

**THE POLITICAL ORIGINS OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT POLICY:
INSIGHTS FROM THE POLICY PROCESS IN CANADA (1938-1951)**

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Revised: October 16, 2014
Submitted to the Gunn Award competition, 2014

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Thirty million or more people were left stateless at the end of World War II, and the plight of these “Displaced Peoples” (DPs) and international responses to it laid the groundwork for the modern international refugee regime.¹ DPs provoked vexing questions among Western governments and thinkers about the rights of man, the durability of state sovereignty, and the responsibilities of the international community to individuals. With millions of people wandering post-war Europe without the protections of citizenship, the Allied powers undertook a massive operation aimed at repatriating refugees. By 1945, military forces and other intergovernmental agencies had relocated 11 million people home, and others had returned on their own.² However, it became clear that repatriation would be inadequate to resolve the crisis; more than a million remained in DP camps, unwilling to return home due to fear of persecution.

For the first time in history, coordinated resettlement to third countries emerged as a public policy response to a refugee crisis.³ Hannah Arendt wrote in April 1945: “It would be a good thing if it were generally admitted that the end of the war in Europe will not automatically return thirty to forty million exiles to their homes... A very large proportion will regard repatriation as deportation and will insist on retaining their statelessness.”⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt echoed a similar point in February 1946: “A new type of political refugee is appearing, people who have been against the present governments and if they stay at home or go home will probably be killed.”⁵ DPs repatriated to the USSR were facing violence and persecution on return. In one of the opening salvos of the Cold War, the US and its Western allies created the International Refugee Organization in 1946 against the protestations of the USSR, and gave it a mandate to coordinate international refugee resettlement.

The subsequent resettlement effort was undertaken from 1946-1951, during which time the DP camps were finally cleared – with about a million refugees resettled in dozens

¹ Marrus, 1985.

² Marrus, 1985: 299.

³ Stoessinger, 1963.

⁴ Quoted in Cohen, 2011: 45.

⁵ Quoted in Cohen, 2011: 45.

of countries around the world. This resettlement effort was all the more remarkable in light of the restrictive and racist immigration policies in most Western countries, a legacy of the interwar period. Between 1947 and 1951 close to 1 million refugees were resettled, including 329,000 in the U.S., 182,000 in Australia, 132,000 in Israel, 123,000 in Canada and 170,000 in various European states.⁶ So, why did states voluntarily accept to resettle DPs after WWII? I will examine the Canadian case to analyse the policy process that led its government to become one of the first, and most generous Western states to resettle DPs.

Scholars contend whether states agreed to resettle DPs because of emerging global human rights norms, or due to economic interest related to domestic labour demand. This framing of the policy process oversimplifies the matter in several respects. Human rights had not yet assumed the global normative position they enjoy today; they were still a set of ideas that lacked credible enforcement in either international or domestic law.⁷ Furthermore, the resettlement policies of receiving countries were not simply a mechanical response to labour demand. In every country the prospect of resettlement stimulated heated debate about changes to immigration policy, obligations within an international community, and concerns about racial composition. The political elites, interest groups, bureaucrats, and international organizations involved in negotiating the terms of refugee resettlement were influenced by a range of arguments and ideas, from liberal idealism to European “overpopulation” to economic reconstruction to global political leadership.⁸ In short, the decision to resettle DPs was the result of political negotiation involving a range of actors and arguments over an extended period. We need to disentangle the different aspects of the policy process that led to the policy decision, with particular attention to how the process developed over time.

John Kingdon describes the policy as process as constituted by three independent ‘streams,’ which converge during a ‘window of opportunity’ created by a particular political circumstance or focusing event.⁹ The problem stream refers to public discourse about a particular issue, including how it is framed and why it should be acted upon. In the political stream are people in decision-making positions, who determine the order and urgency of items on the government’s policy agenda. This stream can be influenced by

⁶ Marrus, 1985: 344-45.

⁷ Moyn, 2010.

⁸ Cohen, 2011.

