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THE TASKS OF PEACE

REBUILDING WESTERN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES
AFTER WORLD WAR II

EDITED BY SØREN WERTHER KJÆR RASMUSSEN

THE
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VELUX FONDEN

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The Tasks of Peace: Rebuilding Western European Societies after World War II

Edited by Soren Werther Kjær Rasmussen

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**PEER
REVIEWED**

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INTRO

The Tasks of Peace Await

Soren Werther Kjær Rasmussen

In May 1945, as the war in Europe came to an end, leading actors across Europe viewed the transition towards peace as a monumental task comprising both obligation and possibility. In Norway, the leadership of the Home Front expressed this succinctly when they declared that: “The tasks of war have been resolved; the tasks of peace await. They demand that, together, we do everything in our power to restore our democracy and our rule of law.”¹ This statement embodied the commonly held sentiment at the time: that the end of the war did not simply call for administrative normalisation, but for the complete re-establishment of the democratic institutions, social cohesion, and civic trust. This was not just the case in Norway, as these notions were prevalent in many post-war European countries. This sentiment had also captured the Danish public where there was widespread agreement that the post-war period should involve a comprehensive reconstruction of society: economic recovery, social assistance for war victims, punishment of wartime collaborators. For the authorities, the ultimate goal was the gradual reintegration of these groups back into society.² In Denmark, the point of departure for this transformation was launched from a relatively intact platform. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Hans Hedtoft, noted that Denmark had been spared from some of the worst consequences of war compared to most other European countries: “We had no Danish Quisling. Our civil administration and our production apparatus

have been preserved intact. Through this the Danish people have been spared much hardship and misery.”³

Nevertheless, there was still much rebuilding to be done, and the future remained uncertain, which was also emphasised by the minister. For other countries the restoration process was far more difficult. In Finland, which had surrendered after two wars with the Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands of displaced people and war veterans now demanded support from the state.⁴ In Italy, the population had to adjust to democracy while simultaneously rebuilding a nation devastated by war. Here it remained an open question whether or not a functioning democracy could be built upon or around the existing fascist social structures or if they could serve as a foundation for reconstruction at all. Genuine innovation was required to solve these issues.⁵

Even among the victorious powers, the problems created by the war were far from resolved. For Britain, European reconstruction was closely tied to the international debate about how to handle refugees and other displaced persons in British-occupied Germany. At the same time, the British government faced significant challenges with domestic reconstruction, while also dealing with thousands of German prisoners of war who were to undergo democratic re-education in Britain before they could be repatriated back to a new and democratic Germany.

Despite the considerable challenges that marked the immediate post-war period, the summer of 1945 across Western Europe was an unusually open-ended historical moment. Occupation regimes had collapsed, wartime restrictions had been lifted, and the future appeared, if only briefly, open to reimagining a new world order. Yet this sense of openness was inseparably linked with a profound sense of urgency. Reconstruction was not merely a promise of change; it was widely perceived as a necessity. For many politicians and resistance fighters, rebuilding Western Europe entailed economic and social reconstruction. For many, though by no means all, it also meant restoring democracy and strengthening the social foundations on which democratic life could rest.⁶

The immediate post-war years were consequently not a simple return to the “normality” of the pre-war world, after an abnormal interlude. This period constituted a transitional phase in which political imagination, moral judgement, institutional improvisation, and social need all converged at a pivotal point. Beyond the usual political rulers from the pre-war period, there were also veterans’ groups and members of the resistance who demanded political influence in the liberated countries, and who held views on the organisation of society, and at times these entities even had social policy ambitions.⁷ Across the

liberated parts of Europe, states and societies faced a set of practical yet foundational questions: who belonged in the post-war community, and on what terms? How should societies deal with wartime collaborators and deserters, refugees and displaced persons, prisoners, veterans, resistance fighters, and survivors of The Holocaust? What forms of welfare provision, punishment, reconciliation, and democratic re-education were required to secure peace? And to what extent did post-war policies represent a break with the past, the continuity of existing institutions, or a negotiated compromise between the two?

This anthology is the final product of the Danish research project *De Udstødte, De Uvelkomne og De Beundrede* carrying the English title *The Outcasts, the Unwelcome, and the Admired* which was carried out through a collaboration between the University of Southern Denmark, HSB (Historical Collection from the Occupation Period), The Varde Museums and Viborg Museum—all of which has been generously sponsored by the Velux Foundation.⁸

While the Danish case studies from this project have already been examined in a separate Danish anthology, this anthology aims to widen the scope and place the Danish cases in a comparative framework that treats Denmark as just one case of many within the broader European transition from warfare to welfare in the post-war period.⁹ The chapters in this work are inspired by presentations and debates that took place during the international conference *From Warfare to Welfare? Resocialisation and Democratisation after World War II* in Odense, 8–9 October 2025, which brought together scholars working on post-war reintegration, reconstruction, and the difficult tasks of creating democratic communities.¹⁰

1945 AS AN OPEN MOMENT

Historians have long debated occupation and war in the context of how it causes ruptures, or continuity, or something in between when it comes to societal norms, cohesion and structure. In some cases, all three perspectives are at play at once and they are all indispensable when making this type of analysis. Yet to understand the immediate post-war years as they were lived and governed by European populations and rulers, it is productive to treat this period as an *open moment*: a phase in which the range of plausible possibilities appeared much broader than what they would later seem in retrospect. This open-endedness, however, did not imply that anything was possible, or that societies were reset to “zero”. Institutions, elites, administrative habits, and legal traditions still remained powerful, but the end of the war disrupted established hierarchies of honour and belonging, and it created strong pressures for political action.¹¹

This anthology therefore treats the post-1945 transition not as a straight-forward and forgone conclusion in the shift from autocracy to democracy, or from warfare to welfare, but as a contested process of *resocialisation* and *democratisation*, which are terms that are used in a broad sense throughout this anthology. Resocialisation refers here to the practical and symbolic work of bringing people back into the social and civic order of society: through welfare provisions, surveillance, schooling, labour-market inclusion, legal rehabilitation, and, at times, punishment. Democratisation denotes both the restoration of societal institutions and the attempt to, explicitly or implicitly, shape civic norms, political loyalties, and the notions of what citizenship entails after the collapse of wartime regimes and wartime economies.

THE STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES OF THE POST-WAR TRANSITION

The first post-war years were shaped by a set of interconnected problem clusters that were present all across Europe, albeit, with varying intensity and configuration depending on differing national experiences of occupation, collaboration, resistance, displacement, and state capacity. These clusters formed the structural and moral context through which post-war societies attempted to navigate the transition from war to peace.

A central feature of this transition was the pressure of the expectations that were blossoming among the populations of Europe by the end of the war. In many cases, the public articulated powerful and often conflicting wishes for compensation, justice, and material recovery, while political actors sought stabilisation and governability. For some, the post-war moment promised social renewal and reform; for others, restoration and normalisation. These expectations were not merely rhetorical, but actively shaped policy agendas, institutional priorities, and political conflict.¹²

At the same time, some post-war governments perpetuated the ideals of centralised planning and continued forms of social engineering that developed during the 1930s and expanded under the wartime conditions. Administrative tools, expert knowledge, and interventionist practices were utilised in different ways; sometimes in support of welfare expansion and democratic education and sometimes in the service of surveillance, categorisation, and containment which will be demonstrated in this anthology.

Acute need for social reform and administrative experimentation further characterised this period. Emergency relief, compensation regimes, housing initiatives, employment and training schemes, child welfare and family policies,

and public health responses to physical and psychological trauma all became central focal points of post-war governance. Yet welfare expansion was rarely a linear or universal process. It was shaped by moral hierarchies of deservingness and constrained by fiscal limitations and political contestation, often producing uneven and exclusionary outcomes.

The conceptual ideals of liberal democracy itself were interrogated and scrutinised with regard to legitimacy and stability. Democratic institutions were not simply restored but actively debated, constructed, defended, and in some cases redesigned. The challenge extended beyond the mere reinstatement of post-war parliamentary routines in order to rebuild trust, civic cohesion, and political authority in societies marked by polarisation and memories of betrayal. The outcomes of these processes were often ambivalent. In many cases, the post-war period produced tangible societal change, though on very different scales across countries and through measures that were sometimes surprisingly limited in scope. At the same time, as the British historian Martin Conway has noted in his work on post-war Belgium, societies in several instances retained much of their pre-war social and political structure, despite pressure from disruptive social conditions, manifesting in the rise of communist parties, extremism and the disruptive effects of the war itself.¹³ In some cases, the absence of deeper structural change was not a sign of failure but rather the result of immediate post-war responses to acute social problems, which prioritised stability over transformation.

Finally, the war created a range of concrete social “problem groups” that posed urgent challenges to governance. Displaced persons, refugees, demobilised soldiers, former prisoners, wartime collaborators, and resistance veterans did not readily fit into the pre-war institutional categories. As this anthology demonstrates, the stability of the post-war restructuring period depended significantly on how these groups were integrated, rehabilitated, re-educated, compensated, or, in some cases, excluded.

The Pivot of Post-War Politics into Reintegration

A key argument in this anthology is that social reintegration was not a marginal administrative task; it was a pivot of post-war politics. Decisions regarding wartime collaborators, refugees, veterans, and resistance fighters would not only constitute decisions about the actual people found in these groups, but would simultaneously entail decisions about democracy, social order, and the boundaries of the concept of citizenship. The conference that inspired this an-

thology highlighted this point across a diverse set of cases. Studies of legal purges and post-release regimes of prisoners and captives showed how some states combined punishment with the practical need to prevent social destabilisation through labour-market inclusion, surveillance, and selective social assistance.¹⁴

The effort spent on German prisoners of war in Britain and on educational initiatives focused on refugees shows how democratisation was sometimes pursued through everyday socialisation, introducing norms, habits, and “ways of life” as much as through formal civic instruction. At the same time, these efforts were underpinned by the assumption that former enemies and traitors to the nation would, at some point, return into the fold of society and therefore they needed to be reintegrated in order to avoid the creation of a shunned pariah caste which was observed in the treatment of convicted “traitors” in Norway and Denmark.¹⁵

Investigations of many different refugees and displaced persons, from German refugees in Denmark to Karelians in Finland, show how resettlement, schooling, and land allocation policies could become tools of reconstruction, while also generating new hierarchies and tensions.¹⁶

Comparable studies on institutional reforms such as the Italian debates over social insurance governance and industrial democracy resonate with the Danish cases in which post-war settlements sought to balance renewal with the inherited administrative cultures.¹⁷

The Danish approach, in this context, is especially instructive. Denmark combined an unusually strong administrative continuity with intense moral-political contestation determining the meaning of resistance, collaboration, and victimhood; and it dealt with the large-scale refugee presence utilising more selective, symbolically charged compensation policies. The Danish case thus helps illuminate how the concepts of “welfare” and “democracy” were constructed in the post-war period, not only through grand constitutional design, but through the formation of eligibility rules, educational programmes, and everyday administrative decisions.

THE SCOPE OF THIS ANTHOLOGY

The purpose of this anthology is not to provide a comprehensive account of every institution involved in post-war reconstruction across Europe, nor does it offer a comprehensive catalogue of inquiries into the social problems present in the post-war period. Rather, the chapters in the anthology examine the principles, practices, and political struggles through which post-war societies sought to

create peace and stability by formulating functional response mechanisms in relation to the different social groups affected by the war. This will be exemplified through the investigation of a multitude of different case studies.

Against this backdrop, this anthology explores how post-war states and the actors within civil-society defined and managed questions of deservingness, danger, and belonging, and how reintegration policies combined welfare and discipline, inclusion and exclusion, compromise and moral judgement. It further examines the extent to which wartime experiences shaped the trajectories of post-war welfare and democratic norms and asks where post-war societal reformation was characterised by rupture, where it rested on continuity, and where it took the form of negotiated hybrid solutions.

Methodologically, the anthology brings together perspectives from social policy history, political history, legal and administrative history, war and post-war history, and the history of education and citizenship. It approaches the post-war reconstruction period as a field fraught with conflict and negotiation between resistance actors and political elites, between administrators and claimants, and between national mythologies and international pressures.¹⁸

STRUCTURE OF THE ANTHOLOGY

The chapters are organised around the central arenas in which post-war reintegration was contested and implemented. One set of contributions focuses on legal reckoning and the resocialisation of groups of people convicted of crimes and other malfeasance in connection with the war, where the tension between punishment and social stability was apparent in both policy design and the everyday practice of the resocialisation process. Other chapters examine refugees, displaced persons, and the democratic educational initiatives tailored for them, highlighting how states confronted mass social need, international obligations, and the inherent conflicts and disagreements that occur when the values of humanitarianism and security need to be promoted concurrently.

Other chapters address veterans, resistance actors, and compensation regimes, analysing how recognition, trauma, and social rights were negotiated through law, administrative procedures, and the institutions of civil society. Finally, the anthology considers several processes of institutional reconstruction and democratic legitimation, exploring how post-war societies balanced societal continuity and reform.

Denmark's development during this period provides a recurring analytical anchor for the anthology as a whole. Yet the volume also situates Denmark within

a wider comparative framework, drawing on cases that reveal both the shared patterns and national specificities through which post-war Europe moved from warfare to welfare.

CHAPTER 1

From Revenge to Probation Service: Convicted Wartime Collaborators in Denmark after World War II

Dorte Kook Lyngholm and Henrik Lundtofte

In Denmark, World War II was followed by a legal reckoning with wartime collaborators. In the years following the war and the German occupation, approximately 13,500 Danes were convicted of treason. The thirst for revenge was near insatiable, but the challenge of reintegrating this large group of convicted traitors into society was unavoidable. This chapter examines ‘the long legal reckoning’—the part of the reckoning that followed the trials of the traitors.

In recent years, much research has been conducted in this field within the paradigm of *transitional justice*.¹ Although resocialisation is considered to be a relevant element of punishment in many theories of punishment—or perhaps the very purpose of punishment—it has played a remarkably small role in this field of research. Jon Elster, a prominent researcher in transitional justice, states this interesting fact in an international research overview. His point being that resocialisation is of marginal importance to transitional justice, as the primary

purpose of resocialisation, which is to prevent recidivism, is meaningless in this context: “The idea of ‘treating’ generals or torturers so that they will not take power again or not engage in sadistic practices is absurd”.² It is telling that this field of research was previously grouped under the term *retroactive justice*—studies of legal reckonings have predominantly revolved around a backward-looking perspective.

In the latest research into Norwegian legal reckoning with wartime collaborators, historian Anika Seemann argues that the reckoning must be understood in a broad political and social context that considers the changing phases of the reckoning. She shows that resocialisation was a focus of attention for the Norwegian authorities early on and throughout the reconstruction period, but her work does not examine the resocialisation efforts themselves and their consequences.³

One exception is the Belgian and Dutch resocialisation efforts. In her pioneering study historian Helen Grevers emphasises the research potential of the field: ... it is precisely by studying the execution of the punishment that underlying ideologies and interest are exposed, and this can demonstrate how well defined citizenship was”.⁴ Her comparative studies conclude that while convicted wartime collaborators in nationally divided Belgium were forced to learn to love their nation and state, the Netherlands took a more socio-economic approach, as the post-war analysis concluded that wartime collaborators had primarily been driven by economic and social motives.⁵

This chapter studies the Danish legal reckoning with wartime collaborators by incorporating a forward-looking perspective. It deals with the consequences of the treason trials – both at the authoritative level and when considering individual convicted collaborators. The findings contained within this chapter are based on studies of parliamentary debates, daily newspapers, criminological periodicals, and publications from the Danish resistance movement. The empirical examination of resocialisation in practice is based on prisoner records and journals from prisons and penal camps combined with records of the supervisory authorities during the probation period of the wartime collaborators. The study covers approximately 100 convicted wartime collaborators and includes both ‘small’ collaborators and more severe cases of wartime collaboration. The ‘small’ collaborators received relatively short sentences. A typical example of such an infraction was if the individual had been a volunteer in the Waffen-SS. While members of the police auxiliary force known as *Hilfspolizei* or “Hipo” were often given severe prison sentences, including life imprisonment because of their role in brutally policing their fellow Danes on behalf of the German occupying forces.⁶

Firstly, the chapter analyses the change of course in policy by the Danish authorities when they began to prioritise the resocialisation of convicted collaborators rather than focussing on punishment alone. What was the motivation of this change? And what did this change of course mean for prisoner treatment and probation services after release? Secondly, the chapter examines the practice of resocialisation. What impact did the efforts of the authorities have on convicted collaborators? And finally, how did resocialisation work in practice within the prison system and after release?

REPRESSION OR RESOCIALISATION?

Shortly after the end of the German occupation the Danish Parliament passed a treason law known as the Criminal Code Supplement. Penalties for wartime collaboration were severe. The minimum sentence was four years' imprisonment, and the death penalty was reinstated. In addition, a conviction under this law also entailed the loss of civil rights for the convicted individual. The atmosphere after the occupation was heated and the purpose of the punishments that were handed down was primarily for revenge, deterrence, and exclusion of the traitors.⁷ The commentaries to the treason law explicitly stated: "The educational aspect of punishment must [...] generally be set aside".⁸

Nevertheless, the question of resocialisation of convicted wartime collaborators surprisingly quickly became an issue clearing the way, not only a return to pre-war practises, but to a modernised way of treating prisoners in general.⁹ A crucial initiative in this development came from Mogens Fog, who was a minister in the Danish government and who had been a prominent member of the resistance movement during the occupation. In September 1945 he wrote a front-page article in *Frit Danmark* – a magazine published by the resistance movement. The title of the article was "Punishment is not enough". Fog argued that it was crucial to view the convicted collaborators as individuals and to initiate measures to help them reintegrate into society after having served their sentences. "It will be to the country's great harm if we instead breed a cohesive, criminal pariah caste that will remain in conscious opposition to democracy for the rest of their lives."¹⁰ If the convicted were excluded from society indefinitely, they would pose a threat to social and democratic stability.

The debate continued from this point, and in October, an expert committee was formed by *Frit Danmark*, which published a report on the importance of the resocialisation of the convicted traitors in November. These views were supported by the leading experts of the country at the annual meeting of the Danish Asso-

ciation of Criminalists.¹¹ The main topics of the meeting were the treason law and its enforcement and tensions were running high among the delegates. In the presence of one of the main architects of the treason law, former Minister of Justice Niels Busch-Jensen, the law was described as: “The most reactionary, expertise-defying law passed in living memory.”¹² The experts characterised the treason law as a step backwards in Danish penal law that needed urgent revision. The meeting concluded with Minister of Justice Aage Elmquist announcing the formation of a committee within the Ministry of Justice to address the revision of the treason law. The announcement was met with applause.¹³

A CHANGE OF COURSE

The report from the committee conducted by the Ministry of Justice was completed in February 1946 and in June 1946 a revision of the treason law was passed in the Danish Parliament.¹⁴ The revised law introduced several changes that improved the reintegration prospects of the convicted wartime collaborators. The most significant change was the introduction of probation from which the convicted collaborators had been excluded in the original treason law. Probation required that they had served at least two-thirds of their sentence with a minimum of one year. The revised treason law also reduced the minimum sentence to two years’ imprisonment and reduced the loss of civil rights. At this point both politicians, experts and the resistance movement clearly recognised that resocialisation was necessary.

Also in February 1946, a separate committee had been formed in order to address the conditions of the individuals serving prison sentences. The committee found that existing regulations regarding the treatment of prisoners were outdated and thus issued recommendations changing treatment practices for both wartime collaborators and other regular criminal offenders. The position of the committee was that the main purpose of incarceration was to improve the prisoners’ opportunities in society after having served their sentences.¹⁵ This led to a significant change in the principles that defined the framework for serving prison sentences in general. The law was passed in May 1947, granting those convicted of treason the same prison conditions as other criminal offenders. The central principle became *normalisation* – prison life should resemble life in society as closely as possible. The deprivation of liberty was now seen as punishment enough, and the prison stay should not cause the prisoner additional suffering.¹⁶

This more lenient approach towards convicted wartime collaborators gradually resulted in extensive reductions in sentences. Within the Ministry of Justice,

there was a growing desire to bring the legal reckoning to an end and to adopt the pragmatic point of view that prisoners should not be imprisoned for longer than necessary. As demonstrated by legal historian Ditlev Tamm, 1947 became a regular turning point in this process, after which extensive pardons and sentence reductions were handed down to many of the convicted collaborators. For example, many convicted collaborators were released on the Danish Constitution Day and the King's birthday in 1948 after serving half of their sentences. Many sentences that had been handed down earlier on in the reckoning process were also mitigated on the recommendation of the so-called Appeal Board.¹⁷ Overall, only twenty-six per cent of the convicted collaborators ended up serving their full sentences.¹⁸

This development was characterised by a genuine paradigm shift, which had nothing to do with forgiveness. Fundamentally, it had to do with the social and political stability of Danish post-war society by preventing the growth of a radicalised minority of former collaborators. The prison authorities and many politicians regarded reintegration of the collaborators into the labour market as the key to turn the convicted individuals into productive members of society.

A STATE PROBATION OFFICE

The treason trials became a catalyst for new initiatives concerning prisoners—even some initiatives affecting former prisoners after their release.¹⁹ Up until then the care of released criminals had been handled by private organisations affiliated with the prisons from which the prisoners were released.²⁰ These companies were under great strain looking at the prospect of the release of the large number of convicted collaborators. In February 1946, the head of these companies, K. Leudesdorff, remarked: “We cannot cast 10,000 individuals out of society and thereby create an extremely dangerous pariah caste. I dread the thought of how we will manage to reintegrate them. I believe it will be virtually impossible to place them in ordinary workplaces—no one dares to employ them”.²¹

Both *Frit Danmark* and the committee within the Ministry of Justice working on the conditions of collaborators serving prison time recommended a state-led solution. The issue became very urgent following the above-mentioned revision of the treason law that permitted probation for the convicted collaborators in June 1946. On 14 June 1946, a state probation office was established in Copenhagen.²² This office was designed to serve multiple functions: as a support office for supervision carried out by prisons and penal camps, as an independent supervisory institution, and as a central register for all collaborators released on probation.

The head of the office was P. Ammundsen, a former member of the resistance movement and probation secretary at Horsens State Prison.²³

RESOCIALISATION EFFORTS IN THE PRISONS

The change of course from punishment to resocialisation is excellently demonstrated by the case of “Jens”.²⁴ Born in 1926, Jens was an apprentice in Copenhagen, but because of his Nazi family and his membership of the Danish Nazi youth organisation of the DNSAP, he was harassed by colleagues and threatened by the resistance. In 1944 Jens became a member of the auxiliary police force, the notorious “Hipo” or *Hilfspolizei*, which worked closely together with the Gestapo. However, he never took part in violent action against members of the resistance – Jens was serving as an armed guard and in the kitchens at the Hipo barracks outside of Copenhagen. During the legal reckoning after the war the standard penalty for having been a member of the auxiliary police was ten years in prison. However, in the case of Jens, his young age and Nazi family environment constituted mitigating circumstances which reduced the sentence to six years in prison.²⁵

Even though young Danes like Jens had been socialised in Nazi subcultures and been a member of an extremist corps like the Hipo, they were never subjected to intense democratic re-education, denazification or deradicalisation measures within the state prison system. They received some mandatory school training, which was orchestrated by progressive teachers, but the efforts of the prison authorities behind the walls focused on labour skills. So, Jens was encouraged to continue as an apprentice within the prison, and in 1947 he was released on probation; the prison authorities were convinced that he would finish his apprenticeship successfully on the outside and that he would be able to find a permanent job and become a reliable citizen.²⁶

Even in the case of deeply convinced Danish Nazis, who had fought with the SS on the Eastern Front and who later were recruited into the *Hilfspolizei* in Denmark, the authorities concentrated on the prospects of these convicts in relation to the labour market.²⁷

THE REVISION NEUROSIS

The practice of reducing sentences was not always met with approval from the prison authorities.²⁸ In Fårhus penal camp, the prison inspector, Cuno Gjerstrup, was engaged in persistent disputes with the Ministry of Justice, owing to the ministry’s repeated overriding of the camp administration’s recommendations

concerning punishment reductions.²⁹ Also in Kragshovhede penal camp the prison inspector, Carsten Rafael's, recommendations were overruled by the Ministry of Justice.³⁰

In 1946 Carsten Rafael gave a presentation at the annual meeting of the Danish Association of Criminalists, in which he argued that the system of granting reductions in punishment without consulting those who were most familiar with the individual prisoners was directly damaging to the resocialising efforts for the prisoners.³¹ A similar viewpoint was articulated by the Director of the Danish Prisons, Hans Tetens, in a 1947 article. Here he contended that many prisoners suffered from what he termed a "revision neurosis". The uncertainty caused by the numerous reductions in punishment prevented the prisoners from settling into the imprisonment process which disrupted the efforts of pushing them into a constructive direction.³²

In 1946, "Kurt", a very well-informed prisoner aged 25 who was serving a sentence in Viborg Prison, sent an inquiry to the Police Chief in Viborg. With great precision, he explained that he had been sentenced to four years in prison for service in the Waffen-SS, but on the advice of his defence lawyer, he had refrained from appealing the case to the High Court. Now he believed that times had changed: "Now that sentencing practice and the revision of the law have reduced the minimum sentence to two years ... something must be done about a sentence like mine, which was passed at such an early stage."³³

Kurt had his finger on the pulse, and a note on the letter shows that his case had recently been sent to the Appeal Board, which was to decide whether his sentence should be reduced or not. In the correspondence between prisoners and their families there are several examples like the one concerning Kurt which show that the question of reduction in sentences was observed with considerable attention on both sides of the prison walls.³⁴

POLITICAL ACTIVITY AFTER RELEASE

The convicted wartime collaborators who were released from prison on probation were subject to a two-year supervision period. During this time, the authorities monitored whether the released individuals were leading law-abiding lives. As a special measure for those convicted of treason, the authorities also kept an eye on whether they engaged in "inappropriate political agitation" during the supervision period.³⁵

When the 'small' collaborators were released from prison in 1946–47 the authorities took different measures in some cases in order to prevent them from

working for or with other released collaborators.³⁶ During the probation period, political activity among the ‘small’ collaborators was closely monitored. One example of this is the former Waffen-SS volunteer “Aage”, who was 27 years old at the time of his release after serving one year and four months in Viborg Prison.³⁷ When he was released on probation, he was described as an avid Nazi who would hardly ever refrain from spreading his political views. Aage moved back to his family in Viborg, where he received several visits from his supervisor from the state probation office. The probation officer repeatedly noted in his case file that Aage—and his wife—still held Nazi views. Aage and the other ‘small’ collaborators—typically, sentenced to between one and four years—who had been assessed as holding Nazi sympathies at the time of release did not prompt any intervention from the authorities as long as they kept a low profile and did not attempt to overtly promote their views.

When the time had come to release the wartime collaborators who received the harshest punishments at the end of the 1940s, the anxiety that permeated the country at the beginning of the post-war trials had dissipated, and the authorities had become much more lenient. Some convicts from the “Hipo” subculture were even allowed to resume anti-communist activities or as demonstrated in some cases, former “Hipo” colleagues helped each other to find jobs. The prison authorities seem to have approved of these connections, as long as they helped the convicts back into society. At this time the question of political activity played a minor role. Most of the former Hipo-members refrained from engaging in political activity. However, compared to the ‘small’ collaborators, it is striking that, barring a few exceptions, there were no conversations or follow-through with released individuals regarding political activity or even observations noted in the relevant case files concerning this matter.³⁸

ASSISTANCE WITH CLOTHING AND FINANCIAL AID

After their release the convicted wartime collaborators could be granted help with acquiring clothing and financial aid from the state probation office. The transition from prison to a new life on the outside could be difficult. Many faced acute problems after their release, such as a lack of clothing, as they had worn out their regular clothes during their time in prison. 27-year-old “Gunnar” had served a sentence in Viborg prison for participating in German military service. When he moved to Copenhagen shortly after his release in 1946, he had no network in the city. The probation office granted him a pair of trousers, a jumper, a jacket, a shirt and a pair of used shoes.³⁹ Many applications bear witness to abject poverty

and desperation. Approximately one fourth of the released collaborators were granted help with clothing.⁴⁰ A smaller part of released individuals received small loans or food tickets. The assistance was primarily given to applicants who, like Gunnar, had settled in Copenhagen and had no network whatsoever. Released prisoners who were in contact with or lived with family members only received assistance in exceptional cases involving illness or extreme poverty.⁴¹

BACK TO WORK

The cornerstone of the resocialisation process in Denmark was gainful employment. This was a central concern for the authorities and in practice it was a necessary condition for the released persons to be able to support themselves and lead independent lives. The overall picture of this process was promising. At the end of the two-year probation period the vast majority of the released wartime collaborators were employed.⁴² One example of this positive trend was 26-year-old “Laurits”, who had been an armed O.T. guard on prisoner transports on the Eastern Front.⁴³ When he was released on probation from the Fårhus penal camp in 1947, he gained a permanent job on a farm in Central Jutland. He lived and worked there for the rest of his probation period.

However, if we look a little deeper into the source material, the picture is not quite so clear-cut. For approximately one third of the convicted ‘small’ collaborators, reintegration seemed to proceed relatively smoothly as in Laurits’ case. They secured stable or long-term employment – working for a gardener, a dairy, a butcher, or as agricultural labourers, industrial workers etc. However, for the remaining two thirds of the released collaborators, life was more uncertain. One concrete example of this is 33-year-old “Marie”, who led a turbulent life during her probation period.⁴⁴ When she was released from Sundholm Prison after serving a sentence as an informant for the Germans, she said that she would move in with her boyfriend and then look for a job as a housekeeper. However, after her release, she disappeared for six months, and then she was imprisoned for vagrancy. When she was released again, she disappeared once more. During the last months of her probation, she held various jobs on farms throughout Jutland, and at the end of her supervision period, she was registered at a hotel in Sweden.

Marie’s case is extreme, defined by disappearance, vagrancy and imprisonment, but for this group, the supervision period was generally characterised by short, casual and poorly paid jobs interrupted by periods of unemployment. Some found temporary employment in Sweden.

Several former collaborators found employment in the West Jutland brown coal camps. Many got jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy: which often meant dangerous and hard physical labour. For those employed in agriculture, it was clear that the winter months were particularly difficult due to the seasonal and unstable nature of their work. Other prisoners on parole got jobs in some of the least attractive industrial plants in Copenhagen. Although many were employed at the end of the supervision period, their employment was neither permanent nor secure. For some – like Marie – the situation was downright dire.⁴⁵

Most collaborators, who were given sentences lasting ten to fifteen years in prison like the former members of the *Hilfspolizei*, were released on parole in the late 1940s and in the beginning of the 1950s. After a new beginning on the outside and occasionally, a new surname, the majority of former convicts seemed to manage quite well; regarding work, housing and family the future looked bright at the end of the probation period for fifty of the total sample of sixty-seven convicted individuals who worked for the “Hipo”. One of these cases included the young Jens who was previously mentioned. Only in four cases did resocialisation completely fail.⁴⁶

A striking and very indicative pattern concerns the place of residence of the convicted collaborators. Immediately after release, many received assistance from parents or other family members, primarily regarding food and shelter. However, by the end of the supervision period, nearly all were living in locations where they had not previously resided. Even family fathers—those who had not divorced—followed this pattern. In some cases, the father went on his own for work, becoming separated from his family. For the ‘small’ collaborators as well as the individuals who were punished severely, it appears that a fresh start in a new location was both beneficial or even necessary.⁴⁷

CARRYING THE BRAND OF A TRAITOR

For some of the convicted collaborators, their affiliation with the German occupying force was the direct causal reason for them losing their jobs. One example of this was “Erik”, who had been convicted for German war service. He was only twenty-one years old when he was released from prison and moved in with his family in Viborg. It was very difficult for him to find work, and he had no doubt about the reason why. In a letter to his probation officer, he wrote: “Here in town, it doesn’t look like there will be any work, as I am well known. People know where I have been”⁴⁸ When he finally succeeded after six months, his joy was

short-lived. He was fired after only eight days. His colleagues had given his boss an ultimatum: it was either him or them.

Keeping completely quiet about his past in German uniform, the sentence and the prison stay was a way of staying alive in post-war society. So, when Jens, the former member of the “Hipo” was released, he remained very cautious, never talking to his colleagues about his activities during the occupation or the years he spent in prison. Jens combined this survival strategy with a change of surname. Using this method, he was able to keep a job.⁴⁹

For others, the past continued to haunt them long after the trials were over. In 1946, 26-year-old “Margrethe” was convicted of being an informant for the Germans. She later moved to Copenhagen, where she found work in a store. Ten years after her affiliation with the German occupation force in Viborg, her past caught up with her. An anonymous person approached her employer and told her that Margrethe was unfit for the job because of her past. Margrethe contacted the probation office, where the officer noted: “She has now been the subject of gossip [...] She is apparently very depressed about having the old case brought up again.”⁵⁰

In some of the writings from the convicted collaborators they use the following expression “I have been branded”. They had been forever marked by their collaboration with the Germans and the treason trials. Even though they had served their prison sentences, public condemnation of convicted wartime collaborators could be harsh. This was observed in the cases of Erik and Margrethe or Ivang Haaeman who had been a colleague of the above-mentioned Jens in the “Hipo”. Many experienced contempt, mistrust, harassment or outright ostracism because of their past. Many convicted collaborators carried the brand of a traitor with them, and for some, the stigma lasted for the rest of their lives and would even be passed on to the next generation as an inherited shame.⁵¹

THE UNEVEN IMPACT OF THE RECKONING

During the treason trials, there was great public attention given to the question about whether or not the impact of the reckoning was unequal. As the trials progressed, it was widely believed that the ‘small’ collaborators were being convicted and sentenced, while the major actors were going free. This violated the public’s sense of justice and led to deeply felt resentment towards the trial process.⁵² A famous satirical piece from one of Denmark’s major newspapers illustrated this sentiment in the following manner: “Just think how far our lawyers have come!

They've managed to do what the engineers couldn't: create a fine-meshed net that catches the small fish but lets the big ones slip through."⁵³

The issue also attracted political attention. In November 1946, during a parliamentary debate, Mogens Fog expressed his criticisms towards the treason trials and pointed to the inequality expressed in the reckoning: "It is one of the circumstances of this social skewness in the reckoning that will, far into the future, hinder the small traitors' understanding of their own crimes and their willingness to reintegrate into democratic society, and among those who are nationally upright, it has created a distrust of the administration of justice, of the settlement, which does not benefit the country."⁵⁴ According to Fog, the unfairness of the legal reckoning could intensify the bitterness among the 'small' collaborators and hinder their motivation and opportunity for reintegration into society.

Looking back at the legal reckoning, the inequality between the convicted collaborators due to the progression and development of the treason trials becomes evident. As pointed out by Ditlev Tamm, the trials against 'small' collaborators were the first to be concluded in the courts since they were relatively uncomplicated. As a result, 'small fish' were convicted relatively shortly after the war. This took place while the thirst for revenge was still strong, while the minimum penalties were high, and while the legal practice was severe. The more complicated cases concerning the more severe crimes committed by some individuals were naturally tried later during the legal reckoning. But by this point, the public fervour had died down and consequently this affected the level of punishment.

Public condemnation also hit the 'small' collaborators hard. In the period immediately after the war, the convicted collaborators were painted directly as major villains. The focus was on the most heinous crimes, and the convicted were all perceived as social deviants and outcasts. This stigmatisation affected the entire group of convicts and did not meaningfully distinguish between those who had received relatively short prison sentences and the collaborators who were punished more severely. The most serious and spectacular cases of collaboration came to define the public's view of the entire group.⁵⁵ As a result, many of the 'small' collaborators were condemned harshly, even though some of their offences had been relatively minor.

This study also has shown that the aftermath and long-term consequences of the treason trials resulted in a disproportionately skewed outcome in favour of the wartime collaborators who were facing the harshest allegations. Another consequence of being prosecuted shortly after the war meant that most of the 'small' collaborators had already served their prison sentence when the nature of

the legal reckoning became milder and shifted in focus from revenge to reconciliation. Therefore, they did not benefit from the new focus on resocialisation and the measures taken to ensure the normalisation of the convicts during imprisonment. A similar conclusion can be drawn concerning the reductions in sentencing and the possibility of release on probation. By the time probation became a possibility for the convicted wartime collaborators and reductions in sentencing became normalised, they had already been released. Thus, it was the severely punished collaborators who benefited the most from this change of approach.

This development that occurred during the first postwar years was also evident in the way prison authorities and probation authorities treated the convicted collaborators. When the 'small' collaborators were released in 1946–1947, their political views were closely monitored, and the authorities sought to prevent them from associating with like-minded individuals. However, the situation was different when the collaborators who were affiliated with the "Hipo" were released in the late 1940s. While some of the worst collaborators were never forgotten and continued to epitomise the idea of treason itself, in most cases, the development favoured collaborators such as the former members of the *Hilfspolizei*. The monitoring of political activity seemed almost absent at the tail end of the 1940s and early 1950s, and the authorities seemed to approve of established connections between convicts from the "Hipo" subculture, if they helped each other to find jobs.⁵⁶

Even the economic conditions favoured this segment of the collaborators. At the end of the 1940s the economic conditions of the country had improved, resulting in low unemployment for this group of labourers in blue-collar jobs. Furthermore, the occupation was slowly abating from the collective public consciousness, so the condemnation of those who were released later was not as severe as it had been in the first heated years immediately following the war. Throughout society and in the workplace, the 'small' collaborators had already functioned as icebreakers, taking the brunt of the thirst for revenge before the collaborators who received longer sentences were released. The path into the labour market thus seems to have been relatively easier for the worst collaborators compared to the 'small' collaborators.

The legal reckoning subsided as the collaborators were dealt with and normality returned. The immediate repercussions of the war and the treason trials were harder on the 'small' collaborators compared to those who received longer sentences, but the Danish authorities could finally breathe a sigh of relief. The threat from a dangerous pariah caste had been averted.

CHAPTER 2

The Braintree Experiment: Demonstrating the “British Way of Life” to German Prisoners of War in Post-War Britain

Alan Malpass

This chapter examines an overlooked aspect of the re-education of German prisoners of war (POWs for short) in Britain: namely the Braintree Experiment. Initiated in Essex, it sought to familiarise POWs with “the British way of life” through practical demonstration and social interaction, focusing on the prisoners located at the ‘Youth Camp’ at Radwinter near Saffron Walden. While existing studies mention this re-education effort in passing, this chapter offers a fuller account of its origins, organisation, and impact as a quasi-official initiative within the wider re-education scheme conducted in Britain.¹ This investigation draws on records from the Foreign Office and Control Office for Germany and Austria at The National Archives (UK), alongside national and local newspapers, as it reconstructs the Experiment’s development and activities. This chapter shows that sociability was central to British re-education, which was cultivated through organised encounters that

were seen as vital for fostering favourable attitudes towards Britain and its democratic institutions. The Experiment's conversational exercises, excursions, and social gatherings complemented official aims and in retrospect it highlights the role of the voluntary sector. The chapter begins by outlining the wider re-education scheme and initiatives promoting relational contact between prisoners and members of the British public following the relaxation of the non-fraternisation principles.

THE RE-EDUCATION OF GERMAN POWS IN BRITAIN

From comparative studies of British, American, and Soviet approaches to denazification to localised individual initiatives, the effort to democratise Germany after the Second World War has generated a substantial and diverse historiography that illuminates this matter.² Assessments of the British re-education efforts in particular have diverged. David Welch judged it: "... a rather arrogant and foolish notion which fizzled out as it deserved to."³ In response, Michael Balfour – drawing on his own experience in the Psychological War Division and later the Control Commission—argued the aim of re-education: "...to produce a Germany which was a free and responsible society, anchored in the western community of nations ..." had largely been realised.⁴

As part of the wider denazification and democratisation agenda set out in the Potsdam Agreement, Britain established a programme to "re-educate" German POWs who found themselves in its custody.⁵ Retained in Britain until 1948, this captive 'audience' was: "... subject to more concerted British [...] efforts than the population at large."⁶ The need for "some sort of political re-education" was recognised within weeks of the first German POWs being captured. A War Cabinet memorandum of 18 December 1939 noted that the 257 POWs already showed the evident effects of intensive Nazi indoctrination and prolonged isolation from the rest of Europe.⁷ The process began in earnest when responsibility for the re-education of German POWs in Britain and the Middle East was transferred to the Political Warfare Executive (or PWE for short) on 18 September 1944.⁸ Persuading POWs of the merits of democracy was considered as a crucial preparation: "... for the coming struggle of ideologies in post-war Europe."⁹ The programme sought to dismantle Nazi and militarist beliefs and promote an understanding of democratic principles, presenting "the British Commonwealth of Nations as an example of a democratic community in action without demanding the models followed in Britain to be slavishly copied."¹⁰ Aside from compulsory film-screen-

ings of liberation footage from the concentration camps, participation in re-educational activities remained voluntary.¹¹

The re-education effort was administered by the Prisoner of War Division of the Foreign Office abbreviated as the POWD. Initially part of the PWE, the POWD was transferred to the Control Commission for Germany and Austria or COGA on 1 July 1946 following the dissolution of the PWE.¹² Within Britain, the POWD Field Section organised re-education and supervised Training Advisors who reported on the progress of the programme. The Re-education Section distributed films, lectures, and reading materials. A key step was to “screen each prisoner and separate the incorrigibles” from the rest of the captives.¹³ Screening involved interviewing POWs and determining their political outlook.¹⁴ The classification system used in this endeavour—“White” (A+ to A-), “Grey” (B+ to B-), and “Black” (C+ to C-)—mirrored contemporary terminology used for propaganda audiences. “Black” POWs, who were identified as committed Nazis, were removed from camps to prevent them from undermining the re-education efforts and intimidating or harming anti-Nazi POWs. Re-screening of the prisoners later served to measure changes in political attitudes and help determine the repatriation schedules.

