

The Accidental Immigrants: Canada And The Interned Refugees: Part II

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Résumé

SYNTHÈSE FAITE PAR C. DADOUN

Dans une étude menée sur les réfugiés, l'auteur de l'article s'étend sur des situations qui, au Royaume-Uni ou aux Etats-Unis, ont été absolument différentes de celles que les réfugiés ont vécu au Canada.

Après un arrêté en conseil passé au Gouvernement du Canada, ils eurent droit à des libertés beaucoup plus grandes. Il en fut ainsi pour la pratique religieuse du Shabbat qui leur fut accordée.

D'autre part, l'auteur fait une couverture bien plus qu'un simple survol de ce que fut la vie dans les camps de réfugiés. Comme on peut s'y attendre, elle fut loin d'y être agréable. Elle fut rendue d'autant plus difficile qu'il n'existait que deux organismes de bienfaisance à cette époque, c'est-à-dire le Y.M.C.A. d'une part, et le Congrès Juif Canadien d'autre part.

Les réfugiés développèrent leur propre système de leadership et d'organisation. Ceci eut pour conséquence de donner naissance à un milieu de travail qui leur fut propre et propice.

L'UJRA fut une fédération d'agences juives dont la fonction était de pouvoir soulager les Juifs qui sortaient d'une impasse très difficile (la Seconde Guerre). Au sein des camps de réfugiés, il y eut un grand nombre de personnes qui firent leur propre éducation. Ils apprenaient autant si ce n'est plus de matières que celles qui avaient cours dans les écoles et universités.

Cependant, l'auteur souligne dans ce texte les difficultés que M. Saul Hayes du Congrès Juif Canadien eut à propos du Directeur du service d'immigration M. Frederick Charles Blair, dont il rapporte ce qui suit: "Le cas de F. C. Blair requiert une explication de la position de l'homme qui était directeur d'un service gouvernemental et dont le seul dessein pendant plusieurs années fut de tenir les immigrants à l'écart. Il fut formé

*Out of respect to the privacy of the individuals who were interviewed in the preparation of this paper, the author has refrained from naming them in the footnotes. Those wishing precise documentation may contact the author through the office of the Editor.

dans cette optique et son comportement illustre sa croyance ferme que tel était le travail qui lui était imparti.”

A l'égard des réfugiés, les employeurs avaient beau jeu pour refuser tout avancement à la personne qu'il sous-traitait. Ils brandissaient le spectre du ré-internement. En décembre 1943, les camps de réfugiés furent abolis et les derniers réfugiés s'en retournèrent en Angleterre ou s'établirent au Canada.

Pour ce qui a trait à la mise en liberté des étudiants, il fallait trouver une personne disposée à le parrainer pendant sa scolarité. Le Congrès Juif Canadien est intervenu pour trouver des familles ou l'argent nécessaire dans certains cas.

Pendant, ce qui était à l'étudiant le plus difficile c'était d'être admis par des institutions scolaires. C'est de cette époque que date le principe selon lequel tout étudiant venu d'un autre pays que le Canada, doit recommencer toutes ses études, qu'il soit médecin, avocat ou autre.

Bien que les situations n'aient jamais été des plus agréables pour les réfugiés, ils sont malgré tout demeurés canadiens à la différence des Autrichiens qui accusaient un certain recul en pensant qu'une fois la guerre terminée, ils pourraient réintégrer leur patrie.

Le Canada offrit aux réfugiés un nouveau foyer et de grandes perspectives d'avenir. Il les traita peut être à certains moments, comme criminels, il leur fit la vie dure peut être, mais ils eurent tout de même un foyer, ce que, ni l'Angleterre ni les Etats-Unis réunis n'ont fait.

Si l'on considère l'holocauste, on peut dire que les réfugiés ont survécu grâce au Canada qui leur ouvrit ses portes.

First of all, I didn't know what was going to happen in England. I felt a much stronger kinship to this continent . . . I wanted to be as far away from Europe as possible . . . I said, even if I have to sit out the duration of the war in this camp, I will not return.¹

RETURNING TO ENGLAND

Finally in November 1940, the long-awaited British representative, Alex Patterson, arrived at the camps. He offered most of the internees the chance to return to England. Patterson's mission was partly one of apology, not to mention an attempt at cleaning up the mess. He spent from November 1940 to June 1941 interviewing individuals and arranging for their return. When he left, 700 men had been sent back.² At this point, the offer for release was based on agreement to join the Auxiliary Pioneer

Corps. This was a non-combat group which had originated with members of the Kitchener refugee camp in England before the internment. To enter this corps meant one would be placed in menial jobs. Since many of the men were anxious to join the armed forces, this offer held little appeal. Most internees felt that their abilities could be put to better use in other types of war work. Once this first release was possible, could not others be soon in coming? Internees were given consent and refusal forms. It was a difficult decision. They knew that organizations were working to obtain their release in Canada. Stethem, representing the government, made it clear that:

If he refuses to accept his release on the conditions stated, he must necessarily remain interned. We do not say he will remain interned for the duration of the war, that will depend on the circumstances, but having once refused his consent it is not likely that he will again be afforded the same opportunity. ³

Eventually over half of the interned refugees were to return to England. Those who remained had various reasons. All were convinced that the Canadian government would have to ultimately release them and few had any intention of returning to Germany. But some remained only because they did not have relatives in England or because their friends were staying.⁴

Then you had the choice to apply to go back to England and join . . . the Pioneer Corps. which was a pick and shovel brigade. I applied to join the army . . . and I figured, if I'm not good enough to join to be in the army, I'm not going over there . . . People who went over . . . had girlfriends or close family, or did not see any hope of getting out at all. ⁵

Others who stayed, still hoped that emigration to the United States, on the basis of their quota numbers, would be possible. Friends in England wrote of the unsafe conditions there and advised the internees to stay. But freedom was, for most, the main goal of life. As friends began to leave them behind, still imprisoned, the quality of the future awaiting them in England lessened in importance. After a while many were to regret not having decided to return, for Canada stood fast against their admittance.

June 14, 1941

A list comes out bearing the names of 61 men to be returned to England. Everybody longs to be on this list, everybody is sick of internment. We want freedom, even if there are bombs in England and none here. Internment bears heavy on my nerves, the barbed wire seems almost choking me. Freedom, freedom.

June 18

The boys leave for England. They stand in the space between the two gates and wave back to us. We stand in the compound longing to be in civilian clothes like they, going back to the old country . . . It was a crime almost that Mr. Patterson . . . told us beautiful things although they knew reality was quite different. If they had told us straight how the matter stood, many would have gladly gone back to England. ⁶

Thus the British government, while anxious to let Canada take care of the interned refugees, felt obligated to receive those who desired to return. Under their conditions, of course.

AMERICAN IMMIGRATION 1940-1941

The United States, the previous destination of most of the refugees, was no longer willing to take them in. The Canadian authorities were agreeable, as early as August 1940, to allow those with American visas to emigrate.⁷ In October, five internees, one whose mother was dying of cancer in the States, received permission from the British government to emigrate to the United States. The U.S. consul refused to see any of them.⁸ The consul stated that: "all interviews with internees were definitely refused and that this stand was concurred in full by Washington."⁹ Four days later the consul agreed to interview one internee, and granted him a visa. The American Department of Immigration immediately stepped in, decreeing that since the internee "had not arrived at a port in the U.S., he was not eligible for entry."¹⁰ By 1940-41 many of the quota numbers held by internees were valid for U.S. emigration. In fact, an arrangement existed whereby temporary visitors in the U.S. could enter Canada to obtain permanent quota visas from American consuls. (Canada excluded enemy aliens, who had to go to Cuba.)¹¹ But as the war progressed and fewer refugees reached American shores, restrictionist and isolationist sentiments grew. The internees were not wanted, and it was easy to keep them out. The American consul informed the Canadian government on December 2nd, 1940 that he was "under no circumstances to interview any internees regarding immigration unless said internees have been released from internment by the Canadian authorities."¹² Since they refused to do this, the American consul was able to blame Canada and get himself off the hook.