⁹ Kingdon, 1984.

variables such as external events, shifts in public opinion, or changes in government. Finally, the policy stream relates to debate among intellectual, ruling and business elites over ‘what is to be done’ about a given public problem. The three streams are brought together by ‘policy entrepreneurs,’ networks of people who connect a public policy problem with its solutions during a moment of political opportunity.

Drawing upon Kingdon’s policy process model, I will argue that Canada’s decision to resettle DPs was made during a brief policy window that followed more than a decade of effort by religious communities and internationalist groups to put the refugee question on the agenda as a public policy problem. They framed the humanitarian crisis of stateless people in Europe as a matter of human rights and dignity, often calling upon a sense of Biblical obligation to “welcome the stranger”. As the DP crisis continued to deepen in Europe and the post-war order began to take shape, influential members of Cabinet saw an opportunity for Canada to exert international leadership by helping to resettle refugees. The creation of the IRO and its resettlement mandate mobilized political will by presenting an opportunity for Canada to express an independent foreign policy as a ‘middle power’. The policy solution, however, reflected the views of business and political elites, who sought to preserve the racial composition of the population and meet manual labour demand in certain sectors of the economy. Business leaders and the Departments of Mines, Labour, and Reconstruction seized the window of opportunity to act on the DP question in order to meet economic demands without immediately liberalizing Canada’s restrictive immigration policy.

The problem stream: Religious and internationalist organizations

On November 9, 1938, the Nazis oversaw the Jewish pogrom that became known as *Kristallnacht*: Jewish homes and business across Germany and Austria were raided, and many of their occupants beaten, shot and taken away to concentrations camps. In response to reports of the violence, Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King wrote in his diary that Canada must open its doors to Jewish refugees because it was “right and just, and Christian.”¹⁰ However, opposition from his Cabinet – particularly from his French-Canadian minister of justice, Ernest Lapointe – led him to consign the matter to

¹⁰ Abella and Troper, 2013: 39.

further study, out of fear of alienating Quebec.¹¹ Despite political mobilization by the Canadian Jewish Congress, Canadian refugee policy remained inflexible. Even overtures from US President Roosevelt to King (that Canada, owing to its low population density, ought to open its doors) were unable to shift the position of the government.¹² The inability to gain real political traction led the Jewish community to seek out non-Jewish allies, whom they found in the leadership of the United and Anglican Churches. Together with representatives of the Canadian League of Nations Society, the group constituted itself as the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution (CNCR). When the Committee secured its own meeting with King, they pleaded on behalf of refugees in Europe – in particular Christians (leaving out mention of the Jews).¹³ King still promised nothing.

The mobilization of Jewish organizations, churches, and sympathetic civil society organizations helped to define the “problem stream” of the policy process.¹⁴ The problem of refugees was defined as a ‘moral obligation’ to uphold universal human dignity. The need of Jews for protection was often veiled in public discourse to avoid inciting popular anti-Semitism (Jewish organizations even disguised their financial contributions to the CNCR out of an abundance of caution). As early as 1938, the CNCR were bringing the issue of European refugees to the attention of the government at the highest levels, framing the issue as a matter of human rights – even invoking Canada’s “Christian” values as at stake. While the CNCR had little policy influence during the 1930s, primarily due to public opinion that remained opposed to admitting refugees, it focused on raising awareness of “the refugee question” and helped a group of anti-Nazi Europeans (mostly Jewish intellectuals) who were transferred to Canada from the UK and interned until the end of the war.¹⁵

The CNCR remained focused on the moral dimension of the problem and publicized Canada’s obligation to help the stateless and disenfranchised people of Europe. In language typical of that used by the CNCR to press its case, B. K. Sandwell, the influential editor of *Saturday Night* and chairman of the CNCR wrote:

¹¹ Abella and Troper, 2013: 41-2.

¹² Abella and Troper, 2013: 40.

¹³ Abella and Troper, 2013: 46.

¹⁴ Kingdon, 1984.

¹⁵ Knowles, 1997: 120.