Younger POWs were regarded as requiring special attention. This led to the establishment of a dedicated POWD-run facility for youthful POWs. Camp #180 at Radwinter in Essex—known officially as “The Youth Camp”—which held POWs aged seventeen to twenty-six.¹⁵ While a German Working Camp nominally supplied agricultural labour, a rotating group of POWs remained in the camp one day per week for compulsory classes. POWs could choose between afternoon sessions, covering languages, literature, mathematics, and history.¹⁶ The atmosphere that was aimed for was deliberately relaxed: barbed wire was absent and military ranks were not used. Although the War Office and camp commandant oversaw administration, a permanent POWD Training Advisor was allotted to Camp #180. The re-education practises of the Youth Camp contrasted sharply with other camps such as the more selective Training Centre at Wilton Park.¹⁷ Whereas Wilton Park admitted cohorts of around 300 carefully screened “White” POWs for an intensive six-week course, Radwinter—designed for 1,300 POWs—included “Black” elements and imposed a minimum stay of three months.¹⁸ Opened in July 1946, the POWs who transferred to the Youth Camp from elsewhere in Britain were quickly joined by 300 prisoners from Germany and 400 from Canada. Visiting the camp in December 1946, a POWD English Inspector—tasked with reviewing English instruction at the camp—reported: “More

good work is being done in this group than any I have visited, and I would like to suggest a fairly early return to it for my second visit.”¹⁹

“AMBASSADORS IN CHAINS”: POW-CIVILIAN RELATIONS

Interest in the treatment of German POWs was not confined to policymakers. Individuals and pressure-groups concerned with the welfare of POWs increasingly challenged official policies, characterising indefinite retention of the prisoners as a form of “slave labour”.²⁰ The most prominent organisation in Britain was Save Europe Now (SEN), launched in September 1945 by the publisher and philanthropist Victor Gollancz. Initially, SEN focused on the desperate conditions in occupied Germany. Gollancz published critical accounts gathered from surviving Germans through his Left Book Club, including Fenner Brockway’s *German Diary*.²¹ Gollancz himself travelled to the British zone of occupied Germany and published articles condemning aspects of British policy.²²

In 1946, SEN expanded its attention to the fate of German POWs in Britain. It petitioned Prime Minister Clement Attlee to accelerate the repatriation efforts and to overturn the policy of non-fraternisation between prisoners and civilians, warning that the prohibition of social contact risked casting POWs as pariahs and undermining post-war reconciliation.²³ Reports of declining morale—including suicides—fuelled fears that disillusioned POWs might turn to communism as Cold War tensions crystallised. Attlee responded with a phased repatriation scheme in September 1946, when the POW population peaked at around 400,000 individuals. Although fraternisation remained contentious, the ban was relaxed in December 1946, allowing greater civilian-POW interaction.

While national campaigns like SEN put pressure on the government, individuals and local communities—especially church groups—took matters into their own hands. Social contact with German POWs was seen as essential to improve conditions and foster positive views of the British and democratic ideals. Among the first to act was the Quaker Miss Bessie Midgley, who placed a “POWs Welcome” sign on her door in Saffron Walden and offered an ‘open house’ to POWs from Radwinter Youth Camp. She hosted gatherings, including a birthday party for 19-year-old Adam Merz attended by seventy POWs, with the strict understanding that political discussions were absolutely banned.²⁴ In an interview with the *Essex Chronicle*, the 68-year-old Midgley explained that her family had previously operated a canteen for troops during the First World War. Drawing on this experience, she sought to provide the prisoners with a sense of domestic

normality by offering a space where they could play games, read, and discuss the difficulties facing their families in Germany.²⁵

Calls to reach out to the Youth Camp POWs were also made from the pulpit. After the lifting of the non-fraternisation rules, the Reverend Roy Sinker, rector of St. Mary's Church in Saffron Walden, urged parishioners to show goodwill towards German POWs. In a sermon, he described them as "ambassadors in chains" and asked families to welcome a POW from the Youth Camp into their homes for Christmas. The appeal provoked mixed reactions. Some parishioners were offended by the suggestion of entertaining Germans in their homes.²⁶ Nonetheless, at least twenty nearby residents extended invitations to the commandant of the Youth Camp, offering to host POWs on Christmas Day.²⁷ Churches became important spaces for fostering contact between the public and POWs. In January 1947, several concerts were performed by choirs from Radwinter. At Saffron Walden Parish Church, a 200 strong audience listened to a Youth Camp choir perform works by Bach and Mendelssohn. An *Essex Chronicle* correspondent reflected that: "...the presence of men who have lost their freedom seemed, somehow, to be out of place in one of England's finest parish churches, where preachers for centuries have extolled the freedom of the individual."²⁸

Building on these early contacts, a social space for POWs was soon established. On 28 February 1947, Stephen Harris, Secretary of the Saffron Walden Christian Council, announced the opening of a "Club for German Prisoners" in the *Saffron Walden Weekly News*. Held in the Parish Room at St. Mary's Church, it met on Saturday afternoons, offering refreshments and games. Harris appealed for donations and volunteers—preferably of a similar age to the POWs. Though modest, he argued such hospitality offered respite and a glimpse of British life: "Our claim to have a way of life superior to that of Nazism means nothing unless we go out of our way to make some practical expression of it. [...] the Christian Council is glad to be able to make this small contribution towards ensuring that they return to Germany having seen something of England apart from camp life."²⁹

The Club opened on 1 March 1947, with fifty Radwinter POWs attending. Councillor H. Collar, the Mayor of Saffron Walden, inaugurated the event. Addressing POWs through an interpreter, he challenged them to a game of chess—provided they were not too talented. Speaking on behalf of the POWs, Gunter Rubahm remarked: "I doubt whether anyone who has not gone through the experience would be able to appreciate fully what it means to men who have lived for years behind barbed wire to have human contacts again."³⁰ Despite the

appreciation shown by the POWs, local opinion remained divided. Letters to the *Saffron Walden Weekly News* criticised the Club. One ex-soldier quipped: "I suppose the next thing we shall hear is that they're serving the Germans morning tea in bed."³¹ Another urged the Christian Council: "... to get a grip on themselves."³² Several ex-service personnel complained that the suffering of British POWs in German captivity had been forgotten too quickly and resented the perceived lack of concern for British servicemen. As the summer progressed, participation from civilians decreased, leading POWs to express concern that the club was no longer serving its intended purpose. To renew engagement, a garden party was organised at Miss Midgley's home, bringing together 250 prisoners and seventy local residents, including those involved in running the club.³³

THE ORIGINS OF THE BRAINTREE EXPERIMENT

Alongside the opening of the Club for German Prisoners in Saffron Walden, a further initiative was established to familiarise POWs with "the British way of life". The Braintree Experiment sought to supplement the official re-education scheme by offering practical insight into British society through visits, demonstrations, and social encounters. Central to its planning was Tom Driberg, Labour MP for Maldon, who had heard a choir of POWs from Camp #180 who performed at Thaxted Church in January 1947. In an accompanying article, Driberg emphasised the importance of social interaction seeing it as a cornerstone in the re-education of young POWs:

"Whatever their degree of collective 'responsibility' for what was done in Germany – a matter on which historians, humanists and theologians may argue forever – all must have been subjected to the intensive, rigorous indoctrination of the Nazi ideologues. [...]. Those who talked with them at Thaxted were heartened to find them neither filled with hatred nor [...] robots, but normal, young human beings, with a quick and growing apprehension of a way of life and thought different from that in which they had been conditioned as boys. They are learning to question and to argue".³⁴

Driberg was one of a small group of Labour and Liberal MPs who criticised government policies aimed towards German POWs, particularly the restrictions on fraternisation between prisoners and civilians. Although contemporary reports and official documents make clear that he played a leading role in the Experiment, biographical accounts of his life remain silent on his actual involvement.³⁵ Instead, they emphasise his post-war work as a *Reynolds News* correspondent in East Asia, reporting on the exploits of Allied troops in the region. As

a war correspondent, Driberg had seen the harsh realities of captivity, including the Buchenwald Concentration Camp, which he visited as part of an official delegation. His own personal history may also have shaped his interest in the matter: his mother, Amy Driberg, had organised a fund for British POWs during the First World War. His concern with the matter endured beyond the immediate post-war era, and during the Korean War he also visited British captives from that conflict. Whatever his motives, his engagement with the Youth Camp and his contacts with POWD Controller Wing Commander Hitch were crucial to the development of the Experiment.

Although the precise origins are difficult to reconstruct, the planning of and shift in practice began around the time the relaxation of the fraternisation ban was announced. In the weeks before Christmas 1946, representatives from the British Legion, the Women's Voluntary Service, and Workers Educational Alliance met with Braintree townspeople and agreed on the central aim of their efforts: "... a selected group of prisoners should gradually be given, week by week, a complete picture of the life of a small English town."³⁶ A further meeting, attended by around thirty POWs and a similar number of civilians, elected a joint civilian-POW committee to manage the scheme. According to Driberg: "initial shyness soon wore off; hosts and guests were mutually delighted by each other's humanity and intelligence."³⁷ Although surviving details are sparse, it is evident that social interaction lay at the very heart of the Experiment from its inception.

INTRODUCING "THE BRITISH WAY OF LIFE"

The Experiment consisted of a series of sessions introducing POWs to British civic life, industry, and legal institutions. They combined expert instruction and explanations with practical social engagements. On 11 June 1947, sixty civilians and thirty POWs met at the Braintree Town Hall, where the Chairman of the Urban District Council delivered a "lively and informative address" on the workings of local government. A panel, including the Vice-Chairman and Council Surveyor, were enthusiastically questioned by POWs on social and political topics such as rates, elections and housing.³⁸ Subsequent sessions examined local industry. At Crittall Manufacturing Company—famous for producing steel-framed windows—the POWs "learned something of its production methods, of the structure of industry, of provision for workers' welfare, and of Trade Union organisation".³⁹ Their interest led to invitations to local trade unionists for further discussions and tours. Judicial institutions were the focus of another session. On 23 July 1947, forty German POWs—mostly from the Youth Camp, but also from other Essex

camps—visited Braintree police station and the courthouse behind the station which was defined by its art deco architectural designs. Inspector Baker led a tour of the cells and explained British policing procedures. The group was then driven to the Crittall Social Club in Silver End—the model village built by Francis Crittall for his workers—where Alred Jones, clerk to the Braintree Bench, lectured the prisoners on the judicial system. Jones remarked that: “... the English people were not afraid of policemen, but looked upon them as their friends”.⁴⁰ While the POWs “followed the address with marked interest”, it is impossible to know what they made of this claim.⁴¹ The event was not just providing a window into British legal institutions and processes; it was also defined by its social components, even including refreshments that were served before the POWs returned to their camps. Later in the year, a correspondent for the *Essex Chronicle* gave a lecture on the British press to around fifty POWs at the Crittall Social Club.⁴²

From Driberg’s perspective, the Experiment was not intended to replace the official programme. Rather, he framed re-education as something that extended beyond a limited and narrow pedagogical approach, emphasising a broader, exploratory re-education philosophy and a largely practical approach to dealing with the issue. Its blend of demonstration and focus on social interaction aimed not only at presenting modern democracy as an alternative to Nazism, but to make captivity itself more tolerable. Against a backdrop of public concern about the ongoing detention of German POWs, the hope was that they would return home as less resentful individuals, with a clearer understanding of how people could coexist within a democratic and free society. As in the official programme, the aim was not to promote a polished imitation of British democracy that was beyond criticism, but rather to present it as a system that, in general, was an effective way of governance while also ensuring the liberties and rights it promised the British public. The social aspect of this effort was regarded as just as significant as the educational aspect. In response to claims that the initiative amounted to little more than a sequence of lectures on democracy, Driberg emphasised the active and practical character of the programme. Rather than passive listening, the programme enabled POWs to engage directly with everyday life that was lived in a small English town and to interact with local residents on equal social terms.⁴³

“THE MOST USEFUL TYPE OF RE-EDUCATION”

POWD officials recognised the value of the Experiment as a supplement to the official re-education scheme. Shortly after its establishment, POWD Controller Hitch wrote a personnel letter to Driberg thanking him for his work and for set-

ting it up.⁴⁴ Beyond its morale-boosting potential, the Experiment closely aligned with POWD priorities by encouraging discussion among POWs themselves about “the British way of life”. Although participation was necessarily limited to a small group, POWD staff envisaged a multiplicative effect of the programme, whereby selected POWs would relay their experiences to the others within the camp. P. H. MacDonald, who served as Youth Camp Training Advisor, observed that the thirty POWs selected for the first meeting were intended to contribute to the process of re-education by subsequently sharing their experiences with fellow prisoners through talks or discussion groups within the camps.⁴⁵ Reflecting more broadly on the process of re-education, Henry Faulk, head of the POWD Field Section, emphasised the importance of barrack-room discussions in shaping POW attitudes.⁴⁶ As Sam A Erkiletian demonstrated, German camp leaders were crucial in influencing: “... how POWs interpreted democratic norms and [their] overall participation in re-education.”⁴⁷ POWD officials such as Hitch and MacDonald, therefore understood that the Experiment’s greatest value lay not simply in what participants experienced directly, but in how those experiences circulated informally throughout the camps among the POWs.

The initiative also attracted the support of Lord Pakenham, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and, from April 1947, Foreign Secretary overseeing the responsibilities of the British Zone in Germany. Writing to Driberg in June 1947, Pakenham accepted an invitation to address the Experiment and made his support clear:

“... we shall certainly try to extend it to other areas wherever local initiative and facilities make this possible. I consider that this form of contact between P.Ws and British citizens who can tell them about their ordinary life and duties is probably one of the most useful types of re-education, and we shall simulate it as far as we can.”⁴⁸

Pakenham expressed a desire to see the Experiment replicated and noted discussions to establish a similar Youth Camp in Western Command. Despite his enthusiasm, he acknowledged the significant obstacles that had to be overcome. The scheme required handpicked British and German staff, and retaining POWs one day per week for schooling added further expenses. Complaints about the unproductive use of POW labour at Radwinter limited its viability there and ultimately led to its relocation.

RELOCATION TO TRUMPINGTON

Unfortunately, economic productivity outweighed the re-educational aims. In August 1947, the Youth Camp was relocated to Trumpington, near Cambridge. This was due to criticism of the ineffective and unproductive use of POW labour at Radwinter. A War Office official remarked: “The men have had nothing to do and no money in their pockets. They have moped about, and this move will be much better for them if only means keeping them occupied.”⁴⁹

Farmers had criticised the inconsistent labour output, owing to POW workers from Radwinter changing between shifts. Its placement also eroded efficiency, as it was ringed by other camps supplying agricultural labour. Yet relocation proved beneficial in promoting contact between local communities and POWs. Following the relocation to Trumpington, there was a clear effort to build new relationships. MacDonald strongly emphasised the importance of developing practical initiatives inspired by the Braintree Experiment, aimed at giving POWs direct, experiential insight and meaningful interaction with the local residents—which was particularly important due to the predominantly non-academic backgrounds of the POW population.⁵⁰

Although meetings of the Braintree Experiment continued in Essex, Trumpington was too distant for POWs to regularly participate. Nevertheless, POW morale improved following the move. The proximity to Cambridge allowed them to take full advantage of the lifting of fraternisation restrictions. In his September 1947 report, MacDonald noted that: “The people of Cambridge have shown greater co-operation when approached with requests to help in constructive measures to occupy PWs leisure time”.⁵¹

This included plans for a public meeting to form a committee to “promote and co-ordinate help for POWs within the educational sphere”. Two sub-committees were envisaged—one focussing on academic education, arranging university courses and local talks, and another with focus on fostering civic education.⁵² Plans were in place for the MP for Cambridge Borough to speak at the camp on parliamentary work, and the Workers’ Educational Alliance had arranged courses in English literature, politics, and geology. These proved popular, with fifty applicants for twenty spots. To meet demand, a music course was also organised. In addition, several “offers of hospitality” had been received from local churches, including a POW club at St. Columba’s Hall on Sundays.⁵³ Surveying these new opportunities, MacDonald judged the move to Trumpington positively, noting: “we have already much more activity than was possible in Radwinter and there is promise of a great deal more to come”.⁵⁴ The Youth Camp was officially

disbanded in June 1948. The longevity of the Experiment following the move to Trumpington is currently unknown.

IMPACT AND LEGACY

It was hoped that the POWs who participated in the Braintree Experiment would return home to Germany with a positive view of British society and its institutions. Writing to *The Times* in August 1947, Ariel Crittall—of the family associated with the Crittall Manufacturing Company—emphasised the perceived impact of the scheme:

“... the P.o.W.s gain enormous interest and satisfaction from this opportunity of seeing practical democracy at work, and in meeting the English supporters of the scheme. The outstandingly successful occasions were those devoted to local government, industrial methods, and British justice. As a number of prisoners were children [...] in 1933, this is in many cases their first contact with the ideas which we all take for granted – tolerance, humanity, and democratic method. Although there may probably be some mental “resistance,” the majority show an alert interest in their faces as they sit listening and learning of our ways. I should be pleased to send further details to any who may consider starting similar “experiments” in their locality.”⁵⁵

Driberg similarly believed that the Experiment could foster a modest, but enduring influence on post-war Germany. By exposing POWs to the civic and social life of a small English town, he suggested that repatriated POWs might carry with them the positive essences of the political culture they had encountered:

“Braintree with a population of 15,000 souls has an ancient and proud tradition of civic consciousness and enlightened adventure. Some of the ancestors of its present citizens founded the town of Braintree in Massachusetts. In spirit, if not in name, a future Germany may have its own Braintrees.”⁵⁶

The official patronage the Experiment enjoyed indicates that it was regarded as a meaningful complement to the formal re-education programme. Michael Balfour later argued that: “...the most important part of the re-education effort [...] was rebuilding the links between Germany and the Western World”, insisting that “... what did most to rebuild those links was personal contact.”⁵⁷ Driberg echoed this belief, maintaining that direct and practical exposure to democratic institutions, combined with informal discussion and social interaction, was essential if German POWs were to be convinced that British-style democracy was not only viable but also desirable. The POWD likewise recognised that socialisation

efforts—particularly among those passing through the Youth Camp—was central to successful re-education. In this respect, the Braintree Experiment reflected the official assumptions that ideological reorientation was best achieved through lived experience rather than didactic instruction alone.

While the pedagogical and social opportunities the Experiment offered were celebrated, whether it succeeded in encouraging POWs to internalise the essences of “the British way of life” is ultimately impossible to determine. Quantitative evidence linking participation to attitudinal change has not survived. Screening figures suggest that Nazi tendencies among Youth Camp POWs diminished over time, but the actual causation behind this shift in attitude remains uncertain. Writing in 1947, the sociologist Viola Klein observed the following: “Although the [Youth] camp is [...] no factory to turn out perfect little democrats on the conveyor belt, it leaves a lasting impression on most minds.”⁵⁸ Letters from repatriated POWs thanking Youth Camp staff suggest appreciation, but none refer directly to the Braintree Experiment. Given the limited number of participants, any assessment of its concrete impact must remain cautious. Henry Faulk later claimed the Experiment “was so successful that it was widely imitated throughout the camps in Britain”, but while such initiatives proliferated in different ways throughout many camps, the extent to which they mirrored the Braintree model is unclear.⁵⁹

Although the concrete impact of the Experiment is difficult to measure, the organisers’ confidence is unmistakable. While the label ‘Experiment’ suggested a radical method, it was hardly original. As Susan Carruthers has claimed, British re-education ‘emerged from national and imperial traditions’, later applied to post-war occupations and counterinsurgencies.⁶⁰ Faith in the efficacy of Allied propaganda combined with pride in the methods of British schooling—particularly the traditions associated with Oxford and Cambridge – underpinned the conviction that the Germans could be reshaped through exposure to the ‘right’ influences. As Nicolas Pronay has noted, this reflected a broader cultural belief that: “... that the right kind of education could transform a boy born of the lower orders into a gentleman.”⁶¹ This assumption is echoed in contemporary evaluations of the Braintree initiative, albeit, with an emphasis on the civilising potential of social interaction and civic encounters with civilians.

Re-education, including the Braintree Experiment, was never simply a humanitarian or pedagogical enterprise. It allowed British participants to showcase a carefully curated—often implicitly upper-middle-class—vision of “the British way of life”. According to its architects, this was not a rigid model but a lived experience rooted in civic engagement, mutual respect, and democratic

practices. It was not without flaws, but generally worked well. As Matthew Frank has argued, British responses to the German refugee crisis allowed the British to reaffirm their commitment to 'traditional British values' and show that six years of war had not left the country morally browbeaten.⁶² Similarly, initiatives fostering contact between civilians and POWs, including the Braintree Experiment, offered a stage on which local communities could celebrate institutional stability and present themselves as exemplars of democratic virtue. In this sense, the Experiment spoke as much to British self-perception as to German reorientation. At the same time, it would be wrong to dismiss its humanitarian dimension. It facilitated meaningful encounters at a local level, rehumanising those long defined as enemies. For POWs whose formative years had unfolded within the Nazi system, it offered practical evidence of genuine interest in their welfare at a moment when their world had collapsed.

The repatriation of German POWs was completed in 1948. On 13 July, the *Daily Mirror* reported the departure of the *Biarritz*, the last ship carrying POWs home. The repatriates' experiences and thoughts about their time in Britain and 'the British way of life' were not surveyed in the article. Instead, the article drew attention to Bob, a three-year-old mongrel, who was pictured among onlookers at Harwich Port. Born in a POW camp near Colchester, Essex, Bob had become a constant companion, accompanying the POWs from camp to camp and remained by their side as they boarded the *Biarritz*.⁶³ As the ship departed: "Bob sat disconsolately on the quayside. His howl [...] the only emotion noticeable."⁶⁴ Bob's fate nearly led to tragedy. While at Camp #260 in Bury St Edmunds—one of the last operational POW camps in Britain—orders came that POW pets needed to either be rehomed or destroyed. Fifty-six dogs and cats were euthanised, with Bob scheduled to be among them. Fortunately, the British camp staff intervened and adopted him. Studies of the re-education efforts on POWs, and stories of war more generally, often neglect the contribution of animals.⁶⁵ The human-canine bond between the POWs and Bob highlights the informal, affective dimensions of re-education which was the focal point of the Braintree Experiment. Bob may have provided emotional support, contributing to their re-socialisation in ways other people never could. Future studies might extend beyond inter-human encounters to consider the role of animals in this regard.

CHAPTER 3

Adult Education in German Refugee Camps in Denmark following the Second World War: Study Circles and Democratic Learning

Palle Rasmussen and Karen E. Andreasen¹

INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, Denmark experienced two substantial inflows of German nationals. The first consisted of soldiers who invaded and occupied the country in April 1940. The second was very different, comprising German civilian refugees who arrived during the winter of 1944 and spring of 1945. When the German forces in Western Europe surrendered in May 1945, there were close to 250,000 refugees in Denmark.² A swift return to Germany proved impossible for most, and many were required to remain in Denmark for an extended period of time. In the autumn of 1945, there were still more than 200,000 refugees in Denmark. In response to this situation, the Danish government established the Refugee Administration in September 1945, which soon afterwards set up two committees in November 1945—one focusing on education and one focusing on refugee enlightenment through information—responsible for schooling,

education, information distribution, and cultural activities for children, young people, and adults.³ The two committees planned and implemented a wide range of activities in the camps in which the refugees and former soldiers were held, some of which were primarily aimed at young people and adults. An important underlying principle of these initiatives was their democratic foundation, and some were explicitly intended to promote democratic education and learning. These included organised study group activities, some focusing on the ideas and practice of democracy, which constituted particularly distinctive contexts for dialogue, reflection, and debate.⁴ The participating adults were often concerned with, or personally engaged in, such issues, and reactions and discussions could be intense, all of which were augmented by the dramatic years of the Second World War.

This chapter sheds light on the educational and informational activities planned and implemented in the refugee camps, with a particular focus on the study groups, their purpose, and the challenges entailed in their implementation. By focusing on attempts to promote democratic learning and development through dialogue and study group activities, and by recognising the special conditions under which these efforts unfolded—namely within refugee camps isolated from Danish society by barbed wire fences—this chapter explores what characterised these activities, the nature of the ideas underlying them, and the challenges that were involved in the facilitation of them.⁵

This chapter draws on primary sources from the Refugee Administration's archive found in the Danish National Archives, with a particular focus on the records of the Information Committee, including an example of a study group process narrated by its leader. This is supplemented by documents from the Odense City Archives, memoirs written by refugees, and other relevant publications regarding the subject. The selected study group example is highlighted because it documents a process taking place over the course of several months and contains a wealth of detail that helps elucidate the core of the matter that is investigated here. The testimonies and anecdotes from participants are drawn from the relatively few existing instances found in memoirs where such activities are mentioned and they have been chosen to highlight the key points and distinctive aspects of this work with the German refugees and former soldiers.⁶

The German Refugees in Denmark

Towards the end of the Second World War, the large number of German citizens mentioned in the introduction arrived in Denmark as refugees, having been

forcibly evacuated. They came from East Prussia, fleeing the advancing Soviet army. In February 1945, Germany ordered a general evacuation of these civilians from East Prussia. Denmark, which had been occupied by German troops since 1940, became one of the destinations for this flow of refugees. After the end of the war in the spring of 1945, roughly 50,000 were able to return to Germany immediately, but more than 200,000 refugees remained in Denmark.⁷ Despite the efforts of the Danish authorities to secure quick repatriation, such decisions were not left to the individual countries in which the refugees were located but were determined by the Allied High Command in Europe. A swift return of the refugees located in Denmark was therefore not considered possible.⁸

Following their initial accommodation in temporary lodgings all across Denmark, dedicated refugee camps were gradually established after the German capitulation, and camp administration regulations were drafted and adopted in the autumn of 1945.⁹ The camp regulations did not permit refugees to have contact with the surrounding population and Danish society at large; they were to remain isolated in the camps until they could be repatriated back to Germany. By the autumn of 1946, many camps of different sizes had been established. The largest camp was known as the Oksbøl Refugee Camp which was located in the western part of Jutland and accommodated around 35,000 people.¹⁰

The living space of the refugee camp constitutes a unique kind of social environment which determines the human existence found there and has been the subject of much sociological and cultural research and analysis. The sociologist Erving Goffman developed his theory of total institutions through the study of secluded institutional settings that are both physically and socially isolated from the surrounding society.¹¹ The specific nature of refugee camps has also been analysed and conceptualised by ethnologist and anthropologist Michel Agier, who highlighted three primary characteristics governing these spaces. One is extraterritoriality, as camps are often located in remote areas. Another is exceptionality, since camps operate as exceptions to national legislation and are therefore governed by legal and administrative frameworks that differ from those that apply to the society that surrounds the camp. The third characteristic embodies social exclusion, as the inhabitants of the camps are not seen as belonging to the society and culture of the country in which the camps are located. These characteristics of refugee camps naturally make effective and meaningful education and learning activities challenging. Despite this, such activities can be argued to carry indispensable importance and meaning, because they provide social

engagement within the otherwise monotonous and routine survival conditions of camp life itself and may offer potentially valuable perspectives.¹²

THE DANISH REFUGEE ADMINISTRATION AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

When the Danish government established the Refugee Administration in September 1945, the Danish Social Democratic politician and former minister Johannes Kjærbøl was appointed as its head. Among the major tasks facing the Refugee Administration was the organisation of schooling for children, as well as the provision of information, education, and cultural opportunities for refugees of all ages found in the camps.

Historically speaking, the utilisation of state power within the context of refugee camps has most often been enacted to control refugees and their behaviours rather than providing them with meaningful opportunities.¹³ The Danish refugee camps were, of course, also subject to strict measures of control. However, in contrast to many other historical cases, the Danish government assumed responsibility, not only for providing health and welfare for the refugees in the camps, but also for offering a wide range of cultural activities to them. Many of these activities directly involved and were primarily organised by the German refugees themselves. The Danish government also sought to establish forms of in-camp governance through which refugees could participate in everyday decision-making, allowing the foundational principles of democracy and citizenship to shape the practice of the camps. Schooling for children and young people, as well as learning activities for adults, were implemented to reach the intended goals of the camps. Non-formal adult learning activities—often referred to in the Danish educational tradition as “enlightenment”—formed an important part of this effort.

The rules for the camps, which were decided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, stipulated that the children should be taught lessons or play at least six hours a day, and that the older refugees themselves should help organise this within a framework decided by the Danish authorities.¹⁴ After the establishment of the Refugee Administration, the framework for educational activities was gradually developed by the administration’s two committees for education and information respectively. In November 1945 a new regulation was also issued for the camps. It is this phase of the development of the camps and their activities that will be the primary focus of investigation in this chapter.

The efforts of the Refugee Administration and its emphasis on education trying to teach the values of democracy should be understood in light of developments taking place in both international and Danish contexts in the years before

and while the camps were established. At the international level, key events included the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Conference which were held towards the end of the war. It was here that the heads of state of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union discussed and agreed upon the roles and responsibilities each country would have in governing Germany following the war. The final agreements reached at Potsdam emphasised the values of democracy and stated that one objective of the post-war effort was to prepare "...for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis." They further declared that "German education shall be so controlled as completely to eliminate Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas."¹⁵

These objectives were also important and foundational for the efforts of the Danish authorities. Furthermore, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which was established in November 1945, also emphasised that education was a key component for the development of peaceful societies.¹⁶

At the national level, the approach to education in the refugee camps was influenced by the political climate dominating Denmark at the end of the war, but also by educational initiatives that were undertaken before and during the war. In the decade preceding the war and during the occupation, the political climate in the country had been shaped by Social Democratic governments, which introduced initiatives and reforms within the field of education heavily championing democratic ideals and values giving them a central role.¹⁷

At the end of the war, a new Danish coalition government was formed led by the Social Democrat Vilhelm Buhl as Prime Minister. Although it existed only for a brief period, it was during this time that the Refugee Administration was established. Some of the actors involved in the educational reforms before and during the war became members of the Refugee Administration and took part in the planning and implementation of educational and informational activities. Social Democratic policies, values and ideas can therefore reasonably be assumed to have influenced the political doctrines and goals of the Refugee Administration and its work.¹⁸

EDUCATION, ENLIGHTENMENT AND IDEAS OF DEMOCRACY

From the outset, Kjærboel emphasised the importance of education and information activities in the camps and argued that these should be based on democratic ideals and values, yet the Refugee Administration needed to stay politically

neutral in its guiding operating principles. Following the establishment of the Refugee Administration, he delivered several speeches in which this view was emphasised and justified, noting that many of the refugees had little familiarity with democracy and democratic ideals. In his view, educating in this way had to be regarded as a moral obligation. He expressed this, for example, in a speech broadcast by the Danish Radio Service on 11 December 1945: "However, it was clear to us that we had a moral duty to initiate such educational and informational activities on a democratic but politically neutral basis."¹⁹ He adds that after: "... 5 years of Nazi occupation, we all have the goal of eliminating all forms of Nazi sentiment and beliefs."²⁰ In another speech, the thoughts behind the information activities were elaborated on by Kjærbøl when he stated the following: "... 13 years of Nazism have made Germans completely unfamiliar with the social conditions that dominate the world today. That is why we need to launch further information activities, for example in the form of lectures, distribution of pamphlets, establishment of libraries and the like."²¹ Kjærbøl acknowledged the challenges posed by this endeavour, including securing a sufficient number of qualified teachers and providing fit for purpose textbooks and materials in the camps.

The Refugee Administration's Education and Information Committee planned and initiated a comprehensive range of educational and informational activities, including schooling for children and young people, information initiatives primarily aimed at adults, short courses for adults responsible for teaching or pedagogical tasks, as well as education and information regarding the ideals and values of democracy. This latter element was also reflected in the structure of everyday camp governance, which partly drew on democratic principles. Despite the inherent constraints imposed by the physical confinement of the refugees in the camps and the many other practical challenges involved, "democracy" appears to have been a key value defining the way the Danish authorities approached the task at hand. This approach was strongly influenced by the ideas of the Danish philosopher and theologian Hal Koch, who emphasised democracy as a concept grounded in dialogue and as a way of life. Koch expressed these ideas in a Danish newspaper article from 1945, writing: "This is Democracy. It is the conversation (dialogue) and mutual understanding and respect that is the essence of democracy. (...) Thus understood, democracy is something far more comprehensive than a specific form of social governance. It's a way of life"²²

The concept of democracy that was emphasised by Hal Koch epitomises the idea that it is far more than just a form of government: it is a set of practices that can engender a complete way of life. In many respects, it corresponds with the

conceptions of democracy that were developed by modern critical social science scholars such as Jürgen Habermas, who emphasized the role of public communication and debate as a cornerstone in democratic governance.²³ However, promoting and teaching such ideas in enclosed and segregated refugee camps might seem ambitious and contradictory. It would require sensitivity, pedagogical considerations, and a well-planned approach that fully accounted for the special contexts that defined the very nature of the camps.

In October 1945, the Education Committee of the Refugee Administration consisted of twelve Danish and German members with a wide range of expertise in schooling and education. Key members included the head of the Refugee Administration, Johannes Kjærbøl, and Johannes Novrup who was an adviser in the Danish Ministry of Education. The committee also included German émigrés, among them the former Regional Minister of Justice and Education Hans Sievers and former teacher Walter Schulze.²⁴

Shortly after the establishment of the Education Committee, an Information Committee was also established. Some of its thirteen members were also members of the Education Committee. Members included Johannes Kjærbøl who functioned as chairman; Poul Hansen, head of Esbjerg Workers' Folk High School and of the committee's activities; Jens Th. Arnfred, principal of Askov Folk High School; Christian Christiansen, Member of the Danish Parliament, co-founder and business manager of the Danish Workers' Education Association; and Johannes Novrup. German émigrés on the committee included Hans Sievers and the politically active Social Democrat Karl Rowold, who served as secretary. Several of the German members of the two committees had previously been active in the German Social Democratic Party but were forced to flee Germany after the Nazis came to power in 1933.²⁵

Several of the appointees were active Social Democrats, and some of the Danish members had, in the preceding years, been involved in the development and implementation of a new type of national schooling for young people. Some, including several of the German members, had taken part in resistance activities during the war and had contributed to the production of the magazine *Deutsche Nachrichten*, which circulated anti-Nazi propaganda. After the war, the magazine continued to be published on a weekly basis, now under the auspices of the Refugee Administration.²⁶

Above, the chapter briefly outlined some of the many initiatives and types of activity that were planned and implemented through the education scheme that was enacted by the Refugee Administration. Below the focus will shift to

the study group activities that were conducted in the camps with the ideals of democracy as the main theme.

STUDY GROUP ACTIVITY. DEMOCRATIC LEARNING IN STUDY GROUPS

In April 1946, the information committee of the Refugee Administration issued a ten-page document titled: "Plan for a Youth School in the German Refugee Camps". The activities outlined herein included lectures, youth school teaching and study group activities.²⁷ Information activities aimed at young refugees were considered particularly important given the propaganda and experiences that most German children and young people carried with them from their time in the Hitler Youth organisation and its Nazi ideology teachings. The guidelines in the document emphasised that the plan should be initiated as soon as possible, with a goal of being implemented by 15 September that same year.²⁸ The committee wrote: "The first task must consist in finding a sufficient number of assistants for the Youth school by carrying out Hal Koch study groups for leaders and teachers. (...) it must be emphasized that a study group in a democratic spirit can only be carried out if the participants have volunteered."²⁹ Furthermore, it is stipulated in the document that "this study group activity for potential teachers should be carried out at 2 to 3 double lessons a week".³⁰ This refers to a specific plan for the training of the teachers who were to lead the study groups. It was meant to guide people who were considered to be suitable teachers and educational leaders, and they were to complete Hal Koch study groups before teaching them. In this way, Hal Koch's writings and ideas about democracy came to play an important role in the general dissemination of the ideas of democracy and democratic practices in general during this time.

This outcome can probably be seen in light of the respect Koch wielded in Denmark during the occupation, as the pragmatic chairman of the Danish Youth Association formed in 1940 that functioned as a unifying organisation for youth associations. His book *What is Democracy?*,³¹ published in 1945, was well suited for the project, and many members of the committee were, like Koch, affiliated with the Social Democrats and the Danish folk high school movement, which was highly receptive to ideas such as these. In March and April 1946, *Deutsche Nachrichten* published a series of five articles based on chapters from Koch's book. Questions were also prepared to accompany the texts, in order to support the study circles in the camps and to promote constructive debate. For example, for the article titled "Freedom", the following questions were formulated: "1) Can democracy be secured through a constitution? 2) Can democracy offer absolute

and unrestricted freedom? 3) If not, what restrictions on freedom may be introduced?"³² The texts were also subjected to discussion in the magazine. For example, a refugee wrote the following: "In the series of articles: study circles by Hal Koch on "What is democracy?" it is emphasized that voting is not the essential thing about democracy. But the vote must reflect the will of the people. Again, the question is asked: 'Is the majority always right?' In a general sense, the answer to this question can only be yes because the majority also bears the consequences, so in reality the responsibility."³³

Koch's contributions were used in various forms of teaching and information activities, where they constituted the basis for debates in the study groups.³⁴ Regarding the study groups, it was emphasised in the plan that these could create opportunities for personal development and for the formation of desirable anti-autocratic attitudes. For example, it was stated that: "The importance of the study groups lies in the personal development they can bring the participants into, and it seems clear that the effect on opinions formed by participants can be spread from them to less developed people in the camps."³⁵

The guide emphasised the importance of including both genders and all different social groups, so that the activities could contribute to personal development and social integration forming across the differences determined by gender and social circumstances, while also facilitating the dissemination of desirable ideas and content.³⁶ The study group methodology is best understood in detail through formulations like the following:

"A study group normally works in such a way that the participants take turns presenting the readings for the class in an introduction. (...) In practice, the lessons should probably be completed as conversation sessions without introductory speakers. This means that the teacher or leader is always the prime mover, who point by point discusses the material with the young people. It is sound method for the teacher to prepare for each lesson questions for the readings and address them to the circle."³⁷

The intention of the study group activity was largely based on an approach of inquiry, thereby fostering inquisitive dialogue among the participants ultimately constituted through a dialectical method. It was designed to provide a framework for the participants' personal reflections and to contribute to the formation of desirable changes in attitudes and personal development that would favour democracy as an institution and way of life. While these activities were participant-driven, the study group leader remained as the 'prime mover' of the ongoing dialogue.

The study group practice had evolved within the Danish folk high school milieu that was dominant around the early part of the twentieth century as a means of ensuring public education and learning. It corresponded well with the ideas of Danish scholar N.F.S. Grundtvig and his followers with regard to education and popular enlightenment, which had gained a strong foothold in Denmark during the nineteenth century. Study groups could be organised as self-directed activities based on inquisitive dialogue among participants, and they proved highly successful in the Danish labour movement's adult education initiatives from the early twentieth century. As part of adult education in Germany during the Weimar years (1918–1933), the study groups were also an activity with which some of the refugees and the German émigrés affiliated with the information committee were familiar.³⁸

From the perspective of the Refugee Administration, the study group methodology offered significant potential for attitude re-formation and desirable personal development as part of the activities provided to the refugees. In the camps, the study group format created favourable opportunities to ground discussions and content in the specific circumstances and experiences of the participants that were likely to take part in such activities. In addition to texts on democracy, the guidelines also proposed the use of texts on subjects relevant to the general situation of the refugees, thereby providing opportunities to discuss issues such as democratic practices even within the confinement of an undemocratic setting such as a refugee camp.