The Canadian authorities could not even be moved by money. One American citizen offered to place twenty-five thousand dollars in trust in a Canadian bank in return for the release of three of his relatives for emigration.¹³ His request was denied. Finally, in July 1941 qualified internees began to be released into Canada. But, because of fears of fifth columnists, the U.S. consuls had received instructions on June 5th to withhold visas from all applicants who had parents, children, husbands, wives or siblings resident in territories under the control of Germany.¹⁴ This covered most internees. Then in July 1941 an Alien Bill was passed in Congress. At the same time plans had just been completed in Canada for

internees to go to Newfoundland as tourists and there visit the American consul. The Bill therefore included a section stipulating that no one would be admitted who had been incarcerated at any time during the year in which application was being made for entry into the U.S.¹⁵ Internees would therefore be required to be freed in Canada for one year before their visa application would be considered. Thus the U.S. effectively barred the same people whose quota numbers had given them refuge in Great Britain.

PART FIVE THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNMENT

I would say being interned, being deprived of your freedom is never good. But, it gave us, at least it gave me, a chance to get acclimatized to the country, being an immigrant. That means I didn't have to come into the country and the next day start work. It gave me a chance to become very proficient in English. It gave me a chance to learn about Canada.¹⁶

It is an event, when the Y.M.C.A. sends us a piano. We dance, and it is a true and unrestrained humour as if the world is in the deepest of peace. We try to forget the sad reality and the dreadful past behind us, and we succeed, at least partially.¹⁷

FORMATION OF REFUGEE CAMPS IN CANADA

Pressure brought to bear on the government finally resulted in a change in status for the internees. Camp Commandants even extended themselves so far as to suggest the change. Lieutenant-Colonel A. T. McLean of Camp "B" forwarded a letter to Stethem from the Camp spokesman in May, 1941 requesting that the Camp be designated "Refugee" instead of "Internment". McLean commented:

After nearly a year's experience with these people it is my opinion that this would be beneficial. They are highly temperamental and react very keenly to what they think are injustices and are very grateful for any favours given them.¹⁸

He also suggested that fewer armed guards were necessary. When Patterson finished his investigations in June 1941, 1542 remaining internees were officially classified as refugees.¹⁹ The Canadian government could no longer claim there were enemies in the midst of the refugees. There could be no justification for armed guards. Then the Jews of Camp "B" were moved to Camp "I".

June 20, 1941

We leave Camp "B" for Camp "I" . . . We travel 30 hours and are guarded like very dangerous criminals. As I watch the people through the windows, I think that they can not be less dangerous or more innocent than I and many more. Yet we are treated like this. It is enough to make everybody lose faith in the world and in mankind. In Edmundston we can see the U.S. border house about 200 yards away,

just across a river . . . What an irony. The land of liberty and freedom so near and yet so far.

On July 1st three Refugee Camps were established. Camps "I", "N", and "A" came under a new director, the Commissioner of Refugee Camps—Lieutenant-Colonel R.S.W. Fordham. PC 5246 specified that the internees were no longer to be classified as prisoners of war, class 2, but as refugees who would now be subject to special regulations. The Order in Council laid out the regulations under which the refugees had to live. They were not substantially different than the previous ones. All orders were to be obeyed immediately (article 1); disobedience could be punished (2-5); visitors would be allowed only by special permission (6); group leaders would assist in keeping order (11); any work connected with the maintenance of the camp would not be paid for (19a); and censorship of mail was to continue (26). Yet there were more freedoms allowed. The right to perform religious duties (7) and to keep Saturday as the sabbath (21) were ensured. Permission to obtain liquor (8) was granted and the provision of a canteen was ensured (12). Monthly medical inspections (13) and the facilities for drawing up legal documents (18) were provided. Refugees were allowed to receive visits from the representatives of welfare organizations (25). If transferred, they would be notified in advance (28) and if seriously ill their relatives would be contacted (29). In cases of punishment, the accused would have the right to have the witnesses take the oath required in a military court (32). In other words, the Refugee Camps were to be prisons still, only the inmates would have certain rights.

LIFE IN INTERNMENT

Camp life became endurable for the "camp boys".

As long as there is a definite hope to cling to, the internment is easy to bear, although this confinement is losing more and more of its rough sides as time passes on. Since our acknowledgement as "refugees" small concessions are made every now and then. For instance we can walk about freely on our small island after giving our word of honour not to leave the island without written permission. We spent Chanukah very nicely and there was a nice evening in our recreation hut where we watched a play performed by some of our mates. It is rather cold now so that we can go skating on the ditch which runs around our old fortress. Most of our men are engaged in knitting camouflage nets for the army. Besides that there is always maintenance work to be done on the premises, so that there is always something to do. We have pictures once a week and generally life is very bearable.²¹

From the moment the internees had settled in the first camps, an active intellectual and physical life had been created. They built an environment which was not only livable, but intense and stimulating. For many, it was an opportunity to learn from some of the best minds of Germany and

Austria. The intellectual climate of the camps was utterly unique. Schools were set up and matriculation exams written. In Camp "L" a series of lectures which were given with the aim of "offering people distraction from boredom and worry, and of replacing their cynicism by a more constructive outlook on life,"²² were enlarged into a school system. This continued in all the Refugee Camps. In Camp "I", yeshiva students studied Judaism together²³ while in all three camps academic subjects were the main topics of discussion.

We have in this camp lecturers for most university subjects who are able to teach up to degree standards . . . We realized that rather than giving a few students the opportunity to continue their studies, we had to prepare those who are not qualified to take a university course for matriculation examinations. This led to the formation of the school, perhaps the only institution in this camp enabling people not only to keep up their mental or manual skill, but actually to improve their worth during internment . . . Education is only too easily put aside as a mere luxury, but people in this camp begin to realize that to them education, apart from being a necessity, is the one and only foundation stone for a better future.²⁴

Books were few, and it was difficult to obtain recent publications due to the nature of the charitable organizations (the Y.M.C.A. and the Canadian Jewish Congress) involved. Thus lecturers taught and students learned, using only their minds. Current events were avidly discussed every day after the news broadcasts. (Originally they were allowed only one radio, but this eventually changed.) Teaching English was also a popular occupation. All the Jewish internees were convinced that English was going to be the language of their future home, be it England, the U.S. or Canada. Once in Canada, great efforts had been made to conduct all activities and discussion in English. For many, this was the prime advantage of the whole experience. It gave them an opportunity to become comfortable with their new language. (In Camp "A", in Farnham, this was less prevalent because there was a large contingent of Communists who intended to return to Germany after the war.) Whether an internee attended structured classes, or not, the camp experience was first and foremost an educational one. Concentrated together with such a group of intellectual and political leaders, the interned refugees learned much more than they could have in any university.

The camp schools, which prepared the boys for matriculation exams, were created with the co-operation of the authorities and McGill University. These classes were desired not only by the younger men, but also by those who felt that having a Canadian matriculation degree would be more advantageous than the European ones they already held. On October 18, 1940, McGill University agreed to hold junior and senior

matriculation exams for the inmates of camps "A", "I", "N" as well as "S" (where Italian civilians were being held). In November, the Registrar of McGill, T. H. Mathews, wrote the Director of Internment Operations that:

I shall be very pleased to hear from you again and can assure you that we are most anxious to do everything we can to provide an interesting and educational element in the life of your anti-Nazi internees.²⁵

Thus the problems of pre-university students were taken care of. In the spring of 1941, classes in Farnham were conducted in the following subjects: English language and literature, French, German, Spanish, Latin and Greek, the history of Europe and England, math, physics, chemistry, heat light and sound, mechanics, biology, geography, economics, general science, divinity, art, music and woodwork.²⁶ The first sets of examinations were written in Montreal. In September 1941, refugees from three camps wrote their examinations on St. Helen's Island, which was Camp "S".²⁷

We went to an internment camp — you know that little island which is under the bridge and is now part of Expo — it was called St. Helen's Island. That was an old prison which they made into an internment camp — mostly Italians . . . That particular night, when we were finished, they gave us an outing. And we were invited to the Jewish club in Montreal, Montefiore Club, and we were invited to have dinner there . . . We went on a bus with guards and the guards said, 'We'll be back at twelve o'clock to pick you up'.²⁸

Many of those who wrote these exams stayed in Canada to become successful doctors, lawyers, accountants and outstanding intellectual and cultural innovators. One such student found his internment to be the first time he had ever excelled in school.