The obligation to grant sanctuary is not, and never was, unlimited... But the obligation to grant sanctuary still exists, the need for sanctuary is greater than ever before in its history, and the nation which ignores this obligation will suffer as all nations ultimately do which ignore the fundamental moral obligation, the debt which man and nations owe to the human being at their gates simply because he is a human being.¹⁶

The response of the government during the War remained privately sympathetic but publicly resistant, out of concern with inflaming hostile public opinion. The minister responsible for immigration, T. A. Crerar, expressed to a CNCR delegation that the government could not take any steps to liberalize its immigration policy due to “high unemployment and xenophobic attitudes [among the Canadian public].”¹⁷ Crerar conceded that there was a groundswell of public support for the refugees, but he expressed concern that “this sentiment might at any time be followed by a strong reaction and severe criticism of any governmental refugee admissions.”¹⁸

In response to this government resistance, the CNCR focused over the next several years on mobilizing public opinion through advocacy work that increasingly reflected the activities of an interest group. Jewish agencies and Christian churches, particularly the United and Anglican Churches, mobilized through local constituencies, and some began to publicly petition the government to “allow selected political refugees from Germany and Austria.”¹⁹ Frustration inevitably followed. C. E. Wilcox, a prominent United Church minister, spoke publicly in March 1939, condemning the government’s “moral and intellectual confusion,” and criticizing it for relenting to “pressures brought upon it by businessmen fearing competition from energetic refugees and the traditional disapproval of the French Canadians for a broad immigration policy.”²⁰ In 1940, CNCR Secretary, Senator Cairine Wilson, lamented how “unexpectedly difficult” it was proving to “arouse public sympathy into meaningful action.”²¹

In 1943, the CNCR began to see some political results. They organized a widely publicized national petition, calling on Canada to help refugees stranded in neutral

¹⁶ Quoted in Knowles, 1997: 129.

¹⁷ Dirks, 1977: 63.

¹⁸ Dirks, 1977: 63

¹⁹ Dirks, 1977: 67.

²⁰ Dirks, 1977: 69.

²¹ Dirks, 1977: 71.

European countries or else be considered “a criminally selfish nation.”²² In what appeared to be a response to this petition, Cabinet heard a proposal to take up to 200 family units from Spain and Portugal. The background paper prepared for Cabinet by the Department of External Affairs noted domestic political considerations: “Public pressure for action by the Government to adopt new measures to assist European refugees is increasing. There is widespread evidence of an uneasy public conscience over the Canadian record.”²³

However, fearing a backlash from public opinion and the anti-immigration lobby, the government kept the program quiet, downplayed the numbers of refugees, and only made its press release when the program was in motion.²⁴ Project costs were recovered from the Jewish community and humanitarian agencies, despite the unsatisfactory, token numbers admitted.²⁵ Furthermore, instead of attracting pro-refugee public support as the CNCR had hoped, the program triggered a feared backlash. Reflecting on the episode, King lamented in his journal that there were so few votes to be had from aiding Jewish refugees.²⁶

In 1946, Canadian public opinion remained opposed to accepting refugees from Europe. A national opinion poll found that 61% of Canadians did not want to see a large number of people from the European continent migrate to Canada. Only 21% were in favour, and they expressed a preference for Scandinavians, Dutch and French refugees.²⁷ Nevertheless, the resettlement of DPs came under study by the Senate Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour in 1945. The release of its report in August 1946, according to one scholar, “marked a watershed” in Canadian immigration policy.²⁸ The report stated: “All were agreed that Canada, as a humane and Christian nation, should do her share towards the relief of refugees and displaced persons.”²⁹ The committee criticized the government for having a “non-immigration policy”. It recommended that Canada resettle displaced people “to hold [its] place abroad and maintain and improve [its] standard of living at home.”³⁰ The CNCR campaign had successfully helped to put the

²² Dirks, 1977: 95.

²³ Dirks, 1977: 96.

²⁴ Abella and Troper, 2013: 157-9.

²⁵ Abella and Troper, 2013: 157.

²⁶ Abella and Troper, 2013: 158.

²⁷ Gilmour, 2009.

