and traitors.

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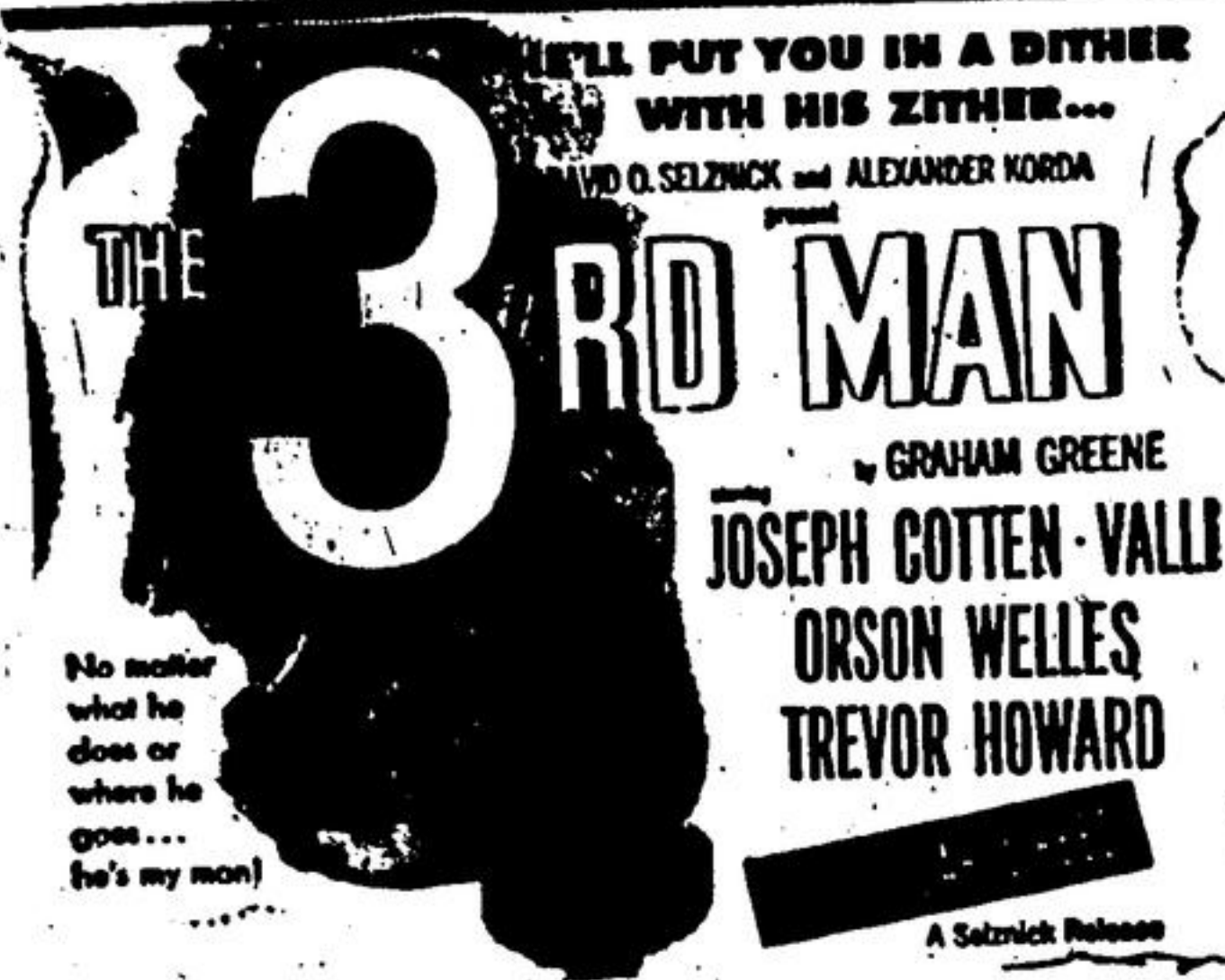