I though I was really quite stupid, because I'd always been stupid in school. And I remember when the results came back . . . The top grade was my friend W.H. . . . The second was a fellow called Peter Neurod, who was released to get his doctorate in physics . . . and then my name was mentioned. And I stood up and I said that this was a mistake . . . I wasn't embarrassed, I said it slipped from the bottom. The fellow said no . . . I thought, what must the others be like? Then I discovered that I was smart.²⁹

Once matriculation had been achieved, there was no opportunity to work for a higher degree in the camps. While Matthews was very helpful and tried hard to find ways for internees to do advanced credit, he was unsuccessful. McGill did not have any correspondence courses but Matthews tried to interest Queens and the University of Toronto in providing facilities for the internees. He got no response. But the matriculation was an important stepping stone for those who were able to use it after their release.

The internees developed their own system of leadership and organization which helped them create a working environment. In Farnham, where most of the political refugees were concentrated, there was a strong leftist presence. Many were seamen who had fought against the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War.³⁰ They held the key authority positions in Camp "A". Sherbrooke was comparatively unpolitical. "Everyone had an uncle in the United States, or was hoping to find one,"³¹ and so politics in terms of returning to Europe did not concern them. But there were camp politics in Sherbrooke. Camp spokesmen were elected to represent the refugees to the authorities. In Camp "L" the first spokesman had been Count von Lingen. He had more or less elected himself the first evening of internment.

I see this guy, who incidentally had left Germany and gone to Czechoslovakia to escape army service, so he was a bona fide refugee. And I see him going to the door and looking out, and shouting GUARD! in real military fashion . . . And then some soldier came and said . . . "Yes sir!" . . . He said . . . "Give this card to the commanding officer" . . . And a little while later this guard comes back and asks for Count Lingen to see the Commanding Officer.³²

Lingen was asked by the Commandant to take the leadership of the internees. The refugees were glad to accept him, knowing that someone of such prominence could only help their cause. Later on, Heinz Kahle, who was the ex-Prussian colonel who had led the anti-Fascist forces of the 11th International Brigade in Spain, became the spokesman. Spokesmen in Camp "N" were elected democratically for a period of months. Other positions of authority were obtained through election and appointment. A pyramid organization extended down to the hut leader. Knowing the Deputy Speaker, or the Works Programme Manager, for instance, would enable one to get particularly desirable jobs. One was the garbage detail. It meant you got the opportunity to ride the garbage truck through the town of Sherbrooke to the dump, and back.³³ This opportunity to get out of the camp was very exciting. Another choice job was working in the Commandant's garden, which was also outside camp, and on the St. Lawrence River.³⁴ To be in charge of some camp organization was also advantageous because you could earn two salaries, amounting to one dollar a day. In this manner a whole government was established in the camps.

The Works Programme was an important aspect of life in the camps. Most people participated in it, more as a means to keep active, than as a way of earning spending money. (The internees ran canteens which sold special foods, cigarettes, and even, for a while, beer. They were self-supporting and all profits were used to benefit the internees themselves.)

While any work which concerned the administration of the camp was not paid for, the Canadian government did offer remuneration for other projects. Since Britain was paying for the upkeep of the internees³⁵ this work meant pure profit for Canada. Work was done on a volunteer basis. In the first camps, the only work provided was for construction and forestry purposes. The reasoning behind providing work was that:

When any group of men, large or small, are forcibly detained from their ordinary activities, their morale rapidly deteriorates if they are not given some occupation. This leads to discontent which gives rise to insubordination, a tendency to destroy property wantonly and renders the group difficult to handle. The result is that an increasing number of men are required to guard them.³⁶

Certainly the employers of Internment Operations could not have received a more discontented bunch of prisoners than these. In Camp "B" they were immediately sent to work in the forests. The pay was twenty cents a day, as set out by the "Regulations Governing the Maintenance of Discipline Among and Treatment of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees," of December 1939. This amount was based on the pay scale of Canadians in forest labour camps during the early 1930's.³⁷ But these were not the kind of workers the authorities had expected.

The internees were not a good type of labourer; many of them were highly educated and had never done labouring of any sort; many others were the school-boy age between sixteen and eighteen and knew nothing about labouring. It was necessary to have to organize the work from the ground up, to teach the men the use of tools, to teach them the necessity for the work that was being done . . . Because of the fact that some of the men had engineering experience, it was possible to organize a survey party . . . These men were interested in the work . . . but slow; however, they more than earned the money paid them . . . This work would probably have cost us \$500 under ordinary conditions. At the 20¢ per day rate it would not cost the government more than \$200 or \$300, and would only cost that amount due to the inexperience of the workers.³⁸

After their recognition as refugees by the camp authorities, more meaningful work was made available. The refugees clearly expressed their willingness to help in the war effort. Workshops were established and materials supplied for the production of various defence items like camouflage nets, ammunition boxes and socks. In September 1941, pay increased so that it ranged from thirty to fifty cents a day.³⁹ The refugees were pleased to be able to aid the Allied cause, but the knowledge that, with freedom, they could make a much more valuable contribution caused increasing impatience. On October 15, 1941 the inmates at Sherbrooke issued a "Statement on the Occasion of One Year in Camp 'N' ". In it they expressed their dissatisfaction.

In England skilled, and even unskilled labour is at a premium. In Canadian Refugee Camps, there are some 1200 potential workers, mostly young, some already fully

trained, all urgently demanding to be given places in that war effort without whose triumph they themselves will be lost. We have been given work to do, important work, but work requiring only a fraction of our energies. We have been promised more war work; some of us may be trained for some specialized tasks. But it is impossible that men who are held in captivity can, or will work like free men.⁴⁰

The Commissioner of Refugee Camps, Colonel Fordham, who was very sympathetic to the men under his care, agreed with this. In February 1942 he wrote some memoranda⁴¹ discussing the possibility of making this refugee labour available to the war industry. The only obstacle he could see was the Director of Immigration.

There also was a large group of men involved in the operation of camp facilities who had to be paid. These wages came from the profits made by the canteens. With the approval of the authorities, this money went to those on cleaning detail, dish washing, kitchen work and other similar duties.⁴² Thus some men were able to earn double salaries. One of these flagrant capitalists started the Camp "N" laundry in the following manner:

There were a lot of lazy people in camp — we were given a bit of underwear — who wouldn't wash their stuff . . . Well you couldn't start private enterprise. We had to steal. Tubs to do your washing, you couldn't get soap, of course, you only had a bit of rationed soap for yourself, but we knew the orderly in the camp hospital, and doing his laundry for free he would give you some soap . . . And the other thing, there were some lazy s.o.b.s who wouldn't wash their socks, and if they saw a line they would steal towels or they would steal socks. You couldn't go to your customer and say tough luck . . . So we had to keep a reserve supply, which we stole off the lines. The laundry went on and did very well . . . Out of the money I bought a fountain-pen, and later a wristwatch.⁴³

Everyone found some work to do to pass the time. A typical day might have included rising at five a.m. to avoid the lineup for the shower,⁴⁴ returning to sleep, and then a roll-call and breakfast. Work took up to eight hours. Then the rest of the day was free. Some played poker, others perfected their bridge game. Only two letters a week were allowed, so the internees wrote, read books, listened to recorded music in the canteen and attended bi-weekly films, mostly westerns.⁴⁵ They frequented lectures and entertainments. Sports involved the active players and the passive spectators. Various outdoor events, complete with team competitions, took up the summer hours. In the winter there were walks and ice skating. Musicians, both classical and popular, combined their skills with artists and actors to provide varied entertainments. Musical instruments were donated to the camp or purchased from canteen profits. Auditions were held for plays and musicals. There was a lot of time for rehearsal. Practically everything was performed in English, and the camp guards often came,

and enjoyed, the performances.⁴⁶ Life in internment camp was certainly bearable.

There was a stage where some people even said the food was good. The treatment was good. They said that if only they had some female companionship they wouldn't even leave the place.⁴⁷

The guards at the three Refugee Camps were members of the Veterans Guards of Canada. Many were unemployed French Canadians who had little, or no, idea of the situation of their charges. Unlike their predecessors, the Canadian Provost Corps, they were not about to shoot anybody. One internee recalls working outside the camp one day and being given his guard's rifle to hold while the man tied a shoelace.⁴⁸ Bribery was easily used in order to overcome certain regulations, such as restrictions on reading materials and outgoing mail. In Farnham, the younger refugees annoyed the guards by hiding from their roll calls⁴⁹ — a kind of passive resistance. The numbers would never be correct. Most clashes with authority were therefore rather petty, and in fun.