REFUGEE EXPERIENCES WITH STUDY GROUP WORK

Key elements of adult education in the camps included lectures, reading circles, and the study group activities described above. These study group activities covered a wide range of topics, allowing for dialogue on a diverse range of issues and from a multitude of different perspectives. The adult education programmes in the camps were generally defined by a broad cultural focus without explicit political content, although more overtly political issues relating to democracy were also addressed.

Reports from the camps submitted to the Refugee Administration indicate that numerous lectures were given on a wide range of topics, cultural subjects were particularly popular, but lectures of a political nature were also prevalent. In Kløvermarken—a large camp consisting of 17,000–18,000 refugees—a very high number of participants were reported to participate in the lectures on “What is democracy?”, which were to be delivered in all camps: 1,100 refugees partici-

pated in one session and 1,600 at another.³⁹ In 1946, there were also four study circles on the topic “What is democracy?”, each with between thirteen and thirty participants. The number of participants may not seem high, but a key point in study group activity was that the ideas could spread from the individuals in these groups to the rest of the refugees.⁴⁰

It was decided that study groups on democracy should be held in all Danish camps, and they were also mentioned in the reports. For example, reports from camps in the Copenhagen district in early 1947 noted that: “The Teachers’ Further Training takes place in a study group (...). All the teachers participate in Neue’s political study circles.”⁴¹

In the reports prepared by the Refugee Administration’s staff from the camps, activities linked to study groups based on Hal Koch’s texts, and on the theme of democracy, were also documented. Examples of this include reports from the Stabrand and Tirstrup camps, where it was noted that: “All young people participate in the study group “What is democracy?” for two hours a week.”⁴²

However, reports also indicate that these study group activities were carried out to varying degrees of success. This must be seen in light of the specific context of the refugee camps, which could highlight ambiguous outcomes in democratic learning, as described by one participant: “The female teachers at the vocational school were taught about democracy by a Dane no more than 24 years old, and he was often cornered by the brash matrons with questions concerning the contradictions between theory and practice.”⁴³

Karl Blutau, who for a period served as cultural manager in the Esbjerg area, reflected in a report on cultural work on the educational activities related to democracy. He described his encounter with resistance to the overall effort and even questioned the feasibility of pursuing such educational initiatives: “As for the establishment of the Hal Koch study circles, I can refer to my previous report from the Esbjerg district. As in that case, after detailed discussions with German colleagues, I have formed the impression that there is no interest among camp residents in discussing the problems of democracy behind barbed wire under the guard of machine guns.”⁴⁴

He notes, however, that there was considerable interest among the refugees in knowing what was happening in the wider world. The same issue is highlighted in a report by a Danish leader of another study group on democracy: “20 April 1946. (...) Today things came to a head, prompted by Hal Koch’s short chapter on freedom—a sensitive subject in this cramped camp, where they have now been

confined for a year. 'Why do we have to stay here? Why can't we at least go out and do some work, dig our own peat, help the farmers?'"⁴⁵

That the task of carrying out these activities could be challenging is thus evident in the various reports from the committee. Discussing the concept of 'freedom' as Koch's text suggested, must have appeared paradoxical to a refugee who lived under the circumstances of camp-life that defined their everyday experience. This points to evident limitations of the educational activities. A report on study group work in the camp Karrebæksminde provides a more elaborate example of this which will be investigated below.

PROCESS AND CONTENT IN A STUDY GROUP

As described, the aim of the study group format was to contribute to democratic education through thematically based activities that sought to involve participants in discussions and reflection through dialogue. However, the study group activities themed around democracy could create tensions among the refugees and were carried out to a varying degree of success which is illustrated by the examples above. Democracy was a subject that could provoke a multitude of different opinions and strong reactions because of the philosophical and political wounds that were inflicted by Nazism and the Second World War. It is important to remember how the refugees had been subject to strong cultural propaganda and political messaging over the last couple of decades in Germany. The conditions for teaching and learning in the refugee camps were not exactly ideal which did not help matters, it is understandable that such study circles could be fraught with conflict. This becomes evident when reading a report from the Karrebæksminde camp prepared by a study group leader who served there.⁴⁶

The refugee camp in Karrebæksminde was relatively small and existed only for a short period of time. The leader of the study group, a provost responsible for the group between May and August 1946, details in his account that it was important to earn the participants' trust and to ensure that they felt able to express themselves freely without fear of consequences, something he suggests was achieved relatively quickly. Regarding the participants in this particular group, he reports an average attendance of around thirty refugees, with women outnumbering men roughly two to one; most were between thirty and fifty years of age, although a few were older.⁴⁷ The meetings lasted between one and a half to two hours. He continues: "As might be expected, the study group largely represented the more mature and intellectually engaged segment of the camp's population. Among the participants were a university professor, who took part in leading the

group, an engineer, a teacher, two farmers, a foreman, several female teachers, two officers' wives, the wives of a doctor, a dentist, and a clergyman, as well as two nurses and several middle-class housewives. Most were from urban backgrounds.⁴⁸ He further notes that many of the participants held types of responsibility within the camp, including roles such as teachers, sanitation workers, and block leaders. One of the participants, a German professor, assisted the Danish official in leading the group.⁴⁹

Regarding the participants' attitudes, he reported that he did not detect any overt expressions of Nazism. As the group included several individuals entrusted with responsibilities within the camp, this was perhaps to be expected. Hal Koch's articles were used as the basis for discussion, and they proved to provide a productive starting point for many conversations.⁵⁰ However, he noted that the participants were more concerned with the practical aspects of democracy rather than the more philosophical and abstract dimensions of the political doctrine, such as the concept of 'freedom' and its inherent meanings. Each session began with the leader presenting a section of a Hal Koch article, which some participants had read in advance. The professor then provided a summary, after which the floor was opened for discussion. Following the discussion, the leader summarised the session and outlined themes for the next meeting. At the first meeting of the circle, the discussion focused on the issue of Germany's guilt and responsibility for the war. While the participants did not defend Nazism, the leader nevertheless experienced: "... a certain distrust of democracy and a pronounced tendency to defend Germany by shifting as much of the blame as possible onto others. (...) The professor's view was that the other powers had not given Germany a fair chance when, under the Weimar Republic, it was genuinely seeking to build a democracy, and they had thereby paved the way for Hitler."⁵¹

As study circle leader, the provost saw this debate as unfruitful in relation to the goal of the exercise. In light of this, when the circle gathered for the second time, he stated:

"... some remarks about the purpose of the circle (...) I then gave several stark examples of German injustices and cruelties in Denmark, including accounts recently shared with me by a personal acquaintance, and explained that it was against this background that we must understand our task and, through cooperation, seek a new and better way forward. This made a certain impression and helped to curb the tendency towards self-defence."⁵²

He followed up on this approach in the ongoing efforts of the circle:

“In the subsequent meetings, where I sought to clarify democratic principles, the discussion readily turned to current and contentious issues (...). At the end of Hal Koch’s series of articles, he addresses the fundamental ideas on which democracy rests: law, freedom, and human dignity. This gave rise to discussions about broader outlooks on life. I sought to show that democracy as such is merely a form, the content of which is determined by the spirit of the people (...). This was met with lively support and no objections from those present.”⁵³

Following the completion of the study group, the provost goes on to describe how two new groups meant for young people were established and led by former participants of the initial group: one of the groups focused on democracy, which was led by the professor, and another on Goethe, was led by a woman. The study group leader noted that:

“... at least some of the participants in the study group at the Karrebæksminde camp left with an impression of a view of life and society that stood in stark contrast to that from which they had come, and of a human outlook that made them more open.”⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

The sources describing the study circles on democracy that were planned by the Refugee Administration illustrate several key aspects of the endeavour. On the one hand, they describe how study circles were implemented, how they were intended to function, and finally how the underlying ideas of the project were aimed at fostering democratic learning. On the other hand, they describe the challenges of such activities in a refugee camp setting and how it affects dialogue, learning, and reflection which was apparent when the accounts of the participants were included. The sources unfortunately do not document the extent to which the study circles were implemented across all Danish camps; the number of available accounts are limited and represent only individual perspectives. However, reports from the inspectors and cultural leaders in the camps make it reasonable to assume that many refugees either participated with genuine interest or at least became aware of the theme and format of such activities. This positive engagement is also reflected in participants’ accounts, as illustrated in the examples above.

The sources indicate that, despite the contradictions—or perhaps because of them—the study groups functioned largely as intended by providing a space in which opinions could be exchanged and the nature and potential of democracy could be discussed. The strong views that could emerge in these debates are also

evident in the accounts, and leading such study groups was undoubtedly not always an easy task. However, the activity could also make a positive contribution to everyday camp life. One refugee later wrote that: “The lectures were of key importance for coexistence and for the German administration of the camp on a democratic basis.”⁵⁵

It is difficult to assess the long-term role of the study group activities in terms of how much the refugees took the lessons to heart and brought democratic ideals with them back to Germany. However, the activities undoubtedly provided meaningful engagement and distraction for the refugees in an everyday reality that was characterised by uncertainty, isolation, and the absence of family and homeland. As the study group leader puts it in his account: “How much of this will bear fruit in the future no one can know, but through the cultural work in the refugee camps Denmark has at least made a modest contribution to addressing what is perhaps the most important and difficult problem in Europe today: the building of a new, democratic, and peaceful Germany.”⁵⁶

CHAPTER 4

Teaching Democracy: Denazification and Democratisation among German Refugees in Denmark, 1945–1947

John V. Jensen

Since the late 1990s, historical research regarding the German refugees in Denmark (1945–49) has largely focused on their health, living conditions and treatment, which has attracted both attention and criticism from many places.¹ This chapter, however, does not address illness and death suffered by the refugees in the camps, but rather it focuses on a largely overlooked aspect: the efforts of the Danish authorities to combat Nazism and promote democratisation among the approximately 200,000 German refugees who were left in Denmark after the war—and in particular among the more than 50,000 school-age children.²

These efforts marked the beginning of what may be described as a democratic experiment that was conducted in the German refugee camps. More specifically, the chapter examines the background of the Danish initiatives and their subsequent development. It explores how the Danish authorities assumed control over

the education efforts within the camps and how schooling was employed as a tool in order to foster ideological transformation. This included, among other measures, the selection and screening of German teachers for the project. Based on a broader study of six selected refugee camps, the chapter analyses how this task was implemented in practice.

RESEARCH AND SOURCES

The history of the German refugees has on several occasions been the subject of scholarly attention. Henrik Havrehed's doctoral dissertation *De tyske flygtninge i Danmark 1945–49* (1987) provides a survey of most aspects of the refugees' history. The wide thematic scope of the study, combined with the fact that Havrehed in practice came to align closely with the perspectives presented in the Refugee Administration's own report, *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945–49* (1950), constitutes its principal scholarly weakness which means it cannot provide the full historical picture.

In 1999, Kirsten Lylloff published the article *Kan lægeløftet gradbøjes?* ("Can the Hippocratic Oath Be Qualified?"), which was followed by the dissertation *Barn eller fjende?* ("Child or Enemy?", 2005). In both cases, she advanced a sharp revisionist critique of both Havrehed's interpretation and the position of the Refugee Administration. At the same time, the focus shifted from a broad "all-round" narrative to the more specific field of health and medical care, which constituted a clear analytical strength.

In recent years, however, this revisionist approach has been challenged. This applies, for example, to Leif Hansen Nielsen's *Tyske flygtninge i Nordslesvig 1945–48* (2013) and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Thomas Harder's *De Uønskede* ("The Unwanted", 2020), as well as to my own contributions to this topic. In various articles and books, I have adopted what might, for the sake of convenience, be termed a post-revisionist position, which includes my book, *Tyskere på flugt* ("Germans on the Run", 2020).

Recently, attention has been given to the education and enlightenment initiatives that were conducted in the German refugee camps. I have contributed to this line of research with the article *Mellem nazisme og demokrati. Skole- og undervisningsarbejdet blandt de tyske flygtninge i Danmark 1945–49* ("Between Nazism and Democracy: Schooling and Educational Work among German Refugees in Denmark, 1945–49"), which was published in *Historisk Tidsskrift* (2021). This research has since been followed by Karen Egedal Andreasen and Palle Rasmussen's book *Uddannelse og oplysning i de danske flygtningelejre efter Anden*

Verdenskrig (“Education and Enlightenment in the Danish Refugee Camps after the Second World War”, 2024) and most recently by my doctoral dissertation, *De må opdrages til at forstå... Nazismebekæmpelse og demokratisering i de tyske flygtningelejre i Danmark med særligt henblik på skole- og undervisningsområdet 1945–47* (“They Must Be Educated to Understand... Denazification and Democratization in the German Refugee Camps in Denmark, with Particular Reference to Schooling and Education, 1945–47”, 2025), which places particular emphasis on the denazification efforts within the school system of the camps. The present chapter of this anthology primarily builds on the findings of that dissertation.

BACKGROUND: COLLAPSE, POTSDAM, AND DEMOCRACY

During the winter of 1944 and the spring of 1945, several million German civilians fled from the advancing forces of the Red Army, which were rapidly moving westward towards Berlin in order to crush Nazism and Hitler’s Third Reich. Even before this, a secret order issued by Hitler on 4 February 1945 had further accelerated the refugee movements from east to west. In the following months, up to 5 May 1945, tens of thousands of German refugees arrived in Denmark. There, the German Plenipotentiary, Werner Best, in cooperation with the German Wehrmacht, was responsible for accommodating the incoming masses.³

Immediately after liberation, the Danish authorities estimated that approximately 240,000 German refugees were present in the country. These were interned in camps with the intention of rapid repatriation back to Germany.⁴ As late as May and June 1945, the Danish government still hoped that the civilian German refugees would soon leave the country. This did not occur, and when the figures were revised during late summer, they showed that just north of 200,000 German refugees remained in Denmark, with no prospect of immediate repatriation.

The broad geopolitical outlines for the future of Germany and Europe were drawn by the Allied victors: the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain. Already at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the question of the future denazification of the German population had been articulated and resulted in the following key terms:

“The establishment of order in Europe and the rebuilding of national economic life must be achieved by processes which will enable the liberated peoples to destroy the last vestiges of nazism and fascism and to create democratic institutions of their own choice.”⁵

At the subsequent Potsdam Conference in July–August 1945, it was heavily emphasised that the primary Allied objectives for rebuilding Germany was to convince the German people that they—and Nazism—had suffered a total and complete military defeat. The task was therefore:

“To prepare for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis and for eventual peaceful co-operation in international life by Germany.”⁶

This overarching objective naturally also applied to the reorganisation of a new German educational system, from which Nazism was to be eradicated and replaced with democratic principles. The German school system was in this way one of the fronts in the struggle to eliminate anti-democratic thought and Nazism among the German public. The goal was a democratic Germany, but the path towards it was only vaguely outlined in the Potsdam Agreement.⁷

The outcome of the war meant that the Western democracies, the United States and Great Britain, stood in a particularly strong position.⁸ In Denmark as well, there was broad support for democracy after the liberation of the country. This is evident, for example, in the Social Democratic Party’s program *Fremtidens Danmark* (“Denmark of the Future”), that was adopted in the autumn of 1945. The Social Democratic vision for the post-war years recognised that the school system played a central role as one of the foundations of a functioning democracy. Through equal access to primary education, social equality was to be strengthened, and a general raising of educational standards was expected to foster economic growth.⁹ Such were the prevailing educational policy ideas of the time.

THE GERMAN REFUGEES MUST BE ENLIGHTENED

On 24 July 1945, Danish authorities received discouraging news from the British military authorities: the German refugees would not be able to leave the country before 1946 at the earliest.¹⁰ Until then, Danish policy had focused on the most urgent matters pertaining to refugee management: food supply, policing and confinement, medical services, and burial arrangements.¹¹ The expectation of a rapid repatriation of the refugees meant that there were only very few considerations given regarding information campaigns, schooling, or the initiation of a process driving denazification and democratisation of the refugees.

During the summer of 1945, however, it became increasingly clear that the Danish authorities would have to assume control over the schooling of the German refugee children. The Danish Refugee Administration, under the lead-

ership of the former minister and Social Democrat Johannes Kjærboel, together with the newly established Education Committee, formulated and implemented educational policies in the German refugee camps, in which the combating of Nazism and democratisation became integral components. The committee consisted of Danish educational experts, newly appointed school inspectors, and German anti-Nazis who lived in exile in Denmark.

In the earliest phase of the refugee crisis, schooling was almost entirely absent from official priorities. One exception was the *Regulations for German Refugees* of July 1945, which stated: "Children shall, with the assistance of the refugees themselves, be engaged in instruction or play under supervision for at least six hours daily."¹² This provision was hardly intended as an instrument of denazification or democratisation. Rather, it should primarily be understood as a disciplinary measure designed to create order and a degree of normality in the camps. That schooling was not yet a central concern was further confirmed by the *Instructions for Camp Leaders in the German Refugee Camps*, likewise issued in July 1945, which contained detailed regulations concerning provisions and disease control, but made no mention of any educational efforts.¹³

The first signs that some of the responsible parties considered information work as a necessary addition became evident in June and July 1945. The surviving drafts for the education initiatives are few and were handed directly to the Social Democratic Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Hans Hedtoft, or his colleagues. One such appeal came from the former resistance member and member of the Danish Freedom Council, Frode Jakobsen, who wrote to Hedtoft on 3 June 1945. From Jakobsen's point of view, an information campaign aimed at the civilian refugees should be conducted before they were sent back to Germany. As he wrote, this was not to be purposeful propaganda, but rather sober and objective information: first off all, the refugees should be presented with a truthful account of the Danish-German relations during the occupation, and thereafter, he mused that a clear statement regarding the Danish population's position on democracy and Nazism would be impactful.¹⁴

Although Jakobsen's proposals were general and not fully developed, he was not alone in pitching such ideas. In July 1945, the Committee of the Anti-Nazi German Organizations of Refugees—an organisation that dealt with German political figures living in exile in Denmark—also approached Hedtoft.¹⁵ They warned the Danish minister: "We could observe that the National Socialists who are in the German Red Cross and in the camps determine what opinions

the refugees are to form and even attempt to suppress any democratic anti-Nazi movement among the refugees.”¹⁶

This, however, was not their only concern as their proposal continued: “We consider it absolutely necessary to make possible a positive attitude among all anti-Nazi and democratically minded refugees. At this very moment they are in such a psychologically receptive state that it must be used to make them understand how the world views the German people, so that they may comprehend the judgment of the world and, on the basis of this recognition, be educated towards a new sense of responsibility (...) An extensive program of information and political education among the refugees is urgently required and of the greatest importance.”¹⁷

The Danish authorities were likely not opposed to the idea that an educational effort was necessary for the children found among the German refugees. At the same time, however, it is evident that they harboured skepticism towards the German émigrés who had organised in the Anti-Nazi Refugee Committee. Minutes from a meeting in the Ministry of Social Affairs on 6 September 1945 reveal that the security police were instructed to investigate the names of all German émigrés involved in the proposal mentioned above.¹⁸ The chief concerns that was expressed by the Danish authorities were that “they live too much in ideas from before 1933 and are highly dependent on Russia,”¹⁹ and that “although the Anti-Nazi German Refugee Committee is strongly oriented towards Moscow, too much time would be wasted if it were dismissed outright.”²⁰

The compromise was therefore to ensure strict control over these émigrés and their organisation: “moderate figures should be attached to the Anti-Nazi German Refugee Committee so that it may be moderated, and we are thereby safeguarded against the Communists.”²¹ The threat of communism thus became a central element in Danish reservations towards the émigrés. Yet this concern diminished during the course of 1945, as several of the most communist-oriented émigrés left Denmark.²² After their exit, the Social Democratic influences became predominant in the organisation. Gradually, Danish skepticism also eased, and German anti-Nazi émigrés came to exercise considerable influence on the Danish educational efforts and how the task was approached.

WHAT PLANS DID THE DANISH AUTHORITIES HAVE?

The most significant response to the continued presence of the German refugees in Denmark was the establishment of the Refugee Administration in early September 1945. It was placed under the leadership of the experienced Social

Democratic politician and former minister Johannes Kjærboel, thereby centralising all responsibility for refugee affairs in one governmental body.²³

On the one hand, the Refugee Administration created economies of scale with regard to food supply, procurement, and the reduction of administrative and guard personnel costs.²⁴ On the other hand, the concentration of refugees in fewer and larger camps strengthened the possibilities for establishing a programme of education and information that was directed and controlled by the Danish state.

In a speech delivered in early October 1945, Kjærboel outlined the plans for the schooling and educational provisions in the refugee camps. With this, schooling had become one of the areas in which the Danish authorities saw a clear opportunity to intervene, ensuring that “appropriate instruction be established for the children and that an information campaign on a democratic basis be initiated for the adults.”²⁵

From October 1945 onward, the initiatives of the Refugee Administration and Kjærboel within the field of education began to crystallise and take shape. Just over half a year later, in March 1946, the newspaper *Information* reported in great detail on the educational initiatives taking place in the refugee camps and their broader significance: “The elementary school is naturally an important element in the democratisation efforts, and the children are given instruction corresponding to that received by pupils in the Danish primary school, as well as in the middle school and the first year of the gymnasium.”²⁶ The coverage of the issue in *Information* illustrates that Kjærboel and his administration had succeeded in communicating to the press and Danish public that the schools constituted an important and reasonable component of the effort to combat Nazism and promote democratisation among the refugees—and that this effort also served Danish interests.

THE REFUGEE ADMINISTRATION'S EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The concrete formulation of the Refugee Administration's school and educational policies was entrusted to the newly established Education Committee within the Refugee Administration. The committee was appointed on 25 October 1945 with the specific task of drafting guidelines for instruction and teaching while also bringing it under Danish control. It consisted of both Danish educational and didactic experts and German exiles and anti-Nazis. The daily head of the Education Committee was the senior lecturer Einar Matthiesen.²⁷

At the same time, it was specified that: “... for the time being, the teachers already present or other suitable persons among the refugees shall be employed

for instruction. In order to ensure that teaching is conducted on a neutral basis, the Refugee Registration Office has been requested to review the teaching staff with a view to excluding teachers who, on account of their political views, must be considered unsuitable.”²⁸ In other words, both a political and a professional selection or screening of the teachers was to take place.

The task of carrying out the exclusion process was entrusted to the newly appointed school inspectors serving the Refugee Administration. Like the similarly appointed refugee inspectors—whose responsibility concerned the material and social welfare of the refugees within the camps—they were to implement and ensure the agreed upon educational policies through regular inspections and by contributing to the development of schools and teaching in the individual refugee camps. Initially, six school inspectors were appointed, shouldering the responsibility for inspecting the 335 refugee camps that were still in operation at the time of their appointment on 1 January 1946.²⁹

In contrast to the refugee inspectors, half of whom were women, all the school inspectors were men and all had professional backgrounds in education. The majority were also Danish-minded South Jutlanders who had grown up in the former German Empire and attended German (Prussian) schools. They were in this way intimately familiar with the German language and culture. Several of these school inspectors had even served on the side of the Germans during the First World War. At least one came from the Danish resistance movement and had been imprisoned by the Gestapo and was held in a concentration camp for a period of time. The group also included the German anti-Nazis Felix Arndt and Walter Schulze who both resided in Denmark.³⁰

The school inspectors' duties consisted of traveling from camp to camp within their respective districts (typically organised by county) and reporting back to the Education Committee of the Refugee Administration and to Einar Matthiesen. During their inspections, they were to engage in discussions with the local Danish camp leaders, the German headmasters, and their teaching staff, and in this way assist in advancing the educational work where necessary. On the one hand, this meant removing obstacles to the programme—whether posed by Danish camp leaders, German school heads, or other individuals. On the other hand, they were to motivate and stimulate the educational effort in accordance with Danish expectations. In addition, they were entrusted with the important task of interviewing all German teachers in order to assess their professional qualifications, political attitudes, and possibly exclude them if they failed to live up to the stipulated standards. The school inspectors were therefore to serve simulta-

neously as pedagogical advisers, political overseers, and as the link between the Refugee Administration and the camps at the local level.

GERMAN TEACHERS AND NEW TEACHING MATERIALS

Sufficiently qualified German teachers with an unblemished political record were in short supply. This limited pool of suitable candidates posed a challenge both to the quality of instruction and to the efforts at denazification. Without circumlocution the head of education in the Kløvermarken camp Claus Moldt stated the following: “The intelligentsia is sparsely represented.”³¹ Another of the newly appointed school inspectors, Johannes Fosmark, commented on the teaching situation in the newspaper *Socialdemokraten*: “Available for instruction are a number of female teachers, several of whom are capable instructors, whereas among the male teaching staff there are almost only pensioners and invalids; and when dealing with older boys who for years have been without a father’s authority, an energetic young teacher could work wonders.”³²

He further noted: “The youngest teachers have known only the school of Nazism. Many of them are deeply shaken by what they have taken part in; they struggle with these problems, often without really having the intellectual resources to form a new foundation. Others are habitually bound to Nazi modes of thought, which they follow unconsciously. They do not understand why they cannot be employed as teachers. But the school must, for the time being, be intolerant on this point.”³³

The consequence was that it became necessary to recruit other personnel in order to fill the role as teachers—refugees with backgrounds in engineering, or merchants, clerks, physicians, or any able-bodied individual who had a diploma of completing secondary schooling or similar qualifications were seen as possible candidates. Teaching materials constituted another major problem. What was needed were German-language books that were denazified and politically acceptable. German textbooks produced after 1933 were most often unusable and had to be discarded.³⁴ These circumstances naturally affected both the quality and the scope of the instruction efforts.

The Refugee Administration therefore initiated the production of its own teaching materials. This meant that the refugees were presented with new textbooks that were not merely devoid of Nazi content, but also specifically designed to encourage, or at the very least not hinder, an “education for democracy.”³⁵ This is evident, for example, in the Education Committee’s textbook *Lehr- und Stoffplan für den Volksschulunterricht* from 1946. The curriculum specified that

teaching should clearly distance itself from National Socialism in academic fields such as geography instruction. At the same time, National Socialist doctrine, militarism, and imperialism were excluded from both textbooks and classroom teachings. “The new Germany must regain the trust of the world through the construction of a peaceful democratic community,” the curriculum boldly declared—its intention could hardly have been stated more unequivocally.³⁶

Another objective of the Danish educational policies in the refugee camps was to increase the number of weekly teaching hours that refugees were exposed to. My research shows that in the vast majority of camps, it was possible to raise the average instruction time from only a few hours per week to more than twenty—and in some cases it was raised to around thirty hours each week.³⁷

CONVERSATIONS, NOT POLICE INTERROGATIONS

The German teachers who were already teaching in the refugee camps were interviewed and prodded with regard to their professional qualifications and their attitude towards the issues of Nazism and democracy. This purging process, as it was occasionally described as, was intended to ensure that active Nazis were removed from the programme. It would, of course, have been easier if there had been a surplus of democratically minded and anti-Nazi teachers available. The interview records of the school inspectors show that the majority of teachers had previously either been members of the NSDAP or other Nazi youth organisations such as the Hitler Youth for boys, the Bund Deutscher Mädel for girls, as well as other Nazi organisations.

In November 1945, Walter Schulze and Gustav Johannsen conducted the first interviews of potential German refugee teachers in the Copenhagen area. In connection with these interviews—or conversations, as the Danish representatives themselves preferred to call them—paper sheets containing fifty to sixty questions were prepared. These were most likely designed to facilitate discussion if the interview came to a standstill and to further uncover the political views of the interviewee. Among the questions were: “Why did Hitler not permit freedom of opinion?” and “When did you first begin to have doubts about the Third Reich?”³⁸

Such questions provided an opportunity to assess the interviewee’s level of reflection and views on democracy and dictatorship.³⁹ How frequently these questions were actually utilised in the interviews, however, remains unknown.

It is reasonable to assume that these conversations resembled job interviews, in which the school inspectors sought to avoid giving the impression that inter-

viewees were facing a partial police interrogation.⁴⁰ A then-contemporary definition of how the Danish authorities understood the term “Nazis,” and therefore who needed to be excluded, is not known. The interview records nevertheless make clear that previous membership of the NSDAP and other Nazi organisations was among the first aspects of eligibility that were considered. Subsequently, attention was given to the individual’s immediate credibility, attitude, and level of political awareness. In other words, these interviews were conducted with a certain matter of discretion. The small group of school inspectors who worked in cooperation with the local Danish camp leaders wielded a certain degree of latitude when determining who could be useful additions to facilitate the teaching efforts.

The inspectors also had the option of granting conditional approval, whereby a teacher would remain under supervision while teaching. In cases of doubt, they could consult the chairman of the Education Committee, Senior Lecturer Einar Matthiesen, who made the final decision. The records occasionally reveal traces of conflicts between school inspectors and some of the German teachers; in cases where no agreement could be reached, the outcome of a disagreement would be decided by a Danish official.

The Danish authorities soon realised that it was an impossible standard to categorically exclude all former members of the NSDAP, the Bund Deutscher Mädel, the Hitler Youth, or other Nazi organizations. Such a policy would have been straightforward and safer, but it would also have excluded many professional and qualified teachers which would have exacerbated the already significant shortage of staff. Danish tolerance, however, had its limits. Former members of organisations such as the SS, Waffen-SS, and the Gestapo were systematically excluded.

The surviving index cards from the project record both the professional and political assessments of the chosen individual teachers. One example concerns a teacher who had been a member of the Nazi Party but, after learning of Nazi war crimes, had become deeply shaken in their belief and now participated actively in the camp’s democratic educational work—at least according to the Danish inspector’s evaluation. Another case involved an individual who projected a quiet demeanour and whose disposition was difficult to assess because of it. A third example described a teacher who, in the inspector’s view, possessed a convincing character, was anti-Nazi and democratically inclined, and who maintained beneficial contact with the children.

These examples underscore how difficult it could be for school inspectors to discern the true convictions of the interviewees during their relatively brief conversations. Was the individual lying or speaking honestly? Should a capable but politically compromised teacher be employed for the sake of the children and the continuity of didactic instruction, or was exclusion the only option? Words such as “presumably” and similar qualifiers appear frequently in the notes, highlighting the considerable element of uncertainty inherent in this line of work.

More than 1,500 potential German teachers across several hundred camps were interviewed in order to determine their political and ideological dispositions or convictions. In connection with a study I conducted of six chosen refugee camps, I examined 573 interview records belonging to these camps.⁴¹ The camps were selected from among more than 300, with the primary criterion of ensuring broad representation from both the smallest and the largest camps in the system. A further objective was to perform an analysis that covered a wide geographical range across the country. While the material that was investigated does not provide a comprehensive view of the national picture, it illuminates several central variations in the interview practices.

The school inspectors began their work in the small camps found in Copenhagen, which makes it possible to examine the initial difficulties encountered in the process. These camps, however, were often closed and dismantled relatively quickly. By contrast, in the larger and longer-lasting camps it was possible to trace sustained developments. In this way, the different types of camps complement one another when investigating them analytically.

Of the 573 interview records from the six camps, women constituted the majority of those interviewed totalling 424 cases or seventy-four per cent of the total. Among the women, 351 (eighty-three per cent) of interviewees were declared suitable, fifty-one (twelve per cent) were assessed as conditionally suitable, and only twenty-two (five per cent) were deemed unsuitable.

The situation was somewhat different for the male teachers. Of the 149 men interviewed, only ninety-eight (sixty-six per cent) were assessed as suitable. Twenty-three male teachers (fifteen per cent) were considered conditionally suitable, while twenty-eight (nineteen per cent) were declared unsuitable.

The reasons for these figures with surprisingly high rates of approval were most likely determined by the practical need for teachers.

There were limits to how critical the school inspectors could be, if instruction and education was not to collapse. The comparatively lower rate of male teachers may be explained by the fact that they were generally older and had more often

been active and more highly placed within the Nazi movement.⁴² The relatively low number of exclusions naturally raises the uncomfortable question of how extensive and thorough the Danish efforts actually were in rooting out Nazism.

Altogether, the evidence suggests that the Danish approach to the political purging was predominantly pragmatic—it was a synthesis of what was ultimately desirable and what was actually possible.⁴³

CONCLUSION

It became an objective for the Danish authorities to counter Nazism and promote democratic tendencies and values among the German refugees who arrived in Denmark during the final months of the occupation. This effort took place in many aspects of the treatment of the refugees including within the field of schooling and education, where it constituted a broader attempt to ensure an enduring peace following the Second World War and the German occupation. In this sense, the initiative may also be seen as a coherent effort aligning with Denmark's democratic traditions that dates back to 1849 and as a reaffirmation of the inherent value and legitimacy of that tradition.

The establishment of a school system in the refugee camps was significant, not only because it served as a control and discipline mechanism within the large camps, but also because it provided refugees with knowledge and wisdom which prepared them for a future within a new international order. It functioned as a safeguard against intellectual and moral stagnation. The effort may also have demonstrated that a democratic state with a strong administrative organisation was capable of shouldering major responsibilities and upholding its values. In that sense, the management of the German refugees helped shape the broader development of the emerging Danish welfare state.

The educational initiatives in the refugee camps were clearly aligned with the Allied decisions at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences to eradicate Nazism and build a democratic Germany. Democracy had triumphed over Nazism—at least in the West—and in Denmark there were influential political currents, not least within the Social Democratic Party, that sought to expand and consolidate Danish democracy and establish a modern welfare state. In this way it seemed natural to extend these guiding principles to the German refugee camps in Denmark.

Despite early calls for action, Danish authorities delayed making any decisions until autumn 1945, when it became clear the refugees would stay indefinitely. After addressing the most urgent issues, the Refugee Administration began implementing schooling, elections, and information campaigns within the camps

to counter Nazism. During the winter of 1945–46, guidelines were established and supervised by Danish inspectors to ensure meaningful alignment with the official aims of the programme.

Democracy had prevailed in the war, and Danish authorities subsequently sought to erase Nazism in its name. Whether this helped foster a democratic Germany is uncertain, but the effort was pragmatic in nature, it was a balance between highminded ideals and very real constraints. Though Danish authorities were unable to promote democracy directly and limited by resources, the establishment of schooling in the refugee camps reflected a clear commitment to democratic values and to the reconstruction of a new Europe.

The actual impact of these democratisation and denazification efforts is difficult to assess and would require an extensive analysis of a completely different set of sources. Nevertheless, the initiative aligned Denmark with its Western Allies in shaping a democratic Western Europe and likely reinforced a sense of belonging to “the free world.” Over time, however, both the initiative and the refugees faded from public memory, despite representing a notable—yet largely overlooked—chapter in Danish post-war history.

CHAPTER 5

In the Absence of a Plan: The Rehabilitation of Non-German Displaced Persons in Denmark, 1945–1953

Morten Baarvig Thomsen

In the wake of the Second World War, Europe was awash with refugees and displaced persons of every kind and origin. Some estimates put the total number at eleven million or more.¹ The heart of this crisis lay in Germany and Austria. Amid the smouldering ruins of Hitler's Thousand-Year Reich, around eight million non-German refugees, prisoners of war, concentration camp inmates, and other kinds of so-called Displaced Persons (DPs) filled refugee camps run by The Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) and the newly established United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in the western occupation zones.² Some, including the majority of Baltic citizens and a large portion of Poles, would stay in this state of flux for years; while most of these individuals, like the majority of Soviet Citizens, would quickly be repatriated - willingly or otherwise.³

This is, of course, not a new tale. The social, political, and humanitarian aspects of this crisis have been tackled in depth by several historians.⁴ While such works can hardly be disparaged for their lack of detail, they have focused almost exclusively on the (western) occupation zones. This is understandable. The former Reich was, after all, the nucleus of the post-war refugee 'problem'. What the current historiography tends to neglect, or only briefly mention, is that the post-war displacement crises stretched far beyond Central Europe. In larger retellings of the post-war refugee crisis, territories formerly under German occupation, such as Denmark or Norway, and neutral countries, such as Sweden, have so far only been allowed a walk-on role. Denmark, which this chapter deals with, had to handle the fallout of wartime German civilian and military evacuations. When the dust settled and the refugees that could be immediately repatriated had left, around 200,000 Germans were stranded in Denmark. It would take years before the allied powers allowed them to return to German territory.⁵ These were not traditional DPs (non-enemy nationals on enemy territory) and, as such, the situation and camp system for German refugees in Denmark shared only few commonalities with the situation in the allied occupation zones. At the same time, the international literature on this subject has largely overlooked that Denmark also housed around 34,000 'actual' DPs in their own separate camp and care system organised by the Danish Red Cross.⁶ This was not a separate crisis. As in the occupation zones, these 'non-German refugees' (or DPs) mostly consisted of Eastern Europeans (26,229) with the largest groups being Soviet Citizens (7,855), Poles (9,435) and Balts (5,950). There were also a variety of refugees from Central and Western Europe (4,835) and a small number from various other nations.⁷ Like south of the border, the DPs were a hodgepodge of civilians, forced labourers, concentration camp inmates, prisoners of war and non-German soldiers from the defeated German army.⁸ In a European perspective, they constitute a missing piece of the post-war refugee puzzle.

The following chapter provides an overview of the treatment of non-German refugees in Denmark during the years 1945–1953. Since the topic is scarcely studied in Denmark, the chapter starts by sketching out the development of the refugee care system.⁹ In the following analysis, I discuss living conditions and rehabilitation efforts within the Danish DP camps. The primary goal is to investigate the efforts made to prepare refugees for a return to normal civilian life. Drawing on reports, meeting minutes and other official state documents as well as published refugee memoirs and local case studies, I argue that the Danish state had not originally envisioned DP camps as sites of rehabilitation. In the absence

of a plan, humanitarian concerns, changes in economic policy, efforts to ease administrative burdens and a hesitantly implemented integration policy nonetheless allowed for the implementation of various piece-meal rehabilitation efforts. These were, in turn, bolstered by the actions of energetic DPs within the camps and hampered by the system's overall lack of resources and standardisation.

CARING FOR NON-GERMAN REFUGEES 1945-1953

The Danish care and camp system for non-German refugees lasted from 1945 to 1953. During this time, operational responsibility changed hands repeatedly from one organisation and government body to another. Preparations had actually begun during the war: in 1944, the headquarters of the allied forces in London agreed with Danish representatives that the Danish state would handle DPs when the occupation ended.¹⁰ In practice, though, when Germany officially surrendered on 5 May 1945, no concrete care system was yet in place. It thus fell to those closest (mostly the local Red Cross and the resistance) to provide food and shelter for DPs wherever they were found.¹¹ Around 9 May, the Danish Red Cross was officially handed the task of caring for non-German refugees. The organisation opened a special refugee department in Copenhagen led by Dr. Esther Ammundsen and Eigil Juel Henningsen, which quickly set about establishing camps to collect displaced foreigners.¹² At the system's capacity peak in July 1945, 65 camps housed around 18,900 DPs.¹³

Due to negative press coverage of the treatment of Baltic DPs, the partnership with the Red Cross did not last.¹⁴ By 1 October 1947, responsibilities transferred to the National Refugee Administration (Flygtningeadministrationen) which had cared for German refugees since September 1945.¹⁵ At that time, the number of DPs and camps had fallen to around 3,000 and seven respectively.¹⁶ In 1948, responsibility shifted again: This time to the local branch of the International Refugee Organization (IRO), the UN body established during 1946 and 1947 as a replacement for UNRRA.¹⁷ As in the rest of Europe, IRO's primary goal was to facilitate the repatriation or resettlement of DPs who remained in the camps.¹⁸ By 1 October 1950, IRO had reduced the number of DPs in Denmark to 1,453, with over half having been granted residence permits.¹⁹ Within the bounds of an expanded agreement, the Danish IRO branch continued its work until 1 October 1952.²⁰

In 1950, as efforts to push the remaining DPs to repatriate or emigrate seemed increasingly hopeless, the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs (Arbejds- og Socialministeriet) established The Committee Concerning Non-German

Refugees, tasking them with closing the care system. This required a solution for the remaining DPs. While overseas resettlement was never fully abandoned, the main task of the committee became to integrate the remaining 'hardcore cases' by helping them find work, education, housing, or an appropriate social welfare program. In their final public report, the Committee described their work as "exceedingly difficult" which they explained was due to the fact that "the most energetic [refugees] had [already] emigrated or acquired housing and work here in the country, and of the group that was left many were physically or mentally ill."²¹ An internal report also noted that most DPs came from "east of the iron curtain, and owing to political reasons they do not wish to return."²² Despite such problems, the committee succeeded. Through counselling, language classes, and pressure on the refugees, it became possible to close the last camp on 1 April 1953. About 1,242 of the original 34,000 non-German refugees had acquired work and residence permits.²³ As far as the Danish state was concerned, the refugee problem had been solved.