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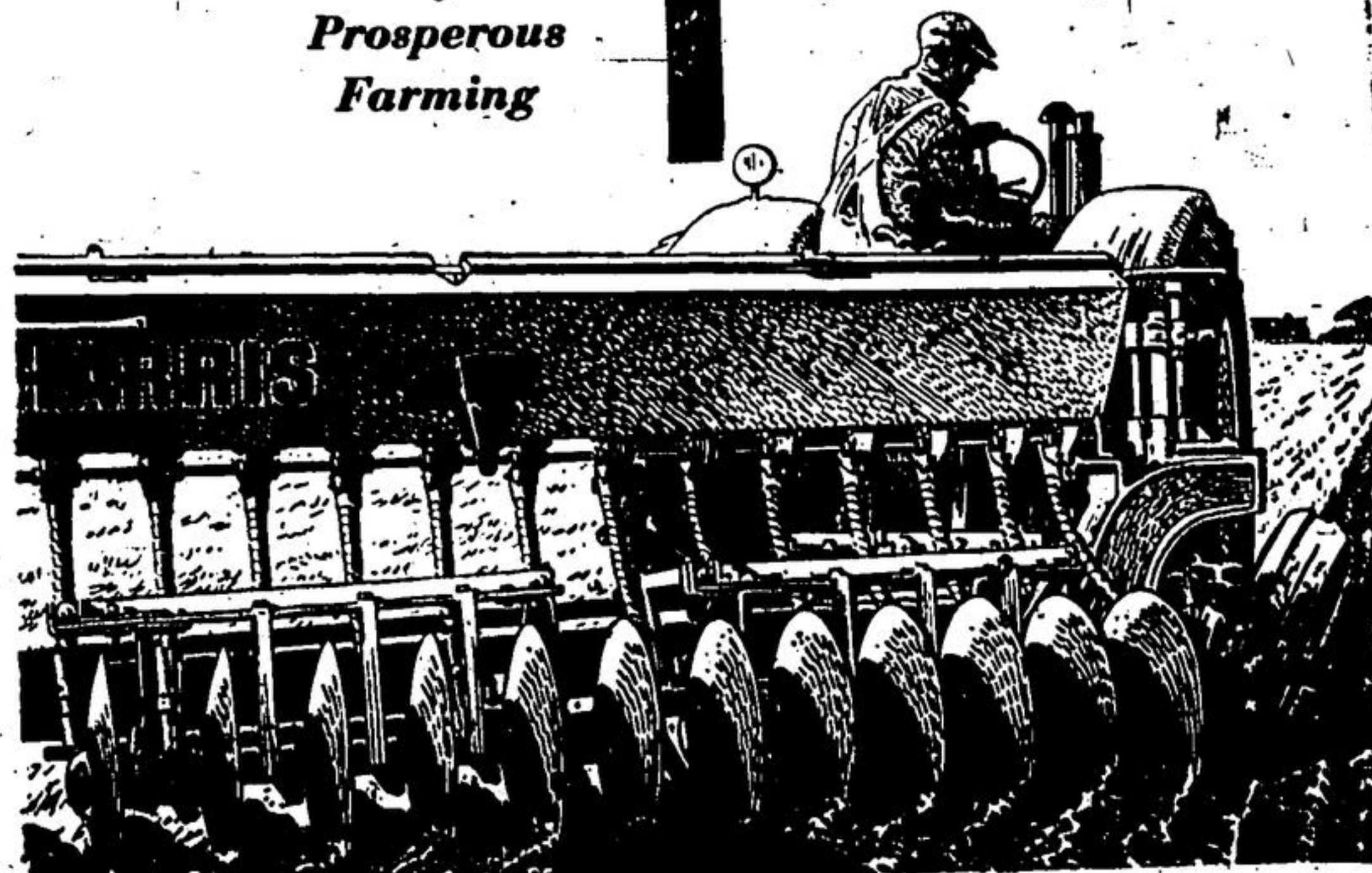
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