Oh, there were some jokers. There is one man I can think of. He pretended he was partially insane. That, of course, was a lot of fun. He would imitate the Sergeant-Major. He would always be late for roll call, then he would come out in some kind of an outfit and march like the Sergeant-Major with a stick under his arm. He would stand right next to the Sergeant-Major . . . He just pretended like he was some kind of a case, and nobody could prove it — whether he was or not — there were no medical authorities who would say he is or he isn't . . . And they would put him in stockade and then he would come out — the same way. I think he just had fun, if you call that fun.⁵⁰

There were, on occasion, more serious clashes with the camp command. In Sherbrooke a number of internees were accused by a French Canadian, who was working in the same bakery, of stealing large amounts of baking goods.⁵¹ The case was taken to the camp court where the refugees' spokesman represented them. The Commandant took the refugees' side and the civilians were soon caught stealing more goods. Thus there was recourse to justice when serious problems did arise. By and large there were few emergencies caused by the internees. The primary occupation of prisoners of war — planning escapes — was not a problem in the Refugee Camps.

Not a soul wanted to break out of camp. Where the hell would you go? Everyone was happy to have a roof over their head, and be looked after in a sense, except that it was becoming too long.⁵²

But there were a few escape attempts. One was connected to the short-lived sale of beer by the canteen in Camp "N".

Then they had for a short while liquor. Then somebody got completely drunk on this and went over the fence. And disappeared. And they had roll call. And the Canadian

Veterans Guard always had trouble in counting. They counted wrong. Nobody was missing. And the police in Sherbrooke arrested somebody, who came up to them because he didn't know where to go or what to do. And they phoned the camp: "Are you sure he wasn't from there?" and they said "No, he isn't from there." And finally they phoned Ottawa . . . Then he came back . . . This was the end of the available beer. Then it remained dry.⁵³

While relations with most guards were generally friendly, some refugees developed close relationships with the officers they worked under. One refugee, who worked in the accounts office, was treated extremely well by the accounts officer. During his internment he was allowed to accompany this man on trips to various towns and cities.⁵⁴ Thus, with the creation of the Refugee Camps the antagonisms between the internees and their overseers had lessened.

There was only one place in the camps where negligence by the military could have serious consequences — the hospital. In the Refugee Camps they were supervised by the Medical Officer and staffed by refugee doctors. Most of the patients had colds, influenza or ulcers.⁵⁵ Those seriously ill were presented to the Medical Officer who was responsible for removing them to real hospitals. In at least one case, the delay of such a transfer caused a death. In October 1941, Dr. Meyerhoff, a gifted young doctor, died of a perforated ulcer.⁵⁶ The Medical Officer had refused the advice of the refugee doctors in Camp "N" and thus this man's life was lost. But tragedies such as this were rare.

Otherwise, working in the hospital was one of the more rewarding jobs. Every day the list taken to the kitchen for meals was padded, and thus everyone in the hospital got more rations. The food was hidden in rolled-up mattresses in the hospital storage room. When the shipments to England began, the extra food was given to the men returning. They knew that food was not so plentiful there.⁵⁸

Yet no matter how much the atmosphere improved in the camps, there was still one major obstacle to contentment.

We are sometimes told that our demands are excessive, and that we are pushing them to a point where those might be antagonized who wish us well. Our answer to this contention is that it is justice which we are demanding, and that justice cannot be demanded too often. It has taken us one year to get our mere living conditions adjusted to acceptable standards. We will never cease to appeal to the sense of reason and equity of the outside world, until we have achieved our most important and elementary aim . . . Freedom for every refugee, who is now unjustly interned; freedom to speak, and freedom to work.⁵⁹

RELEASE AT LAST

With the possibility of release in Canada, which was finally available to them after their change in status, the refugees began to regain hope. As

early as November the War Cabinet Committee had been forced to consider the release of the internees in Canada. The Minister of Mines and Resources, T.A. Crerar, brought to the meeting of November 7th, 1940⁶⁰ the case of an internee who wished to remain in Canada. He noted that "the decision in this case would create a precedent, affecting large numbers, possibly 1700 or 1800 internees in the B and C categories, whom the U.K. government were prepared to release." The Minister of Justice, Lapointe, expressed concern over such admissions while C. D. Howe, Minister of Transport, felt that Canada should continue to regard herself as jailers for the U.K. Dr. Skelton suggested a careful study of the individual internees, since many had U.S. visas and thus might be desirable citizens. It was decided at the time that no releases would be granted pending a further investigation.

More and more requests began to flood the Immigration Branch, coming from all parts of North America as well as England. Frederick Charles Blair, the Director of Immigration and a longtime civil servant, was not amenable to the idea of two thousand more immigrants, especially Jewish ones.⁶¹ In a letter dated December 20th, 1940 he outlined his views to the likeminded Colonel Stethem.

I may say that pressure is being brought to bear on our Minister to take favourable action in a few cases of the interned Jewish boys, the object being their release in Canada . . . A couple of days ago, Mr. Crerar said he thought we should take some steps to deal with a few of the more pressing cases. The moment this is done there will be, figuratively, a rush to the door and a determined effort to get the release of the whole lot including those destined to the U.S. Some people profess not to be able to understand why there should be any objection to admitting any number of Jewish people to Canada to wait here until they can get into the U.S. We take a determined stand against anything of that sort because in no case would we have any assurance of their admission to the U.S. and none of them could be sent back to where they came from. Government, as we are both aware, does not want any wholesale delivery of these internees to Canada.⁶²

Blair was not to have his way. But the fight was going to be a long one.

On January 24th, 1941 the question of release again came up in the Cabinet.⁶³ Crerar asked that a German internee whose family (mother and two brothers — his father had died in 1937) was already in Canada, be released. This young man had remained in England in 1939 in order to join the armed forces. Crerar further urged that other internees, totalling eight,⁶⁴ who had first degree relatives in Canada be allowed to immigrate. This was agreed upon, and by February 18th the first nine internees had been released into Canada. On January 29th, Crerar sought permission for the release of a skilled technician who had been requested by Research Enterprises Ltd. for secret war work. Once again, the release was ap-

proved. On May 3rd another skilled worker was released.⁶⁵ While the first releases in no way contravened the existing Immigration regulations, the second ones precluded the "rush to the door" which Blair so dreaded.

In 1940 only 11,324 immigrants had been accepted into Canada. This number was comparable only to the lowest point of the Depression.⁶⁶ In a time of economic recovery and rapid industrialization, two thousand educated and skilled men could only be a boon to Canada. On April 1st, 1941 this question of immigration was raised by various members in the Commons.⁶⁷ One asked: "What is the possibility of some of these people being permitted to make a contribution in Canada towards defeat of our common enemy?" Another stated:

I think it is desirable if some of these wanted to stay here and it was found convenient that they should be allowed to stay, they would be an asset to our country as I am sure they are to Great Britain.

As pressures continued to mount, inside the government and from without, the inhumanity of the situation became clear. The Prime Minister, who was under pressure himself regarding an internee whose uncle was a professor at the University of Toronto⁶⁸ decided to deal sympathetically with the problem. On May 13th, 1941 the War Cabinet Committee agreed:

that applications to remain in Canada, on the part of internees whom the U.K. government were prepared to release should be investigated individually, with a view to reaching just and humane decisions and granting admission where good faith could be established and arrangements made as to maintenance.⁶⁹

Provisions were immediately set up for release. For the internees the next two years were to be occupied with attempts to find employers, sponsors and, ultimately, freedom.