THE BIRTH OF A TWO-TIERED CAMP SYSTEM: LIVING CONDITIONS IN DANISH DP CAMPS

Gaining an accurate overview of the day-to-day living conditions in the Danish DP camps is far from a simple task. They evolved much over the eight-year period, and the chaotic post-war conditions of Europe in May 1945 makes grasping the system's origins particularly difficult. Immediately after liberation, it seems that non-Germans were often separated from German refugees wherever they were held even before any official instructions had been issued from Copenhagen. Otherwise, living conditions were contingent on where DPs found themselves. Most, however, likely resembled those found in Svendborg, an old harbour town in Southern Denmark. Here, 1,500 French and Soviet prisoners of war were housed in various school buildings, where they slept on beds of straw. They did not lack sustenance or shelter, but their clothes were tattered.²⁴

In the second half of May 1945, the Red Cross sent inspection teams to assess the situation. This reflected a general information deficit for all the relevant agencies: the headquarters in Copenhagen was not yet fully aware of the size of the problem they had promised to handle. As a first step, they needed to know *where* the refugees were. Over the next month, reports came in. One team in Aarhus told of a camp where 206 Russians were sleeping in "paper sleeping bags with straw and blankets". Lice was a problem and the basement, which also housed refugees, was overcrowded and dirty.²⁵ Such living conditions were hardly envi-

able, but no report speaks of acute shortages of essential supplies (food, water, and medicine) in May or June 1945. Despite the confusion inherent in this early period, there is little evidence that such shortages were widespread.²⁶ Still, some DPs undoubtedly lived an inadequate existence in the shabby German refugee camps, wandering the countryside seeking shelter with local Danes or fending for themselves.²⁷

It took time before a set of general guidelines were laid down. Thus, most decisions during this period were left in the hands of local aid workers, resistance groups and municipal staff. The first guidelines came on 5 June 1945, giving non-German refugees special privileges not afforded to Germans—which was allegedly decided in agreement with the local SHAEF branch in Copenhagen.²⁸ DPs were to receive a daily ration of about 2,500–3,000 calories per person—corresponding to the regular Danish ration at the time.²⁹ Besides food and shelter, they were to receive a weekly allowance of 5 Kroner (about 127 Kroner or €17 in 2026).³⁰ The refugee department also declared that it would attempt to acquire entertainment (books, board games, and radios) from relief organisations as well as cigarettes from the tobacco industry. Healthcare and sanitation were to be handled by local doctors and paid for by the refugee department. The most significant aspect was the near-total ban on stationing armed guards at the camps.³¹ In practice, this meant that non-German DPs would not be prisoners and could move freely during the day. This order thus officially cemented a two-tier refugee care system, which had been forming more or less organically throughout Denmark since liberation: German refugees were to be put behind barbed wire under armed guard and strictly forbidden from ‘fraternising’ with the local population; non-Germans were to live in open camps with few restrictions and near-total access to Danish society.

Despite their significance, the initial guidelines were not very detailed. By December 1945, the Red Cross had gained a greater overview of the refugee situation and the needs of the camps.³² They then produced a more detailed handbook on camp operations, which made a few basic changes. Food was no longer just described in terms of calories; it also had to be “good and well tasting [...] just as the preferences of the refugees should be followed to the extent it is possible”. For healthcare, non-emergency dental treatment was prohibited, as was the purchase of dental prosthetics except “where the patient has no teeth and thus no ability to eat”.³³ Refugees could no longer necessarily expect admission to Danish hospitals—even for childbirth. However, healthcare professionals from among the refugees could assist Danish staff. Regardless, in some places,

health services became entirely supervised by refugees.³⁴ The handbook also set a minimum standard for DP accommodation: each person should have at least 4,25 square metres of living space, and there should be a minimum of one toilet per thirty refugees. Additionally, a camp should have a sewing room, a shoemaker's workshop, and a carpentry workshop so that the refugees could repair furniture and mend their own clothing.³⁵ Finally, if there were children of school age in the camp, classrooms needed to be established. The guidelines were clearly a reaction to complaints from both staff and DPs, which the Red Cross had received in droves. It was also a response to a general lack of supplies, materials and the high costs of the whole operation. Broadly speaking, the new handbook highlighted the Red Cross's difficult balancing act between economic and humanitarian considerations.

Official guidelines sketched out a camp system with relatively adequate living conditions. Of course, such documents are prescriptive rather than descriptive. It is therefore no surprise that other sources paint a less rosy picture of the actual state of things. In the summer of 1945, many camps were overcrowded and sanitary conditions worsened in some places.³⁶ It also seems that some camps lacked more than just clothing. In Copenhagen, it was discovered in July 1945 that DPs had not received their full rations.³⁷ Finally, the Red Cross were seemingly not hesitant in using their disciplinary powers in peculiar ways: In one slightly bizarre case, a DP was imprisoned for sending the Refugee office and the local British Military mission too many letters of complaint allegedly filled with "baseless" accusations.³⁸ Still, it is clear from most sources that the Red Cross did not see deteriorating living conditions as acceptable. Looking across the initial two years of the system's existence, they broadly succeeded in establishing and running humane refugee camps.³⁹ When one considers that there were also about 200,000 German refugees in the country, who also required accommodation, food, and medical care, it is a minor miracle that the non-German refugees could be provided with the amenities and standard of living that they did end up receiving. Of course, any such generalisation must reckon with the fact that every camp was different and that there were as many experiences of the system as there were refugees.

REHABILITATION, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Nobody expected that the camp system would last forever. DPs had to return to society at some point. But how, if at all, were they prepared for this eventuality? There were three broad phenomena in the Danish DP camps which could be

designated as part of 'rehabilitation' efforts: employment outside the camps, education and political activation.

Employment outside the Camps

Shortly after liberation, many non-German refugees started to seek employment independently of centralised efforts.⁴⁰ Danish farmers and factory owners also quickly noted the untapped resource that these 'idle' foreigners represented. Local Red Cross branches soon received requests from employers requesting permission to hire DPs, and often staff were happy to rubber-stamp such arrangements.⁴¹ The resulting employment could be seen as a form of informal rehabilitation. While refugees mainly sought employment to earn money, work likely also served as a respite from prolonged inactivity in the camps.⁴² This was not to last, however. The government was concerned that refugees would drive down wages for native Danes and that employment would make it difficult to repatriate the DPs down the line.⁴³ Thus, from 1 August 1945, employment of DPs required state permission—which was unlikely to be granted.⁴⁴ It is unclear how effective this was at deterring enterprising DPs or the farmers who needed cheap fieldhands, but it officially limited refugee labour and thus any resulting rehabilitation.⁴⁵

The situation changed again on 25 May 1946. The remaining refugees who were deemed fit were now ordered to do assigned mandatory paid labour, initially mostly in the agricultural sector. If they refused, they would be sent to a closed disciplinary camp—which effectively functioned as a prison.⁴⁶ As a result, thousands of non-German refugees shouldered seasonal and permanent work duty all across Denmark from 1946 onwards. Official documents of the Red Cross carefully avoided using the term, but this arrangement should be recognised as a form of forced labour—albeit with monetary compensation.⁴⁷ To the refugees, it was presented as a benevolent gesture for those eager to work. In truth, the scheme was devised due to mounting pressure from Danish employer organisations who argued that they were in desperate need of workers.⁴⁸ To save on expenses, the Red Cross simultaneously made working refugees pay rent to live in the camps.⁴⁹ As such, economic concerns rather than altruistic rehabilitation efforts forced the doors of the Danish economy slightly ajar for DPs.

Despite the coercion, and the fact that it was not intentionally structured for this goal, it could still be argued that it had rehabilitating effects. Many refugees who wanted to work *were* finally allowed to do so. They were limited to specially assigned jobs, and thus they could not freely choose their own employer, but in the

end, such work was still work. It seems likely that it served to counteract prevalent demoralisation among refugees as some of the professionals in the care system hoped for.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the forced labour programme worked against other forms of rehabilitation. Refugees attending higher education in Denmark, for instance, were not exempted from work duties unless they could pay tuition themselves. At the same time, several refugees were given jobs which they were vastly overqualified for.⁵¹ One camp leader minced no words when he expressed to a local newspaper that: "... there is nothing wrong with a professor weeding beet fields!"⁵² It is likely that tradesmen and academics became more demoralised by being forced to work in the Danish agricultural sector.

When the Ministry of Social Affairs took charge of the system in 1950, policies changed yet again. Permanent employment became a means (besides emigration) by which refugees could leave the camps permanently. Administrators reasoned that once refugees had secured steady work, direct state responsibility for them could end. After a few months, more than ninety per cent of refugees had secured employment and several disabled persons had been sent into "apprenticeships, reschooling, and retraining" or light employment.⁵³ While ramping up such efforts, the committee also attempted to make the remaining refugees leave the last refugee camp (Prags Boulevard in Copenhagen). They did this by charging rent and by "encouraging" refugees to save up for the move, or by providing loans.⁵⁴ In a few cases, the committee used legal means to force out refugees who had employment and outstanding offers for housing.⁵⁵ Some were reluctant to leave the camps, their home for over six years, even after securing an income. This mattered little in the minds of ministry caseworkers: if a refugee had secured meaningful employment, then they should move on.

Teaching and Education

Education may seem an obvious method to ensure refugee rehabilitation from a humanitarian perspective informed by present-day sentiments. By providing refugees with educational opportunities, it helps mitigate the risk that displacement could potentially harm their future prospects. Despite this, it remained a tool that was only occasionally used in the Danish DP camps. Primary and secondary education was the exception to this trend. The refugee department feared that the children might become intellectually: "... handicapped, when they once again had to return to open society and fend for themselves,"⁵⁶ and camp classrooms became a requirement in late 1945.⁵⁷ Despite the prioritisation of this issue, it took quite some time for schooling initiatives to be established. Administrators

found willing teachers among the refugees, but because many of the early camps contained a diverse set of languages, it only became possible to establish schools once refugees had been separated by nationality. Even then, educators lacked teaching materials. Many children thus likely received an uneven education during their stay in Denmark.

Adult refugees were not afforded structured schooling in the same way, but they were free to attend higher education or trade schools so long as they could pay for it. Internally, the refugee department, knowing that many sought (or dreamt of) emigration to English-speaking countries, also provided DPs access to English classes.⁵⁸ These ‘courses’ mostly consisted of assignment booklets that refugees could fill out and send in for correction. Occasionally, a traveling teacher might show up in the camp, but this was not guaranteed.⁵⁹ In a few places, independent and dedicated language classes were set up.⁶⁰ While English and other languages could be taught, the teaching of Danish was officially prohibited.⁶¹ This ban was instituted because the refugee department wished to prevent DPs from growing attached to Denmark and thus refrain from seeking repatriation or emigration.⁶² Accordingly, an underlying goal of the education policy was to expedite the process of getting refugees out of Denmark.

Things changed drastically when the Ministry of Social Affairs took over in 1950. The Committee working in the last camp in Copenhagen prioritised having the remaining refugee children moved to Danish schools.⁶³ Some were placed in a German-speaking school, but most probably ended up in regular public institutions. The challenges that these children faced by suddenly attending regular Danish schools after years without formal instruction in Danish were probably significant. Circumstances also changed for adult PDs. To the Committee, education seemed an obvious alternative if a refugee could not find employment—especially for refugees who had become physically impaired during the war. For instance, one Lithuanian who had lost a leg was given a correspondence course in radio engineering which later secured them steady employment.⁶⁴ In other cases, previous policy decisions came back to haunt rehabilitation efforts. Some refugees, it turned out, spoke very little Danish which proved a significant hurdle for them when looking for work.⁶⁵

Political Activation: Camp Politics and Refugee Representation

A final phenomenon worth discussing is the political activation of non-German refugees. Unlike educational initiatives, which sought to prepare refugees for re-entering post-war society, these were not aimed at long-term rehabilitation.

Instead, most policies primarily sought to make administrative tasks easier and camp life more bearable to the refugees. Incidentally, they also guided the DPs towards a life as engaged democratic citizens.

A rather simple aspect of the political rehabilitation happened through access to Danish newspapers. Refugees facilitated this aspect themselves when they began publishing their own papers within the camps.⁶⁶ These newspapers were likely subject to some censorship as Danish authorities sought to keep a low international profile by limiting anti-Soviet propaganda.⁶⁷ DPs were also given access to the anti-Nazi refugee paper *Deutsche Nachrichten*, primarily intended for German refugees. In some camps, radios likewise enabled refugees to receive news from abroad and, if refugees taught themselves Danish, local radio broadcasts could be consumed as well.⁶⁸ The primary effect of this access to information from the outside world was probably to alleviate boredom and feelings of isolation, but it also meant that DPs could stay informed and retain their political engagement with the outside world while staying in Denmark.

Non-German refugees were most explicitly politically engaged when they voted for camp or group representatives. This system of democratic representation seems to have manifested organically early on, but it was formally established with the December 1945 handbook. Every national group: "... should find a representative who is chosen by the refugees in the camp without influence from Danish [persons/organizations] or other parties".⁶⁹ Representatives spoke for everyone in their refugee groups during negotiations with camp leaders and the refugee department.⁷⁰ While they never had any official decision-making power, their job was not merely symbolic in nature. In correspondence from the refugee department, it is normal to find references to statements of refugee representatives in connection to complaints or evaluations of the behaviour of specific refugees.⁷¹ Their wishes or advice were not always followed, but the fact that their opinions were heard and recorded at all shows that their perspectives were seen as at least potentially important. The refugees themselves also took this position seriously, as several cases of violently contested elections illustrate.⁷²

The Baltic refugees, who were among those that stayed in Denmark the longest because Danish policy makers refused to repatriate them by force, had an additional layer of political representation in the form of the democratically organised Baltic Committees. These were, in effect, political pressure groups set up by Baltic citizens already living in Denmark to advocate for the interests of their countrymen in the camps.⁷³ They were especially keen on resisting repatriation efforts back to the Soviet Union, which was viewed as a hostile occupying

force.⁷⁴ Because of this, the committees had a fraught relationship with the Red Cross and several Danish ministries. While changing Danish governments, unbeknown to the DPs themselves, consistently refused calls by the Soviet Union to forcefully repatriate Baltic Citizens, no Danish politician wished to spark unnecessary animosity with the new superpower by stating this policy publicly. For this reason, and as a token gesture towards the Soviets, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also eventually ordered the Baltic committees to disband.⁷⁵ The Baltic DPs continued to elect representatives locally in their camps but it was clear that their political activism, and thus also any resulting democratisation processes, would have to play out within the confines of a cautious Danish foreign policy.

CONCLUSION: IN THE ABSENCE OF A PLAN

To what degree, then, were the non-German refugees rehabilitated through the efforts of the Danish camp system? As shown, few initiatives (outside camp schools) focused specifically on rehabilitation. This was especially true in the case of language instruction, which remained a sporadic and voluntary initiative until 1951. The opening of the Danish job market was motivated by economic concerns rather than rehabilitation: Denmark simply needed the manpower. Measures around political activation were likewise more practical than idealistic in nature. By allowing DPs to elect representatives and by providing them with radios and newspapers, the Red Cross sought to make camp life more bearable and ease their own workload. No sources indicate an intention to systematically nurture a democratic culture.

Still, even if there was no plan, nobody in the refugee department wanted the DPs to sink into an abyss of inactivity and meaninglessness. In part, this was why so many sporadic initiatives were implemented over the course of the system's eight year lifespan. An overall plan would have made these measures more effective, but it should not discredit, nor distract from the fact that Danish bureaucrats and aid workers cared about the future and well-being of the non-German refugees. The practical issue was that noble intentions had to be balanced against a system, suffering from a lack of standardisation and resources, and an overall refugee policy geared towards repatriation or emigration rather than integration or assimilation.

In the absence of a plan, piecemeal rehabilitation efforts were influenced by the free nature of the non-German refugee camps, the administration's humanitarian orientation, and the energy of those DPs who printed camp newspapers, volunteered as teachers, and acted as local national representatives. The lack of

planning with regard to rehabilitation can probably be put down to the fact that the refugee department was overburdened with the arduous construction and maintenance of the camp and care system. Only in 1950, when less than 2000 DPs remained, and when the government was forced to let a small group remain, did rehabilitation achieve greater priority.

CHAPTER 6

Sacrifice, Service and Reciprocity: The Moral Economy of Resettlement in Post-war Finland

Mikko Rapo

“**T**he Karelians have fought and shed their blood not only for their fellow citizens and the Finnish state, but also for themselves. Since the law has obliged us to make such far-reaching sacrifices, the state too, according to our laws, has obligations towards its citizens and their property. Obligations cannot be only one-sided.”¹

With this powerful phrasing, a war veteran belonging to the Karelian minority of Finland advocated for the rights of Karelian refugees after the Finnish-Soviet War of 1939–1940, also known as the Winter War. As a result of the war, Finland was forced to cede around 10 per cent of its pre-war territory, primarily the Finnish Karelia² in Southeastern Finland, displacing a population of approximately 400,000 people.

In his long and eloquent letter, published in the newspaper *Karjala*, in May 1940, the Karelian veteran emphasised that the Finnish state was responsible for taking care of the Karelians since they had sacrificed their homes and lands for

the wellbeing of the rest of the Finnish nation. In articulating his demands, the Karelian veteran did not appeal to charity but to reciprocity, framing wartime sacrifice as the basis for legitimate claims and demands on the state. Read in this way, such interventions reveal how experiences of war and displacement informed a shared moral understanding of rights, duties, and entitlement in wartime and postwar Finland—what this chapter conceptualizes as a moral economy of the nation-state, in which sacrifice and service for the nation reinforced reciprocal expectations toward the state.

This chapter explores demands for reciprocity and recognition by examining the resettlement of displaced Karelians³ and demobilised soldiers after the wars affecting Finland from 1939–1945. It shows how experiences of displacement and military service shaped the moral expectations through which citizens articulated claims and right to state support. Rather than treating these groups merely as recipients of social policy legislation, the chapter emphasises their role as active interpreters and articulators of wartime sacrifice and entitlement.

The relationship between war and the expansion of social policy has been extensively examined in existing scholarly literature.⁴ Influential studies have linked the nature of total warfare to the growth of welfare states by emphasising increased social need, strengthened state capacity, and the legitimisation of state intervention in all aspects of economic and social life.⁵ In Finland, the wars of 1939–45 have similarly been interpreted as formative events for national integration and welfare-state development, as wartime needs compelled the state to assume responsibility for broad sections of the population.⁶ These developments strengthened the state's legitimacy as “an economic actor, regulator, redistributor, and provider” and the increased frequency of state intervention was only partially reigned in after the war.⁷

While this existing scholarly body of work has convincingly demonstrated the structural and institutional consequences of war, it has paid less attention to how these transformations were understood and negotiated by those who were most directly affected by them. By shifting attention from policy formation to claims-making and experience, this chapter reorients the discussion towards the moral foundations of the relationship between the state and its citizens in the post-war era. The Finnish case that is examined here illustrates a broader post-war phenomenon in which veterans, refugees, and other war-affected groups across different societies demanded recognition and compensation after the Second World War.⁸

The resettlement of displaced Karelians, demobilised soldiers, war invalids, war widows and others was an example of the increased need for social protection and state intervention in the aftermath of total war. The majority of the existing literature regarding the resettlement of these groups has primarily been defined by a top-down perspective, dealing with the organisation, implementation, and outcomes of the resettlement effort, as the resettlement constituted and propagated large-scale social reforms with long-lasting consequences. Through voluntary sales and expropriation from private businesses and large private estates, the resettlement led to the creation of over 42,000 new farms and around 51,000 new residential plots from 1945-1958.⁹

Less attention, however, has been given to the perspectives of those who were subjected to these policies. This chapter therefore adopts a bottom-up perspective, examining how resettled Karelians and demobilised soldiers themselves interpreted, embodied and justified the responsibility of the state in the aftermath of total war. I argue that the experience of total war made visible a previously implicit moral economy of the nation-state, grounded in reciprocity between sacrifice for the nation and entitlement to state support. Drawing on the concepts of experience and moral economy, this chapter shows that resettlement functioned not merely as a policy response to social need, but as a moral settlement in which popular expectations of recognition and obligation were negotiated.

EXPERIENCE AND MORAL ECONOMY AS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

By “experience,” this chapter refers to a mediated and historically defined process through which individuals make sense of events and give them meaning. Experience is thus not treated as a direct reflection of reality, but as something articulated through language and shaped by cultural narratives, social structures, and available interpretive frameworks. Understood in this way, experience is both individual and social: it emerges in the interaction between people and their surroundings and can, in turn, inform action and future claims directed at society.¹⁰

Building on this approach, I examine how displaced Karelians and soldiers interpreted their experiences of war and displacement, and how these interpretations were mobilised in order to articulate moral notions of rights, duties, and state responsibility within the resettlement process. Drawing on inquiries, complaints, petitions and newspaper writings in which these experiences were articulated, I argue that the war reshaped not only the reach of the Finnish state but also the expectations of its citizens.

To conceptualise these expectations and the emergence of claims to state support, this chapter employs the concept of moral economy, originally formulated by the British historian E.P. Thompson. For Thompson, moral economy refers to shared beliefs about customary rights, social norms, and reciprocal obligations that structure relations between ordinary people and the authorities.¹¹ Crucially, these beliefs were not imposed from above but emerged from everyday practices and shared understandings, becoming visible in moments of crisis when established norms were perceived to be violated. Building on this insight, Johanna Siméant emphasises that the concept of moral economy draws attention to the expectations people have towards authorities—expectations that are often implicit and unspoken during ordinary times but surface when individuals appeal to, or demand, the upholding of what they understand as legitimate rights.¹²

Following this framework, I interpret the resettlement of displaced Karelians, demobilised soldiers, and others affected by the war as an expression of a wartime moral economy in Finland. For these groups, resettlement was understood not as charity or discretionary assistance but as a right earned through sacrifice and suffering as citizens who had fulfilled their wartime duties—an obligation that the state was morally bound to recognize.¹³

EXPERIENCE EXPRESSED IN THE SOURCES

As source material for analysing the experiences of Karelian refugees and war veterans, this chapter draws on letters and comments published in newspapers, as well as correspondence addressed to the Land Settlement Bureau between 1945–1947. These materials document how individual people articulated their interpretations of war, displacement, and entitlement in public and semi-official settings.

The Land Settlement Bureau, which was responsible for implementing the post-war resettlement program, operated through local settlement authorities in almost every municipality. Although these local bodies were formally tasked with handling applicants' concerns, the central bureau was flooded with inquiries, complaints, and petitions from the summer of 1945 onward.¹⁴ Such correspondence provides insight into how displaced Karelians and veterans framed their expectations towards the state and justified their claims to land and support.

In addition to administrative correspondence, the chapter analyses letters to the editor and selected newspaper articles published in the aftermath of the Winter War in 1940 and during the Continuation War when public debate

over resettlement was particularly intense.¹⁵ Read as attempts by their authors to articulate, construct, and share experiences of war, displacement, and loss, these sources illuminate the moral language through which rights, obligations, and state responsibility were negotiated and formulated in wartime and post-war Finland.

This chapter proceeds to accomplish this in three steps. The first section briefly outlines the impact of the Second World War on Finland and the political and social background behind the post-war resettlement. It then turns to the two principal groups affected by the resettlement: displaced Karelians and demobilised soldiers. This second section analyses how these groups came to understand themselves as national heroes who believed they had shouldered a disproportionate burden of the wartime suffering. Building on this, the third section explores how their experiences were translated into moral claims levied on the post-war state, tracing the emergence of a moral economy in which sacrifice and service generated expectations of recognition, reciprocity, and entitlement. Taken together, the chapter illuminates how the lived experience of total war reshaped the relationship between the state and its citizens in post-war Finland.

THE POST-WAR RESETTLEMENT

The roots of Finland's post-war resettlement effort sprang from the two wars fought by the country against the Soviet Union during the Second World War, namely: the Winter War of 1939–1940 and the Continuation War of 1941–1944. As mentioned, in the aftermath of the Winter War, Finland was forced to cede the Karelia region to the Soviet Union. As Karelia constituted the main conflict zone of the Winter War, large parts of its population had already been evacuated during the fighting. Following the armistice of March 1940, the remaining inhabitants were transferred within the bounds of the new Finnish borders, leaving more than 400,000 people without homes or livelihoods by the spring of 1940. In response, the Finnish government moved quickly to draft plans for resettling and compensating the displaced population under the Prompt Settlement Act.

The outbreak of the Continuation War in the summer of 1941 interrupted these efforts. As Finnish and German forces advanced into Soviet territory, many evacuated Karelians returned to their former homes. This return was particularly common among the agrarian population, for whom access to land and livestock was essential for their subsistence and prosperity. Urban evacuees, by contrast,

often found it easier to secure housing and employment elsewhere in Finland and were therefore less inclined to return to Karelia.

During the Continuation War, proposals to grant land to soldiers in recognition of their military service increasingly gained support. The abandonment of farms and land plots established under the Prompt Settlement Act further fuelled these discussions. Although soldier settlement plans were debated throughout the war, they were never fully implemented. In the summer of 1944, the Soviet Union launched a major offensive against Finnish and German forces, prompting a second mass evacuation of Karelia. When the war ended in September 1944, Finland was again forced to cede sovereign territory—this time including not only Karelia but also the sparsely populated Petsamo region and other, smaller areas in northern Finland. As a result, Finland yet again faced the urgent task of resettling approximately 400,000 displaced Karelians alongside a large number of demobilised soldiers who felt that their wartime service had entitled them to support from the state.

To address this, the Land Acquisition Act of 1945 granted displaced Karelians, war veterans with families, war invalids, and war widows the opportunity to buy reasonably priced farmland or residential plots with government assistance. The right to land was also granted to any tenant farmers or agricultural workers who might lose their homes and employment because of the application of the Act, basically encompassing the workforce of large manor houses and estates whose lands were expropriated by the state.¹⁶

It is important to note that the Land Acquisition Act did not emerge in isolation or as a result of the wars alone, but built on land policies introduced after the Civil War of 1918, which were intended to restore social peace and stabilise the young Finnish state. These earlier land reforms enabled tenant farmers to purchase their holdings and promoted the settlement of landless rural populations, advancing the ideal of an independent peasantry as a central social and ideological foundation of Finnish nationhood and citizenship.¹⁷ This vision of national integration rooted in the continuity of rural society strongly shaped the resettlement policies that were enacted following World War II and was further reinforced by the public's wartime experiences of food scarcity and economic vulnerability. Together with a strong and shared sense of a "debt of honor" owed to those who had suffered during the war,¹⁸ it helped legitimize the idea of large-scale land reform.

The scale of the resettlement programme highlights its significance as a formative social and societal experience in post-war Finland. The Land Settle-

ment Bureau received approximately 150,000 applications for land, of which around 113,000 were approved.¹⁹ Of these, roughly 45,000 applications came from displaced Karelians and about 60,000 came from former soldiers. Most rejected applications were submitted by soldiers who were excluded from the resettlement programme because they were unmarried. When the households of successful applicants are considered, it has been estimated that resettlement directly affected the lives of approximately 700,000 people in a country of only 3,7 million inhabitants in 1940.

As noted earlier, much of the existing research on post-war resettlement has focused on policy design and implementation. Studies that address the lived experiences of individuals who went through the resettlement process have largely drawn on oral history materials collected decades after the fact, focusing in particular on Karelians and questions of cultural and social assimilation.²⁰ Much less attention has been given to the perspectives of former soldiers, who constituted the majority of resettlement applicants. Research based on retrospective memories has also struggled to fully capture the total lived experience of a historical moment that was neither wartime nor fully post-war, but rather a liminal and transitional in nature. This limitation is due, in part, to the rapid integration of the resettlement efforts into the larger national narrative of successful reconstruction—a narrative that has shaped collective memory by smoothing over very real tensions, conflicts, and personal hardship during this period.²¹ By drawing on contemporary sources, this chapter seeks to elucidate and exemplify some of the conflict, uncertainty, and frustration that has been largely marginalised in later accounts.

An important dimension that is obscured by the national narrative is the strong sense of entitlement that emerged among both displaced Karelians and demobilised soldiers at the end of the war. For members of these groups, wartime suffering and sacrifice were central pillars to how they understood their position in society. Many came to see themselves as bearing the primary burdens of the war and, on that basis, articulated claims of compensation and recognition grounded in shared experiences and collective identities. It is these communities of experience which shaped how displacement and service were shared, understood and embedded within a moral economy of the nation-state that are examined next.

THE SHARED EXPERIENCE OF DISPLACEMENT

For displaced Karelians, the experience of permanent loss and evacuation formed the foundation of a community of experience through which claims for recognition and compensation were articulated. Finnish historians Aapo Roselius and Tuomas Tepora have argued that the Winter War marked the moment when Karelians first emerged as a group distinct from the rest of the Finnish population. The experience of evacuation and temporary accommodation united Karelians from different backgrounds and social positions, laying the foundations for a shared sense of belonging that developed into the modern Karelian identity.²²

Of course, Karelians were not the only Finns displaced by military operations during the wars. During the Winter War alone, nearly half a million people fled their homes, and at the time, no clear distinction was made between those who were evacuated from frontline areas and those who left urban centers due to the threat of aerial bombardment.²³ All those who moved—whether by official order or for voluntary reasons—were collectively and commonly referred to as evacuees (*evakot*) or, later, as forced migrants (*siirtoväki*). Initially, these terms did not denote a specific regional or ethnic identity. Rather, they described a temporary condition shared by diverse groups of people whose displacement was thought of as reversible.²⁴

It was only after the wars that these categories became associated almost exclusively with permanent displacement.²⁵ Following the publication of the final peace terms in September 1944, it became clear that large parts of the evacuated population would never be able to return to their homes. As more than ninety per cent of the permanently displaced Finns came from the ceded Karelia region, the meanings attached to evacuation and forced migration increasingly converged with the Karelian identity. In this sense, the foundations of a distinct Karelian community and modern identity were laid during the evacuations, but it only solidified once it became clear that the displaced Karelians had permanently lost their homes and livelihoods.

The loss of homes and local communities, prolonged “refugee life” in temporary accommodations, and the uncertainty about the future created a sense of liminality and alienation that those who had not shared these experiences could not always understand.²⁶ In their correspondence with authorities, displaced Karelians frequently described their situation using expressions such as “wandering in a new land,” “evacuation,” or “migrant life,” all of which conveyed a condition of being out of place and outside the norms of settled existence. Scholarship on displacement has conceptualized refugees as liminal figures and as social “matter

out of place,”²⁷ and the language used by displaced Karelians suggests that they recognized similar aspects in their own situation.²⁸

I argue that this experience of permanent loss and prolonged displacement formed the basis of what can be described as a Karelian *community of experience*. Members of this community recognised the similarities between their experiences and began to identify themselves as a distinct social group.²⁹ While much of Finnish society began to transition back towards peace-time routines following 1944, Karelians remained in a prolonged state of uncertainty. Their experiences increasingly diverged from those of the rest of the population, fostering a shared sense of identity rooted in loss, dislocation, and exclusion from normal social life. This community of experience provided a framework through which individual hardships were interpreted as collective and historically specific.

The perception of Karelians as a group whose experiences fundamentally differed from those of other Finns is evident in the way they articulated their experiences. In a letter to a radio programme dealing with the problems concerning the evacuated population, a young Karelian woman who had lost her position at a war hospital in 1944 framed her situation in explicitly moral and legal terms:

“Now, however, our open positions are being filled with local people who have been able to keep their homes and their land while we, in order to save our common fatherland and independence, have lost everything that was unspeakably dear to us, and which we had once again managed to build anew after the Winter War. Inevitably, the question arises whether we can be treated in just any way, and whether this is right and lawful.”³⁰

Her complaint juxtaposed “local people” with evacuees, framed displacement as a collective sacrifice made for the nation and raised questions containing components of justice and legality. In doing so, she articulated a moral claim grounded in shared experience and national contribution rather than individual misfortune. As the complaint illustrates, the community of Karelian evacuees was itself a product of wartime experience. Collective formulations such as “we evacuees” or “we migrants” emerged during and after the war, and especially once it became clear that it would be impossible for them to return to the land that was conquered by the Soviets. This shared sense of belonging shaped how Karelians experienced resettlement: through it, they sought—and demanded—recognition and compensation for losses that were framed and understood as sacrifices made on behalf of the Finnish nation.

Although the experiences of displaced Karelians were shaped by loss of home and livelihood, they were not unique in producing strong communities grounded

in a collective wartime experience. Soldiers likewise developed a shared sense of community rooted in military service, sacrifice, and exclusion from daily life enjoyed by civilians. Examining this community of experience highlights both parallels and contrasts in how different war-affected groups articulated moral expectations toward the postwar state.

THE FRONTLINE BROTHERHOOD

Among frontline soldiers, shared experiences of combat and sacrifice similarly produced a community of experience that informed expectations of post-war entitlements. Historian Ville Kivimäki has argued that during the Winter War and the Continuation War, Finnish soldiers formed a frontline community defined by the exceptional conditions of combat and military life. The intensity of this sense of community varied over time. During periods of heavy fighting, soldiers often experienced their personal hopes and fears as inseparable from the fate of the nation, producing a powerful sense of collective brotherhood. In its more everyday form, the frontline community manifested as camaraderie: an awareness that frontline soldiers bore the main burden of wartime sacrifice, removed from their civilian lives, while life on the home front appeared to continue relatively undisturbed. According to Kivimäki, these forms of community were crucial for the longevity of the soldiers' mental endurance, providing meaning in the senseless fighting and a shared framework within which even extreme events of violence could be shared and endured.³¹ Traces of this frontline community are visible in the letters that former soldiers sent to the resettlement authorities following the war, where wartime experiences shaped the expectations of the post-war future and of reasonable compensation for military service.

Finnish soldiers were not alone in holding such expectations. In their comparative studies of veterans of the First and Second World Wars, Martin Crotty, Mark Edele, and Neil Diamant uncovered that demands for recognition and material compensation were a global phenomenon. The soldiers that endured and experienced total war, which was characterised by mass mobilisation, prolonged military campaigns, and heavy casualties, often felt a strong sense of entitlement.³² Notably, similar hopes and demands emerged in both the victorious and defeated societies, highlighting the cultural power of wartime experience itself.³³ For Finnish veterans, special treatment was not framed as a discretionary reward, but as a shared right that had been earned through service. This understanding is evidently seen in the complaint of a former soldier whose resettlement application was rejected for being submitted too late:

“I myself feel dismissed by the law. I have earned what thousands of other frontline soldiers have, for I have been with them through everything.”³⁴

Describing the frontline soldiers as a community of experience pushes the boundaries of the concept, given that the wartime experiences of individual soldiers could vary greatly depending on their backgrounds and the tasks they performed. In the Finnish context, it is also true that the sense of solidarity experienced at the front weakened after the war when former soldiers returned to civilian life.³⁵ Yet the sources suggest that former soldiers nonetheless recognised similarities in their experiences and identified with one another because of them. This is visible in their correspondence with authorities, in their mobilisation for benefits, and in the shared moral language through which they justified their claims.

Following the concept of moral economy, it is important to note that Finnish soldiers formed a community based specifically on experience rather than legislation or organisation, even if such a sense of community was only temporary. As Norbert Götz and Emilia Palonen have noted, “only popular demands that draw on common sense adequately reflect a moral economy”.³⁶ Together, the Karelians and soldiers comprised more than a quarter of Finland’s wartime population, and in the immediate aftermath of the Continuation War their demands for recognition and support enjoyed broad legitimacy among the broader population.³⁷ Although this consensus eroded as the practical challenges of resettlement became apparent from the spring of 1945 onwards, it is clear that the moral economy underpinning these claims was not only confined to the communities themselves.

I argue that the communities of displaced Karelians and soldiers functioned as key sites through which broader moral sentiments were articulated and made visible. Through them, shared experiences of sacrifice and service were incorporated into the moral economy of the nation-state and translated into legitimate claims of reciprocity. The following section of this chapter examines how these claims were articulated through appeals, petitions, and public discourse.

THE DUAL NATURE OF THE KARELIAN SACRIFICE

The displaced Karelians’ sense of entitlement was built on the experience of sacrifice, as exemplified by the following passage from a letter published in the Karelian newspaper *Laatokka* after the Winter War:

“Has not all this happened for the sake of our common fatherland? And is it not precisely the lands of Karelia that may be regarded as the ransom price by

which the independence of what remains of Finland was purchased this time? Do the displaced people not have the right to reclaim the land they lost within the present borders of our state? If Karelian farmers are to be regarded as citizens of Finland, then they should have the right to get back what was taken from them.”³⁸

For Karelians, the narrative of sacrifice offered a means of understanding and making sense of their loss.³⁹ Historian Frank Biess has argued that one of the central challenges faced by the German population after 1945 was the task of deriving meaning from total defeat, as their National Socialist framework of understanding the world around them and their place in it had collapsed. In Finland, by contrast, no such total breakdown of meaning occurred. Instead, wartime frameworks that emphasised national unity and sacrifice could be perpetuated into the post-war period. Focused citizenship education during the interwar years had helped lay the groundwork for the social acceptability of national sacrifice by emphasising the fusion of the individual and the community. Institutions such as the school system, children’s and youth organisations, and civic education provided through military service instilled Finns with the virtues of national defense, patriotism, and a strong willingness to make sacrifices when needed.⁴⁰ Together with the strong sense of solidarity and togetherness forged during the Winter War, these ideals made it possible to frame the loss of Karelia as a price that had to be paid in order to ensure the nation’s very survival.⁴¹

Crucially, this framing did not merely give meaning to the experience of loss; it transformed it into a claim. By portraying Karelia as the “ransom price” of national independence from the Soviet Union, displaced Karelians came to accept and understand their suffering within a reciprocal moral relationship with the state. Sacrifice thus functioned as a form of moral currency, creating expectations of recognition, restitution, or compensation. In this way, individual experiences of loss were linked to broader notions of justice and obligation, forming a key foundation of the emerging moral economy.

However, the narrative of sacrifice was an inherently fragile construct. According to historian Tuomas Tepora, the ethos of sacrifice is best examined as a shifting position between voluntariness and compulsion.⁴² In its positive form, the language of sacrifice enabled the displaced Karelians to interpret what had happened to them and give it meaning. Crucially, it allowed them to view themselves not as passive, traumatised victims of war, but as active agents who had helped secure the nation’s future through their own actions.⁴³ By invoking their sacrifices, the Karelians could demonstrate that their need for help was not due to personal failure and enabled them to distinguish their situation from

that of other dependents, such as recipients of poor relief. In this way, displaced Karelians claimed that their entitlement to support was legitimate and had been earned through sacrifice on behalf of the nation.

When, however, the Karelians felt that their rights—or their expectations of rights—were being violated, sacrifice for the nation could be reinterpreted as something that had been imposed on them rather than something given voluntarily, constructing a self-perception of victimhood:

“It seems that, while the rest of Finland has managed to recover from the war with little more than a fright, people’s hearts are hardening towards the plight of the Karelians. As if the demands of the displaced were boundless! And yet, they ask for nothing more than justice and fair compensation for the lands and homes that the government handed over to the Russians without even asking their permission.”⁴⁴

Like the writer of the quote, Karelian newspapers frequently emphasized that the state had surrendered their homeland against their will and was therefore primarily responsible for the consequences, including the obligation to provide compensation and support to those affected.⁴⁵ Importantly, being forced to sacrifice their homes and livelihoods did not weaken Karelians’ sense of entitlement; it may have even intensified it. When loss was interpreted as imposed from above, the articulation of rights often assumed explicitly legalistic forms, as illustrated by the statement introduced at the beginning of this chapter: “Since the law has obliged us to make such far-reaching sacrifices, the state too, according to our laws, has obligations towards its citizens and their property. Obligations cannot be only one-sided.”⁴⁶

Sacrifice can thus be argued to embody a dual character. It could be embraced as a meaningful contribution to national survival, but when expectations of reciprocity were unmet, it could just as readily be reinterpreted as unjust victimisation. In both cases, by framing displacement as a sacrifice for the nation, Karelians situated their claims within a moral economy of the nation-state, in which the loss of their homeland was understood as a contribution to the collective survival of all Finns that generated reciprocal obligations.

While displaced Karelians grounded their claims to recognition and support in the irreversible loss of land and livelihood, they were not alone in translating wartime sacrifice into moral entitlement. Soldiers too, drew on shared experiences of service and danger to articulate expectations of reciprocity from the state. Examining how soldiers articulated these claims makes it possible to trace both the parallels between the two wartime communities of experience, and to

further clarify how serving the nation functioned as a legitimate moral currency in post-war Finland.