²⁸ Knowles, 1997: 129.

²⁹ Gilmour, 2009: 171.

³⁰ Gilmour, 2009: 171.

issue of displaced people on the government agenda, although it would not be able to control the subsequent direction of public policy.

The political stream: The IRO and Canada as an aspiring ‘middle power’

During the war, both the US and UK pressured Canada to accept refugees, due to what they perceived to be Canada’s low population density and abundant space. King always demurred on the subject, however, expressing his personal sympathy but saying that his hands were tied politically. Adelman has contended that Canada’s policy on refugees “had its roots directly in the anti-Semitism of bureaucrats,” particularly those serving in the Department of Mines and Resources, under whose control immigration fell.³¹ In his view, “Canada’s refugee policy was motivated by discrimination and implemented by political leaders and mandarins with broad general public support and only the opposition of leading religious leaders and some newspaper editorials.”³² What is clear is that Canada’s decision to resettle refugees cannot easily be explained by US hegemony or political pressure from the US or UK. There is little evidence to suggest that such bilateral pressure was successful throughout the War and in its aftermath.

Instead, the actors who constitute the “political stream” appeared to put refugee resettlement on the decision-making agenda primarily for reasons related to Canada’s aspirations to carve out an autonomous role in the post-war international community as a ‘middle power’. Rather than bowing to pressure from great powers, Canada’s decision to amend its immigration policy was related to a national desire to express an independent position in world affairs. While Canada’s foreign policy was not unrelated to US influence, it cannot be reduced to this cause. We need to look instead to the debates over DPs and the creation of the International Refugee Organization as one of the key foreign policy issues of the post-war period, through which Canadian senior bureaucrats and political leaders saw opportunities for Canadian influence in the new multilateral setting.³³

Before discussing the post-war setting of Canadian foreign policy, it deserves to be noted that Canada did not operate its own foreign policy at the turn of the century. The establishment of the Department of External Affairs in 1909 did not involve a separation of Canadian foreign policy from that of the UK. Indeed, the name of the department denotes

³¹ Adelman, 1991: 188.

³² Adelman, 1991: 188.

³³ Keating, 2002.

its subordinate position. Canada gained more control over its foreign policy during and after the World War I; however, it was not until the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931 that Canada was granted full legal autonomy – including in the domain of foreign policy. The Second World War soon followed. The post-war period, therefore, presented Canada with the opportunity to establish an autonomous role in world affairs. In view of Canada's size, the government was quick to identify Canadian interests with the creation of a world order of multilateral institutions.³⁴

The International Refugee Organization was created in April 1946 “to bring about the rapid and positive solution of the problem of bona fide refugees and displaced people.”³⁵ Its primary mandate was the resettlement of about one million displaced people who remained in camps in Western Europe. The IRO replaced the United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Agency (UNRRA), which was primarily responsible for caring for and repatriating DPs. Following recurring reports of Soviet imprisonment and execution of repatriated DPs whom it regarded as criminals, and attacks faced by Jews who were repatriated to Eastern Europe, the US advocated the creation of a new multilateral organization devoted to third-country resettlement for those refusing repatriation. Overriding Soviet objections, and despite the reticence of potential destination countries (including the US itself), the IRO was created as “the first international organization devoted to the mass re-establishment of refugees.”³⁶

In addition to its novel focus on resettlement, the work of the IRO marked a departure from previous approaches that identified refugees collectively (as groups of stateless people) in favour of an individualized approach. After 1945, DPs were screened on an individual basis, to evaluate the particular risks of persecution. The turn to resettlement was one of the first practical efforts of states to put in practice emerging human rights ideals, where the individual who lacked access to the right of political membership could be restored (by the international community) to a normal status within a state.³⁷ Cohen remarks, “The turn to individual rights concretely meant the abandonment of the League of Nation's collective recognition of refugees in favour of

³⁴ Keating, 2002.

³⁵ Zolberg, et al, 1989: 22.

³⁶ Stoessinger, 1963: 113.