THE COMMITTEE FOR INTERNED REFUGEES

Many of the pressures which resulted in the improvement of the lot of the internees were a direct consequence of the activities of the Canadian Central Committee For Interned Refugees. This committee was a united front for the National Committee for Refugees and the United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies (U.J.R.A.). The U.J.R.A. was a federation of existing Jewish relief and community agencies which was formed in 1939 to deal with refugee problems. Senator Carine Wilson was the Chairperson of the Committee for Interned Refugees, and Constance Hayward and Saul Hayes were joint secretaries. The office was in the Canadian Jewish Congress in Montreal. While the U.J.R.A. had been actively involved in attempting to obtain justice for the interned refugees

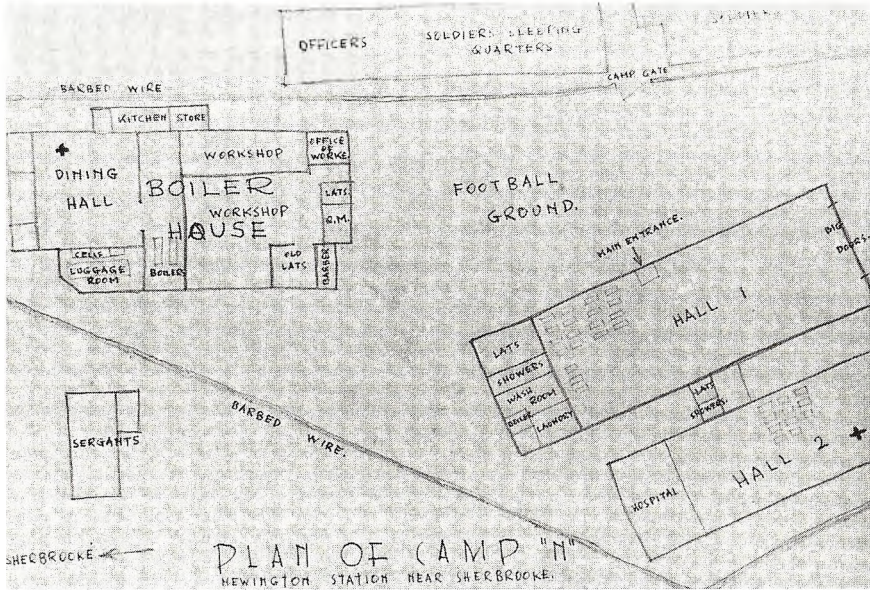


Figure 1:
 Plan of Camp "M"
 (Courtesy of Public Archives of Canada)

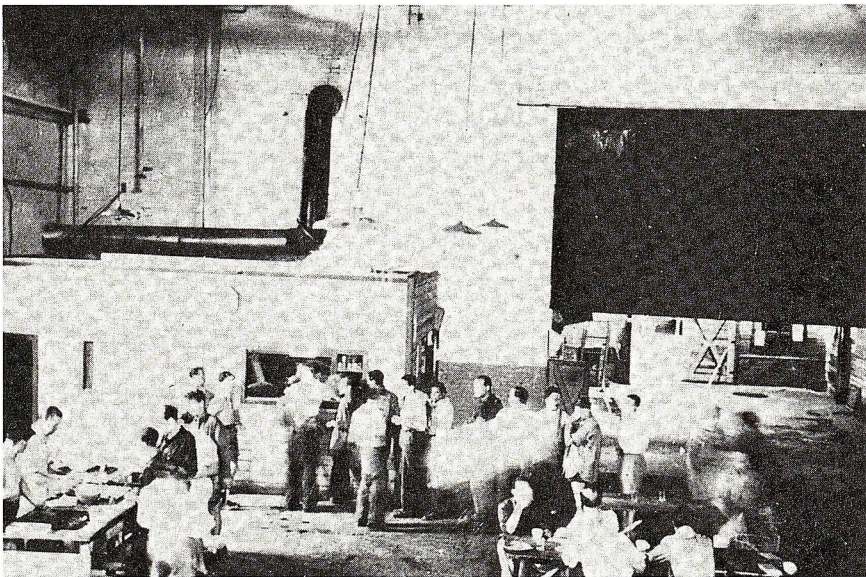


Figure 2:
 Meal Time at Camp "N"
 (Courtesy of Public Archives of Canada)



Figure 3:
Camp "N" - Interior view
(Courtesy of Public Archives of Canada)



Figure 4:
Summer at Camp "N"
(Courtesy of Public Archives of Canada)

since the summer of their arrival, the National Committee was not aware of their presence until November of 1940.⁷⁰ Yet it was Senator Wilson who was asked by the government to form the Committee for Interned Refugees. Late in December, Colonel Stethem wrote the Senator.

It is safe to say that the greater part of our time is being taken up with questions connected with these B and C internees. The office is being flooded with correspondence from relatives, friends, legal advisors and a very large number of Jewish societies and refugee organizations . . . It is desirable that all the various associations concerned should follow the procedure adopted in Great Britain and organize a joint unofficial body to represent . . . those . . . who are concerned with the welfare of the refugees. In England this is known as the Central Department for Interned Refugees.⁷¹

In January 1941 the Committee was formed. To have a Senator as chairman was definitely an advantage for the Jewish organizations, and they were aware of this. It had been already made quite obvious that the government was not anxious to deal with Jews. Thus an agreement was worked out by which both Christian and Jewish sources could be tapped in the battle for recognition and release of the internees. The Committee also ensured that the needs of the internees were met both physically and mentally. Massive correspondence fills the files kept by the Canadian Jewish Congress in Toronto. Once release was possible, sponsors were found for students and employers for workers. At first, only students who had been studying in England and skilled men needed in the war industry were eligible for release. The Committee fought a battle for each individual internee, continually stretching the regulations to fit their charges. Eventually most who could prove that they were good students, as well as farm workers, were able to be released. Christians were dealt with by the National Committee, as well as by the U.J.R.A.

Ann Cowan was the secretary for the Committee in Toronto. After persistent badgering, she and Charles Raphael — an Englishman sent from the Jewish Board of Governors in London — were allowed into Camp “I” by Blair. On September 7th, 1941 they reached the Ile aux Noix, eager to interview and collect the *curriculum vitae* of the internees.⁷² The Commandant tried to dissuade them from their task and by eleven a.m. they were on the phone to protest to Blair. He told them that “the camp officials were nervous because the internees had not seen a woman in two years.” She told Blair that if she was not allowed to see the men she would communicate with every newspaper in the country. “They finally agreed, and as we entered we walked down an aisle with bayoneted guards on either side.” When Cowan reached the designated meeting place she was amazed to find her chair perched on top of two tables “which meant that I

would be out of reach. I was indignant and refused to have the men looking up at me.” Finally able to intelligently interview the internees, Cowan found herself showered with an abundance of information and artistic gifts.

Suddenly I am called to this Mrs. Cowan. He asks her whether she can get a sponsor for me, so I might be released in Canada and she says yes. Then he mentions that I write, asks me to bring some of my work . . . She says she’ll have them published.⁷³

As soon as Cowan returned to Toronto, she indeed published a poem by Henry Kreisel in the Jewish newspapers.

VISIT

My mother came to visit me.
She looked pale and her hand trembled
As she took my head and kissed it.
She did not speak much
Just asked me how I was.
She never took her eyes off me,
And her hands stroke my head
As she had always done,
When I was very small.
And then the time was up.
“So soon”, she murmured, “so soon”.
And then she kissed me.
Kissed me long and deep.
“Be brave, my child, she said, “be brave”.⁷⁴

As a result a large number of Jews offered to sponsor the student internees. Thus persistence and determination fueled the supporters of the interned refugees against the resistance of government officials. By the end of 1943, 972⁷⁵ of the original 2250 would be released for residence in Canada.

THE DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING RELEASE

Internees released for employment found their new jobs in a variety of ways. Once the possibility of release for war work became known, they compiled *curriculum vitae* and sent them to companies which they found in the Toronto telephone directory. The Committee For Interned Refugees compiled lists of men with various skills and then convinced Jewish-owned companies to apply for specific internees. They achieved good results through personal contacts of members of the Committee, as well as through the Jewish newspapers. This sometimes meant an overlapping of requests for internees with particular skills, since the men themselves had no idea who the Committee was approaching on their behalf. The conditions of release were such that a refugee needed the special permission of F. C. Blair to obtain release or to change jobs. This

one man proved to be a formidable obstacle to the smooth and quick release of many of the interned refugees.

A Scottish-Canadian Baptist, born in 1874, and President of the Union Mission in Ottawa, Blair refused to retire until 1943. "In closing he stated that he had tried to do his duty to his God and his country."⁷⁶ In order to do this duty, Blair took it upon himself to deal with every single internee release.