THE SOLDIERS' PROMISED LAND

Like the displaced Karelians, soldiers framed their post-war expectations through a language of sacrifice, service and reciprocity. If Karelians emphasised the loss of land and home as their contribution to national survival, soldiers grounded their moral claims in years of military service and exposure to mortal danger.

In an article published during the Continuation War in *Aseveli* (Brother in Arms), a wartime newspaper intended primarily for Finnish soldiers, several soldiers anonymously expressed their opinions on the possible post-war resettlement efforts. One sergeant articulated a sentiment that was shared by many – the expectation of compensation for the years spent at the front and of a future defined by stability and security:

“By obtaining a piece of land on reasonable terms where he could build his own home, a soldier would feel that he has received at least some compensation for the years he has been forced to spend here in the prime of his life.”⁴⁷

Other interviewees quoted in the newspaper article also felt that receiving land would be recognition for the years spent on the frontlines and the sacrifices made. One lieutenant stated that resolving the land question before the end of the war would demonstrate the country’s gratitude to its defenders, while another commented that the soldiers had done their part without compromise and therefore expected a fair outcome to their cause.⁴⁸

The groundwork for the soldiers’ expectations had been laid during the interwar period, when the education of Finnish men emphasised the ideal of soldier-citizenship. The image of a man defending his homeland functioned as a powerful normative model of masculinity and civic virtue. Within this framework, frontline brotherhood—where political and social differences lost all significance in the face of shared danger—was understood as the realisation of ideal male citizenship.⁴⁹ During the wars of 1939–1945, this ideal was crystallised as conscripted men were exposed to extreme conditions and mortal risk. In return, soldiers and their families came to expect compensation, or at the very least a reciprocal response, from the rest of society.

Expectations of a “fair outcome” or compensation were widespread among the Finnish soldiers. In a memorandum on the demobilisation of soldiers drawn up in autumn 1944, the Finnish League of Brothers in Arms (Suomen Aseveljien Liitto), the main advocacy group of Finnish soldiers, stated that resettlement

was an essential factor for the morale of demobilised soldiers. According to the memorandum, soldiers expected the state and wider society to recognise their special status after the war and hoped for a fairer social order that would ensure the mental and material security of soldiers and their families. The memorandum warned that failure to meet these expectations would lead to deep disappointment.⁵⁰

It seems that for many soldiers, the resettlement came to represent not only material compensation but also symbolic recognition of the moral bond between the soldier-citizens and the state. This sense of moral economy was expressed most explicitly when soldiers demanded that the state needed to honor what they understood as concrete promises made during the war. A writer disappointed by the slow progress of resettlement wrote to the authorities in April 1945:

“There’s no need to rush this resettlement issue any faster than the pace with which we were being sent to the front lines, that speed is enough. Back then, we were told that soldiers would be given land. But now, it turns out that it’s not for sale, let alone being given away. We’ve just been miserably deceived.”⁵¹

The contrast drawn between the rapid mobilisation of soldiers and the perceived sluggishness of resettlement highlights the writer’s belief that the state was responsible for compensating soldiers for the mental and physical strain they suffered because of the war. In line with the writer here, many soldiers firmly believed that they had been promised land in exchange for their military service. While historical research has found no evidence of official guarantees, wartime rumors and informal promises from officers were widespread.⁵² From the perspective of the lived experience of soldiers, it mattered little whether or not such promises had been formally made or by whom; their significance lay in the expectations they generated. The idea of a “promised land” crystallised a broader moral economy of the nation-state, in which military service for national survival constituted a binding obligation of the state towards its soldier-citizens. Thus, beyond simply demanding the land they believed they were promised, veterans, like the displaced Karelians, were asserting a broader moral claim on the state grounded in the promise wartime reciprocity.

CONCLUSION

As noted in the introduction, E.P. Thompson’s concept of moral economy captures the implicit expectations and reciprocal obligations that structure relations between social groups and governing authorities. These expectations become most visible in times of crisis, when people demand the fulfilment of what they

see as legitimate rights. In post-war Finland, both displaced Karelians and soldiers articulated such claims towards the state. Although these were directed at state institutions, their underlying logic was national and moral rather than bureaucratic. The sources examined within this chapter thus point not only to a reciprocal relationship between citizens and the state, but to a moral economy of the nation-state, grounded in belonging, sacrifice, and contribution to the collective survival. As Helene Laurent has observed, those who had suffered for the nation could no longer be understood merely as the needy. They were recognised—and recognised themselves—as war victims and national contributors, a shift that profoundly reshaped their understanding of the state assistance they should receive.⁵³ Their demands were not framed as appeals to charity but as essential and immutable rights grounded in sacrifice and service:

“They [the Karelians] have suffered and are suffering even now for the sake of the entire nation, and therefore they have the right to make far-reaching demands. This is by no means a matter of charity or benevolence, although such a shameful way of thinking has appeared here and there, but rather a matter of the rights of those who have sacrificed themselves for their country.”⁵⁴

The experience of total war reshaped how state–citizen relations were imagined and negotiated. Before the war, Finnish citizenship remained ambiguous: although liberal reformers increasingly cast the state as a guarantor of welfare, full membership of this system still depended on productivity, independence, and moral worth. The claims articulated by Karelians and soldiers drew on this logic by emphasising sacrifice and fulfilled obligations. At the same time, their demands for compensation and recognition highlighted a reciprocal moral bond between citizens and the state. Mass mobilisation, coercion, and personal loss legitimised expectations that the state should respond to sacrifice with tangible support.

Scholarly work investigating the relationship of war and social policy has long emphasised the role of military service in the expansion of social policy. Bryan Turner, for example, has shown how wartime service has historically generated social security entitlements, including pensions, healthcare, and access to housing.⁵⁵ This chapter complements such accounts by shifting attention from the more abstract process of policy formation to the palpable lived experience of the individuals that such policies affected. The cases detailing the ordeals of displaced Karelians and soldiers show that wartime upheaval reshaped not only institutions but also public expectations. Although neither group articulated demands for universal social rights or a fully developed notion of social citizenship, their

claims nonetheless helped normalise the expectation that state support could be demanded when warranted.

When resettlement stalled or access was denied, such decisions were experienced not merely as arbitrary administrative outcomes but as repudiations of legitimate suffering and service—and thus as breaches of the moral economy. This is illustrated in a 1946 letter from a tenant farmer who was evicted when his holding was reassigned to a Karelian family. He justified his claim through his and his sons' own military service and injuries, asking whether he had: "... no other option than to pack up our belongings and set out along the road."⁵⁶

Although this chapter has focused on displaced Karelians and demobilised soldiers, the wartime moral economy extended far beyond these groups, as reflected in the broad initial support for their claims in post-war Finland. Over time, this support eroded, suggesting that the moral economy was historically contingent and gradually gave way to more universalistic notions of social rights and emerging welfare-state ideals. In the immediate post-war context, however, these claims resonated because they expressed widely shared expectations of fairness, obligation, and reciprocity. Post-war resettlement thus functioned not merely as a practical response to displacement and demobilisation, but as a key arena in which the moral economy of the nation-state was negotiated, contested, and made visible.

CHAPTER 7

From Hiding in Darkness to Entering the Spotlight: Finnish Military Deserters and Their Return to Post-War Society

Riku Kauhanen

Military desertion is a common phenomenon, particularly when an army is collapsing during war or when military service is generally unpopular. In Finland during the Second World War, desertions peaked in 1941 and 1944, encompassing more than 30,000 Finnish soldiers committing some form of desertion. Given the actual size of the army in such a small European country, this constituted a significant number of soldiers with real impacts to its fighting ability.

Among the European countries that actively participated in the war, only the Soviet Union (Russia), Great Britain, and Finland avoided having their capitals occupied by enemy forces. The first two emerged on the winning side of the war, whereas Finland—despite declaring war on Nazi Germany in the autumn of 1944—ended up on the losing side. As a result, Finland’s wartime experience was not defined by the traumas of prolonged occupation, yet Finns still had

to confront the legacy of having been on the “wrong side of history”.¹ For this reason, the post-war situation and the discussion of Finnish deserters and the war’s aftermath are difficult to compare with those of other countries, although certain similarities do exist. In most countries, occupation and subsequent liberation were followed by prolonged debates over collaboration, the role of resistance movements, and how these groups should be treated in the eyes of the law. In France, for example, post-war legal proceedings initially granted amnesty to members of the resistance and, in the 1950s, this grace was extended to most collaborators.² The victors, too, had to deal with tens of thousands of men who had deserted and broken the law, yet punishing them for violations of military law had largely lost its meaning.³

In general, the relatively few scholarly studies investigating the nature of Second World War deserters focus on desertion during the war, typically ending their inquiry when deserters were apprehended or granted clemency. In the United States, research has primarily centred on the Civil War (1861–1865), while in Great Britain primary emphasis has been placed on the First World War. As a result, Second World War desertion is often treated only within broader studies, such as those by Heike Niebergall-Lackner and Robert Fantina.⁴ Finnish desertions have been examined in detail by Jukka Kulomaa, while Charles Glass traced the experiences of selected individual deserters from British and American armies. The post-war period and the subsequent fates of deserters, however, have rarely been meaningfully addressed, with D.C. Peifer as a notable exception.⁵

This chapter examines the reintegration efforts of Finnish military deserters back into post-war society from multiple perspectives. It analyses this process at the legislative, political, and economic levels, which are irremediably intertwined rather than separate. The chapter offers new overall perspectives on deserters in the post-war context, a topic that has typically only been approached through individual or family histories. Given the limited existing research and the difficulty of comparing Finland’s experience with that of other countries, the study draws primarily on Finnish archival records, contemporary newspaper sources, and parliamentary sources.

THE FINNISH DESERTER

In Finland, the term *Forest Guard* (*metsäkaarti*) refers to men who evaded military service through desertion during the Continuation War that was fought against the Soviet Union. They typically deserted by hiding in their local com-

munities, retreating into the wilderness, moving into cities, or fleeing to neutral Sweden.

Desertion was not always directly linked to fleeing active combat, as many soldiers deserted already during the mobilisation of the Finnish army in the summer of 1941. In total, around 1,500 men failed to report when summoned. During the Continuation War, desertion became a major challenge for the Finnish army: more than 30,000 men—approximately five per cent of all service members—deserted in one form or another. By contrast, during the preceding Winter War, desertion was virtually non-existent in comparison; only a few hundred men deserted, and only a small number refused to fight out of sympathy for the attacking Soviet Union. The exact number of desertions remains difficult to determine precisely. Some deserters were pardoned by their superiors if they returned to their units, while others deserted multiple times, with each act generating a separate legal case.⁶ The total number of deserters is estimated at around 30,000 men in 1941–44, of whom about 15,000 were “actual” deserters, who were either imprisoned or in hiding at the end of the war.⁷

The reasons for desertion varied wildly, but generally deserters formed a heterogeneous group. Trauma and fear of combat which were often reductively labelled as simple “cowardice” were commonplace but complex factors. These ranged from planned desertions at the front, often triggered by the prolonged stress that was faced there, it could be due to spontaneous flight when soldiers were in states of panic or it could be the response to mobilisation altogether. Many veteran soldiers carried trauma from the Winter War and were unwilling to face combat again. Others opposed the alliance with Nazi Germany, particularly in the summer of 1941, or objected to military service on religious or ideological grounds. Some were simply unwilling or unable to adapt to military life.⁸

In addition to their motivations, deserters can be classified according to the charges brought against them under Finnish military law (Sotarikoslaki, SRL), which distinguished between offences such as desertion, absence without leave, and failure to return to service. Sentences were typically custodial, although their severity varied over time; the death penalty was applied mainly in 1944, when the frontlines collapsed. During interrogations, most deserters cited fear or “cowardice” rather than sympathy for the Soviet Union, which could have resulted in harsher charges pertaining to espionage or collaboration. Only a small minority of a few hundred soldiers were politically motivated in their actions and engaged in active resistance, including espionage and sabotage against the Finnish state and military.⁹ Captured deserters who participated in the resistance movement

were typically sentenced to long terms of imprisonment or even death. Only a few managed to remain at large throughout the war. In total, just 173 documented cases involve men who avoided capture for the entire period from 1941–1944.¹⁰

THREE ROADS TO FREEDOM THROUGH PARDONS AND AMNESTIES

19 September 1944 Finland was forced to sign the Moscow Armistice treaty. Its most significant terms required Finland to cede territory, pay war reparations, expel German troops from its soil, and lease the Porkkala region in southern Finland to the Soviet Union as a military base. For the deserters, however, the most important provision was Article 20, which stated that: “Finland undertakes immediately to release all persons, irrespective of citizenship or nationality, held in prison on account of their activities in favour of the United Nations or because of their sympathies with its cause, or in view of their racial origin, and will also remove all discriminatory legislation and disabilities arising therefrom.”¹¹

This provision was primarily intended to secure the release of left-wing political prisoners who had been arrested and placed in preventive detention (*turvasäilö*) at the beginning of or during the war. However, if interpreted broadly, it could also be applied to Finnish soldiers who had deserted out of sympathy for the United Nations (not to be confused with the UN organisation), in practice meaning the Soviet Union. When the final peace treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union was signed in Paris in 1947, this provision was incorporated as Article 7 of the agreement.¹²

Some deserters returned home shortly after the armistice, but many were arrested, as it remained unclear whether the provision applied to them and they had still violated the tenants of Finnish military law. The consequences varied: some were merely interrogated and subsequently released, while others were detained and brought to court. On 20 October 1944, the Headquarters of the Home Forces (*Kotijoukkojen esikunta*) ordered that all “Forest Guard” members were to be arrested and prosecuted. As a result, many deserters remained in hiding until late 1944 or early 1945, when the provision was incorporated into the general body of Finnish legislation. The government’s first step was to suspend prosecutions and sentences under a temporary military court law that lasted until the end of 1945, a measure that applied to offences reaching beyond simple desertion.¹³

Amnesty legislation was ratified on 1 December 1944, granting pardons or sentence reductions for sentences meted out by military courts before 19 September 1944. It covered most deserters, regardless of their motives. However, it

excluded those who were convicted of serious offences, particularly sentences pertaining to war crimes such as the mistreatment of prisoners of war, in accordance with Article 13 of the armistice agreement. Military deserters were thus included among those pardoned for violations of military law, rather than being treated as a separate category. Beyond fulfilling the terms of the armistice, the amnesty was also driven by practical necessity, as the number of convicted soldiers was simply too large to handle effectively. During parliamentary debates in November 1944, the scope of the proposed legislation was gradually expanded.¹⁴

Although Finland was not occupied, the Allied Control Commission exercised significant influence over its domestic policy. In December 1944, the new Minister of Justice, Urho Kekkonen, met with the Commission in Helsinki, where Soviet representatives insisted that Article 20 should also apply to military deserters. On 7 December, the Ministry of Justice instructed the courts to grant amnesty to those who had deserted rather than fight the United Nations. The Soviets emphasised that the amnesty should be based on Article 20, not ratified Finnish legislation. Following this, 1,225 imprisoned deserters were re-interrogated; 544 claimed to have deserted out of sympathy for the United Nations and were released on Kekkonen's orders, while the rest were later freed under the amnesty act. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the outcome.¹⁵

This did not end the controversy, however. Shortly afterwards, three Soviet officers visited the central prison in Turku and asked inmates whether they had been imprisoned for sympathies with the Soviet Union. Several prisoners, who had previously cited other reasons for their desertion recanted and now claimed they had deserted because of sympathies for the Soviet Union. The officers demanded their release, and the prison warden freed eleven of them. The incident angered Kekkonen, who raised the matter with the Commission after Christmas of that year. It was subsequently agreed that Soviet officials could still inspect prisons and report grievances but not directly order the release of prisoners.¹⁶

This Soviet interpretation of Article 20 encouraged more deserters to claim that their actions were motivated by sympathy for the Allies, most often specifically the Soviet Union. In at least one case, a deserter born in the United States in 1911 stated that he had deserted in June 1941 because he was certain the United States would join the United Nations and he did not wish to fight against his country of origin.¹⁷

Whereas deserters captured during the war typically cited trauma from the Winter War or fear of combat—reasons seen as more acceptable and less punish-

able than sympathy for the enemy—the situation was now reversed. This shift makes it difficult to determine the true motives for desertion in many cases, as some adapted their explanations in order to directly affect their sentencing. Even during the war, interrogators questioned such claims when deserters with known ties to communist circles attributed their actions solely to fear or “cowardice”. A revealing example of these shifting attitudes can be found in a letter written by a deserter to the head of his local military district on 31 January 1945. He explained that, when captured for a second time in the summer of 1944, he had cited cowardice to avoid being “executed as a two-time deserter and a political one at that.” Now, however, he claimed that his actions had been motivated by “political conviction and sympathy for the United Nations” and expressed willingness to fight against the Germans in Norway. He also claimed that his comrades could attest to his convictions and argued that the Finnish president, Risto Ryti, had been more harmful to Finland because of the 1944 Ryti–Ribbentrop letter of agreement (Ryti–Ribbentrop-sopimus) with Nazi Germany. The deserter concluded by asserting that he would be more useful to the country as a free citizen rather than being behind prison bars.¹⁸

Amnesties granted under Article 20 were largely completed by January 1945. By then, 1,324 Finnish and 195 Soviet citizens had been released; 1,735 prisoners were fully pardoned, and 2,348 received reduced sentences. Finnish legislation also granted amnesty in around forty per cent of desertion cases from the summer of 1944. In addition, deserters could seek clemency directly from the president. Some pardons were already granted by Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim in September 1944, and by November, approximately 150–200 pardons were being issued each week.¹⁹

Similar policies were adopted in other countries, and amnesties have almost always been part of most peace treaties and post-war government decisions. As part of the celebrations marking the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, Stalin granted amnesty for a range of military offences committed by the troops. This was unsurprising as such measures also had precedent in Russian military history. The amnesty also extended to those who had evaded conscription or deserted and had been sentenced to serve time in labour camps.²⁰ Those who deserted by defecting or surrendering to the Germans were nevertheless treated harshly. Across Europe, even after the end of the Second World War, the Allied armies still faced tens of thousands of deserters who were at large for years after the conflict.²¹ These deserters were located all across mainland Europe and in Great Britain. Although most Allied governments initially sought to arrest and

convict them, the perceived need for punishment diminished over time. For example, in the autumn of 1946, the Canadian government granted amnesty to 14,000 deserters.²² At the same time, nearly 19,000 British deserters from the army, navy, and RAF remained at large. By 1947, more than 15,000 were still unaccounted for and were widely associated with a rise in crime. According to Scotland Yard, they were responsible for over sixty per cent of offences in England. In early 1947, amnesty was offered to these individuals, but only 1,340 deserters surrendered before it expired at the end of March. Efforts to capture the rest proved largely ineffective, and by 1948 the British armed forces still estimated the existence of around 20,000 deserters, with only about 3,000 having turned themselves in during 1947.²³ It was not until 1953 that all deserters in Great Britain were granted a full pardon, as part of the coronation of Elizabeth II. One argument focused on their reintegration into society, as Sir Thomas Moore (1886–1971) explained: “[The pardon] would restore thousands of men to family and community life and perhaps give them an opportunity to justify this clemency.”²⁴

In Allied Armies, deserters were involved in the black market in many cases and resorted to other crimes in order to survive, and many saw no benefit in returning to society.²⁵ Thousands of deserters began living double lives. While amnesties and pardons typically covered minor offences associated with desertion, serious crimes excluded individuals from this kind of pardon, which was the case in Finland, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain. With this context in mind, it is easier to understand why rapid pardons were often regarded as less damaging to society than the prolonged and largely futile efforts to track deserters down—despite the fact that such pardons appeared unjust to those who had “done their part” and suffered during the war.

Desertion has been a far more common factor than governments have been willing to admit, and reconciling wartime propaganda with post-war realities proved difficult both legally and morally. In the eyes of the public desertion was typically seen and condemned as cowardice and a betrayal of fellow soldiers and countrymen. In post-war West Germany, for example, Wehrmacht deserters were widely viewed as having violated the ideal of *Kameradschaft*, the sacred bond of soldierly comradeship.²⁶ In Finland, by contrast, the status of deserters could be reframed in light of their perceived alignment with the eventual victors, the Soviet Union, even though the Finnish army remained largely intact until the end of the war. In retrospect, the rapid granting of legal pardons in 1944 helped Finnish society avoid a prolonged crisis which was more of an unintended

consequence rather than a deliberate aim. Compared to other countries, Finland adopted clemency measures earlier than most and applied them more broadly.

THE QUESTION OF MONETARY COMPENSATION AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

After the pardons, most deserters were legally able to reintegrate into society. The post-war years were, however, marked by severe economic and psychological strain and have been widely studied from various perspectives. The period from 1944–1948 is often described as the “years of danger” (*vaaran vuodet*) or as a “peace crisis”.²⁷ Demobilisation, the resettlement of internally displaced persons, and the burden of war reparations posed major challenges for Finnish society. At the same time, fears of a potential Soviet occupation and the legalisation of the previously banned Finnish Communist Party added to the uncertainty felt in the country. In this context, former deserters were one group among many in a war-torn society, though the rise of the far left offered some opportunities for political mobilisation and claims for compensation. The Finnish Communist Party established a broad political coalition, *Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto* (SKDL), which achieved major success in the 1945 parliamentary elections. Political parties actively sought the support of former soldiers, and shortly before the end of the 1939–1945 “Long Parliament,” a relatively generous Land Acquisition Act was passed to provide land and new homes, partly to prevent the radicalisation of ex-servicemen and displaced populations.

One of several leftist organisations founded after the war was the *Entisten Sotilaiden Toverikuntien Liitto* (EST, “Comrade Union of Former Soldiers”). It brought together former Red Guards from the Finnish Civil War, ex-front soldiers, and former members of the Forest Guard. Established in November 1944 by members of the resistance and reorganised as a nationwide association in April 1945, EST maintained strong communist sympathies and espoused anti-fascist rhetoric. Despite this, the Finnish Communist Party viewed the organisation with some suspicion, and the two occasionally disagreed on issues such as benefits for former soldiers. At its peak in 1946, the EST had over 200 local branches and around 30,000 members. The organisation declined rapidly towards the end of the 1940s, although some local groups remained active into the early 1950s.²⁸

The EST argued that Forest Guard members were entitled to compensation for the economic hardship they suffered while deserting. It also demanded support for former red veterans of the Finnish Civil War in 1918 and their families, and sought to expand the Land Acquisition Act to include more ex-soldiers. The claim rested on the loss of military pay and benefits, which left deserters and

their families in financial distress. After the war, many argued they had remained “soldiers” on the “right side” of the conflicts and thus deserved compensation. EST actively promoted these demands through meetings, petitions, and publications.²⁹

Notably in Finland, desertion was already framed as a form of resistance in 1944–1945. In contrast to this attitude, in post-war West Germany, Wehrmacht deserters were widely condemned for abandoning their comrades, while recognition was reserved for active resistance figures such as Claus von Stauffenberg. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that desertion came to be more broadly regarded as a form of resistance in Germany.³⁰

In early 1945, EST asked its Forest Guard members to submit accounts of their wartime activities in order to document their experiences and assess the legitimacy of their claims for compensation. One response, dated 18 January 1946 titled “a request for compensation,” stated: “I supported the Allied cause... I deserted on 23 November 1941 and remained in hiding until the end of the war... I seek compensation for lost working hours and request my daily allowance and monthly family pay... for the period from 1 December 1941 to 12 December 1944.”³¹

In January 1946, the Finnish Ministry of Finance appointed a committee in order to consider whether or not compensation should be given to Forest Guard members. This initiative was built on the work of an earlier committee, which in April 1945 had concluded that some released political prisoners were entitled to compensation, though this did not include imprisoned deserters.³² The committee completed its work in 1948, estimating the total number of Forest Guard members at around 15,000 individuals which effectively functioned as a proxy for the general number of deserters, although compensation had initially only been intended only for deserters who were motivated by sympathy for the United Nations. Through questionnaires distributed by the EST, 4,152 responses were collected, of which 4,012 were classified as coming from Forest Guard members constituting more than a quarter of all deserters at the end of the war. Roughly one thousand of these claimed to have deserted for ideological reasons.³³

In June 1948, a majority of the committee rejected compensation claims for Forest Guards, with two members dissenting. The main argument was the lack of a legal basis, as neither the armistice, the peace treaty, nor any other legislation legitimised such compensation. It was also noted in the press that not a single Forest Guard member had volunteered to fight against the Nazi Germans after the 1944 armistice, although this was not directly emphasised in the report. The committee further concluded that former deserters had generally reintegrated

into society without major difficulties and already enjoyed the same social benefits as other former soldiers.³⁴

Shortly after this rejection, on 4 August 1948, several members of Parliament would yet again propose that Forest Guard members were entitled to receive compensation comparable to that which was granted to political prisoners.³⁵ The proposal was rejected. Some newspapers later claimed that compensation had already been paid, but this was inaccurate; such false claims were largely propagated by anti-communist politicians and journalists. After the SKDL's defeat in the 1948 elections, the issue of compensation effectively disappeared as an issue in the political landscape. At the same time, opposition to the idea grew within Parliament, and the press—across right-wing, centrist, and Social Democratic outlets—became increasingly dismissive of the issue, often ridiculing the Forest Guard.³⁶

The issue of compensation resurfaced decades later, in May 1971, when six SKDL members of Parliament proposed reparations for the “so-called Forest Guard members and other opponents of war and fascism” for losses suffered during the Second World War. It reappeared again in 1984 in connection with debates on military pensions though nothing ever came of it.³⁷

The committee's third reason for rejecting compensation claims in 1948 highlights that most deserters were able to reintegrate and support themselves economically without assistance. This was supported by certain legislation, such as a February 1945 law stating that returning deserters should be treated as continuing employees, meaning that desertion could not affect their entitlement to annual leave.³⁸ In one letter to the EST, a deserter described his experiences in the following way:

“I went to my old workplace on 20.11.44, but I was told that my employment had been terminated because I was not in the war; however, they could arrange forest work for me. I told them I could not take the work, as I was not a forest worker by profession. On 4.12.44, I went to the workplace again, but the technical supervisor of the factory told me that they had no obligations towards me, because I had not fulfilled my obligations to the fatherland, and that my employment had ended. I went there again in February 1945 to ask for proof of employment. At the same time, I asked for my old work, and they took me back with all the benefits of a former employee, except for my annual (paid) leave. I requested the leave on the 19th day (June 1945), and they told me they could not pay it because I had not worked the previous year. I replied that I could not come to work, because I was not allowed to, even though I tried.”³⁹

All the other workers in the factory had received the payment they were owed, except for the writer and one other worker.

Evidence of workplace discrimination against deserters appeared mainly in communist newspapers, reporting that former Forest Guard members were sometimes treated with undue suspicion by employers. The EST therefore demanded that any and all documented record of desertion should be removed from military passports, as some employers scrutinised them during the hiring process when screening applicants.⁴⁰ It is difficult to assess how widespread such instances of discrimination were. The overall situation of deserters was likely quite similar to that of other ex-servicemen: those with a trade could more easily return to work, while young unskilled men faced greater challenges when looking for employment. For Forest Guard members, employment may actually have been easier in areas where established trade unions were led by communists. Furthermore, it was economically impractical to exclude thousands of able-bodied men from the workforce because of their actions during the war, especially when any kind of punishment no longer served a military purpose. Given that Finland, with a population of just 3,5 million individuals, had outright lost over 90,000 men of prime working age and was left with many more who were disabled; reconciliation was not only a question of dignity but of practical necessity. While individual employers may have harboured some resentment towards deserters, it is difficult to substantiate in concrete terms due to the lack of relevant sources.

FROM THE FOREST BACK TO CIVIL SOCIETY

In the end, all countries involved in the Second World War embraced large-scale emphasis on clemency for deserters. After the Continuation War, Finnish deserters had several avenues to seek amnesty or pardon for their violations of military law. A broad amnesty policy allowed most deserters to return quickly back into society without any legal consequences. While all the belligerent states participating in the war faced large numbers of deserters, Finland's position as a defeated power, shaped by the terms of the Moscow Armistice, created a particular legal framework that enabled the practice of extensive amnesties.

In the Soviet Union (1945) and Great Britain (1953), pardons were tied to major events such as victory celebrations and the coronation of a new monarch. Compared to the Western Allies, Finland avoided prolonged social problems by implementing swift and comprehensive amnesty measures, though this was not their primary intent. Unlike the Allied countries, Finland did not face large

numbers of deserters remaining in hiding and turning to a life of crime after the war. The longer deserters remained outside of the law, the more difficult reintegration became, often forcing them into criminal activity simply to survive.

In Germany, post-war society faced a dilemma between recognising active resistance to Nazism and condemning “ordinary” deserters, who remained stigmatised until the 1980s. This distinction helped “redeem” the majority of German soldiers. In Finland, no such narrative was necessary. Although Finland preserved its independence in 1944, it lost the Continuation War fought with the Soviet Union. This unique position gave Finnish deserters greater room to negotiate their status and reputation, particularly because they were not excluded legally or politically from doing so. It is also notable that Finland granted pardons to soldiers who defected to the enemy, whereas the Soviet Union treated their defectors harshly.

The personal economic recovery of deserters appears to have been similar to that of other population groups in post-war Finland. This is according to a parliamentary committee that collected data from roughly twenty-five per cent of them and calculated the numbers. Although left-wing efforts to secure compensation for the Forest Guard failed, most deserters were able to return to civilian life achieving more or less equal outcomes. Further research is needed to assess how factors such as employment, training, education level, motives, and age shaped the reintegration process. Available evidence suggests that many deserters resumed their previous lines of work with little difficulty, supported by legislation and a general demand for labour, which likely led employers to overlook past discrepancies. This indicates that desertion was often tolerated, if not fully accepted. There is little reason to portray deserters as a distinct group whose rehabilitation was systematically planned.

CHAPTER 8

From Criticism to Celebration: Intelligence Officers, Memory Wars, and the Recasting of Honour in Post-war Denmark

Jacob Vrist Nielsen

The German occupation of Denmark beginning in April 1940 marked a decisive break in the Danish officer corps' fighting position. The armed forces were ordered to stand down, which was perceived as a moral defeat. This break deepened in August 1943, when the government's policy of cooperation collapsed. On the morning of 29 August, the German occupiers imposed martial law in all of Denmark and launched Operation Safari that disbanded and interned members of the armed forces. Once again, the military did not resist, and in the fall, around 300 officers fled to neutral Sweden, among them the leadership of the General Staff's Intelligence Section.¹ Their flight was widely criticised as a failure of duty at a moment of national crisis.² Yet in later historiographical literature, these same intelligence officers came to be

portrayed as early resistance actors and as essential contributors to Denmark's post-war recognition as an Allied nation.

This chapter explores how this revaluation was produced, propagated and contested in the post-war years. After the liberation, the inactivity and self-imposed exile by the officers were viewed with suspicion. The officers' legitimacy had to be restored over time, particularly through struggles over interpretation of and access to sources. The analysis presented in this chapter draws on Nikolay Koposov's concept of "memory wars", that is, struggles over the legitimacy of actions and events from the past as they are perceived in the present.³ Koposov mainly analysed conflicts fought through avenues of legislation, the courts, and formal regulation. The Danish case constitutes a different kind of arena. Here, disputes over the wartime past unfolded within the discourse of historical knowledge itself, shaped by restrictive and selective archival access, exclusive cooperation with selected historians, and by the authority that was granted to a particular set of narratives.

By focusing on military officers, this chapter also engages a broader literature on post-war democratisation that moves beyond the simple binary of resistance and collaboration. After 1945, resocialisation involved more than just the reintegration of victims, veterans, and convicted collaborators. It also involved dealing with parts of the pre-war elite whose legitimacy had been badly damaged by the occupation. Army intelligence officers form one such case, in which questions of memory, honour, and the interpretation of the past became central to ensure political and institutional stabilisation.

The chapter consists of four sections. The first section addresses the wartime erosion of the military honour of Danish officers and their experiences of humiliation. The second section examines post-war criticism of the officer corps and public challenges to its legitimacy. The third section analyses internal post-war conflicts regarding authority and responsibility. The final section examines how historiography and archival control of sources contributed to the long-term stabilisation and rehabilitation of the intelligence officers' reputation and the understanding of their role in the war.

THE OCCUPATION OF DENMARK

For the officer corps, both the occupation and the events of August 1943 were experienced as humiliations, and each involved a loss of prestige and honour. As Ute Frevert has argued, war is shaped not only by military action but also by senses of honour, shame, fear, and hope.⁴ These emotional ideals shaped the

wartime conduct of the officers but also how they were seen following the war. Actions taken under the constraints of honour and shame would later have to be reinterpreted and justified to restore the legitimacy of the officer corps in the post-war period.

Within military circles, honour and masculinity were central to officers' self-understanding. The honourable way for a soldier to act was to fight and die for the nation, while surrendering or fleeing was considered disgraceful.⁵ Fleeing into exile, from this perspective, is also a monumental experience in which shame and dishonour can play a major role. The nature of the Second World War sharpened these emotions. In occupied Europe, much of the resistance fighting was carried out by partisan groups, among whom communists—long-standing enemies of the conservative officer corps—played a prominent role.⁶ It was they who fought, bled, and died on the battlefield, not the officers. For officers trained in conventional warfare and ideals of military honour, this inversion of roles deepened the sense of humiliation. Among rank-and-file soldiers and lower-ranking officers, the senior officer corps suffered a significant loss of prestige. In diaries from the period, criticism of the officers was widespread.⁷ This internal disillusionment is also clearly visible in sources found in the Swedish Security Police archives, which contain large numbers of intercepted letters written by Danish refugees living in Sweden. In many letters, the officers were criticised for their lack of resolve and initiative. One regular soldier, for example, remarked that he: "...personally does not believe that our old officers are capable of anything truly effective."⁸ A lower-ranking officer likewise complained about his superiors, asking rhetorically: "What has the Army done at home? Nothing. Now we sit comfortably and warmly in Sweden while others are fighting."⁹ A third soldier expressed his frustration with the officers' passivity in the resistance struggle even more bluntly, dismissing them as "a staff of idiots."¹⁰ While the officers' precise sentiments are impossible to reconstruct, there is little doubt that their sense of honour was severely shaken and that shame formed an essential part of their wartime experience.

A final humiliation for the officer corps followed in May 1945 when Denmark was liberated, not by its own military forces and resistance fighters, but by foreign powers: the British and the Soviets.¹¹ These wartime experiences would later become central points of contestation in the post-war struggles in shaping the narratives with regard to the ideals of honour and legitimacy.

BRITISH CONNECTIONS

From the fall of 1940 onwards, the intelligence section transmitted relevant intel from occupied Denmark to the British. However, this effort ended abruptly when the officers fled to Sweden. The escape was an improvised and chaotic affair, with files lost, contacts broken, and no overarching master plan. The British also regarded the Danish intelligence officers—known as the Peters—with disdain. The leader of the Special Operations Executive's Danish section in London, Ralph Hollingworth noted the following in December 1943: "Those, including the PETERS themselves, who escaped to Sweden, did so to escape internment – not to come over to England to fight the Germans. The good ones remained behind, avoided registering by going underground, and they are available to us today."¹²

After fleeing to Sweden, the intelligence section in Denmark collapsed, but out of these rubbles grew a new interimistically formed intelligence, geographically located in Stockholm. From November 1943 until 5 May 1945, the Danish officers produced and transmitted roughly 15,000 pages of intelligence to the British.¹³ The intelligence work conducted in Sweden was not only a contribution to the Allied cause, but also a way for the officers to reclaim their lost honour and demonstrate professional relevance in the war effort.

British officials frequently praised the high quality of the material.¹⁴ Yet it does not appear to have been put to much operational use. When one of the intelligence officers travelled from Stockholm to London in October 1943, he discovered that many of the intelligence reports were lying unused in a closet.¹⁵ As late as December 1944, the officers expressed their frustrations to the British about how their work seemed to have little impact. One officer noted: "This sounds a little bitter, and it is. It cannot be denied that, especially among the people working in the field, there is a certain despondency, because one does not feel that our work is being applied in practice." Another added: "One receives recognition in words, but misses seeing the work put to use in practice."¹⁶ The main reason for this was probably that the British did not demand detailed intelligence on Denmark, which, for obvious reasons, was a low priority until the final stages of the war. So, to some extent in operational terms, the intelligence work amounted to another moral defeat. Yet, the significance of the intelligence work cannot be assessed solely by its operational impact. In the post-war contest over honour and legitimacy, the importance of the reports lay less in their wartime effect and more in what they could later be shown to represent, namely ongoing diligence, activity and loyalty to the Allied cause.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR

In the immediate aftermath of the war, resistance fighters were widely celebrated as heroes and hailed in films, newspaper articles, and resistance memoirs.¹⁷ At the same time, politicians were successful in situating their own wartime conduct within the emerging narrative of total national resistance. Cooperation was interpreted through the “Sword and Shield” thesis, according to which the government’s policy had created the conditions that allowed the resistance movement to operate.¹⁸ “The fight over honour,” as former members of the resistance named it, was being fought. Politicians also began to voice direct criticisms of the resistance movement.¹⁹ One of the most sensitive issues of the occupation was the liquidation of German informers. The Social Democratic chief ideologue, Hartvig Frisch, stated that the killings carried out towards the end of the war had been outright murders and had nothing to do with the liberation struggle.²⁰

The criticism of the resistance movement was less about the movement itself than it was about the politicians’ own conduct during the occupation. Having distanced themselves from armed resistance and chosen to cooperate with the German authorities, they now needed to restore their own honour and, more importantly, their political legitimacy. The editor-in-chief of the formerly illegal news agency *Information*, Borge Outze, gave a name to the politicians’ attempts to discredit and diminish the resistance—“the countermovement.”²¹ The politicians largely won the battle of reclaiming their honour, and in the official narrative of the occupation that was constructed in the years after the war, it was a united Denmark consisting only of freedom fighters that stood against the Nazis. All Danes, high and low, men and women, politicians and resistance fighters alike, had, at heart, been members of the resistance. They had merely been waiting for the right moment to express their opposition in word and in action. This narrative rescued Denmark’s self-understanding and underpinned its sense of honour against the trauma of a long and humiliating occupation. In their study of the occupation as a “collective memory”, the historians Claus Bryld and Anette Warring refer to this consensus narrative as “the basic narrative.”²² The historian Hans Kirchhoff has taken a more polemical stance, describing this narrative as “the great myth of the Danish people in battle.”²³

However, this expansive narrative coexisted with sharp and sustained criticisms, particularly of the officer corps. In the eyes of the public, the army’s reputation had been “seriously burdened”, as a contemporary source described it, by its weak performance on 9 April 1940 and 29 August 1943.²⁴ After the war, the military leaders remained targets of public criticism. Unlike the politicians, they

had no official channels through which to reframe the past as it was presented to the public and they found themselves trapped in a narrative they could not easily alter. Moreover, the totality of the Danish defence and army structure had been fundamentally disrupted during the occupation and would have to be rebuilt from scratch.²⁵

Some of the criticism came from former resistance members, who argued that the army had been too passive throughout the occupation. The Army Chief, General Ebbe Gørtz, became a central target. He was criticised for failing to issue orders to fight on 9 April 1940, for his unwavering loyalty to the political leadership, and for his refusal to cooperate with the resistance movement before 29 August 1943. He was also blamed for allowing the Germans to seize the army's weapons and equipment and, finally, for failing to carry out a thorough purge of compromised officers after liberation. According to the Swedish military attaché in Copenhagen, the Danish military leadership had become "somewhat suspect in the eyes of the public" because of its conduct during the occupation. He observed that the criticism was voiced by representatives of the resistance movement, by the press, and by various political factions.²⁶

A recurring and particularly damaging line of criticism concerned the extent of Nazi sympathies that was rampant within the officer corps. This was not merely a matter of rumours or speculation. A considerable number of officers, especially among the younger cohorts, had been enamoured by and attracted to Nazi ideology in the early years of the war as many had joined one of the Danish Nazi parties. Membership records from the largest of these parties, the Danish Nationalist Socialist Worker Party (DNSAP), listed 21 first lieutenants, 32 second lieutenants, 32 captains, and 16 sub-lieutenants.²⁷ In addition to these figures, the reserve officers and enlisted personnel must be added, and the actual figures are likely even higher, because the DNSAP reportedly maintained secret membership lists of officers before the war even began.²⁸ A contemporary report noted "a certain unease" within the Danish military as the purge of compromised officers unfolded. It also observed that investigations into compromised personnel were themselves roadblocks to the effective training of new personnel and the effective fighting capability of the armed forces.²⁹

While most ordinary Danes were unaware of these affiliations during the occupation, several public incidents involving Danish officers expressing sympathy for Nazism later came to haunt the officer corps. In the immediate post-war years, a flood of publications about "the five evil years" appeared, and in many of them, the officers were criticised harshly. One example of this was

seen in the issue *5 Aar. Besættelsen i Billeder* (5 Years: The Occupation in Photographs), which reprinted numerous images of Danish officers who had joined the DNSAP's military unit, the Free Corps Denmark. Another influential work was *Besættelsestidens Fakta: Dokumentarisk Haandbog* (Facts of the Occupation: A Documentary Handbook), published in 1945. Spanning almost 1,600 pages, it compiled laws, decrees, and official statements made by officials during the occupation period. It was intended as a reference work for courts and lawyers in possible trials concerning harmful conduct perpetrated by the enemies of the state, whomever they might be. The handbook documented that several senior army officers had been prominent figures in the segments of Danish Nazism.