³⁷ Cohen, 2011; Haddad, 2008.

individual eligibility.³⁸ Applicants for resettlement were to be interviewed and processed by ‘eligibility officers,’ to evaluate whether they fit under the organization’s definition of a refugee.³⁹ This approach also made refugees amenable to individualized selection by resettlement countries.

The IRO had a mandate to negotiate resettlement agreements with countries willing to accept DPs on humanitarian grounds, outside of normal immigration admissions. The US, Australian and Canadian governments were initially unfavourable, so the IRO focused its efforts on Western European countries.⁴⁰ Its approach resembles what Betts describes as ‘issue linkage’; that is, to induce burden sharing by appealing to particular interests of states in exchange for cooperation on refugee policy.⁴¹ Issue linkage arises during “bargaining that involves more than one issue,” where an issue is “a single goal that has found its way onto a decision-making agenda.”⁴² The IRO sought to secure admission and regular status for DPs in exchange for terms that often imposed obligations on the refugee to work under government contracts for a set period of time, before naturalizing – thereby allowing states to meet particular labour shortages in areas of dirty, dangerous and difficult work.

The IRO negotiated agreements that produced terms that were not necessarily optimal for DPs, but which opened doors to their resettlement. The first agreement was signed with the UK. The UK agreed to take 50,000 refugees, but stipulated that they had to be unmarried manual labourers, and that they had to contract to undertake only employment selected by the Ministry of Labour for the first two years of their residence.⁴³ Belgium signed an agreement soon afterwards, admitting 50,000 DPs to work for two years in coalmines specified by the government. Stoessinger characterizes these terms as “indentured servitude,” owing to brutal conditions in the most difficult mining areas. Only about 22,000 DPs agreed to go to Belgium, and some 20% requested to return to the camps.⁴⁴ “The Belgian failure,” Stoessinger notes, “began to convince the members of the

³⁸ Cohen, 2011: 54.

³⁹ Zolberg, et al, 1989: 23.

⁴⁰ Stoessinger, 1963.

⁴¹ Betts, 2008.

⁴² Haas, quoted in Betts, 2008: 161.

⁴³ Stoessinger, 1963.

⁴⁴ Stoessinger, 1963: 118.

IRO General Council that a permanent solution of the refugee problem could be found only through overseas migration.”⁴⁵

Canada had participated in international conferences convened by the US since 1938 to consider multilateral solutions to the refugee problem in Europe. The first was the Evian conference, which Canada attended reluctantly. As Knowles remarks: “Canadian officials realized all too well that attendance at this gathering implied an interest in helping to alleviate the refugee problem by lowering immigration barriers and admitting sizeable numbers of Jews.”⁴⁶ Canada, at the time, was not prepared to do this. King was concerned that any action would strengthen the position of Duplessis and the nationalist party in Quebec. After the war, King excused Canada’s inaction to its allies by citing the possibility of a post-war recession and the lack of suitable passenger ships to transport people from Europe to Canada.⁴⁷

Despite this inflexibility, Gilmour observes that participation in international conferences leading up to the creation of the IRO sensitized senior bureaucrats and political leaders to the need for resettlement and Canada’s potential responsibilities.⁴⁸ “Canada’s new membership in international bodies concerned with the plight of refugees,” she remarks, “had a significant impact for the nation in the post-war period.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, by 1945, Canada’s economy was growing again and the need for workers was becoming clearer. Canada had emerged onto the international scene as a state with an independent foreign policy, and the government was eager to accept a measure of responsibility for keeping up this new status.⁵⁰

At first Canada sought to assume new international responsibilities for DPs that would allow it to avoid opening itself to refugee resettlement. For instance, in the process of setting up the IRO, Canada raised concerns about costs and volunteered to chair the UN Economic and Social Council sub-committee on finance, hoping to indicate commitment to solving the refugee problem without admitting DPs: “Some Canadian officials hoped that a substantial financial contribution to the proposed organization might relax the pressure being placed upon the government to open Canada for refugee

⁴⁵ Stoessinger, 1963: 119.

⁴⁶ Knowles, 1997: 117.