Mr. Blair is not sitting in his office concerned with the K case or the F case or any one case. He has a department to run and refuses to put anyone else in charge of internees, reserving for his own approval only all these cases . . . The sensible thing for him to do would seem to be to hand over these cases to some other man, or some other men, in his department to deal with. To reiterate, he steadfastly refuses to do this. Under the circumstances it is easy to understand that a case which might be able to be solved in two or three weeks might take six or seven weeks because of the conditions which hold.⁷⁷

Thus every delay, every complication, every refusal of release, and every mixup was due to Blair. The internees' files abound with such problems. One boy was refused release because Blair did not believe he was telling the truth about his job experience since he had been eighteen when interned. He had claimed to be a Rabbinical student with one and a half years plumbing experience. The plumbing had been learned in camp.⁷⁸ Blair wrote a prospective employer that although he knew nothing about the requested internee's qualifications he found it incredible that such a young man could have had such work experience. The employer refused to have any further correspondence with him.⁷⁹ People who had caused any difficulty for camp authorities or had written letters criticizing the camps were refused release.⁸⁰ Files that were put aside for unknown reasons delayed releases for months.⁸¹ In one case Blair feared that the release of a mathematician, who was to be sponsored by a colleague of Einstein, would cause him to bring over his whole family from Cuba. This was not desirable.⁸² In May, 1943 a total slowdown occurred in releases and refugee workers complained that while "we are continually taking up cases with the Immigration Department . . . the Department is being particularly difficult."⁸³ Blair therefore found the means to interpret the Immigration regulations in their most restrictive sense. This necessitated constant intervention by Saul Hayes, with whom Blair was often persuaded to agree. Hayes' lasting impression of Blair was that of the perfect Canadian public servant.

The story of F. C. Blair requires an entire explanation of the man's position as head of a branch of government whose sole purpose for so many years was to keep out immigrants. He was trained in this respect and his whole attitude illustrated his firm

belief that this was his job. ⁸⁴

RELEASES FOR EMPLOYMENT

The Committee For Interned Refugees had to set up a system of application for release which would satisfy the strict interpretation of immigration regulations practiced by Blair. This meant that certain responsibilities would have to be taken by both sponsors and employers.

It rests with the firm to make sure that the refugee for whom they propose to apply is a suitable man for the work which they are offering. If afterwards the refugee does not live up to his own statement about his qualifications and capacities he will presumably have to go back to the camp. ⁸⁵

Thus prospective employers were informed of the importance of their application in giving freedom to a refugee, as well as of the fact that they had the power to cause re-internment. The employers were also given guidance in how to write their applications. A sample letter was offered by the Committee:

Dear Mr. Blair,

We are experiencing considerable difficulty in obtaining qualified men to work in our printing plant. We understand that _____, at present in Refugee Camp "N", Sherbrooke Quebec, is an experienced compositor and is familiar with all branches of printing. We are urgently in need of the services of a man with his qualifications and are prepared to offer him employment. (It might be well to elaborate on the shortage of skilled workers of this type and perhaps say something more about the type of work done in your plant, making references most particularly if the work is allied to the War Effort.) Would you be good enough to advise us if it would be possible for us to obtain the services of _____ and if so how soon we might expect him. ⁸⁶

During the war, when there was a large demand for skilled workers, the release of the interned refugees was to prove a boon to those companies who utilized their skills. Unfortunately this was not always to be the case.

Most of the internees had few possessions. On their release they were given some basic clothes and a loan to pay for their transportation to Toronto, by the Committee. They came alone and in small groups. On arrival they could stay in a boarding house with which the Congress had an arrangement, until a more permanent lodging could be found. This house was owned by a German refugee family which had arrived earlier. The Congress had given them a loan to buy the house, on St. George Street, on the condition that refugees could stay there temporarily. ⁸⁷ Once settled in Toronto, with only the barest necessities, the refugees went to work. The men were treated differently in each company. While it is impossible to generalize about the attitude of their employers, it is clear that some of the companies exploited the internees as cheap labour.

In one factory a thirty-six year old man, who had had three years ap-

prenticeship training and had even had a similar business in Europe, earned fourteen dollars for a sixty hour week.⁸⁸ Thus the problem was twofold. Men with various skills were given menial and lowpaying jobs, while others were underpaid for work which they were qualified to handle. In either case, the internee had to remain in his job because of the wartime restrictions. When the owners themselves were confronted with these inequities, either by the employee⁸⁹ or the Committee, the situation was usually remedied.

Apart from the usual grumblings about no future prospects and having to live in a small town, he states that he doesn't receive legal pay for overtime or night work. And so many of the refugees at this firm . . . seem to be disgruntled and want to change, would it be possible to bring up this matter to the firm in a general way? . . . We understand that some of the Jewish employers in Toronto have been approached personally with a request for better treatment of their refugee workers and that improvement had resulted.⁹⁰

In some cases the threat of re-internment was used to keep internees from complaining.⁹¹ Once an employer wrote Blair about an unsatisfactory employee, there was little the Committee could do to protect him.

It was difficult because I do believe in some instances the prospective employer felt he would be getting experienced but cheap labour. This was a complex problem to deal with and in some cases other employment had to be found for the men.⁹²

Therefore some of the internees had to suffer through menial jobs at subsistence wages until the wartime regulations were eased. But at least they were free.

The employee situation for those released to smaller companies was usually satisfactory. The owners of these operations were often former refugees themselves. As such they either felt that the newcomers should be given the same rough treatment they had received, or else they developed an empathy based on an understanding of the refugee's difficulties. In most cases the latter occurred. One internee whose experience in knitting consisted of four summers of working in his father's textile factory, (and one year of medical school), was released to a Jewish-owned mill. Beginning in the factory, he worked his way up through clerical work and the shipping department to eventually become the vice-president and general manager of the company.⁹³ While this story is not a typical one, the fact remains that internees released for employment in industry worked at jobs, even those not necessarily commensurate with their abilities, in which they received fair treatment.

Despite the fact that many refugees went to work in companies dominated by Eastern Europeans, they found that they mixed quite easily. The internment process had provided opportunities and experiences which

permanently altered the perspectives of many internees.

You can never become a bourgeois after that. When you're separated from the bourgeois customs and you suddenly find yourself dressed the same way as other people and you really see through the kind of superficiality of public life. We all said this.⁹⁴

While most of the internees had come from upper and middle class backgrounds, the change in status they experienced was cushioned by what they had learned in internment. Once they entered Canada's working class this re-evaluation of standard was reinforced.

What impressed me the most, coming to Canada, is the lack of the caste system. In Canada I learnt very soon that the only thing that counts was money, more or less, to determine your status. Another thing that I admired very much and that I was not used to from Europe was that Jewish people were workers here. That means that it was not a shame here to be an electrician or a plumber or a glazier or whatever . . . Well in my background you wouldn't dream of it. People would look down on you if you were in a trade . . . This impressed me very much in favour of this part of the world.⁹⁵

Comfortable in their job relationships, the internees were able to make friends with their co-workers. They were invited into homes and introduced to girls. For many it was a whole new lifestyle.

It made me a much better person. All the experiences. Because I was rather spoiled. I came from a wealthy home and, terribly spoiled . . . First of all, mixing with the working people and seeing their point of view . . . They got a much bigger kick out of life than we did because they took it much easier . . . And I learned to relax a little, which I never did before.⁹⁶

Clashes did occur, but they usually stemmed from the fact that the typical internee was more highly skilled than the people he worked with. One of the Gentile internees,⁹⁷ a qualified toolmaker, was released to a job working the night-shift in a small company. Since his training meant he could operate all the machines, which the more specialized Canadian-trained men could not, he was soon promoted to foreman for the night-shift. Then he began to have problems. There was one man who gave him a particularly hard time. He was an Irishman who resented having a "foreigner" telling him what to do. Other internees were confronted with anti-Semitism among their fellow workers and lower management.⁹⁸ But these difficulties were overcome in time. In fact the most obvious discrepancies — those between German and Polish Jews — were not problems at all in the working class environment.

This was a funny thing, and I gave up after awhile to tell people. When I told people I came from Austria, they'd say "Oh, you're a landsman of mine. You come from Galicia too." and I tell him no, I came from Vienna. "You come from Austria. So, you must come from the same part that I come from." So, after awhile, I say sure, I gave up . . . I learned how to speak Yiddish. With my German background it wasn't too hard. I got along very nicely.⁹⁹

Those men who successfully adjusted their expectations and made a conscious effort to adapt to the new environment, found that in Canada, life as an immigrant workers was full of promise.

RELEASE AS A FARM WORKER

A substantial number of internees were released as farm workers. Most had had little or no experience with farming and thus had to make the most difficult, and often degrading, adjustments of any of the internees. Those who went to farms were ineligible for release to war industry or as students. There were a variety of problems which arose after the internees reached the farms. Most, no doubt, were rooted in the isolation of farm life which was anathema to men raised in large cities and emerging from two or three years of incarceration. Some were physically unfit for strenuous labour, while others were injured or became ill on the farms. Some of the farmers mistreated, overworked, or neglected to pay their helpers. The Committee worked to try and aid these internees, by requesting their transfer to other farms and to industrial jobs. But they were not always successful, and a number of the refugees were re-interned. This was an especially harsh and disturbing experience for men who had believed that freedom was at last theirs.