The criticism reached new heights in January 1946, when chairman of the youth section in the Danish Social Liberal Party, Erik Jørgensen, gave an interview to *Hjemmeværnet*. This publication was the membership magazine of the Danish Home Guard, and here Erik declared that the officer corps constituted one of the most compromised segments of the Danish population.³⁰ This publication and in extension the remark was primarily aimed at former resistance members, only exacerbating the problematic relations between the officer corps and resistance veterans which was already deeply strained. Gørtz attempted to persuade Jørgensen to withdraw the statement, but when he refused by insisting that he spoke the truth, Gørtz initiated a defamation lawsuit against him on behalf of the army. The Chief of the Navy later joined the case.

Instead of restoring the honour of the officer corps, the trial deepened the crisis. When the case reached the courts in September 1946, the defence and Jørgensen had little difficulty substantiating their claims. A comprehensive overview prepared by the Ministry of War showed that of the 691 serving line officers in the army, 61 had either died in German service, been dismissed for Nazi collaboration, or faced disciplinary proceedings. Among reserve and reinforcement officers, 68 out of 619 fell into the same categories, corresponding to roughly ten per cent in both groups.³¹ The defence further cited well-documented cases of Danish officers acting in leadership positions within the Free Corps Denmark, as well as a pro-Nazi pamphlet written by senior officers during the occupation.³²

Even before the trial began, the case attracted intense media attention. The newspaper *Friheden* published the names of all 69 officers listed in the DNSAP membership register, while the communist daily *Land og Folk* went further by publishing the names of the 180 officers who were identified in Nazi and resistance archives as having pro-German affiliations.³³ Gørtz himself was singled out and criticised, not least because of his participation in a parade welcoming

back the Free Corps Denmark from the front in October 1942. During the trial, Gørtz was also questioned about his contact and connections to the Danish Nazi Party. He explained that in 1939, he had commented on a draft army bill submitted by the leader of the DNSAP Frits Clausen, because Clausen was a member of the Danish Parliament at the time.³⁴ In later statements to the press, however, this episode was reframed. The contact was now presented as having served an intelligence purpose, allowing the General Staff to investigate possible collaboration between Nazi activists and circles within the officer corps. In December, the issue was raised in parliament, where the Minister of Defence defended Gørtz and supported this interpretation.³⁵ In this way, the episode also suggested a distinction between the officers in the intelligence service and the other individuals of the officer corps who were suspected of political malfeasance.

Although Erik Jørgensen was ultimately convicted of defamation and fined, the real losers were probably still the officers themselves. The trial exposed the extent of compromise within the officer corps and inflicted a profound loss of face. All the documents, the stenographic records of the trial, and the final judgment, were published in book form before the end of that same year.³⁶

The officers were acutely aware of the damage that had been wrought. Having already suffered repeated humiliations during the war, they now faced sustained public criticism that questioned their loyalty, honour, and legitimacy. For the intelligence officers, the Gørtz case served as a warning of how struggles over documents and public exposure could rapidly undermine institutional authority and personal legitimacy.

INTERNAL FRACTURES IN THE OFFICER CORPS

It is important to stress that the officer corps was far from homogeneous. Relations between different groups within the officer corps remained immensely strained after the war. Many argued that an extensive purge was necessary, if the army was to regain public trust. In accordance with a law passed on 25 May 1945, officers who had served in German military units were dismissed from service outright. For many, however, this measure did not go far enough. In July 1945, the Minister of Defence, Ole Bjørn Kraft, convened a meeting at the Ministry of War in order to discuss the future of the armed forces. Present were the leadership of the resistance movement in Copenhagen, the Army Chief, Ebbe Gørtz, and several officers who had themselves been active in the resistance. During the meeting, Kraft asked the officer and resistance leader A. R. Jørgensen how the Copenhagen leadership viewed a proposed purge of the army. Jørgensen argued

that, if the military were to regain respect among the population, the officers who had fled to Sweden needed to have their career advancement opportunities curtailed. Other possibilities were suggested but Gørtz ultimately rejected this view.³⁷

Similar tensions surfaced in the case of Colonel Helge Bennike, who also believed that the purge was proceeding far too slowly. Shortly after liberation, Bennike wrote to Gørtz, arguing that all officers who had supported Nazism should be dismissed from service. Gørtz responded sharply. He interpreted Bennike's intervention as a breach of discipline and removed him from his position as commander of the Border Command.³⁸ Gørtz was unwilling to punish officers for having been members of the Danish Nazi Party (DNSAP). In a memorandum to the Ministry of War dated 4 October 1945, he explained that the German invasion had come as a profound shock to the officer corps. Many, especially among the younger cohorts of the officer corps, had become deeply frustrated with what they perceived as a political system that had failed them. The DNSAP had exploited this discontent through a proposed army law, which appealed to younger officers and: "... in some cases, was followed by party membership."³⁹ The explanation framed the political compromise made by these officers as a transient reaction to the government's neglect of the army and to institutional collapse.

Conflicts over authority were particularly acute within the intelligence service. After fleeing to Sweden in October 1943, the head of the section, Einar Nordentoft, remained head of the service in an informal capacity. Still, his control over the domestic network that continued to operate inside of Denmark was, in practice, limited. This led to a post-war conflict with Svend Schjødt-Eriksen, who had served as General Gørtz's right-hand man during the war and who considered himself as the leader of the domestic intelligence service.⁴⁰ Although Nordentoft ultimately prevailed and regained control of the section, the relationship between the two men remained damaged. It was not merely organisational authority that was at stake, but control over how the wartime intelligence work would be defined, documented, and remembered after the war.

One manifestation of this struggle was the intelligence service's involvement in publishing the DNSAP membership register shortly after the war.⁴¹ The card index showed that Schjødt-Eriksen had been a party member for a brief period of time, as had many other officers. A disciplinary case was opened against him, but it led nowhere. His membership had apparently lasted only a few months, and there was no evidence that he had ever paid any dues or participated in party activities. He did not appear to have been a committed Nazi, either in word or in action.⁴² Yet, the episode illustrates a broader pattern. By emphasising cases

of political compromise within the officer corps, the intelligence service was able to draw a line between itself and the other compromised parts of the military because of their association with Nazism. The distinction allowed officers conducting intelligence work to be separated from the failures and political entanglements of officers in the regular armed forces. Accusations of political compromise were used as ammunition in struggles over claiming authority and to secure promotion, as well as in the efforts to redefine the boundaries of the entire institution.

Tensions were also evident within the relatively small circle of intelligence officers themselves. Hans Lunding, who had remained in Denmark in the fall of 1943 and was arrested and imprisoned in Germany, appears to have harboured a deep resentment towards his colleagues who escaped to Sweden. At least this was how he was portrayed by fellow officer Per Winkel, who claimed that after the war, Lunding: "... harboured a profound disgust for everything connected with the intelligence service after 29 August 1943; in particular, I believe he despised all those intelligence officers who had left Denmark and sought refuge in Sweden."⁴³ Whether or not this assessment fully captures Lunding's actual sentiments, it points to the depth of post-war resentments and to the moral fault lines that continued to divide officers who had experienced the war in radically different ways.

Taken together, these internal conflicts reveal that the rehabilitation of the officer corps would never be a unified nor uncontested exercise. These conflicts revolved around access to documents, authority, and the right to shape the historical record. In doing so, they laid much of the groundwork for the later consolidation of the interpretation that framed exile, secrecy, and institutional continuity as essential contributions to the national cause.

REMEMBERING INTELLIGENCE

As mentioned, the officers of the intelligence service were criticised for fleeing to Sweden and abandoning the service.⁴⁴ In general, however, the intelligence service attracted relatively little attention in the first years following the war. Intelligence work, by its covert nature, takes place in the shadows, and only a few people knew what the intelligence officers had done during the German occupation.

The first comprehensive attempt to write the history of Danish wartime intelligence came from the historian Jørgen Hæstrup. A former resistance member himself, Hæstrup began toiling with historical research in the late 1940s in

response to what he perceived as an unjust political critique of the resistance movement.⁴⁵ As most relevant archives remained closed, Jørgen Hæstrup based his early works primarily on interviews and testimonies collected from resistance fighters and officers. In Hæstrup's influential accounts, Danish intelligence officers occupied a privileged position. They had already, in the autumn of 1940, defied the government's policy of cooperation and established intelligence links with Britain. In the fall of 1943, they moved to Sweden to continue their intelligence work. Hæstrup argued that these initiatives had preserved Denmark's honour and contributed to its recognition as an Allied nation. His account foregrounded disciplined and foresighted intelligence work, while giving little space to communist resistance activities and emphasising British-backed networks.⁴⁶ Hæstrup did not operate in isolation. Ebbe Munck, who had been the intelligence officers' representative in Stockholm, acted as an informal adviser on Hæstrup's project, commenting on drafts and proposing amendments.⁴⁷ As is so often the case when memoirs and testimonies dominate the source base, the narrative ended up closely reflecting the protagonists' own self-understanding.

For the intelligence officers, Hæstrup's works carried particular weight. They provided an authoritative framework through which exile and secrecy could be interpreted as purposeful and legitimate service. In the years that followed, the officers took considerable precautions to protect this interpretation. Central to this effort was their control of the wartime intelligence archive, known as the Stockholm Archive, which remained closed to most people. Tensions surfaced in the early 1970s when Lieutenant Colonel Helge Klint sought access to the archive.⁴⁸ Klint was not an outsider. He headed the Army Staff's Military History Section, taught at the University of Copenhagen, and had himself served in the Danish intelligence service in Sweden during the war. Klint took a different position. He believed that Hæstrup had overstated the importance of the intelligence service and portrayed the intelligence officers too heroically, whereas others, including Schjødt-Eriksen, were portrayed in a more antagonistic light in the narrative.⁴⁹ When Hæstrup's two-volume book *Hemmelig alliance* (Secret Alliance) was published in 1959, they indeed played a role in Schjødt-Eriksen being passed over for promotion to major general.⁵⁰

Klint's request for access was denied. Instead, two young historians were granted controlled access to the material under the supervision of Jørgen Hæstrup. One of them was Hans Christian Bjerg, who wrote about the intelligence service's activities during the five years of occupation. The task was given to Bjerg with a clause stipulating that the army chiefs retained the right, on "security

grounds,” to reject the manuscripts if the results did not meet their expectations.⁵¹ Drafts circulated among former intelligence officers, particularly P. A. Mørch and Per Winkel, who suggested several revisions and deletions. As Winkel put it, the aim was to ensure “the most correct, truthful, historical description,” which in practice meant safeguarding the officers’ own version of events.⁵² The two-volume work, *Ligaen* (The League), reiterated much of the established narrative.

Although *Ligaen* was well received in the press, academic historians were sharply critical of the work. Bjerg was accused of adopting an outdated, heroic perspective and of grossly overestimating the intelligence service’s importance.⁵³ This was also partly evident in the studies conducted by Knud J. V. Jespersen, published in the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁵⁴ Jespersen introduced greater nuance to the story, not least by emphasising the officers’ anti-communist motivations. Still, he explicitly presented his work as a continuation of Jørgen Hæstrup’s interpretation, now supplemented by British archival material.⁵⁵ It is noteworthy that Jespersen, whose scholarly background lay primarily in early modern history, was encouraged to take on the subject by Jørgen Hæstrup himself and by Ole Lippmann, the former head of the Danish SOE agents.⁵⁶ Their involvement underlines the degree to which the historiography of wartime intelligence developed in close dialogue with its former practitioners.

The most recent addition to the discourse within this field is Trine Engholm Michelsen’s book about the officers’ secretary Jutta Graae: *Storfyrstinden: besættelsens magtfulde, men ukendte frihedskæmper Jutta Graae* (The Grand Duchess: the occupation’s powerful but unknown freedom fighter, Jutta Graae), published in 2021.⁵⁷ Michelsen’s book, as its predecessors, received positive reviews in the press and is a continuation of the heroic narrative tradition within this field, in which the small but clever Danes outwit the large but foolish Germans. A central difference to her approach is the shift in protagonist and the gendered framing, with Graae occupying the role previously reserved for male officers.

Taken together, the historiography illustrates how the intelligence officers’ wartime actions were reinterpreted over time. This process rested on memoirs, interviews, selective archival access, and close collaboration and interaction with a limited group of historians. Far from being marginalised, they came to occupy a privileged symbolic position in the historical narrative of the occupation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced how Danish military intelligence officers sought to reposition themselves in the aftermath of German occupation and Danish defeat. In

this sense, the struggle over their reputation was not fought within the arenas of public memory but rather it was shaped by the institutional conditions under which history about the occupation was written. During and immediately after the war, the officer corps faced sustained public criticism for its wartime conduct or lack thereof. For intelligence officers, exile in Sweden intensified this predicament. In the post-war period, flight, secrecy, and institutional continuity were difficult to reconcile with the prevailing ideas of honour that centred on visible resistance and sacrifice. For many officers, reintegration into the post-war order was uncertain and uneven. It did not follow automatically at the end of the war, but it gradually took shape through disagreements over how the occupation should be interpreted and over who could legitimately speak with authority about it. By reading through Kaposov's concept of "memory wars", the Danish case suggests that the struggles over the legitimacy of the past found herein were not primarily fought over through legislation or the courts, but through control of archival access, documentation, and historical authority. In this sense, the rehabilitation of the intelligence officers illustrates a form of memory war fought within the production of historical knowledge itself, where access to archives and historiographical authority became decisive factors in determining the outcome.

In this context, memoirs, interviews, and the handling of archival material became particularly significant. They allowed wartime conduct to be framed without accountability or recourse to open and fair criticism. From this perspective, the experience of the intelligence officers also speaks to a broader aspect of post-war resocialisation. The reconstruction of democratic authority after 1945 did not only concern resistance fighters and collaborators. It also involved re-establishing legitimacy for elements of the pre-war elite whose positions had been weakened by the occupation. In Denmark, this took place through legal measures and purges, as well as through slower measures, including more gradual disputes over interpretation and institutional continuity.

CHAPTER 9

Compensation Policies for Danish Resistance Fighters and World War II Victims 1941–2026

Søren Werther Kjær Rasmussen

Denmark was a peculiar case among the German-occupied countries. After the 1940 invasion, it surrendered within hours, resulting in only few casualties and no immediate need for extensive social measures. Danish politicians then pursued a policy of cooperation with Germany, accepting their militarised presence while formally retaining sovereignty which was largely illusory. Submitting to these conditions, the civilian population was largely spared and the Jewish population protected until this state of affairs collapsed in August 1943.¹ Because of the policy of cooperation, there was little impetus for coordinated resistance, and no organised Danish resistance movement existed in the first calendar year of the occupation. Consequently, in 1940 there was no perceived need to establish measures to assist war victims, or what would later be termed *victims of the occupation*.²

The first instance of a defined group of Danish citizens who required war-related social assistance during the occupation occurred in summer 1941. This occurred when the Danish state, at the request of the Germans, arrested around

300 leading (mostly male) communists after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Their wives, outraged by the detentions of their husbands, demanded that the state assumed responsibility for their material needs. The women organised themselves into a group that later became known as the Red Widows. They approached the Ministry of Social Affairs, where their primary contact became the senior civil servant Hans Henrik Koch. Koch took their demands for support seriously and established a social relief apparatus for the internees' families.³

This initiative constituted the first kind of assistance directed at individuals defined as victims of the occupation. It was, however, only the first of many such initiatives, some of which remain in effect today. This chapter examines the overall developmental trajectories of social assistance for resistance fighters and other victims of the occupation. It asks which actors were responsible for providing assistance and what support former resistance fighters received.

The institutions discussed here merit a vastly more extensive investigation than what has been possible within the confines of this anthology. A full review of their structures, practices, and procedures, as well as a detailed account of the often-extreme social conditions faced by victims and their families, lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, it focuses on the overarching principles behind the compensation that was given to victims and the roles of key officials across different periods.

Scholarly inquiry of social assistance that was granted to victims of the occupation began with historian Jørgen Hæstrup. He conducted a study of the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and the support structures they created for Danish concentration camp prisoners. This effort was later refined by historian Hans Sode Madsen in his work on the White Buses operation (the evacuation of Danish and Norwegian concentration camp prisoners), which also details the Ministry's assistance to the relatives of resistance fighters who were combating the occupation.⁴ The most comprehensive analysis of the various post-war compensation schemes to date has been compiled by Sofie Lene Bak, whose research focused on the support granted to repatriated Danish Jews and demonstrated how this assistance contributed to their resocialisation back into civil society.⁵ The most recent contribution to this field of inquiry is the anthology *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede* (The Excluded, the Unwelcome, and the Admired) which analyses the social assistance provided to the victims of the occupation. It compares initiatives aimed at Danish resistance members, resocialisation measures directed at refugee groups and convicted Danish collaborators.⁶

Social assistance during the occupation is difficult to reconstruct due to fragmented and often discreet archival material, as much of the work was conducted semi-clandestinely. Nevertheless, extensive sources from ministerial, municipal, and private archives allow the uncovering of what turned out to be a broad, multilayered system of wartime relief after liberation. Moving past the tumultuous years immediately following liberation, the records become more systematic and comprehensive, which shifts the historical documentation challenge from one of scarcity to one of scale, as compensation archives comprise thousands of files documenting the post-war assistance initiatives.⁷

A PROCESS IN FIVE PHASES

To explain the relief process from 1941 to present day, this chapter divides the history of social assistance into five distinct phases. This division is based on the premise that each assistance period operated according to a distinct set of guiding principles or assumptions. In developing this periodisation, I was inspired by the work of historians Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij. They uncovered how Dutch assistance to war victims evolved through clearly defined phases. Their periodisation analysis is particularly useful for understanding how welfare measures and recognition of victims are not merely the outcome of administrative planning but shaped by wider transformations in the public memory and by expert knowledge.⁸

This chapter uses their analytical framework as a comparative point of departure for examining the development of Danish compensation practices as they developed over time. Withuis and Mooij argue that early sporadic initiatives were followed by a focus on compensation for resistance fighters and, from the 1970s, a shift towards a focus on alleviating trauma and cultivating health. This pattern also largely holds true in the Danish context. Similar developments can be observed in Norway from 1968, where the trauma suffered by former resistance members and sailors became the focal point of contemporary compensation legislation.⁹ Despite these parallels, I propose an alternate periodisation structure that better describes Danish assistance developments.

As noted, this chapter primarily focuses on resistance members and the assistance they received. In the Compensation Act, they were defined as part of the group of Danish war victims, who were assigned the formal legal term *victims of the occupation* (besættelsestidens ofre).¹⁰ For the sake of clarity, this chapter also uses this designation when referring to the period prior to the Compensation Act. In these terms it is important to remember that this designation functions

as a legal categorisation rather than an ethical classification that tries to define who should be regarded as victims.

THE FIRST AD HOC PHASE: FROM 1941 TO MAY 1945

The first period of social assistance for victims of the occupation can be described as the *ad hoc phase*, as support was improvisational in nature that did not operate on a solid legal foundation and relied on guidelines rather than laws. Assistance was given in close cooperation between social authorities and members of the resistance milieu. The phase consists of two parts: the first occurred during the occupation, when the vestiges of the state determined forms of support, and the second part from 5 May 1945 to February 1946, when assistance continued on the same legal basis and with the same actors but without the yoke of German occupation.

In this section I ask how the assistance to Danish victims was organised during the war, and how public actors such as the state and municipalities as well as other interest groups interacted.

After Hans Henrik Koch presented the complaints of the Red Widows to the Danish government, the politicians granted him broad discretion to design an appropriate system of social assistance. This initiative became the first organised form of relief for members of the group that would later be legally defined as “victims of the occupation”.¹¹ Despite experiencing strong resistance from the social services in many municipalities, the Red Widows ended up being supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs for the remainder of the war. Despite the official anti-communist line in Denmark, the government and civil service found it reasonable to mitigate the social consequences for the relatives of the imprisoned communists. Danish Social Democratic prime Minister Thorvald Stauning stated: “It is we who have interned them, and thereby we have driven them into poverty and ruin.”¹²

As no applicable legislation existed for assisting civilian war victims, the Ministry of Social Affairs relied on section 281 of the Public Assistance Act, originally intended for people drafted for extraordinary military service. This provision allowed for more generous support than ordinary municipal relief, reflecting official recognition that internment created exceptional hardship for the affected requiring extraordinary assistance. Unlike ordinary social assistance, the aid was intended to involve “a more generous allocation of support and a more lenient mode of disbursement,” as stated in an official circular issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs to municipal social offices in 1941.¹³

In the summer of 1943, tensions in Denmark reached a breaking point as large-scale strikes erupted and the resistance movement had grown significantly. Originating in communist networks formed after the 1941 arrests, the resistance movement expanded to include people from a diverse set of social and political backgrounds. As activities intensified, German pressure on the Danish government increased, which included demands for reinstating the death penalty. When the government refused to comply, it led to the collapse of the policy of cooperation that had been conducted by the Danish authorities since the start of the occupation.¹⁴

After 29 August 1943, the number of wartime victims rose sharply. Nearly 6,100 Danes were deported to concentration camps, around 7,000 Jewish Danes fled to Sweden, and thousands of Danes were imprisoned and often tortured by the Gestapo. The Ministry of Social Affairs expanded assistance schemes under section 281a to support Jewish refugees, deportees, and resistance families by covering rent and living costs. What began as a limited initiative for a few hundred individuals soon became a broad sweeping effort assisting thousands. Throughout the war, the Red Widows worked closely with the Ministry, gathering information on wants and needs and alerting Koch and his staff when municipalities failed to act in accordance with the Public Assistance Act. Their requests were consistently accommodated.¹⁵

THE SECOND AD HOC PHASE: FROM MAY 1945 TO FEBRUARY 1946

Already during the occupation, Danish politicians, civil servants, and the resistance movement discussed how assistance to resistance fighters should be organised after liberation. Social support was a featured item on the agenda of the Danish Freedom Council (consisting of the leaders of the resistance movement), and confidential contacts between the Council and the Ministry of Social Affairs made plans for the future structure of post-war relief. Likewise, Allied representatives and Danish politicians in exile stressed the importance of recognising and supporting the resistance movement to ensure post-war stability, a message they conveyed to the political leadership in Copenhagen. As a result, the Danish political elite was already planning concrete institutional solutions for post-war social assistance in 1944.¹⁶

Upon liberation, a coalition government established the so-called Offices for Special Affairs (Kontorerne for særlige Anliggender) to provide rapid and targeted support to victims of the occupation. Officially, the offices were presented as an initiative originating from the resistance movement. But here it becomes perti-

ment to ask how significant the resistance's actual role was in their establishment and operation, and what the assistance actually entailed?

A coalition government was formed between the established political parties and the resistance movement. Members of the Freedom Council were assigned responsibility for resistance-related political portfolios. The communist and resistance leader Mogens Fog was appointed Minister for Special Affairs and was tasked with ensuring that the offices were established and that a compensation law for victims of the occupation was drafted. In his memoirs, Fog recounts that he defined the overall direction, while the civil service handled the concrete construction of the compensation apparatus.¹⁷

The Offices for Special Affairs were established immediately after liberation. They consisted of a central office in Copenhagen and local offices in most provincial towns. Their primary purpose was to ensure that resistance fighters and any other eligible individuals could receive immediate relief and financial support. Another priority was to reintegrate resistance fighters back into the labour market helping them find gainful employment. Assistance was disbursed through municipal treasuries but financed by the state. The guiding principle of the assistance remained that support should be provided in an uncomplicated and generous manner. In this respect, the system continued to function long after its initial conception much as it had during the war, with its legal basis still rooted in Section 281.¹⁸

Financial support from the offices varied. Payments were generally based on the social assistance rates of the Municipality of Copenhagen but could be adjusted according to the specific situation. Assistance included compensation for lost property, payment of rent, purchase of essential consumer goods, and in some cases the settlement of urgent debts. In addition, tax relief and wage supplements could be granted to former resistance fighters.¹⁹

The resistance movement was strongly represented on the board of the central office, but day-to-day operations were primarily handled by civil servants. Nevertheless, in their own case materials, the offices were portrayed as a resistance initiative that was exclusively planned and executed by the movement during the occupation. This narrative is misleading, as municipal and state authorities in fact financed and staffed the offices. Moreover, as mentioned above, the Ministry of Social Affairs had already played an active role during the occupation in the planning and execution of future assistance.²⁰

The operation of the offices was initially chaotic but gradually became more structured. Certain issues persisted, including the interpretation of unclear rule-

sets and guidelines while it also posed a challenge to verify the backgrounds of some applicants. The offices also encountered cases of abuse, where individuals attempted to obtain assistance through fraudulent means. Nevertheless, they succeeded in providing extensive support to a wide range of victims. Surviving records from that time show that assistance was distributed on a large scale, with more than 30,000 recipients in Copenhagen alone. Although many victims of the occupation received help, resistance members formed the largest group of recipients, accounting for 75 per cent of applicants in provincial towns and 55 per cent in Copenhagen.²¹ Average payments were modest, but particularly hard hit persons such as widows and disabled individuals could receive larger sums which in some cases exceeded half a year's worth of wages.²²

The Offices for Special Affairs was a temporary institutional measure and was gradually phased out following the adoption of the Compensation Act in October 1945. From December 1945, most payments ceased, and by the end of February 1946, the vast majority of local offices had closed. In many respects, the social assistance provided by the offices was unique in Danish history. The aid functioned as an extraordinary social safety net for victims of the occupation and helped ensure a relatively smooth transition into the post-war period. The offices became part of a political narrative in which the resistance movement presented itself as the primary driving force behind the effort, even though civil servants working and paid for by the state were largely responsible for its practical implementation.²³

SECOND PHASE: THE PHASE OF STATE CONSOLIDATION 1946-1948

The second phase of aid was marked by the state's emergence as the official central actor, behind the compensation schemes, while the resistance movement played a more limited role in the social apparatus. At the same time, the legal basis for assistance was now anchored in the Act on Compensation for Victims of the Occupation. The formal starting point of the second phase was 1 February 1946, when assistance under section 281 was finally discontinued. This second phase ended in 1948 when the authorities stated that the direct social problems caused by the war had largely been solved.

While the time frame here is 1946-48, the first part of this section addresses the genesis of the Compensation Act, which chronologically belongs to the "ad hoc phase". The legislative process is examined here because it explains the framework within which the Compensation Board operated during the phase of state consolidation.

The compensation act

In July 1945, a working group of civil servants and resistance representatives was established to draft a compensation law for victims of the German occupation. The first draft, written by resistance fighter and communist Carl Madsen, sought political recognition and preferential treatment for resistance members, awarding them with higher compensation rates while also enabling former concentration camp prisoners to retire, as well as introducing more innovative welfare measures. In contrast, the civil servants aimed for a broader and administratively streamlined compensation scheme without experimental elements and preferential treatment. The final draft was a compromise between the two compensation philosophies that strengthened state control of the process and reduced overall benefit levels, while securing a continuous honorary payment (*hædersgaven*) for resistance members.²⁴

When the proposal was presented in parliament, several parties criticised its exclusivity and argued that compensation should cover everyone who had suffered during the war. The debate became a power struggle between the resistance movement and politicians. The politicians ultimately prevailed, they broadened the scope of the law, reframing it as a collective national settlement rather than just being a reward for resistance.²⁵

The Compensation Act which was enacted in November 1945 with full effect from February 1946, covered resistance fighters, communists, police officers, border guards, Jews, victims of German reprisals and other civilian victims. Compensation was granted for disability, loss of a breadwinner, funeral expenses, torture and imprisonment. However, benefit levels were significantly lower than those proposed by the resistance movement. For example, the annual honorary payment awarded to resistance widows and individuals disabled by German torture or those who were seriously injured during resistance operations was set at 800 kroner (20,760 kroner or € 2,780 in 2026 when accounting for inflation).²⁶ This was a stark decrease when compared with the 7,800 kroner (202,500 kroner or € 27,100)²⁷ that were originally demanded, while compensation for having been imprisoned abroad was reduced to one quarter of the originally proposed level.²⁸

For context, a skilled worker's annual wage in Denmark in 1945 was on average 11,400 kroner²⁹ (295,900 kroner or € 39,600).³⁰ The final legislation thus became a broad but comparatively modest compensation scheme, falling far short of the resistance movement's original ambitions for a generous but exclusionary support apparatus.

A relevant question concerning the Compensation Act is whether it represented a genuine social policy innovation. The short answer is no. At liberation, social policy was characterised by an expansion of social provision, but without a decisive break from earlier traditions of poor relief. The Ministry of Social Affairs addressed acute social challenges in general through emergency legislation, and there was a broadly founded political willingness to support victims of the occupation. At the same time, reforms introduced in 1945 reduced legal incapacitation and abolished repayment requirements for assistance. The Compensation Act reflected these general trends: support was allocated according to need and followed existing social policy principles, with widows and concentration camp survivors receiving the highest benefits. The structure of the law, however, drew on earlier social and insurance legislation, including the Workers' Compensation Act and military compensation schemes. The concept of the honorary payment also had historical precedents which were notably present in legislation for veterans of nineteenth-century wars.³¹

The Compensation Board

The Compensation Board was established in November 1945 and was operated by both civil servants and resistance representatives. In 1946, the central council for former resistance members was dissolved due to internal conflicts, leaving no formally appointed resistance representatives, although those already delegated to the board remained as ordinary members until the 1960s. Initially intended to operate until 1947, the Board had handily expedited most cases by then, but complex cases prolonged its work, and it remained in existence until 1997.³²

The Compensation Board served as the central body for administering the Compensation Act. The Directorate of Industrial Injury Insurance (DIII) processed disability cases under the act and made its own decisions, though it could seek guidance from the Compensation Board in cases containing elements of doubt. Applicants could also appeal the Directorate's decisions to the Board. Case processing followed the same procedures as ordinary industrial injury cases, with standardised forms and sober descriptions of incidents.

Cases concerning honorary payments, compensation for torture, property damage, and assistance for education were referred directly to the Compensation Board. The Board's secretariat conducted preliminary reviews of the cases before they were presented to the board, which determined the final outcome. Some complex cases were used to establish standardised precedents for future rulings. This meant that the distribution of war-related compensation was, in

many respects, handled in a traditional manner, closely resembling the administration of standard work accident insurance schemes.³³

In total, the Compensation Board processed 21,706 applications from 15,640 individuals, excluding cases handled by the DIII. Fifty-five per cent of recipients were resistance fighters or communists. There is no complete account of how much individual recipients received in disability support from DIII, but a sample of case files indicates that a person assessed as fifty per cent disabled could receive one and a half weeks' wages per month in disability benefits. If an applicant before the Compensation Board was awarded compensation for torture, property damage, and non-material losses, the average payout amounted to 4,453 kroner, equivalent to approximately 15,000 Euro in present-day value with inflation taken into account.

Although this compensation provided recipients with some financial leeway, it was insufficient to allow receivers to withdraw from the labour market completely.³⁴ Nor was that the intention of the compensation scheme. Severely disabled individuals and widows were to be supported by the state, while the expectation was that most applicants would be able to re-enter the labour market after recuperation, medical treatment, possible educational support, and compensation. The Minister for Special Affairs emphasised this point in 1947, stating that the assistance efforts were nearing completion.³⁵ This proved true for a lot of clients, though many resistance fighters never fully recovered from the traumas they had suffered because of the war.

The Freedom Fund

After liberation, several private funds were established to assist victims of the occupation, the largest of which being the Freedom Fund (Frihedsfonden), founded by prominent resistance leaders in June 1945. The board was dominated by older, socially established non-communist resistance veterans whose outlook differed from that of the younger fighters who sought broader social change within Denmark. It was intended to supplement the Compensation Act and the fund primarily supported resistance fighters and their relatives who received insufficient public assistance. Although formally independent, it maintained close ties to the state and was mentioned in the Compensation Act, which allowed it to receive surplus compensation funds in certain cases.³⁶

The fund provided educational support, supplementary aid to surviving relatives, grants or interest-free loans for business start-ups, retraining, or convalescent care not covered by the public schemes. In practice, its activities soon

coalesced around three core areas: education, support for widows, and business start-ups, the latter of which often proving unsuccessful due to the severe health problems or lack of experience among loan recipients. Between 1945 and 1959, 1,001 individuals received educational support, helping prevent social decline within resistance families and enabling occupational mobility for the individuals who were supported. Initially the fund changed from functioning as a general relief organisation into a more selective body focussing mainly on widows and children. While the fund played an important role in the post-war assistance system, it did not constitute a social policy innovation but rather, it represented aspects of the traditional philanthropic model structured around private charity.³⁷

THIRD PHASE: THE PHASE OF REJECTION 1948-1969

Just as the Compensation Board and the Freedom Fund believed that the social assistance effort was nearing its completion, many victims of the occupation began to experience the long-term effects of wartime trauma. Within the medical profession, prevailing attitudes increasingly supported the reality that chronically ill resistance fighters continued to require substantial support. Those who had experienced German imprisonment were particularly prone to serious health problems. The Compensation Act, however, did not account for such problems with long-lasting and debilitating health conditions. Several interest organisations advocating for former resistance fighters demanded political action, but it was not until 1969 that this issue was regarded in earnest and opportunities for applicants were improved. Because many victims were denied support during this period, it is referred to as the phase of rejection in this chapter.

KZ Syndrome

Shortly after liberation, Danish physicians Paul Thygesen and Jørgen Kieler who were both former resistance fighters and concentration camp prisoners, began studying the psychological and physiological effects of camp imprisonment. Under the guidance of Per Helweg-Larsen, research conducted in 1947–48 showed that most former prisoners suffered serious physical and psychological after-effects, later defined as “concentration camp syndrome,” and this syndrome was considered as potentially permanent as early as 1947. The physicians therefore concluded that the existing assistance apparatus helping the victims of the occupation was insufficient.³⁸ The key question then becomes how the compensation system responded to this new medical knowledge.

As early as 1947, the Danish press began reporting that many resistance fighters suffered severe after-effects. In subsequent years, articles regularly appeared describing how former concentration camp prisoners continued to suffer from serious impairments. This intensified public debate over how these late effects could be addressed.³⁹

The Compensation Board actually attempted to adjust compensation rates as it became clear that many were more severely affected than initially assumed. The Board therefore financed research into the specific health risks faced by concentration camp prisoners. The resulting medical examinations prompted procedural changes in the system aimed at improving assistance for former prisoners. This was not sufficient, however, as the DIII did not recognise psychological illness when determining disability ratings because they did not recognise that KZ syndrome was a genuine illness.⁴⁰

The Freedom Fund also took a critical stance towards applicants with mental illnesses, dismissing psychological trauma as a pretext for financial support and publicly claiming cases claiming this were fabricated. It opposed aiding traumatised resistance fighters on the grounds of potential abuse of the system, reflecting a broader prejudice against the mentally ill implying that psychological illness was not a “real disease”. This point of view was reinforced by the belief that seeking support for mental illness undermined the legacy of the resistance and conflicted with the ideal of the mentally strong, heroic freedom fighter.⁴¹ These reservations on the part of both DIII and the Freedom Fund contributed to the absence of systematic and long-term rehabilitation efforts for many victims of the occupation.

Although the Freedom Fund began rejecting applicants with “KZ syndrome” in the late 1940s, other parts of the resistance milieu called for expanded social assistance. In the 1950s, the magazines *Gestapo-Fangen* (The Gestapo Prisoner) and *Pigtråd* (Barbed Wire), published by two competing associations of former imprisoned resistance fighters, voiced criticisms of the state. *Pigtråd* was issued by the left-leaning Comrades’ Relief Fund (*Kammeraternes Hjælpesfond*), which provided loans and financial support to victims of German imprisonment, while *Gestapo-Fangen* was published by the Gestapo Prisoners’ Association, whose members spanned many political affiliations including conservatives, social democrats, and others from across the political spectrum.⁴²

Numerous clubs, associations, and funds supported victims of the occupation, but the Comrades’ Relief Fund and the Gestapo Prisoners’ Association led the push for change. They sought comprehensive revision of the Compensation Act

and criticised the Freedom Fund for the inadequate assistance that was provided. Disagreements over how support should be administered escalated into direct conflict between the Freedom Fund and the Comrades' Relief Fund, resulting in incidents serious enough between the organisations to warrant police reports being written.⁴³ Thus, the milieu surrounding the victims of the occupation was fragmented, and actors often disagreed about the best course of action.

FOURTH AND FIFTH PHASE: ACCOMMODATION AND DISSOLUTION

The fourth phase can be described as one of accommodation, as victims of the occupation were treated more favourably by funds and public institutions after several difficult years. Although the Compensation Act was revised multiple times, early changes were largely technical, only concerning deadlines and benefit rates. Substantial reforms only came after sustained political pressure from resistance organisations, which coordinated their efforts by the 1960s and presented a united front in order to champion legislative revision. Prominent resistance figures promoted this shift in attitude, and a workgroup was established to improve the quality of assistance to victims of the occupation. This coincided with contemporary and broader political currents that favoured more generous social support for war victims. By the late 1960s, resistance magazines such as *Pigråd* and *Gestapo-Fangen* overtly demanded social improvements for surviving victims of the occupation. Although the Freedom Fund (having undergone organisational changes in the late 1960s) did not formally align itself with these public demands, it gradually revised its dismissive stance on the long-term psychological consequences of camp confinement and began acknowledging the seriousness of KZ syndrome. Following this, the fund participated in negotiations with government ministries concerning the future organisation of its assistance efforts.⁴⁴

These developments led to significant addendums to the Compensation Act between 1968 and 1973. These revisions made it easier to apply for assistance, it allowed for the reassessment of disability ratings, and enabled previously rejected cases to be reopened, all the while benefit rates were increased. Applications were now assessed by members of the resistance milieu, and mental illness was recognised as a legitimate condition when determining compensation. The burden of proof was now reversed, requiring the authorities to disprove claims rather than for claimants to prove the validity of their disabilities. Resistance fighters gained increased recognition, including access to pensions and welfare benefits, and the Compensation Board underwent reforms with the Freedom Fund acting as an

expert advisory body. Overall, the system became markedly more accommodating towards victims of the occupation.⁴⁵

The legislative changes led to an unexpectedly large number of new applications. The Freedom Fund, for example, received so many enquiries that the Ministry of Social Affairs was forced to grant it extraordinary funding. After 1970, it became standard practice for the Freedom Fund to actively seek out former resistance fighters and encourage them to apply for assistance. In several towns, former prominent local resistance figures were engaged to maintain contact with victims of the occupation and support their claims.⁴⁶ Finally, the resistance fighters were granted access to a compensation scheme that provided extraordinary financial assistance and the opportunity to withdraw from the labour market exactly as they had requested twenty-five years earlier.

In 1996, the Freedom Fund dissolved itself as the number of tasks and victims of the occupation declined. The following year, the Compensation Board held its final meeting. At that time, 5,979 individuals still received support under the Compensation Act. The number of recipients declined rapidly as the ageing resistance fighters passed away. Nevertheless, the Compensation Act remains in effect. In 2026, the scheme was administered by the Danish Labour Market Insurance (*Arbejdsmarkedets Erhvervsforsikring*), and they continue to process new cases, including claims from widows of resistance fighters and individuals who were children during the war. The once extensive compensation apparatus is thus in the dissolution phase, yet it still exists.⁴⁷

CHAPTER 10

Social Aid and Gender in Post-War Denmark: Women and the Practices of the Compensation Law, 1945–1948

Mathilde Skaarup Marker

The occupation from 1940–45 left a profound impact on large segments of the Danish population. Several thousand Danes had participated in the resistance movement, and consequently many were forced to go into hiding, flee to Sweden, or endure internment in German concentration camps. Ordinary citizens also experienced the occupation through economic hardship and personal loss resulting from the presence of the occupying forces in the country. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the state was left with an immense socio-economic responsibility requiring Herculean effort to amend: the reconstruction of Danish society. As early as four days after liberation, it was announced that special offices would be established across Denmark. These offices operated under the newly established Ministry for Special Affairs and were tasked with providing immediate aid to the many victims

of the occupation. The objective was to enable citizens to return to the labour market or resume their respective educations as swiftly as possible while also ensuring legal compensation for personal injury, pain and suffering, or damage to property.