⁴⁷ Knowles, 1997.

⁴⁸ Gilmour, 2009.

⁴⁹ Gilmour, 2009: 164.

⁵⁰ Dirks, 1977: 122.

resettlement.”⁵¹ While King had passed a number of orders-in-council between 1945 and 1947 making allowances for limited admissions of refugees, the government did not act on them owing to “a deeply ingrained tradition of restriction within the department [responsible for immigration].”⁵²

A tension was emerging within the Canadian government between External Affairs, which was increasingly concerned with Canada’s international responsibilities, and the Department of Mines and Resources, which was responsible for immigration. John Holmes, who served as first secretary in London from 1944-47, and accompanied C. D. Howe on tours of the DP camps in Germany, wrote in his memoir:

Within the civil service the facts of life, including the conservatism of the cabinet on population policies, were recognized as setting limits to policy proposals, even though External Affairs officials in particular were aware of the handicap placed on their vision of the country by Canada’s insensitivity to the plight of refugees, its archaic immigration regulations, and the racism clearly evident in practice. External Affairs battered vigorously against what they regarded as the defensive mentality entrenched in the Immigration Branch, sought to warn the cabinet of the desperate realities they saw in Europe, and to encourage an imaginative approach to population policy for Canada.⁵³

This tension between the two Departments lasted until 1947, when the setting up of the IRO brought DPs up the political agenda and focused deliberation on a new policy.

In 1947, H. L. Keenleyside, was appointed Deputy Minister for Mines and Resources, a career diplomat who was recommended for the position by King with a view to bringing an international perspective to immigration policy.⁵⁴ In May, Keenleyside wrote to Laurent Beaudry, acting under-secretary of state for External Affairs, making recommendations about DPs. Keenleyside noted that delays in setting up the IRO, coupled with problems in the US with passing legislation by Congress, presented an opportunity for Canadian leadership. He referred to concern for refugees “who continue to suffer,” and expressed the hope that Canada’s actions would encourage “other countries to make an early contribution to the problem.” Hinting at the future direction of policy, the

⁵¹ Dirks, 1977: 111.

⁵² Anderson, 2013.

⁵³ Quoted in Gilmour, 2009: 166.

⁵⁴ Thanks to Rob Vineberg for this comment.

memo stated that early action would also allow Canada to “select the DPs in accordance with our own ideas as to who would be likely to make the best Canadian citizens.”⁵⁵

C. D. Howe, the powerful Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, helped to advance DP resettlement within the ‘the political stream.’ Howe was an energetic minister who had seen the DP camps first hand and was conscious of the opportunity presented to recruit workers to help with reconstruction. He had long advocated in Cabinet the need for additional manpower in primary industries. Howe wrote the memo to Cabinet in late May 1947, drawing on Keenleyside’s note, to request the immediate immigration of 5000 DPs to Canada. His rationale emphasized “the Canadian example” to other nations and the possibilities it opened for advantageous selection “of desirable types.” The final point of the memo was perhaps most indicative: “It will also allow the Canadian Government to point out to its own people that Canada was the first country to make a serious effort to contribute to a solution of this problem. It will also attain a wide degree of recognition abroad and bring very favourable publicity to Canada.”⁵⁶

The reference to attracting favourable publicity clearly implied international plaudits rather than domestic ones. The policy would remain difficult to ‘sell’ to Canadian voters. When Mackenzie King spoke on the subject in May 1947, he emphasized that Canada was acting out of “moral obligation” and that the government would carefully select refugees “as desirable future citizens.” “It is not a ‘fundamental human right’ of any alien to enter Canada,” he emphasized. “It is a privilege.”⁵⁷

The longstanding deadlock on immigration and refugee policy within King’s government was finally broken. A growing awareness of domestic labour demand helped to make the decision to resettle refugees more palatable among political leaders. However, the key developments that actually stimulated the decision were international ones: the creation of the IRO, the establishment of an individualized approach to resettlement (which permitted fine-grained selection of refugees), and the development of an international community in which Canada sought an independent position.