Perhaps the only fault they made was that they have been too precipitate because most of them registered for farm work, a job which they have never performed and for which they were neither physically fit nor physically suitable . . . It must be said that the re-internment of those refugees was a terrible shock to them. They took it as punishment for their precipitate will to help, but on the other hand, they thought that after a few months they will have a chance for rehabilitation . . . The Immigration Authorities once more demur, they are against us. ¹⁰⁰

In December 1943 the Refugee Camps were dissolved and those remaining either returned to England or were released in Canada. Transfer from farms became easier because the threat of re-internment could no longer be used. Thus most of the released internees would be living in the cities by the end of the war.

THE RELEASE OF STUDENTS

In order to be released as a student, a young man had to meet four requirements. First of all he had to be under twenty-one and able to prove that his studies had been interrupted by internment. This was especially difficult for German Jews who had been expelled from the gymnasiums in the mid-1930's. The Committee eventually was successful in making both these requirements more flexible. Having passed a matriculation examination in camp was extremely helpful. Secondly, the prospective stu-

dent had to find a sponsor with enough money to support him through school. (He was only allowed to do farm work in the summer, and therefore could not be expected to work.) A number of internees had relatives who could send them money and the Committee found them nominal sponsors, to satisfy the Immigration authorities. Sponsors were also found who would support a student on their own. The Committee followed the same procedures to find sponsors as it did to find jobs. Internees wrote letters to distant relatives, in the hope that they might be able to help them. Those who had no-one to turn to wrote strangers with the same surname who they found in the telephone directories.

You will certainly be surprised to hear from me. I have got your address by pure chance and I hope you will excuse my liberty of writing to you . . . It is almost impossible to say how much it would mean to me if my freedom were restored to me . . . You might be able to imagine how desperate I am by seeing that I am writing to you, a complete stranger, on the off chance that you may be willing to help me. Perhaps if you yourself can not comply with the above formality, it would be possible for you to find someone who could . . . However the case may be it would mean so very much for me if I at least had some connection in this tremendously big country.¹⁰¹

These efforts also met with some success. If one family could not afford to carry the whole burden, then a group of friends or associates would contribute to an allowance. The money for all sponsorships in which the student did not live with the sponsors was funneled through the Committee offices, at the Canadian Jewish Congress. Refugee workers were thus able to keep a close rein on the finances of these youths. Once in a while there were difficulties, either when sponsors were unable to live up to their commitments, or when money promised from abroad did not materialize. People who undertook nominal or partial sponsorships were usually unable to support the student when the funds disappeared. In November 1941 this type of problem arose.¹⁰²

The final requirement for release as a student was acceptance by an educational institution. This proved, in many cases, to be even more difficult than finding money and sponsors. Unless they had their senior matriculation, students often had to repeat one year of high school. Those who did usually attended Harbord Collegiate where the highly competitive atmosphere was such that students even "went to the toilet with a book to read."¹⁰³ Some students who had finished a number of years of university or medical school, in England as well as in Europe, were forced to repeat their studies at Ontario universities. McMaster, Queens and the University of Toronto were the major institutions which students who

were released to Ontario attended. A few internees attempted to enter the College of Pharmacy in Toronto, with little success.¹⁰⁴ From those accepted into secondary schools and universities there were few complaints. With the help and friendship provided by their sponsors the students became the most fortunate of all the internees. If they had remained in England they would not have been given the chance to finish their education.

In Germany I had never planned my future because everything was so uncertain. I had never dared hope for a career — my schooling had been interrupted when I was thirteen. When I came to England I thought that now I would be like everyone else, that my life would be normal. When I was asked what I wanted to be I said a doctor. The woman who was filling the form in said: "I can't put that down — you must remember that you are a refugee."¹⁰⁵

Students were invited to the homes of prominent and wealthy Jews. Many excelled, standing at the tops of their classes and winning scholarships. A large proportion reached prominence in academic, cultural and professional fields. They had all the advantages.

CANADA — FIRST IMPRESSIONS

By 1943 the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis could no longer be ignored. Newspaper articles described mass shootings and gassings. Debates in both Houses re-iterated the ghastly details, as the battle for a new immigration began. The released internees were pointed to again and again as examples of desirable immigrants.¹⁰⁶ In this context it was no longer expedient to have any of the refugees remain interned. Thus, on December 10th, 1943 PC 9440 was passed. The Canadian government thereby dissolved the remaining Refugee Camp and issued temporary permits to the last refugees.¹⁰⁷ For the remaining few, three and a half long years of unjust imprisonment were over.

For those who chose to remain in Canada, at least for the duration of the war, there was a degree of adjustment necessary. At first, "anything looked good."¹⁰⁸ They were free. The whole continent and way of life was new to them. Many of them liked it, despite the peculiarities of Toronto. To the big city boys Toronto seemed provincial. One internee, picked up at Union Station and driven through the city to his sponsor's home in Rosedale asked on arrival where the downtown was. Sundays everything closed down and even the blinds were drawn on the store windows of Eatons. But the city was clean, and the way of life more European and easygoing than south of the border.

As soon as I got my citizenship I flew to New York to see my family . . . When I came to the States and I saw the life there, which was quite different . . . much more

hectic . . . Then I appreciated Canada a lot more . . . I got used to it here and I wasn't going to move anymore.¹⁰⁹

Tired of upheaval and uncertainty, many internees were content to accept Toronto as their final refuge. "It was like you found a new home."¹¹⁰

It was not always easy for the new immigrants in Toronto. While many had discarded the class consciousness which marked those refugees who had not been interned, they were still separated from the general Jewish community by culture and education. There was also a degree of hostility in the community. Some were told: "I want you to know we don't like German Jews".¹¹¹ The German Jewish immigrants of the mid-nineteenth century did not share their values as they had not come from the same strata of society. But there was one skill which these refugees possessed that made adjustment easier — assimilation. The orthodox Jews quickly entered the predominantly Eastern European community. Those who did not wish to be identified as Jews were able to merge into the Gentile world. The rest went to High Holy Day services at Holy Blossom Temple, and wherever else the tickets were free. They formed their own groups of internees, and friends made on the job or at school. Many married Canadian girls and stopped speaking German. Summers were spent at cottages on Hanlan's Point or at Sunnyside swimming pool. A large group of ex-internees lived in the Bathurst-College-Spadina area of the city. Most spent the little money they had to attend operas, concerts and theatre. They had been a unique group of immigrants, and each in his own way remained unique, no matter which path he chose to take.

BECOMING CANADIAN

There is no way of knowing how many of the 972 internees released in Canada remained here after the war. A substantial number moved to the United States to join their families or to attend universities. Others returned to Germany and Austria when reconstruction began. But most of those had already been sent back to England. Among the German Jews interviewed there was widespread hostility towards Germany which continues to this day. With one exception, none of these German refugees had ever thought of returning to live in their country of birth. Some cut themselves off totally from the language and thus their German identity.

Q. Do you ever speak your native language? When?

A. Rarely, when talking to foreigners.¹¹²

For some internees a lifelong hatred of Germans marks their personality.

As soon as I am with one for awhile I see him in that brown uniform. I think it's a

sickness with me . . . Its left me with something that cannot be erased. ¹¹³

The men who felt this way would only return to Germany in order to show their wives where they had grown up. Without exception, the men who did not have feelings of antipathy were those who escaped as teenagers and were released as students. They have business dealings with Germans, speak the language often and make many trips to Germany. But they remain Canadian. Thus for the German Jews, the decision to remain in Canada was not a difficult one. They had rejected the possibility of any future in Germany long before they had escaped.

In the case of the Austrian refugees the sense of Canadian identity is much different. Many of those interviewed maintain a strong identification with Austrian culture, and are active members of the Canadian Austrian Society. None of those interviewed had rejected being Austrian, or minded speaking German. With one exception, all had returned to Vienna and two of them make yearly trips. Yet their attachment to Canada is no less than that of their German counterparts.

One thing they all share is a deep-seated suspicion of nationalism.

I am constantly surprised that some people have such strong national feelings, particularly in a multicultural country where we are. ¹¹⁴

Most will always have an accent, and a knowledge that others know they were not born in Canada. They will forever feel that they are, in some way, outsiders.¹¹⁵ Despite their treatment by the Canadian government every internee has a strong belief that Canada was the best place that they could have settled and raised their children. Both the internees, and Canada, are the beneficiaries of this accidental immigration.