Although Denmark was not engaged in direct conventional warfare, approximately 6,000 Danish citizens lost their lives as a result of participation in the resistance movement, from imprisonment in concentration camps, serving as soldiers, police officers, or seamen, or as victims of aerial bombardment.¹ This meant that thousands of Danish women became widows or sole providers due to their husbands dying or being maimed to such an extent that they were unable to work. In addition, a considerable number of Danish women suffered debilitating financial losses or were forced to interrupt their employment or education as a consequence of the war.

The legal basis for social aid and compensation after the war was established in *Act No. 475 of 1 October 1945 on Compensation to Victims of the Occupation*. The legislation enabled numerous categories of victims, both men and women, to apply for compensation mitigating losses or injuries sustained during the war. At the same time, it excluded certain individuals from receiving aid including those who were deemed “pro-German” and “asocial.” The provisions of the Act were strongly influenced by the resistance movement’s position on the political scene in the post-war period, as well as by the prevailing conceptions of gender roles and breadwinner responsibilities of the 1940s.

Most applicants were men, but women also applied for compensation and social aid through the new provisions. This study examines how female applicants were treated in compensation proceedings and whether they experienced discrimination because of their gender. It also explores whether the political negotiations underlying the Act on Compensation to Victims of the Occupation had an impact on the processing of these women’s cases. This study is based on 143 cases involving women, processed between 1945 and 1948. Although women constituted a clear minority of approximately five per cent of the total number of individuals who applied for compensation after the Second World War, it remains important to shed light on how they were treated by the state at a point in time when the societal role of women was still largely defined as that of a homemaker rather than the primary breadwinner. Because of the 1940s traditional family roles, the female applicants have been divided into different categories based on their marital status in this study.²

THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK BEHIND SOCIAL AID FOR VICTIMS OF THE OCCUPATION

During the final months of the Second World War, the Danish Freedom Council had been working to establish a committee tasked primarily with devising how social aid should be administered and coordinated once the many imprisoned members of the resistance movement and other victims of the occupation had returned to everyday life after the war.³ When the liberation Government was formed, the Freedom Council proposed the creation of a special ministry to assume responsibility for the extensive social tasks anticipated to reveal themselves in the aftermath of the war.

The Prime Minister of the Liberation Government, Vilhelm Buhl, addressed this directly at the opening of Rigsdagen on 9 May 1945. In his speech to the nation, he declared: “In this time of reconstruction that now lies before us, major economic and social problems will demand resolution. Although our country has fortunately been spared the ravages of war, the occupation has left deep marks on every aspect of our social life.”⁴

The announcement was subsequently broadcast by radio, where it was stated in addition that the so-called Offices for Special Affairs (*Kontorer for Særlige Anliggender*) would be established throughout the whole country. These offices were intended to provide immediate assistance to the victims of the occupation. In addition to the required extensive social work, the Central Office for Special Affairs (*Centralkontoret*) was also responsible for compiling a report of missing and deceased resistance members, assisting in helping the returning Danish refugees from Sweden, procuring clothing and household goods for affected families, and organising convalescent care for citizens suffering from nerve damage.⁵

Case processing at the Offices was conducted in the following manner: an applicant, or a representative acting on the applicant’s behalf, would visit one of the offices. They were then asked to fill out a form where they were to provide relevant details such as the applicant’s name, age, marital status, family situation, housing conditions, annual income, nature of alleged injuries, affiliation with the resistance movement, and so forth. In many respects, the application form resembled the same forms used at the social welfare offices at the time. However, the key difference was that assistance at the Offices for Special Affairs was not universally accessible but rather it was extraordinary and discretionary. This also meant that applicants could be rejected outright if they were not deemed “worthy” of receiving aid. Such judgments often affected individuals with questionable national loyalties. This practice also indicates that case processing

during the first months following the end of the war was carried out in a rather improvised manner.⁶

Decisions regarding disbursements made by the Offices for Special Affairs during the period from 1 June 1945 to February 1946 were only temporary. Determinations pertaining to the payment of longer-term social aid would be finalised once legislation governing this area was drafted, adopted and enacted.

THE FEMALE APPLICANTS IN 1945

As the section above explains, the first victims of the occupation had to apply for social aid through the Offices for Special Affairs in the quick order following the end of the war. In the study presented in this chapter a total of 1,308 compensation cases have been reviewed all of which originated from the Offices for Special Affairs. In fifty-five of these cases, the applicant was a woman. The female applicants comprised thirty war widows, fourteen single female breadwinners, and eleven married women. The processing of their cases was generally conducted in an objective manner, and the female applicants' personal circumstances and financial information were presented and assessed in accordance with the statutory provisions governing eligibility for compensation, in the same manner as applications submitted by men. However, gendered arguments in support of the granting of social aid are notably present in certain cases. This initial phase may also be described as the "ad hoc phase," as was the case in the previous chapter and the evidence provided here illuminates the tendency of the time to award women larger compensation sums than they would, for example, have received through a municipal social welfare office.⁷

The war widows

The war widows constituted the largest group of female applicants, and this is most likely causally linked to the circumstance they found themselves in, having suddenly lost their family breadwinner which put them in acute need of social aid. A considerable proportion of the war widows were also relatively young at the time of submitting their application, and many had children, whom they were required to provide for. The widows' need for social aid was thus marked by sudden financial hardship because of the death of their husbands. Most widows applied for death compensation; however, such compensation could only be disbursed once the Compensation Act was fully enacted. Consequently, they typically received temporary weekly or monthly maintenance payments through the Offices. These payments were intended to cover rent, fuel, food, and clothing.

As in the parliamentary debate regarding the Compensation Act (see below), particular consideration was also shown towards war widows in the administrative processing of claims. This is evident in several case files, for example, in the case of the widow Tinne Svendsen. Her husband was shot and killed during a confrontation with German soldiers on the day of liberation in Denmark. The report makes it clear that the caseworkers felt a responsibility to provide for the surviving dependants. It is stated explicitly in the report that the: "... application is hereby made for us to assume responsibility for the maintenance of the above-mentioned Svendsen's surviving dependants."⁸ A similar consensus appears in the case of a 21-year-old widow whose husband died at the hospital after having been subjected to severe mistreatment while being interrogated by the Gestapo. The widow had found employment as a telephone operator, earning 250 kroner per month (6,400 kroner or € 860 in 2026 values).⁹

The case officers considered it inappropriate that she should hold what they described as "a scarcely enviable position," while at the same time caring for her young child at home. The case report includes the following comments: "Considering that her husband gave his life for the liberation of our country and suffered greatly (...), and that the widow has naturally been subjected to severe nervous strain, it is found reasonable that a better and more secure financial arrangement for her and her child be established as soon as possible."¹⁰ The administrative records also directly suggest that some of these widows were not regarded as capable of supporting themselves in their husbands' absence.

In other cases, the reports emphasise the destitute conditions under which widows were forced to live without their breadwinner. A widow from Tønder applied for aid after losing her husband, who had been a German citizen conscripted into German military service in 1943 and had fallen at the front a few months later. The widow was solely responsible for supporting three children. The report states that she had: "... sustained life through casual labour, in the autumn by potato lifting and similar work..."¹¹ and that her elderly foster parents had been obliged to support her and the children for an extended period. Although neither the widow nor her deceased husband were Danish citizens, she was nevertheless granted compensation, as the caseworkers assessed that she would be unable to provide for her family on her own. This example also indicates that the administrative practices within the Offices for Special Affairs was comparatively lenient, since non-Danish citizens would scarcely have been approved by the Compensation Council, where the guidelines were more strictly defined. It is also noteworthy that, rather than encouraging war widows to enter

the labour market, the prevailing view was that it was preferable for them to subsist on social aid. This attitude on the part of the state was likely related to the relatively small number of Danish men who died during the Second World War, meaning that the male casualty rate did not constitute a significant shortage of labour in Denmark. Consequently, demand for female labour in the Danish post-war period was simply not there, which is the opposite of the trends that were observed in countries such as the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, or France.¹² As a result and to a considerable extent, many Danish war widows maintained their traditional roles as homemakers, while being supported financially by the state.

The Single Female Breadwinners

Fourteen of the female applicants consisted of unwed, divorced, and other sole providers. The most frequent grounds for compensation were claims for non-pecuniary injury and monthly or weekly maintenance payments. The need for social aid expressed by these women typically arose as a result of reduced earning capacity, unemployment, or illness. Women in this category were self-supporting and thus dependent upon being in good health to generate an income. Several of the reports indicate that the authorities demonstrated considerable understanding and empathy for this group of women.

One such example concerns a 51-year-old single woman who applied for compensation for personal injury after losing her right eye in connection with a street bombing. The injuries she sustained were grave enough for medical personnel to declare her disabled. She had already received 5,000 kroner (129,750 kroner or €17,360).¹³ from her accident insurance but she subsequently encountered financial difficulties due to her reduced capacity for work. The woman was a trained dental technician but had been compelled to close her practice because of her impaired vision. The report notes that the Offices had inquired “whether some form of maintenance might be granted, as her earning capacity has been reduced by 100 per cent.”¹⁴ This request illustrates a clear willingness on the part of the authorities to help. A similar readiness to intervene is evident in a case concerning a 20-year-old unmarried woman who sought compensation for personal injury. She had been struck in the face by a bullet during a shootout in the town of Vejle and was no longer able to continue her employment as a trainee in a sandwich shop. She was promptly awarded maintenance of 250 kroner (6,400 kroner or € 860)¹⁵ per month, accompanied by the remark that: “... the applicant is entirely unfit for work and should receive assistance as soon

as possible.”¹⁶ These statements indicate that the state authorities recognised that single women were expected to support themselves through employment and that the loss of earning capacity therefore warranted immediate financial support.

The Married Women

Eleven married women applied for aid from the Offices for Special Affairs. The low number of applicants is likely attributable to the fact that married women still had a living breadwinner and therefore did not face acute need for help. Their needs also differed from those of the other female applicants insofar as they primarily applied for compensation for personal injury and property damage. Two cases concerned women who had been shot in the leg and struck by shrapnel respectively on 4 May 1945 during disturbances involving German soldiers in Kalundborg.¹⁷ Another female applicant sought compensation for personal injury after her son had been seriously wounded during an air raid.¹⁸ These cases concerned innocent victims of the occupation period, and there were no gender-related considerations in their files.

When the Offices for Special Affairs were finally dissolved in May 1946, they had disbursed social assistance amounting to approximately 8,8 million kroner¹⁹ (229 million kroner or €30,5 million).²⁰

Law No. 475 of 1 October 1945, on Compensation for Victims of the Occupation

The Minister for Special Affairs, Mogens Fog, introduced the bill on compensation for victims of the occupation period in the Danish Parliament (Folketinget) on 19 September 1945. For the first time, the extent of the social aid was concretely defined and specified within a fixed legal framework. The content of the bill outlined the rules and procedures that were to be followed when citizens submitted their claims for compensation. The Act comprised five sections, which further specified who was eligible to apply for compensation and which application forms claimants were required to complete.

The five sections addressed the following categories of compensation:

Section 1: *Compensation in Connection with Disability and Death.*

Section 2: *Honorary Payments.*

Section 3: *Compensation for Suffering and Injury in Connection with Deprivation of Liberty, etc.*

Section 4: *Compensation for Damage to Property.*

*Section 5: Assistance for the Commencement or Continuation of Business or Education, as well as for the Restoration of Particular Losses.*²¹

These sections were specifically designed to address the wide range of needs that had arisen in the aftermath of the occupation. The Danish Compensation Act ultimately became one of the most comprehensive schemes of its kind in Europe. Danish historian Sofie Lene Bak argues that this was because the Danish state felt a strong sense of responsibility towards its population, whom it had been unable to protect from German mistreatment and abuse during the occupation.²²

WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE COMPENSATION ACT

There were several ways that women could obtain social aid under the newly adopted Act. Certain provisions were even specifically directed towards women. This is evident in Section 1, which concerns compensation in connection with disability and death. Section 1, subsection B, stipulated that those entitled to death benefits include:

“Survivors of Danish citizens who have lost their lives (...). ‘Survivors’ shall be understood as widows (widowers) and children; if none such exist, other close relatives whom the deceased supported or to whose maintenance he had provided, or under normal circumstances would have provided, substantial and more permanent contributions.”²³

This provision thus entitled widows, mothers, and other family members of individuals who lost their lives during the war to apply for compensation. The final lines of subsection B further opened the possibility for other persons who had been previously supported by the deceased to seek compensation. This included girlfriends, fiancées, former wives, or children born out of wedlock. Women who applied for compensation under Section 1 were often not directly involved in the resistance movement during the war. Rather, they were women whose lives and daily circumstances had been profoundly affected by the loss of a breadwinner, at a time when women had not yet fully become an integrated part of the labour market.

Another way that women could receive aid was through the granting of honorary payments. These were granted either as an annual payment or as a lump sum. In 1945, the fixed amount for the annual, lifelong honorary gift was 800 kroner (20,760 kroner or € 2,800)²⁴ per year, with an additional supplement of 200 kroner (5,200 kroner or € 700)²⁵ per child under the age of eighteen.²⁶ The

scheme of honorary payments illustrates how women who had not themselves participated in the resistance movement were nevertheless awarded recognition and financial support on the basis of their husbands' contributions. These provisions of the Compensation Act also reflect the then-current and prevailing societal perceptions of gender roles, in which women were more readily regarded as dependants rather than being seen as active participants in the resistance struggle.

The wording of the Act also conveys the extent of the influence that was exercised by former resistance members on the Danish political scene after liberation. This influence is particularly evident in the pronounced pathos arguments and language-use directed towards the widows and relatives of deceased resistance fighters. A clear consensus emerged that war widows were entitled to financial aid because their husbands had died while carrying out an honourable duty. This perception of war widows may also help explain why other categories of female victims of the occupation were not met with the same degree of understanding and compassion by the state in the processing of their compensation claims.

THE POLITICAL DISCOURSES ABOUT WOMEN AND THEIR IMPACT ON RELEVANT COMPENSATION CASES

Within the social constructivist approach, the linguistic dimension is accorded particular significance in relation to the political decision-making processes. Discursive power may prove decisive in determining which political issues are highlighted as important and which are excluded from the public or political debate altogether.²⁷ The significance of discursive power was clearly manifested in the parliamentary debate on the Compensation Act. The bill underwent its first reading in the Danish Parliament on 25 September 1945. Eleven spokespersons from various political parties were present. None of them were women. This is odd given that female politicians usually employed a relatively substantial amount of speaking time in debates concerning social policies during the 1940s. However, the relative absence of women from the political and public sphere was striking in the immediate post-war years.²⁸

In the first reading of the bill, two overarching themes can be identified in the debate among the political spokespersons: the state's sense of guilt and "debt of honour" towards members of the resistance movement, and the state's sense of responsibility towards the resistance fighters' surviving relatives, with special focus on those who had lost a breadwinner during the war. These themes relate to masculine and feminine roles respectively, whereby the stereotypical mascu-

line role as breadwinner along with protector, and the stereotypical feminine role as housewife, were maintained and reproduced in the political debate. The discourses concerning women were, overall, tied to the loss of a breadwinner. In particular, war widows were referred to as victims in connection with their husbands' deaths or disabilities. These discourses contributed to elevating the resistance struggle to such an extent that both resistance fighters and their widows were granted special status in the post-war discussions regarding social aid.²⁹ Consequently, resistance fighters were foregrounded at the expense of other categories of victims of the occupation.

These discourses confined women to a traditional role as housewives without employment and framed them as a "problem" for the state insofar as they were no longer able to provide for themselves without a husband. In the debate, women were thus discussed exclusively in relation to their husbands. The core concern of the political negotiations was the male compatriots who deserved honour and compensation for their wartime efforts. Honour associated with participation in the resistance struggle therefore assumed greater prominence than gender in the political debate. As a result, women were effectively treated as a homogeneous group, whereas the various categories of male compensation recipients were differentiated in greater detail, reflecting an awareness of the many types of male victims. Female resistance fighters were entirely absent from the debate. Women active in gender politics were likewise not given a platform or voice in the parliamentary deliberations surrounding the bill, which was directly caused by women lacking political representatives capable of articulating and nuancing women's experiences during the occupation.

SOCIAL AID AFTER 1945: THE COMPENSATION COUNCIL AND THE DIRECTORATE FOR ACCIDENT INSURANCE

With the enactment of the Compensation Act, the Compensation Council (*Erstatningsrådet*) was established as the new supreme administrative authority responsible for the compensation scheme. The Compensation Council administered claims for non-pecuniary damages and property damage, which involved the payment of lump-sum compensations, whereas the Directorate of Accident Insurance (*Direktoratet for Ulykkesforsikring*) was responsible for compensations awarded meant to cover extended periods.³⁰ Both authorities were state institutions operating under the Ministry of Social Affairs. Within the Compensation Council, the application procedure and case processing practices were organised in such a way that cases were reviewed on a weekly basis.³¹ Typically, up to thirty

cases were placed on the agenda for each meeting. At the council meetings, the claims were presented and assessed based on the information provided in the application forms, in light of previous decisions, the applicant's financial circumstances, and supporting witness statements.³²

Female applicants through The Compensation Council 1946-1948

A total of 1,471 cases from the archives of The Compensation Council were reviewed in connection with this study, of which eighty-eight involved a female applicant. Among the female applicants, forty-four were war widows, thirty-six were single female breadwinners, and eight were married women.

The War Widows

The war widows constituted the largest group of female applicants. Their need for social aid appears to have been broadly comparable to that observed in the Offices for Special Affairs. The war widows most frequently applied through Form 1A (death compensation) and Form 5C (substantial financial loss). An emerging tendency in the cases processed by the Compensation Council was that a number of applications submitted by women were recommended for rejection. Conversely, women who were granted financial compensation were often awarded sums under several different claim forms. This practice is illustrated, for example, by the case of a 24-year-old widow with a young child, who was awarded death compensation, an honorary payment, educational assistance, and a monthly maintenance allowance. The Compensation Council held that it was incumbent upon them to assume responsibility for alleviating the widow's "economic and existential difficulties."³³

The Single Female Breadwinners

The thirty-six female breadwinners were widely distributed in terms of age, ranging from eighteen to sixty-five years and beyond. Given the composition of this applicant group, there was also considerable variation in the reasoning for their claims. Most frequently, the women applied through Form 5C, likely because this category was less specific than the others and open for interpretation. Several Jewish women, for example, applied for grants to cover debts accumulated during their exile as refugees in Sweden. Others used Form 5C to claim compensation for stolen valuables or reimbursement for loans they had been compelled to extend during the occupation.

One divorced woman with four children needed aid to re-establish her personal financial situation. In 1944, she had been wanted by the Gestapo for assisting Jews in escaping to Sweden. She subsequently fled to Sweden herself in order to avoid arrest. Upon returning to Denmark, she discovered that her home had been burglarised. The conclusion of her case stated that “the applicant must presumably, insofar as her children are concerned, be obliged to re-establish the capital.”³⁴

In this instance, the woman was regarded as the primary family provider, and this assessment was used as grounds for granting her aid. A similar willingness to recognise and support women in the provider role is evident in another case concerning a 51-year-old woman. She applied for a grant of 10,000 kroner (259,500 kroner or € 34,700)³⁵ to cover her loss of earnings and the purchase of a new car. She worked as a doctor and had played an active role in the resistance movement. Since liberation, she had suffered from illness and reported severe financial hardship, including being unable to afford new clothing for her children. Several members of the Compensation Council maintained that the requested amount should be granted: “... in order to provide the applicant with both the moral and financial support that would help stabilise her future.”³⁶

While some women in this category were self-supporting, others were financially dependent on fathers, sons, former husbands, or cohabitants. Such male familial relationships were consistently factored into the assessment of claims. In several cases, the financial circumstances of fathers or sons were documented, and decisions were made based on the male relative’s economic situation rather than that of the woman herself. One such case concerned a single mother whose son had been killed in a street riot.

The deceased son had supported both his mother and siblings. The report noted that: “... the household had to a considerable extent been maintained by the deceased, who was ‘like a father to the home.’”³⁷ In another case, a single woman applied for 5,908 kroner (153,300 kroner or €20,500)³⁸ to cover expenses incurred during her flight to Sweden as a Jewish refugee. Because she was near retirement age, she was supported by her sons. In processing her claim, the Council dismissed her own account and instead referred to the case file of one of her sons, noting that: “... the applicant has had difficulty accounting for her circumstances.”³⁹

This apparent mistrust of female applicants’ financial competence is discernible in several cases. For example, a 35-year-old unmarried woman applied for aid to repay loans. The Council considered that her finances might be intermin-

gled with those of her father and conducted a thorough investigation to ensure that she was financially independent. The case concluded that: "... the applicant is entirely without means and does not share finances with her father."⁴⁰ In another case involving an unmarried woman, her father's financial records and tax certificate were submitted to determine whether she should be awarded the 3,000 kroner (78,000 kroner or €10,450)⁴¹ she applied for. The sum represented money that was confiscated at the time of her arrest in April 1945 for illegal transport by sea to Sweden. On the basis of her father's financial prosperity, the application was rejected on the grounds that the loss did not constitute a substantial financial hardship. This practice indicates that, even when female applicants were educated, employed, and self-supporting, the financial circumstances of male relatives could, in certain instances, prove decisive for the outcome of their cases.

The Married Women

The smallest category was married women. These applications almost exclusively concerned compensation intended to cover various loans incurred during their husbands' absence. In one case, a married woman applied for 2,000 kroner (52,000 kroner or € 7,000)⁴² to repay loans she had contracted while her husband had resided in Sweden to avoid arrest. During his absence, she had received a monthly allowance of 450–500 kroner (11,500 –13,000 kroner or around € 1,600)⁴³ from the municipal social office; however, as noted in the case file, these funds proved insufficient. The report commented: "In the opinion of the appointed authority, the wife fell into panic following her husband's flight, and the money slipped through her fingers."⁴⁴ Although the woman was granted compensation, she ultimately received only 500 kroner. The justification stated: "The incurred debt is undoubtedly highly substantial, but as it is solely the wife's panic and lack of financial understanding that caused the indebtedness, we presumably cannot provide full coverage."⁴⁵ The Compensation Council assessed the woman's financial difficulties as self-inflicted and determined that she did not face an urgent need for full debt relief, given that a male breadwinner had returned to the household and could once again assume responsibility for managing the family's finances.

Gender Bias and rejected Female Applicants

Out of 143 cases involving female applicants, no fewer than forty-five were recommended for rejection. The most frequent ground for refusal was "§65" (pro-German sympathies). In these cases, many women were stigmatised based

on allegations that they had associated with German soldiers during the war. Such stigmatisation, often accompanied by insinuations of moral impropriety, is not observed in the same manner in cases involving male applicants. Historian Anette Warring has pointed out that women's sexuality shifted from being a private matter to becoming a public and political issue, as many (former) members of the resistance movement perceived relationships with Germans as an affront to national honour and allegiance. Consequently, this form of gendered discrimination was experienced exclusively by women.

A comparison of male and female cases also reveals more subtle examples of gender bias. One such example can be found in two cases concerning a man and a woman, both of whom suffered from psychological difficulties in the post-war period.

The male applicant sought financial support from the Compensation Council to establish an independent business. The Council was informed that he had prior convictions for filing a false report of burglary and that he had set fire to the residence in which his family lived as tenants, destroying a considerable amount of household property and clothing. The assessment by the Council stated: "Prone to entering states of mental tension. His act of arson must presumably be understood as a tension-release reaction."⁴⁶ A female applicant likewise applied for a grant to start her own business. During the occupation, she had been affiliated with the resistance movement and had lived underground for an extended period of time. As a result, she suffered from what was described as "poor nerves" and had been unable to work in any significant capacity. She experienced fainting spells and dizziness. The medical evaluation of the woman stated: "She was found to be self-important, theatrical, highly reactive, not depressive."⁴⁷

This constitutes a clear example of how some women's behaviour was pathologized and morally framed in ways that differed markedly from the interpretation of similar or more severe conduct in male applicants. The actions conducted by the male were interpreted through a clinical lens, his violence explained as the product of psychological strain, while the symptoms of the woman were reframed as indications of her temperament and personality. In this way, diagnosis functioned not simply as a medical judgment, but as a gendered framework, one that contextualised men's behaviour while implicitly passing judgment on women's.⁴⁸

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Female applicants were, to some extent, assessed based on their gender. The presence of gendered reasoning across all categories of female applicants sup-

ports the argument that gender played a relatively significant role in determining access to social aid. Gendered forms of discrimination were observable among the various categories of applicants, depending on personal background and the role they had played during the occupation. In addition to gender, the context of the Second World War and the occupation itself had a decisive influence on case processing practices. The honour accorded to resistance fighters during the political negotiations surrounding the Compensation Act, as well as the resistance movement's influence on the post-war political landscape, added further layers of complexity to both the public debate and administrative practice.

It is difficult to determine conclusively whether women were subjected to differential treatment as a direct consequence of the then-current political conceptions of gender and breadwinner roles, or whether such practices reflected the then deeply rooted societal understandings of gender in 1940s Denmark. In the political debates, it was largely assumed that the primary beneficiaries of compensation would be men. Simultaneously, the term "breadwinner" was implicitly understood to refer to a man. Within this framework, one dominant discourse framed women as needing social aid because they had lost a provider. However, these attitudes towards gender and breadwinner roles were likely products of the contemporary social context in which politicians found themselves in the 1940s.

CHAPTER 11

Defining Veteran Status in Post-war Norway and Denmark 1945–1969

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The Norwegian Armed Forces (*Forsvaret*) changed the official definition of the term ‘veteran’ as recently as in 2024. It went from only applying to individuals who had served in international operations, to including individuals who had served domestically.² Such changes reflect the difficulties of defining a group of individuals who hold a unique status in societies due to the military service they provided to the country. This special status involves both social recognitions, but also legal entitlements such as pensions and compensation payments. Moreover, the idea of being a “veteran” can be central to the formation of group identity. While this status carries a different value in each country, and is even met with public ambivalence in certain cases, war veterans are typically celebrated in memorials and anniversaries. Dedicated social welfare systems are often put in place to recognise their service and compensate them and their families for any long-term health implications and death that they suffer. At an underlying level, who gets to count as a veteran, and the status they hold in society, reflects how a country tries to position itself in the world, and how a nation relates to its own past. The term is constantly renegotiated based on a

complex interaction between the individual groups claiming the status, and the willingness of wider society to potentially accept such demands.

It is therefore no surprise that the concept of the “veteran” has been subjected to a considerable amount of debate. In different national contexts, it has been contested and redefined over time, as expanding welfare states and rising expectations of compensation led various groups to seek further recognition and support. These debates varied across countries, and they were shaped by wartime experiences and post-war memory strategies.

The situation in countries that were occupied during the Second World War reveals considerable complexity, when it comes to groups such as the pre-war military, resistance fighters, and even collaborators identifying as “veterans” and competing for recognition. Precisely because neither Denmark nor Norway developed a formal veteran category after 1945, it is indeed analytically productive to explore how veteran status was conceptualised and constructed indirectly through law, welfare provisions, and public narratives of recognition. This chapter adopts a broad definition of the term “veteran”, including individuals who were engaged in military service or action during the war. This makes it possible to examine how different groups sought social and legal recognition for their wartime roles, and how they presented themselves as having fought for the “right” cause, even when such claims were not widely accepted. This chapter explores the concept of the veteran in Norway and Denmark from 1945 to 1969, focusing on the dimensions surrounding the label as described above.

In post-war Norway and Denmark, veteran status was neither fixed nor self-evident but contested. Multiple groups such as army officers, resistance fighters, and even former wartime collaborators sought recognition for their wartime roles. In Denmark, such group efforts were particularly pronounced, while the interpretations in Norway more quickly coalesced on the dichotomy between “good” and “bad” Norwegians. Nevertheless, key groups, including women and communists, remained marginalised and had to push actively for recognition. At the same time, collaborators in both countries promoted alternative narratives reframing their actions and, in some cases, even sought to claim a form of veteran identity.

These struggles over recognition were closely tied to the legal frameworks that arose in the aftermath of the war for compensation, pensions, and support. Veteran status was thus not only a symbolic label but directly linked to material entitlements, making legal categories defining wartime service more valuable and substantive. Compensation schemes could reflect social hierarchies of sacri-

fice as well as political efforts to reward or regulate groups. In this sense, post-war veteran policy reveals how welfare states responded to war while encoding distinctions between service, suffering, and legitimacy.

A further key dimension of this issue was gender. In both Norway and Denmark, the concept of the veteran remained tied to masculine ideals of service, honour, and duty, often ignoring the invaluable contribution of women. Post-war legal frameworks likewise reflected traditional gender roles, including in how provisions for survivors and dependents were determined. Examining the recognition of veterans or the lack thereof in this way sheds light not only on memory and welfare, but also on the gendered boundaries of citizenship, sacrifice, and belonging.

Through a threefold analysis, the chapter highlights different definitions of the veteran term, the groups competing for recognition, and its gendered dimensions. The chapter traces changes in the debates and legal frameworks surrounding this issue between 1945 and 1969, exploring the shifting ideas of veteran status, power dynamics, memory politics, and the development of veteran benefits in the emerging Danish and Norwegian welfare states. This endeavour is significant for three reasons: 1) it shows that the veteran concept was fluid and renegotiated in relation to memory practices; 2) it uncovers the legal and practical challenges of establishing and adapting the enacted compensation schemes, including in relation to changing understandings of long-term and psychological war injuries; 3) it demonstrates the strongly gendered nature of the concept and its impact on the differentiating recognition of men's and women's wartime roles.

Utilising Norway and Denmark as case studies, allows for a particularly fruitful comparison when it comes to investigating debates about who did and did not deserve the status of 'veteran', including compensation for the suffering caused by wartime service. The two countries share many cultural similarities and enacted many similar policies in the post-war era regarding matters such as welfare and the historical framing of the legacy of occupation. There were a range of similarities in terms of the experience of occupation too, with both countries having had both national fascist parties and active resistance movements. At the same time, there were significant differences, both in terms of the nature of the German occupation in each country, and in terms of the groups competing for influence and recognition in the post-war era. Denmark had pursued a policy of cooperation until 1943, leaving formal state structures intact and placing political elites in a more ambivalent position compared to Norway, where the government and king went into exile in 1940. Nevertheless, in both countries, questions of status

and compensation for wartime actions and suffering were contested after the war. An analysis of the veteran concept can in this way highlight differences in politicised narratives, while also showing how various wartime groups sought recognition and benefits.

For that reason, the chapter also investigates the groups who fought on the “wrong” side. This is not to equate their status with that of recognised wartime patriots, but to show that the boundaries of veteran status were produced through mechanisms of exclusion as much as inclusion. Former collaborators and SS volunteers were denied compensation, honour, and public legitimacy outright, yet some of them still articulated what they saw as legitimate claims based on service, sacrifice, comradeship, and anti-communism. Their post-war rhetoric demonstrates that the veteran identity could be claimed by groups and individuals who were firmly rejected by the state and wider society.

The history of veterans has attracted increasing attention in recent years, including studies of their role in the rise of fascism and their wartime and post-war experiences. Less attention, however, has been given to systematic analysis of the veteran concept itself and how it was contested and redefined in the post-war era.³ While some recent studies have examined the use of the veteran term for other countries, such an analysis is missing altogether for Norway and Denmark.⁴ At the same time, the link between warfare and welfare has in recent years offered new research insights into veteran benefit schemes, and combined research branches which have previously been seen as somewhat separate.⁵ This chapter contributes to this body of literature by enhancing both our understanding of the veteran concept in the post-war era, and by analysing the link between the Second World War and the expanding welfare state in Norway and Denmark.

CONFLICT AND DEBATE OVER THE SOCIAL RECOGNITION OF VETERANS

In both Denmark and Norway, the term “veteran” played a surprisingly limited role in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Neither country developed a clear legal definition of veteran status, and the term itself was not central to the language through which wartime experiences were understood. Recognition of wartime service was instead articulated through other categories rooted in specific wartime roles and experiences. These categories were not merely descriptive entities. They provided frameworks through which individuals and groups presented themselves as legitimate participants in the national struggle and articulated claims to recognition, influence, and social support in the post-war order. Thus, even though none of these groups explicitly embraced the

label “veteran”, they nevertheless pursued recognition and status to compensate for their sacrifice and wartime service in ways typically associated with veteran communities.⁶ Following historians Crotty, Diamant, and Edele, these groups can be understood as constituting “entitlement groups,” much like regular army veterans of the two world wars. They were collective entities bound together by a shared conviction of deservingness, grounded in sacrifice and in claims to a form of martial citizenship. Whether such groups succeeded in converting this sense of entitlement into recognised social and political status, however, depended on political opportunity structures, organisational strength, and the readiness of the state to institutionalise their claims.⁷ The following sections examine how these dynamics unfolded in Denmark and Norway.

THE VETERAN CONCEPT IN POST-WAR DENMARK

In the immediate post-war years, Denmark had no legal or administrative status directly benefiting veterans. As documented in previous studies, recognition was organised through schemes for the victims of the occupation, with documented loss and injury as the key criteria.⁸ This is evident in the 1945 *Act on Compensation for Victims of the Occupation*.⁹ The compensation legislation did not establish a clearly defined veteran status but instead rested on invalidity and death resulting from acts of war, imprisonment, deportation, or other abuses suffered by individuals during the occupation. Military service in itself did not constitute a criterion for recognition. Deaths and injuries suffered by military personnel during the German invasion on 9 April 1940 and during the brief armed clashes connected to the dissolution of the Danish armed forces in late August 1943 were dealt with under separate legislation.¹⁰ In the *Act on the Payment of Honorary Grants to the Next of Kin of Those Killed and to Those Wounded on 9 April 1940*, the term veteran was not used at all.¹¹

This absence of a veteran category carrying legal weight was not confined to the post-Second World War period. As historian Anton Marckmann has shown, Danish soldiers from Southern Jutland who served in the German army during the First World War were likewise not recognised as veterans in any legal or administrative sense, even when they returned as invalids having sustained combat injuries.¹² Military personnel without physical combat injuries, including large parts of the Danish officer corps, similarly fell outside the scope of the compensation legislation that was enacted after the Second World War.

The concept of the veteran was nevertheless familiar in a Danish context. From the nineteenth century, “veteran” had been used about soldiers with a

long service record and about participants in earlier national wars, in particular those of 1848–1850 and 1864.¹³ In early twentieth-century administrative reference works, the term appears in biographical entries together with the rank and occupation of a given soldier.¹⁴ Meyer's Danish dictionary of foreign words (1924) similarly defined the veteran as an elderly or experienced soldier or official, with no reference to legal status, entitlements, or state recognition.¹⁵

A survey of the illegal press that flourished during the Second World War suggests that the term “veteran” was not a central rhetorical term used in the resistance discourse. In two of the most well-produced, underground newspapers, *Frit Danmark* and *De frie Danske*, the term does not appear once. In the illegalised news agency *Information*, the term occurs only sporadically, in reference to foreign soldiers or the First World War, rather than as a designation for Danish wartime actors.¹⁶ Even in post-war resistance-associated periodicals, references to veterans remained rare and unsystematic throughout the late 1940s. For instance, in *Pigtraad*, the term “veteran” appears only twice before 1950. In February 1949, the association behind the journal discussed whether it should dissolve or continue specifically as a veterans’ association.¹⁷ The discussion suggests that the meaning and usefulness of the term had not yet settled. Later that year, the term was used to describe a literary figure that had been shaped by wartime experience.¹⁸ The Danish resistance members instead referred to themselves as *freedom fighters*. This term was widely used in the illegal newspapers during the occupation and embedded within was the implicit claim that these were individuals who had fought for freedom. The totality of the loosely organised groups operating under the leadership of the self-appointed Freedom Council were correspondingly described as the “freedom movement.” At the same time, the terms *resistance fighter* and *resistance movement* were also in circulation and they were used interchangeably. In the clandestine press, the resistance fighters also referred to themselves as *patriots*. In resistance newspapers and memoirs, the term *freedom fighter* and *patriot* appears most frequently, whereas contemporary historical scholarship tends to favour the more neutral term *resistance fighter*. This preference is partly based on the view that *freedom fighter* is a more value laden expression, one that does not fully acknowledge that the aim of some communist resistance groups was not solely to liberate Denmark from the Nazis but to transition the country into a Stalinist system.¹⁹ After the war, however, the dominant language was that of the “freedom fighter” and the “resistance movement”. The term freedom fighter was widely adopted by both right- and left-wing

resistance members and became the standard designation in those circles for individuals who had opposed the German occupation during the war.

Although resistance members did not claim veteran status through the term itself, they nevertheless argued that they had fought for the nation and therefore deserved particular recognition, much like regular war veterans often did. Former resistance fighters, for example, argued for expanded social support by pointing to the physical and social hardships they endured that now embodied the consequences of their wartime sacrifices. As an example of this, one former resistance fighter who was now disabled, complained about the limited employment prospects available to men like himself and asked in an editorial letter: "Is there no commendation for having participated in the fight for Denmark's liberation?"²⁰ There were numerous such demands, expressions of grievance, and assertions of deservingness in the magazines published by organisations for former resistance fighters throughout the late 1940s, the 1950s, and the 1960s. However, their demands were not always met. Research suggests that this was due, in part, to a political reluctance to recognise resistance fighters as a particularly deserving interest group, as politicians feared that such recognition might give rise to claims for increased political influence. Furthermore, there was an ongoing struggle over who deserved the greatest benefits. In the immediate aftermath of liberation, Danish resistance fighters argued that they should be treated more favourably than groups such as Danish Jews, who were often portrayed as merely passive victims.²¹ This is just one such example.

Thus, the investigated sources indicate that "veteran" was not perceived as a natural designation for resistance fighters in the immediate post-war years. Rather than being adopted by the resistance, the term apparently continued to be associated with regular military service and seniority. This pattern must also be seen in light of post-war memory politics. As historian Nils Arne Sørensen has argued, two competing narratives of the occupation emerged after 1945. Both placed resistance at the centre of national self-understanding. The disagreement between the two concerned how broadly resistance should be defined and how the conduct of the political elites should be judged.²² This mattered in the context in which most Danish soldiers had not participated in the resistance at all and in light of how strained the relations between resistance groups and the officer corps were.