The policy stream: Refugees as mobile labour

⁵⁵ See: Gilmour, 2009: 167.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Gilmour, 2009b: 91.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Anderson, 2013: 134.

While religious communities and the CNCR were largely responsible for raising the profile of European DPs and refugees in the public eye, they were unable to mobilize sufficient public support to accomplish mass resettlement on a humanitarian basis alone. When the time came that Cabinet was ready to act on the DP question, the successful ‘policy entrepreneurs’ were IRO representatives, industry elites, and bureaucrats within the Department of Mines and Resources and the Department of Reconstruction and Supply who saw an opportunity to selectively resettle DPs and turn them into mobile labour. The IRO had a fast-approaching time horizon to clear Europe’s DP camps, and while it lauded countries like Turkey and Israel for unconditionally welcoming refugees, it was pragmatic in its work. Its representatives “attempted to link the economic needs of various countries with particular skills among the DP population.”⁵⁸ As Marrus notes:

The IRO quickly discovered that, in spite of all the protestation of sympathy, the pivot of national immigration policies in almost all the countries was strictly practical, and closely related to domestic labour requirements. The IRO, in order to fulfill its mission, had, in fact, to function as an international employment agency.⁵⁹

This policy solution to the DP crisis would find a receptive hearing among influential elites in Canada, whose government was outwardly sympathetic but unwilling to accept refugees on humanitarian terms alone.

Canada had already begun to move in the direction of resettling Europeans to meet new labour demand. On July 23, 1946, the cabinet passed an order-in-council permitting about 4000 Polish Army Veterans to enter the country as ‘qualified agricultural workers.’⁶⁰ These Veterans were in England at the time of war’s end and feared persecution upon their return home, and Canada agreed to the UK’s request to take some of the Veterans after a positive British experience with their integration into the labour market. External Affairs was increasingly pushing resettlement with the Department of Mines and Resources in language that suggested the possibility of selection based on country of origin and in reference to particular economic demands. One memo to the director of immigration read as follows: “Special provision might be made for the

⁵⁸ Marrus, 1985: 344.

⁵⁹ Marrus, 1985: 418-9.

⁶⁰ Wyman, 1998.

settlement in Canada of a limited number of refugees, *drawn from particular groups of people and chosen in light of conditions existing in this country for their maintenance.*"⁶¹

On November 7, 1946, King approved emergency orders to bring DPs to Canada under two separate programs. The first was a bulk labour program, under which Canadian employers would specify the types and numbers of workers to come in under contract. A second program would allow Canadians to sponsor relatives. The first DPs sailed for Canada on April 4, 1947. These programs were carried out under an agreement Canada would negotiate with the IRO. Canada stipulated that it would accept 100,000 refugees as manual labourers, irrespective of nationality, religion or marital status (whether the commitment to non-discrimination translated into practice is another matter). While Canada initially proposed a two-year labour contract with incoming refugees, it eventually agreed to adopt a system whereby particular industries 'placed orders' with Canadian selection missions, which would in turn identify suitable candidates.⁶² The orders primarily consisted of requests for hard rock miners and construction and track workers. Canada refused to take any intellectual or professional occupations, causing the head of the IRO to remark sardonically that Canada had an "embargo on brains."⁶³ This was not an exaggeration. Wyman notes:

Several DPs told of being forced to show Canadian authorities the callouses on their hands; a Ukrainian noted that Canadian railroad representatives examined his father's arms and shoulders to see if he was fit for railway labour. The aim was to recruit workers, not to prove their humanitarianism.⁶⁴

Those with higher education who remained in the camps sought training in skills needed to do physical labour, and young women disguised their education to seek positions as domestic help. The latter problem became so widespread that the Canadian Labour Department sent a memo to selection missions in the field that they ought to reject any young woman applying for employment as a domestic who might be suspected of having higher education.⁶⁵ A particular irony was that the "mobile immigration teams" sent to Germany and Austria to identify DPs for resettlement also screened for ethnicity: "Acting

⁶¹ Wyman, 1998: 138; emphasis added.