I think I have made as good an adjustment and as nice a contribution to Canadian life as one can make. ¹¹⁶

For a penniless immigrant to become president of a national corporation . . . can only happen in North America. ¹¹⁷

The interned refugees did not remain a group after their release. While strong friendships were maintained, many internees developed whole new circles of friends. Yet whether or not the relationships have been preserved, a feeling of brotherhood persists.

And to this day, many of these people, even though we may not see each other very often . . . if anyone needed anything I would be there and I'm sure they would be there. Its a bond that just can't break. ¹¹⁸

One internee, recently met a visitor from New York, who, upon sighting him, immediately proclaimed: "Well if it isn't number 521, group 21!"¹¹⁹ It is only when these "camp boys" meet one another by chance, or design

that they think about their internment. Their stories and memories then are all in a humourous vein. They remember the funny things that happened to them, and the rosy side of the more unpleasant events. Otherwise, few dwell on the internment, or on the circumstances surrounding their early lives, and their escape.

Basically most people forget. They don't put it out of their mind, but they don't want to be disturbed by it. And I think its only right . . . You have to draw a line somewhere . . . Its a horrible thing that happened. Its not the first time. It won't be the last. Suffering . . . has happened before.¹²⁰

CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, internment did deprive the internees of a number of years of their lives. While they learned a great deal from the experience, there was no compensation for the stolen time. At the time they were undoubtedly bitter. But in the light of the Holocaust these survivors have rejected any resentment of their treatment. They know now that England literally saved their lives by taking them in. Any discomfort or inconvenience they experienced is negated by this knowledge. Canada, although reluctantly, did give them a new home and generous opportunities. Many were able to become extremely successful. Others never reached the goals they had set for themselves in their youths. But the blame is attached to Hitler, not the internment.

The story of the interned refugees has significance on a number of levels. In essence it is only a small part of the whole tragic episode of the destruction of the European Jews. The interned refugees were caught up in the political machinations of four countries — Germany, England, The United States, and Canada — and abused as if they were no more than pawns in a game. Their treatment clearly illustrates the political and public climates of the mid-1930's and early war years in each country. Forced to flee Germany, they looked away from the firmly closed doors of Canada towards the United States. America gave them pieces of paper and shallow promises. England gave them refuge, but deprived them of their freedom. Canada treated them as criminals, made their lives difficult, but ultimately gave them a home. In terms of Canadian immigration policy, before 1947 and even afterwards, these internees were among the fortunate few.

The degree of generosity which Canada has shown in her international relations is reflected in the admission of refugees. In 1949, the peak year of overseas resettlement of refugees . . . the United States accepted almost five times as many refugees as Canada. Australia more than three times as many and Israel twice as many . . . Records were kept of the number of refugees requiring permanent care in institutions . . . Canada accepted so few that she was not even listed among the

countries which received two hundred cases or more . . . ¹²¹

These refugees might not have been admitted any other way. In terms of the Holocaust, they had survived.

The story of the interned refugees is also an illustration of group survival. Thrown together in a period of massive injustice these men succeeded in maintaining their love of life, their dignity, their humour, and their hopes. Individuals united in order to utilize their inner resources to build a vibrant microcosm of society. Upon regaining their freedom each individual was strong enough to independently pursue his new life in Canada and elsewhere. By maintaining their individualities through a unity of purpose they were able to re-enter the mainstream of life without crutches. And as individuals the interned refugees know that, as former refugees, they will always carry a unique perception of the fragility of personal contentment.

A refugee is a man, who has learned that nothing on this earth-plane is constant, but is subject to a permanent alteration. Yet only by finding a foothold in this whirlpool and by picking out of the passing waves the red thread of life, he moulds into a real human being. ¹²²

FOOTNOTES

1. Interview with E. Kenton.
2. *House of Commons Debates*, February 23, 1942. p. 776.
3. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6592, 5-2-9.
4. Confidential Interview.
5. Confidential Interview.
6. Kreisel, p. 24-25.
7. P.A.C., Department of National Defence RG 24 C4, 6593, 5-2-9.
8. P.A.C., Department of National Defence RG C4, 6593, 5-2-11.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Wyman, p. 181.
12. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG C4, 6593, 5-2-11.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Wyman, p. 191.
15. Canadian Jewish Congress Central Region Archives (hereafter referred to as CJC Central Region Archives) Internees Files: Paul Batist.
16. Interview.
17. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files", Fritz Mueller-Sorau.
18. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6592, 5-2-9.
19. *House of Commons Debates*, February 23, 1942, p. 776.
20. Kreisel, p. 25.
21. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files": Ernst Meyer.

22. *Camp L Chronicle*
23. Interview.
24. *Camp L Chronicle*
25. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6581, 3-3-2.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Interview
29. Interview
30. Interview
31. Interview
32. Interview
33. Interview
34. Interview
35. *House of Commons Debates*, November 20, 1940, p. 245-46.
36. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6576, 1-1-5.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. P.A.C., Orders in Council, RG series 1, #2112, PC 7398.
40. *Statement on the Occasion of One Year in Camp 'N'*. Camp 'N' Inmates, Sherbrooke, Quebec, October 15, 1941.
41. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6576, 1-2-3.
42. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 11262, 12-1-19.
43. Interview
44. Interview
45. Interview
46. Interview
47. Interview
48. Interview
49. Interview
50. Interview
51. Interview
52. Interview
53. Interview
54. Interview
55. Interview
56. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 11262, 12-1-20.
57. Interview
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Statement on the Occasion of One Year in Camp 'N'*. Camp 'N' Inmates, Sherbrooke, Quebec, October 15, 1941.
60. P.A.C., Canada Privy Council, Cabinet War Committee Minutes, RG 2 7C November 7, 1940.
61. "I often think that instead of persecution, it would be better if we more often told them frankly why many of them (Jews) are so unpopular. If they would divest themselves of certain of their habits. I am sure they would be just as popular as our Scandinavians." F. C. Blair, 1938, *Canadian Jewish News*, April 22, 1977, p. 1.

62. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 11262, 5-2-12.
63. P.A.C., Canada Privy Council, Cabinet War Committee Minutes, RG 2 7C, January 24, 1941.
64. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6593, 5-2-12.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Hawkins, p. 91.
67. *House of Commons Debates*, April 1, 1941, p. 2058-59.
68. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6593, 5-2-12.
69. P.A.C., Canada Privy Council, Cabinet War Committee Minutes, RG 2 7C, May 14, 1941.
70. *Senate Debates*, May 18, 1943, p. 242.
71. P.A.C., Department of National Defence, RG 24 C4, 6577, 1-2-6.
72. Interview.
73. Kreisel, p. 34.
74. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files": Henry Kreisel.
75. Moon
76. P.A.C., Personnel Records, RG 32, C-2, vol. 21.
77. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files", Rabbi Fischel.
78. *Ibid*, Leo Gutter
79. *Ibid*, H. Koppl
80. *Ibid*, Hartog Hartogson
81. *Ibid*, Kurt Jacobson
82. *Ibid*, Dr. Fritz Rothberger
83. *Ibid*, Ernst Glatz
84. Saul Hayes to Paula Draper, 16 March 1977.
85. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files": M. Guggenheim.
86. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files"
87. Interview
88. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files": Egon Eckman.
89. Interview
90. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files": Norbert Glasberg.
91. *Ibid*, Otto Berman
92. Interview
93. Interview
94. Interview
95. Interview
96. Interview
97. Interview
98. Interview
99. Interview
100. "Statement on Behalf of the Re-Interned Refugees" August, 1943.
101. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files", Lothar Bick.
102. *Ibid*, Werner Buchholtz
103. Interview
104. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files", Heinz Alsberg, Egon Stark.
105. Gershon, p. 40.

106. *Senate Debates*, May 18, 1943, p. 242.
107. P.A.C., Orders in Council, RG 2 Series 1, 2209.
108. Interview
109. Interview
110. Interview
111. Interview
112. Confidential Correspondence
113. Interview
114. Interview
115. Ontario Educational Communications Authority, *Education of Mike McManus*, E. Koch.
116. Interview
117. Interview
118. *Ibid.*
119. Interview
120. Interview
121. Corbett, p. 198-99.
122. CJC Central Region Archives, "Internees Files", Fritz Mueller-Sorau.