⁶² Stoessinger, 1963.

⁶³ Stoessinger, 1963: 126.

⁶⁴ Wyman, 1998: 193.

⁶⁵ Wyman, 1998: 193.

on instructions from Ottawa, the Canadian officials routinely rejected Jewish applicants.”⁶⁶ The solution to the policy problem of DPs would be an exceptional, discrete liberalization of immigration policy, for the purpose of selecting manual labour – preferably from Baltic and Eastern European countries.

Conclusion

Canada’s resettlement of DPs as refugees after WWII is widely recognized as a watershed moment in the beginning of Canada’s development into a multicultural society, which would be the product of an increasingly liberal immigration policy.⁶⁷ It also set an important precedent of national hospitality to refugees, which would be recalled in the future to support further expansions in resettlement programs. Studies of this period of Canadian history have emphasized a variety of factors as contributing to the decision to resettle refugees. Ideational change among politicians and bureaucrats has featured prominently in recent historical accounts, such as those by Anderson and Gilmour.⁶⁸ Triadafilopoulos has emphasized ideational change at the level of ‘global culture,’ as a consequence of the horrors of World War II.⁶⁹ Other accounts by Adelman and Abella and Troper have stressed the role of anti-Semitism among bureaucrats and the general public in sustaining a restrictive regime for so long, and slowing the pace of liberalizing reform.⁷⁰ Dirks and Stoessinger, on the other hand, highlight material interests and labour demand as the key variables leading to the decision to resettle refugees.⁷¹ International relations scholars, such as Haddad, point to the emergence of a newly configured international community, which propagated a conception of the refugee that was adopted by states.⁷² Each of these explanations points to factors that played a role in the development of refugee resettlement policy, without systematically integrating the insights of the others.

In this essay I have sought to analyze the history of the resettlement of DPs in Canada by specifying how separate variables influenced aspects of the policy process at different points of time. Religious and humanitarian groups made the moral argument for

⁶⁶ Knowles, 1997: 133

⁶⁷ Triadafilopoulos, 2012.

⁶⁸ Anderson, 2013; Gilmour, 2009.

⁶⁹ Triadafilopoulos, 2012.

⁷⁰ Adelman, 1991; Abella and Troper, 2012.

⁷¹ Dirks, 1997; Stoessinger, 1963.

⁷² Haddad, 2008.

resettling refugees and liberalizing immigration policy over several decades of lobbying and public engagement. While there is little evidence that these efforts influenced the content of the DP resettlement programs of the 1940s, their arguments for Canada's 'moral responsibility' would increasingly feature in the content of immigration policy reforms over subsequent decades. It successfully defined the scope and nature of the 'problem' of European refugees. However, the main factor that put resettlement on the political decision-making agenda, and which finally led Cabinet to take a decision, was the government's eagerness for Canada to be an important and autonomous actor in the post-war international order. Finally, the resettlement of refugees as selected mobile labour (based on race, sex, and body type) was a policy idea that only emerged once the government had decided to move forward on the resettlement refugees. It allowed the government to publicly defend its policy decision, which was not broadly favoured by public opinion, as one that served the national economic interest.

The domestic debate over Canada's responsibilities to DPs had the effect of opening up a broader public discourse over immigration, admissions, and the criteria Canada used to select its future citizens. Indeed, King's policy speech on May 1, 1947 is widely considered to mark the beginning of the end of Canada's restrictive approach to immigration, when he declared: "The policy of the government is to foster the growth of the population of Canada by the encouragement to immigration."⁷³ However, the liberalization of Canadian immigration policy would have to wait until the early 1950s, and a humanitarian embrace of refugees (*as refugees*, rather than as mobile labour) would not happen until the Hungarian refugee crisis of 1956.⁷⁴ The origins of refugee resettlement policy of Canada were the product of a more contingent convergence of ideas about moral obligation, an historical moment where Canada sought to establish an independent foreign policy, and material interest in the form of demand for low-skilled labour.

⁷³ Knowles, 1997: 130.

⁷⁴ Knowles, 1997.

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