In regular Danish newspapers from 1945-1950, the term "veteran" appears frequently. The most common use was as a non-military nomenclature. "Veteran" denoted experience: football and boxing veterans, a veteran typographer, a polit-

ical veteran, and a veteran in social or educational work.²³ In a military context, it most often referred to foreign soldiers or to the First World War. American and British veterans were mentioned in reports and obituaries,²⁴ as were Danish First World War veterans, including members of several veterans' associations.²⁵ References to "guerrilla veterans" likewise concerned foreign conflicts and not the Danish context.²⁶ In contrast, the designation was only rarely applied to members of the Danish resistance. A telling example of this appears in a 1949 article on the unveiling of a monument to "fallen freedom fighters". The term "veteran" was reserved not for the resistance fighters who died, but for a speaker who had served in the First World War.²⁷ However, one early example refers to a "sabotage veteran" trained by SOE and returning from Sweden in May 1945.²⁸

According to the 1952 Dictionary of the Danish Language, "veteran" was still used at that time as a descriptive term for people with many years of experience or former soldiers, without any legal connection to rights, compensation, or state recognition.²⁹ Nonetheless, that same year, the association Frihedskampens Veteraner (Veterans of the Freedom Struggle) was established.³⁰ From the outset, it was linked to the international framework of the World Veterans Federation, which sought to unite resistance fighters and uniformed war veterans across national borders in the interest of post-war reconciliation and the prevention of future conflict.³¹ In Denmark, it also included participants from the Danish Brigade in Sweden, the exile force established under Swedish auspices in 1943–45.³² Thus, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the word "veteran" gradually began to function as an umbrella term for different forms of wartime participation. This slow and hesitant consolidation of the terms stands in marked contrast to the much later politicisation of the veteran term, which, as Poulsen and Rasmussen have shown, only gained sustained political traction from the 1990s onwards.³³

A Danish case can illustrate how veteran identity could be constructed outside of the framework of a formal legal category. The association De Alieredes Danske Våbenfæller (Allied Danish Comrades-in-Arms) brought together Danes who had fought in the two World Wars. In the mid-1950s, the association initiated the construction of a monument to the fallen combatants in "Danish and Allied war service, 1940–45", presented as a gift from "the Danish people". The inscription deliberately encompassed Danes who fell in Allied service abroad and those soldiers who were killed during the German invasion on 9 April 1940 and in the armed clashes on 29 August 1943. In contrast to the immediate post-war elevation of illegal resistance, the association's commemorative practices centred on fallen soldiers and the legitimacy of uniformed war service.³⁴

Among Danish Nazis and former Eastern Front volunteers, the term “veteran” was also absent. A systematic reading of the Danish Nazi newspaper *Fædrelandet* demonstrates that the concept was not adopted by these groups during the war. Danish SS volunteers did not describe themselves as veterans but instead referred to themselves as *frontkæmpere* (front fighters), as soldiers, and internally as comrades, and more broadly as “SS volunteers”. When *Fædrelandet* used the term “veteran”, it did so in other contexts, much like the resistance press: it referred to figures from the world of sport or to veterans of earlier conflicts, such as the war of 1864 or the First World War. In other words, “veteran” remained a designation for participants in nationally recognised wars of the past, rather than being a label appropriated by Danish SS volunteers for their own wartime service.³⁵

After the war, several former Danish SS volunteers organised themselves in *Landsforeningen af 6. maj 1945*, a revisionist association founded by convicted and ostracised wartime collaborators and nazis. The association published a membership journal titled *Revision*.³⁶ Within this publication, the former SS volunteers were consistently described as *frontkæmpere* rather than veterans. This terminology was mirrored in their organisational language. Their own post-war association was named *Frontkæmperforbundet*, and in petitions and statements, including those printed in *Revision*, they referred to themselves as “former front volunteers” or simply “front fighters”.³⁷ The same designation persisted in later revisionist literature on SS volunteers, where *frontkæmpere* remained the preferred term, alongside *Frontsvin* (“front pigs”), which implied a form of macho pride and toughness.³⁸

Although the veteran-term was not used by the Danish Eastern Front volunteers, the term *frontkæmper* remained a politically charged concept. It was employed as a source of pride, an emblem of honour among the former volunteers and a way of drawing attention to the fact that they had fought for what they believed in. It was used to describe a group that in their own opinion had entered service at the urging of the Danish government, which they interpreted as an outright permission to enlist in the Waffen SS during the war. This interpretation was rejected after the war by Danish politicians who argued instead that the policy had been introduced through German coercion: “We wish to establish the following: that we [former SS-volunteers] were a part of Denmark’s legal army, which was the consequence of Denmark’s accession to the Anti Comintern Pact and which followed the line taken by the Finnish volunteers.”³⁹

They also frequently emphasised that they had fought against the communist threat, which in 6 May circles continued to be regarded as a central and genu-

ine danger both during the war and in the years that followed. In this light, they argued that they deserved recognition for having carried out what later became NATO's task of containing communism, even before the North Atlantic Treaty had been signed:

“Today we are in the situation, like the West, that the enemy we fought in the East is the enemy that the entire Western world is compelled to fight in this day and age! ... We therefore believe that both parties in Denmark should let petty grudges rest, forget what was, and move forward together! We are, after all, when it comes to everything, in the same boat!”⁴⁰

The volunteers claimed to be misunderstood. Implicitly embedded in the term *frontkæmper* and how it was used by them after the war was in this way also a desire to be rehabilitated and recognised in the post-war period, rather than being ostracised and stigmatised, as former Danish SS volunteers.⁴¹

THE VETERAN CONCEPT IN POST-WAR NORWAY

As was the case in Denmark, Norway had no set definition of who was a veteran either during or immediately following the Second World War. In his study of Norwegian post-war veteran policies, Gullow Gjeseth applies a broad definition when discussing veterans of the Second World War (*veteraner fra annen verdenskrig*), which does not only include: “...persons who served in the Norwegian or Allied forces, but also [...] persons who served in the Norwegian or Allied forces, as well as persons who were involved in illegal activities, war sailors, and persons who were held in German or Japanese captivity.”⁴²

This highlights how the term “veteran” has traditionally been applied to a wide range of groups who served Norwegian interests during the Second World War, reaching well beyond an affiliation with the military alone.

All the groups mentioned by Gjeseth were *de facto* recognized as veterans immediately following the war. This entailed official acknowledgment of their wartime actions for Norway, and it was reflected in the first war compensation schemes adopted in 1946, for which all these groups were eligible (see below). However, some groups received wider social recognition for their specific wartime injuries or suffering only much later than others, and some groups faced considerable obstacles in gaining formal access to the publicly instituted compensation schemes. In the early post-war period, the groups that received the highest levels of social recognition were those which could easily be tied to heroic narratives relating to Norway's battle against the German occupiers and their collaborators.

This applied first and foremost to the civilian and military resistance, as well as political prisoners from the pre-war mainstream parties.⁴³

The term “veteran” was not contested in its application to these groups, but it was also not central to their identity. It was simply not used extensively, either during or after the war. During the war, resistance newspapers continued to mostly use the term in relation to the veterans of the First World War or even the Dano-Prussian war, or in relation to senior figures in any type of political, social or cultural organisation. Other terms and labels carried a much more substantial and central meaning, both during and after the war. “Jøssinger”, a term which was originally used by the Nazis in a derogatory manner about resistance members, became widely used for ‘patriotic Norwegians’. This term, or simply “good Norwegians”, were among the most unifying labels used, encompassing the various groups seen as having been heroically engaged in the battle for Norway. However, these terms were used loosely and in an informal way; they were largely not part of a contested linguistic struggle in the early post-war period.

One reason for the absence of debate over the concept of the “veteran” was the broad social recognition that was granted to many groups for their wartime service, which made explicit demarcations unnecessary. At the same time, the experiences of key groups, including communists and Jews, were largely omitted from public discourse. In post-war Norway, a clear binary between “good” and “bad” Norwegians quickly took hold, centred around patriotism, a binary that did not make room for the Holocaust and the complex experiences of occupation. Although only a minority had participated in the resistance or performed military service, most Norwegians identified with and celebrated wartime heroes. This produced a strong consensus, leaving little room for linguistic conflict over the veteran term and the individuals it granted recognition. The notion of the veteran ideal was tied to having fought on the “right” side and defended Norwegian interests, reinforcing a patriotic narrative that excluded minorities and women.

Beyond this general conceptualisation of veterans, more specific identities centred on concrete wartime experiences that also held important meaning to individual groups. As in Denmark, a type of “veteran identity” formed among individual groups without the term “veteran” carrying central importance to them. This identity could be grounded in more concrete experiences that were shared; of joint activities in the war or the day-to-day experience of imprisonment in specific camps. The two camps in which most Norwegians were imprisoned, Grini and Sachsenhausen, became synonyms for specific wartime experiences and alliances between people having spent time there which reached well into

the post-war period.⁴⁴ Differences between groups existed, not just concerning wartime bonds and experiences, but also with regard to how their contributions to the well-being of the nation were perceived in the post-war era. Specific terms were in circulation to highlight each group's contribution. For political prisoners, the introduction of the term "prison front", complemented the term "home front" which was used by the resistance, and the term "outer front" used by people living in exile. This use of a complementary term allowed prisoners to argue that they, too, had contributed in key ways to the war-effort, promoting a narrative of unity despite everyone involved having vastly different wartime roles.⁴⁵

In tracing the use of the term "veteran" in NS circles, (Nasjonal Samling, the fascist party of Norway during the war), surprising parallels can be observed between the Norwegian exile and resistance milieus, the streamlined and heavily censored press in the occupied territories and the publications created by individuals in NS milieus. It was frequently used loosely, rather than being a term driving public debate and disputes. Among people in occupied Norway and the NS publications, both during and after the war, the term was used mostly to refer to former or serving foreign soldiers. We see occasional references to the term in NS papers, mainly to refer to senior party members ("Membership of the NS is growing day by day, and the veterans welcome the newcomers."⁴⁶ However, the term was not used in an instrumental way. It also does not appear to have featured in propaganda aimed towards SS volunteers or in the debates they had.⁴⁷ After the war, we see it mentioned in the newspapers of the former wartime collaborators, but not to a great degree. The term was therefore not central to the identity of these groups, neither during or after the war.

It was also clear that wartime collaborators, especially SS volunteers, had no claim to the veteran status not to war compensation in post-war Norway. Even if the term held any meaning for them, broader recognition would have been impossible to obtain, and they remained social outcasts with limited prospects for rehabilitation. Nevertheless, certain "veteran dynamics" were present. NS members formed interest organisations in the late 1940s to rehabilitate themselves and reinterpret their wartime actions, not by aligning with recognised veterans, but by presenting alternative narratives of having served Norwegian interests. Within NS milieus, a form of veteran spirit persisted, expressed through ideas of comradeship and shared purpose which was expressed in newspapers, networks, and post-war social circles.⁴⁸ This veteran identity was only intensified by the shared imprisonment, and the trials collaborators had to go through in the so-called *rettsoppgjør*.

The absence of debate over who counted as a veteran in post-war Norway reflects both the limited significance of the term and the perceived clarity of who deserved recognition. The dominant focus was on unity, with a key differentiating distinction between “good” and “bad” Norwegians. This produced a general understanding of veterans as men associated with the military, resistance against occupation forces, or other wartime contributions. The concept was not contested precisely because most people shared a clear idea of who had served Norwegian interests.

As in the Danish case, a closer examination reveals clear and jarring gradations in both public recognition and levels of compensation. Certain groups were overlooked, excluded, or even subjected to stigmatisation rather than recognition in post-war society, most notably Jews.⁴⁹ There was not necessarily a shared veteran identity among recognised groups; rather, identities were tied to specific wartime experiences such as resistance, seafaring, or imprisonment. Veteran organisations reflected these distinctions, as they were founded and run by individuals with shared experiences. This shows that, despite a dominant narrative dividing “good” and “bad” Norwegians, patterns of recognition were of a complex nature. Over time, the term “veteran” became more established and was adopted into the names of certain organisations, such as *Norges Veteranforbund for Internasjonale Oppdrag* (Norwegian Veterans’ Association for International Operations) (1960). At the same time, the concept remained contested, particularly in relation to UN and NATO missions, raising questions about whether different forms of service should be grouped under a single veteran identity or kept distinct.⁵⁰

For participants of the Second World War, social recognition as “veterans” and their veteran identity largely remained intact in the immediate post-war period. This was the case even though some groups were initially overlooked and wartime narratives became more complex. However, this recognition did not mean that access to pensions and other benefits was a straightforward process.

TRANSLATING WARTIME SERVICE INTO POST-WAR RECOGNITION

In comparison, the Danish and Norwegian cases suggest that the limited use of the term “veteran” did not reflect an absence of policies concerning veterans, but rather different national pathways for translating wartime service into post-war recognition. In both countries, those who had fought, suffered, or served in any capacity sought forms of distinction that resembled the veteran status without relying consistently on the term itself. Yet the two political settings differed. In

Norway, the occupation quickly generated a more unified patriotic framework, in which service to the nation could be linked to the legal continuity of the state whose leaders were in exile. In Denmark, the legacy of cooperation and the later rise of resistance created a more fragmented landscape, in which claims to honour perhaps were stronger contested and more dependent on postwar moral sorting.⁵¹ This helps explain why the Norwegian sources more readily point towards a broad but internally differentiated patriotic community, whereas Danish sources reveal a more visceral and explicit struggle over wartime contributions and the following recognition.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK DEFINING VETERAN STATUS

To understand how “veteranhood” takes shape after a war, it is not enough to study language, identity, and commemoration; the term is also shaped through judicial means. In many countries, the social meaning of military service is defined less by eloquent speeches or monuments than by compensation acts, pension schemes, and other tangible benefits. These frameworks determine who is recognised as having served, which sacrifices count, and which claims are legitimate. In this sense, welfare and compensation legislation function as a practical index of how a society creates a veteran hierarchy.⁵²

Denmark and Norway are instructive cases in this regard, as their post-war legal regimes created patterns of differential privilege without a distinct and legally protected “veteran” category. Recognition was instead distributed among socially defined groups such as resistance members, war widows, concentration camp prisoners, war sailors, and other “victims of the occupation,” with entitlements ranging from pensions and medical care to educational support and honorary payments. The absence of a formal veteran category is analytically productive, as it highlights how veteran-like recognition was embedded within the compensation frameworks and was constructed indirectly through eligibility criteria, evidentiary standards, exclusions, and moral language delineating worthiness.

DANISH COMPENSATION LAWS FOR WAR VICTIMS

With Denmark’s new groundbreaking social legislation in 1933, a range of laws was introduced that specified how military personnel were to be supported. For example, Section 281 of the Public Assistance Act (*Forsorgsloven*) stipulated that the relatives of conscripted soldiers were entitled to public support during wartime and in other situations in which the man had been called up for service.

The same act also defined how the honorary payments awarded to veterans of the 1864 Second Schleswig War should be regarded in relation to other potential forms of state sponsored public assistance.⁵³

As the Second World War approached, additional legislation was enacted to assist Danes who might be affected by the war. Among these was the Act on the Payment of Honorary Payments to Danish Seamen and Fishermen and Their Survivors (*Lov om Udbetaling af Hædersgaver til danske Søfolk og Fiskere og deres Efterladte*). This meant that fishermen and seamen who were injured and rendered invalid as a result of wartime events while at sea, were entitled to an annual honorary payment of 800 kroner (approximately 3,000 euros in 2026). The same amount could be granted to their widows in the event of death. Shortly after 9 April 1940, a similar act was introduced for Danish soldiers killed or wounded in connection with the German invasion, likewise granting 800 kroner in assistance annually. For civilian Danes, the state introduced war insurance schemes, including War Insurance for Movable Property (*Krigsforsikring af Løsøre*) and War Insurance for Private Household Effects (*Krigsforsikring af privat Indbo*), which insured property against war damage. In addition, the Act on War Accident Insurance (*Lov om Krigsulykkesforsikring*) covered most civilians in cases of invalidity or death caused by acts of war. However, there was no legislation specifying support or recognition for war veterans nor provisions for civilians affected by the broader social consequences of war. Such measures were only introduced after the war.⁵⁴

After liberation in May 1945, the Danish state established the Offices for Special Affairs (*Kontorerne for særlige Anliggender*) to provide immediate relief to civilians affected by the war, with the aim of supporting them until they could return to the labour market. Individuals with eligibility were “worthy” Danish citizens, while those suspected of unpatriotic conduct during the war were excluded. Although outwardly embracing of all, the scheme primarily served members of the resistance who made up the largest group of applicants, and the offices were partly staffed by former resistance members as well. Various groups were mentioned, including Jews, bombing victims, and resistance fighters, but there was no formal definition of what resistance activity did and did not entail. In practice, guaranteed recognition required a written declaration from another resistance member.⁵⁵

While the Offices for Special Affairs operated on the basis of administrative guidelines rather than statutory law, assistance was formalised with the adoption of the Compensation Act for Victims of the Occupation (*Lov om Erstatning*

til Besættelsestidens Ofre) in October 1945. Through the Compensation Council (*Erstatningsrådet*) and the Directorate of Accident Insurance (*Direktoratet for Ulykkesforsikring*), the Danish state established clearer criteria for recognising the eligibility of individuals as “victims of the occupation.” This category included resistance fighters, communists, police officers, Jews, and others who had suffered injury as a result of German measures or reprisals. At the same time, the law introduced stricter documentation requirements and a more clearly delimited circle of beneficiaries. Although formally directed at civilian victims (resistance fighters included), research has shown that the act contained many elements typically associated with compensation legislation for veterans.⁵⁶

Recognised victims were entitled to disability pensions, compensation for loss of a breadwinner, imprisonment, and medical expenses. The scheme also included special privileges: support for establishing a business, favourable educational grants, and honorary payments (*hædersgaver*). These benefits were not available to the general population through existing ordinary welfare provisions, and this marked a clear distinction between regular citizens and the specifically defined group of occupation victims.⁵⁷ The act therefore functioned not only as a compensation scheme but also as an institutional recognition of a certain status best described in terms of moral superiority and honour.

A key weakness of the original legislation was its failure to account for the long-term effects of the persecution and injury it tried to remedy, including trauma developed from concentration camp imprisonment, also known as KZ syndrome. This was the case for both Denmark and Norway. From the late 1940s into the 1950s, this led to recognition disputes, as many former prisoners and resistance members developed detrimental health conditions that did not fit the existing categories. As a result, the boundaries of eligibility became a contested affair, with authorities having to determine which injuries qualified as war-related and which did not.⁵⁸

In addition to the Compensation Act, Danish war sailors were covered by separate legislation. This included revisions to maritime war accident insurance laws and the Act on the Establishment of the Danish Seafarers’ Memorial Fund of 1945 (*Lov om oprettelse af Danske Søfarendes Mindefond*), which provided support to war sailors and their relatives who had suffered financially or socially as a result of their service. The eligible group was loosely defined as those affected because of their “service to Denmark,” a formulation widely open to interpretation.⁵⁹

No separate veteran compensation laws were introduced for Danish soldiers who were injured or killed during regular military service. However, in 1946 an amendment to the Compensation Act expanded the range of eligibility to Danish citizens who had fought in Allied uniform or in foreign resistance movements, granting them compensation on the same terms as Danish resistance fighters. This meant that some Danes who had served in a military uniform were covered by civilian compensation legislation rather than a distinct legislative framework covering the military.⁶⁰

In practice, between 1940 and 1969, Danes who suffered as a result of the war could claim compensation, with additional privileges for those who had actively fought, served in Allied forces, been imprisoned in concentration camps, or worked as war sailors. Compensation was primarily based around physical injury or death. Educational support and business grants could be awarded to resistance members, but only if war-related disruption or injury could be demonstrated. Honorary payments were not given for service alone, but mainly to widows of resistance members and for those assessed to have lost more than fifty per cent of their ability to work due to disability, including soldiers and war sailors.⁶¹

Between 1945 and 1969 there was no protected legal definition of a resistance fighter. There were no statutory rules concerning who had been actual members of the resistance movement or specific activities that ensured any level of qualification. Instead, the Compensation Council assessed each of the approximately 9,000 individual applications submitted by resistance members and determined whether the applicant was deemed to have participated in the resistance struggle or not.⁶²

A legislative amendment in 1969 clarified this criterion for compensation. Danish citizens who had been imprisoned in concentration camps, served on Allied ships for at least six months, or participated in organised resistance work for at least one year could receive an honorary payment if their earning capacity had been reduced by at least twenty-five per cent, compared to the previous requirement of fifty per cent disability. The amendment effectively introduced a statutory definition of a resistance fighter as a person who, through membership of an “illegal” group, had carried out organised resistance activities.⁶³

From the outset, the Compensation Act contained a strict exclusion clause. Danish citizens who had collaborated improperly with the occupying forces were barred from receiving any compensation, even if they otherwise met the criteria. This applied to many groups including so-called German girls (*tyskerpiger*), meaning women who entered into relationships with German soldiers. It

also applied to war profiteers who had benefited economically from trade with the occupation authorities, and to Danes who had served in German uniform, including SS-volunteers.⁶⁴ These exclusions reflected both the moral reckoning of the liberation period and the intention to preserve the exclusive character of the compensation scheme as a privilege that was reserved for worthy Danish citizens, with additional honours granted to those considered especially deserving.

NORWEGIAN COMPENSATION- AND VETERAN LEGISLATION

Before the Second World War, Norway had no comprehensive compensation schemes for veterans. Some ad hoc legislation existed for civilians, such as a 1916 act introduced for seafarers. This was an act which was applicable only to individuals with a connection to the First World War, however, and a permanent scheme for seafarers injured in military conflict was only adopted in 1937, when the work accident scheme came to include permanent war compensation for seafarers.⁶⁵

Beyond the scheme for seafarers, no legislation existed concerning war injuries or death incurred in military conflicts. However, as early as autumn 1939, the Norwegian government began to consider a compensation scheme for ordinary military personnel and appointed a committee to work on the matter. In the first instance, it was about exploring possible schemes granting assistance for “permanent injury”, while the mandate of the committee was only later expanded to include compensation options for invalidity and death, including pensions for survivors.⁶⁶ On 31 May 1940, the Norwegian government adopted a first set of provisional decrees concerning pensions for those injured in connection with their service during the war, or their survivors in case of death. In addition, a committee appointed by the interim Administration Council in the occupied territories worked on a pension scheme for both military and civilian participants of the war, which led to two decrees being adopted on 9 December 1941, covering military and civilian victims respectively.⁶⁷ Upon the liberation of Norway, these war schemes were temporarily continued by provisional decrees on the 4 and 8 May and expanded to include “any injury to a person caused as a result of patriotic work or attitude”.⁶⁸ However, on 13 July 1945 the post-war unity government appointed a new committee, the so-called War Damages Committee (*Krigsskadekomiteen*), to work on a new comprehensive scheme which would be fit for purpose and grant assistance coverage to a wide range of groups affected by the war.

The War Damages Committee presented its findings to the Department of Social Affairs on 30 November 1945. In its recommendations, the committee drew heavily on the existing wartime provisions, since most of those initiatives were considered to be well-functioning.⁶⁹ The work of the committee led to the adoption of the Act on War Pensions for Military Personnel (*lov om krigspensjonering for militærpersonell*) and Act on War Pensions for Home Forces Personnel and Civilians (*lov om krigspensjonering for hjemmestyrkepersonell og sivilpersoner*), both of which were adopted on 13 December 1946. The names of the acts reflect both their scope and the difficulty of categorising veterans and victims. The creation of two laws followed the earlier distinctions that were highlighted between military and civilian compensation schemes. However, legislators were concerned that members of the military resistance (the Home Forces) were not included by the act for military personnel, but placed within the civilian category due to the technical definitions used.⁷⁰ The Social Affairs Committee, following the recommendation of the War Damages Committee, had advocated the use of this categorisation mainly for ‘practical’ reasons: it argued that it could be difficult to draw a distinction between resistance members and ‘other patriotic activity’, which would be covered by the civilian act.⁷¹ This meant that resistance members would be subject to different rules of causation in relation to their claims for assistance. Under military law, any injury or death during service qualified an individual for a pension, whereas civilians had to prove a direct link to specific wartime actions in order to be eligible. The Social Affairs Committee justified this by noting that many resistance members also pursued civilian work during the war. At the same time, the Committee stressed that this distinction did not imply a hierarchy of recognition and that members of the military resistance “are to be regarded as military personnel.”⁷² To reflect this, the Committee proposed to change the title of the act from “Act on War Pensions for Civilians”, to “Act on War Pensions for Home Forces Personnel and Civilians”.⁷³

The two acts were based on similar principles: military personnel received pensions for injuries incurred during service, while civilians were entitled to benefits for injuries resulting directly from patriotic activity or when they were classified as eligible victims of war-related injuries. Pensions aimed to ensure an adequate material living standard based on pre-war income and reflecting the expected post-war status of the individual. This approach caused unease among some parliamentarians, who argued that all forms of service should be honoured equally. Despite their concerns, the principle was adopted with reference to the fact that the pensions who were under consideration could never receive an

adequate amount of monetary reward for their actual war contribution (*krig-sinnsatsen*), but at the very least the state should ensure fairness and an adequate living standard for those who had incurred injuries because of the war.⁷⁴

Civilian legislation covered three subgroups, systematically ranked by their level of service or exposure. Group one included those who had served in the home forces, participated in resistance work, served in Norwegian or Allied forces, been forcibly conscripted, or worked in civil defence or assisted a certain set of voluntary aid organisations and were particularly exposed to the dangers of war. Group two included seamen, pilots, fishermen, and other civilians in occupations deemed especially vulnerable to war-related accidents. Finally, group three applied to: "...other civilians, and persons belonging to the aforementioned groups when the accident is unrelated to the aforementioned service or employment conditions."⁷⁵ In this way the law ensured coverage for a wide range of groups. Legislators generally understood the first two groups as having faced an active risk of injury, whether through military service, resistance work, imprisonment, or labour as group one included prisoners of war. The War Damages Committee had recommended including merchant sailors sailing under the Norwegian flag in this group, but the Social Affairs Committee rejected this "for practical reasons," while still emphasising their importance to the war effort. Groups one and two were nevertheless seen as comparable, and contemporary parliamentary debates made clear that both were regarded as comparable categories of wartime veterans.⁷⁶

Unsurprisingly, the schemes applied only to those who were seen as having fought on the right side. The wartime schemes had previously excluded Norwegians serving allied interests as military and merchant seafarers. These individuals were now included and could apply for assistance. In the 1946 legislation, those who had been sentenced for committing treason (*landssvik*) were expressly excluded. This reveals some of the symbolic intention behind the act: while these revolved around providing compensation benefits, and not veteran pensions, they were still only to be paid to those who fought for the nation against the occupying forces. In other instances, however, the legislative process revealed the difficulties of drawing a clear distinction between those who were worthy and those who were unworthy of receiving pensions: When it came to the so-called 'German workers' (*tyskerarbeiderne*), the War Damages Committee had proposed to exclude such individuals outright from eligibility when those "persons who had worked on German sites and in German companies" incurred an injury. However, the Department acknowledged that most labour performed in the industries

under consideration had been: "...for the benefit of both Norwegian and German interests".⁷⁷ This highlights that it was hard to define who were deemed to be deserving of pensions because of the practical ambivalences of working life during the occupation.

While the principles of compensation, and the adequate grouping of individuals were debated, it was not the veteran status as such which was contested in the context of the legislation. The Act corresponded with the ideals of patriotic duty and sacrifice commonly held at the time. There was a general understanding that in addition to the individuals who were covered by the act for military personnel, individuals in group one and two of the civilian acts had in fact made a contribution to the war effort comparable to that of actual military personnel. This was emphasised by the War Damages Committee, by the spokeswoman of the Social Affairs Committee, and by several members of Parliament. In principle, the 1946 laws covered a broad group of individuals and represented an extensive and comprehensive scheme when counted together.⁷⁸ The laws were met with general satisfaction in 1946 from the different groups of individuals who were injured during the war. While some of the guiding principles behind the benefit calculations were debated, there was strong support for the solutions that were ultimately adopted. Norway had also taken reasonable precautions when deciding upon the scope of law by looking at corresponding legislation from abroad. The main inspirational source for the laws came first and foremost from Denmark. As the chairman of the Social Affairs Committee highlighted during a parliamentary debate: "In this regard, it has been significant for the committee that the Danish law on victims of the occupation, which is based on similar principles, has now been in force in Denmark for over a year and, according to the information provided to the committee, has functioned satisfactorily without any difficulties or causing any controversy."⁷⁹

Shortly after taking effect, the shortcomings of the legislation became apparent. Pensions failed to keep pace with inflation and the compensation from other schemes, and it was often difficult for claimants to prove that their injuries were war-related or even covered by the 1946 provisions. This led to minor adjustments of the laws in the 1950s. However, the laws continued to be strict in regard to proof of causation, something which caused challenges for some individuals. This caused dissatisfaction, because many veterans believed that their pensions were a reward for their service, rather than compensation for sustained injuries. Such practical challenges led to the establishment of the *Krigsinvalidforbundet* in 1954 with the purpose of improving the access to war pensions.⁸⁰ However,

further reforms were needed in order to handle other challenges. This was the case in particular because the early post-war acts in both Denmark and Norway did not cover a range of long-term physical and psychological damage such as the so-called concentration camp syndrome, which only revealed themselves over the years and were not legally recognised immediately.

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP SYNDROME IN NORWAY AND DENMARK

Shortly after the Second World War, Danish doctors began systematically researching the physical and psychological effects of concentration camp imprisonment. Doctors and former prisoners Paul Thygesen and Jørgen Kieler conducted early studies in 1947–48, documenting starvation-related illnesses, chronic conditions, and severe psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and reduced work capacity with only one third of afflicted individuals being able to work full-time after the war. Mortality was also significantly elevated among the afflicted, especially in the first five post-war years. In 1954, Thygesen and Knud Hermann defined the “KZ syndrome,” highlighting the accompanying trauma and social decline among survivors and their families. These findings aligned with international research, and conferences on the subject from 1954 onwards facilitated the further exchange of medical research in this field. Overall, the studies showed that former prisoners suffered more severe and longer lasting harm than initially assumed. The Norwegian physician Leo Eitinger, himself a former prisoner, demonstrated that similar symptoms affected merchant sailors exposed to prolonged danger at sea. Despite this, war pension laws in both countries required clear medical proof directly linking acts of service to the claims of illness—a burden that proved extremely difficult to meet for many.⁸¹

Despite growing medical recognition, authorities were slow to acknowledge psychological injuries in compensation cases in both Denmark and Norway. Only in 1968, following sustained pressure from veterans’ organisations and mounting media attention, the Norwegian legislation was finally amended through the *Tilleggsloven til krigspensjonslovene av 1968* (Supplementary Act to the War Pension Acts).

The parliamentary debates on the supplementary act in Norway were marked by expressions of regret. Politicians acknowledged that the legal framework had been insufficient to help those it was meant to protect. Although knowledge of the KZ syndrome had existed since the early 1950s, compensation procedures had not been significantly updated. Most significantly, the 1968 amendment reversed the burden of proof. Instead of requiring veterans to demonstrate a causal link

between service and injury, this connection was now automatically presumed for those who had served more than six months in the military, the resistance, on Norwegian or Allied ships, or for individuals who had been imprisoned.⁸² In her study of Norway's merchant sailors, Guri Hjeltnes characterised this shift as a "social policy sensation".⁸³ One consequence of this was that the number of individuals receiving war pensions increased fivefold.⁸⁴ More indirectly, it led to a renegotiation of the veteran term, which could now also include individuals suffering from psychological conditions.

The same tendencies were evident in Denmark. Although Denmark had pioneered compensation legislation and early research on the KZ syndrome, Norway had overtaken Denmark in the 1960s in both trauma research and compensation reform. Norwegian changes directly inspired the Danish amendment of 1969. The political process was similar: a public debate questioned whether the state could abandon aging resistance veterans who had sacrificed their health for the good of the country. Driven largely by a media campaign from veterans' organisations, the reform was ultimately passed with an overwhelming parliamentary majority.⁸⁵

The Danish and Norwegian cases show that medical knowledge alone was insufficient to secure recognition and compensation. Although the long-term psychological effects of war had been documented since the late 1940s, legal frameworks continued to individualise responsibility and require proof from the injured veteran. Only when sustained political mobilisation reframed the issue as a collective moral obligation, did the burden of proof shift from the individual to the state. In the words of the American historian Jay Winter, these former resistance fighters may be understood as a form of moral witnesses. Winter emphasises how veterans and survivors position themselves either within dominant national narratives of heroism and sacrifice or against them.⁸⁶ In the Scandinavian context, resistance veterans, former prisoners, and merchant sailors increasingly challenged the post-war consensus of unity and heroism. Instead, they emphasised the lasting effects of their physical war injuries, psychological injury, social marginalisation, and long-term physiological effects. In doing so, they questioned the moral economy of the post-war state and demanded that the recognition of their suffering should be a collective responsibility. The reforms of 1968–69 in this way not only marked a technical change in pension law, but a broader renegotiation of what counted as a war injury and who qualified as a veteran in the welfare state.

GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF THE VETERAN CONCEPT

The concept of the “veteran” is closely associated with military service and armed combat and therefore carries a strong gendered imprint that is male aligned. Military service and combat have traditionally been understood as “male,” a perception rooted in nationalist norms that define a binary gender order. Within this framework, women are assigned responsibility for reproduction, childcare, and care work, while men are expected to defend the nation. Military skill and combat thus form central elements of the nationalist ideal of masculinity, making it appear “natural” that men fight while women care for the home.⁸⁷ As a result, military heroism has been closely linked to ideals of masculine sacrifice and national service. The soldier’s willingness to die for the nation was framed as the ultimate expression of masculine duty.⁸⁸ The figure of the veteran was therefore closely associated with notions of martial honour, courage and combat experience.

This binary gender order, rooted in the nineteenth century, retained strong authority into the twentieth century, including during the Second World War. However, in occupied Denmark and Norway, fighting was largely conducted by exile forces and the resistance movements and in neither society did mass mobilization occur. As a result, the traditional divide between a male war front and a female domestic sphere applied only to a limited extent.

Especially in Denmark, the military played an exceedingly limited role in the war. The swift defeat in April 1940 and disarmament in August 1943 left many officers unable to demonstrate traditional martial masculinity, contributing to the post-war tensions with resistance groups. While resistance offered visible proof of and claims to sacrifice, regular military service provided fewer means of asserting wartime merit. More broadly, war and occupation did contribute to a loosening and blurring of the traditional gender order, particularly in Norway.⁸⁹ Following the onset of the German invasion, most men and women initially continued their everyday work and responsibilities. However, both became involved in organised resistance, and in Norway, women were also incorporated into the armed forces. At the same time, wartime collaboration involved both genders and, in some cases, opened up new opportunities for women to take on roles that were otherwise less accessible.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, binary nationalist gender roles retained a strong normative force. As soon as occupation and war came to an end, social and political efforts were directed towards re-establishing traditional societal structures rather than altering the gender order. This effort once again defined everything associated

with the military as distinctly masculine and eroded the traces of female actions in this sphere during the war.

This particularly affected those militarily connoted roles that women had assumed during the war in the resistance, in the intelligence services, and for Norway in the armed forces, and on the basis of which they might have claimed political participation, social influence and entitlement to social benefits according to the legislation described above after the war.

One context, in which this development became painfully obvious, is memory politics. In the aftermath of the war, narratives concerning both the merits and the misconduct of men and women during the occupation were gendered. The resistance struggle was framed as a “male” phenomenon – despite the many women who had taken an active part in it. Although female resistance fighters were discussed and praised in the media in the immediate post-war months, the importance of their deeds and their contribution to the success of the resistance was soon downplayed.⁹¹

Female tasks were depicted as subordinate to men’s or as mere support for the “real” resistance. Women who acted as messengers, spies, or served in the armed forces did not fit the traditional gender order. As Karen Steller Bjerregaard, Helle Bjerg and Claudia Lenz have shown, women in Norway and Denmark often reproduced these interpretations themselves. Even when engaged directly in resistance, they remained in the background in terms of recognition and political influence, and their contributions were often neglected in the big picture.⁹²

Instead, another form of “female resistance” was promoted: the housewife and mother who sustained the home front under the yoke of occupation. In Norway, women who managed to feed their families despite shortages or mend clothing when shops were empty were seen as the true heroines. A similar pattern appeared in Denmark. As Anette Warring has shown, women’s resistance was often framed within the domestic sphere. Activities such as hiding fugitives or distributing illegal newspapers were thus interpreted as extensions of household duties rather than as political or military action.⁹³ Both the Norwegian and the Danish narrative represented another variation of the nationalist ideal of the female role as a caring mother.⁹⁴

The extent to which this myth was socially pervasive in Norway, even within circles associated with the women’s movement, is illustrated by the following example: After the war, the women’s magazine *Alle kvinners blad* sought to duly recognise the numerous contributions made by women to the resistance. The magazine also announced that its honorary prize for 1945 would be awarded to

a “brave woman” who had rendered outstanding services to the resistance. The prize, however, was not awarded to a woman who had been part of the military resistance or assumed other “male” roles during the war, but to the director of a tuberculosis sanatorium in Finnmark, Helga Mårdalen.⁹⁵

When German troops devastated northern Norway towards the end of the war, Mårdalen persuaded them not to burn down the hospital. After the surrounding area had been destroyed, she took in numerous people who had been rendered homeless. During the occupation, she had also assisted refugees by organising transport, clothing and provisions and by hiding them.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it was above all her service as a nurse (“sister”) and the traditionally “female” qualities associated with these actions – care, nurturing attentiveness and self-sacrifice – that were foregrounded. In the justification for the prize, *Alle kvinnens blad* stated: “Sister Helga [...] is very representative of the Norwegian women’s front. She is a housekeeper for a large institution. She is a social worker and has made an outstanding humanitarian contribution.”⁹⁷ The *Rjukan Arbeiderblad* described her as: “... a mother to all those in need in Eastern Finnmark.”⁹⁸ Mårdalen thus primarily embodied the “resistant Norwegian housewife” and thereby the traditional gender role ascribed to women.

In Denmark, particular attention was given to the widows of resistance fighters, who were praised for their husbands’ sacrifices. In speeches, commemorations, and compensation practices, they were celebrated for this “ultimate sacrifice” and were by far the most generously accommodated group in the compensation legislation.⁹⁹ The Danish Freedom Fund, a private initiative with broad popular support, also provided extensive assistance to both widows and children, while also organising special events for the widows and even producing dedicated gifts intended to symbolise their sacrifice.¹⁰⁰ It was simply good politics to support resistance widows, and part of the fund’s advertising strategy in connection with fundraising was to emphasise that they provided special support to widows—one of the many advertisements they placed in the daily press, for example, read: “The Freedom Fund is thinking of the widows.”¹⁰¹ In this way, the Danish resistance widow resembled the typical war widow in terms of the elevation and emphasis placed on the ultimate sacrifice made by the husband. Likewise, the practice of tying the support granted to soldiers’ wives and war widows to their husbands’ service and earnings was characteristic of military widows more generally.¹⁰²

In a broader societal perspective, this was also characteristic of contemporary views on women in Denmark as well as in Norway. Women, especially married

women and mothers, were primarily regarded as economically and socially dependent on men, and both prevailing norms and social legislation were therefore based on the assumption that they neither could, nor should, manage on their own.¹⁰³

Gendered narratives of the war and occupation also shaped the handling of collaborators in the Norwegian treason trials. During the war, the “typical collaborator” was assumed to be male, except in cases of sexual collaboration, which was primarily observed as a “female” phenomenon. When the trials began in 1945, authorities were surprised by the high number of accused women—who made up one third of all suspects and convicts.¹⁰⁴ Over the course of the treason trials, gender stereotypes and gender roles consistently shaped the treatment of wartime collaborators by the police and courts. Female defendants who were perceived as independent, strong, influential or even violent—attributes coded traditionally as “male”—were depicted as deviant, often in a sexualised manner, and prosecuted more harshly.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, female defendants who presented themselves in gender-stereotypical ways—as caring mothers or impoverished widows—often fared better in the *Rettsoppgjør*. Courts frequently downplayed even serious offences perpetrated by women by neglecting female agency, while at the same time rewarding behaviour that conformed to ideals of women as caring housewives and mothers. In this way, police and judicial authorities framed domestic roles as the proper model of a “good” Norwegian woman.¹⁰⁶

The re-traditionalization of society was not only a retrospective effort but it was also oriented towards the future. This is evident in the debate about women’s position in the Norwegian military after 1945. During the Second World War, around 700 women served in the armed forces. From April to June 1940, following the German invasion, women volunteered mainly in medical, domestic, and administrative roles. In 1942, the Norwegian authorities in exile introduced conscription for women aged 18–40 living abroad, who received military training in Great Britain to form a female medical corps and an armed women’s corps with separate hierarchies and ranks.¹⁰⁷

After the war, these women initially remained in the armed forces as regular officers, and additional female volunteers were recruited and trained. The Ministry of Defence worked to establish a voluntary peacetime service option for women in non-combat roles, but it was concluded that Parliament would have to decide whether or not women should be integrated into the armed forces as a matter of principle. At the same time, a heated public debate arose over the planned “militarisation” of women, which many, including the bourgeois-con-

servative opposition, saw as a threat to traditional gender roles. In December 1946, Parliament rejected further integration projects and terminated the female recruitment and training programme. Consequently, by the end of 1947 all-female support units and new recruits were discharged, and by 1955 the last thirteen female officers had been dismissed. Thus, "... military defence continued to be identified thoroughly with a male world."¹⁰⁸

In Denmark, women did not serve in the armed forces during the Second World War, but many participated in the resistance movement. As in Norway, their contributions were soon marginalised after the war. A notable example is the "Red Widows," whose husbands were Danish communists that were interned during the occupation and later deported to Nazi camps. From informal meetings in 1941, they developed into an organised network that secured financial support for affected families, petitioned local authorities, and organised relief efforts. Over time, they became both a welfare advocacy group and a political pressure movement. After the war, however, they were pushed aside. As their husbands returned, the women's networks and experience lost influence, and they were expected to resume traditional roles. Their wartime efforts were largely forgotten until rediscovered in the 1980s.¹⁰⁹

Most striking is the limited political influence granted to women after 1945. In Denmark, no resistance women were appointed to prominent positions in the liberation government or post-war councils. In Norway, despite strong efforts, Kirsten Hansteen was only appointed as a consultative minister without her own department in Einar Gerhardsen's first post-war cabinet. Female representation in parliament and government remained low in the following decades.¹¹⁰ In both countries, political arenas were largely male dominated. Regardless of how effectively women had operated within the resistance during the occupation, they were granted little influence after liberation and they were typically not understood as military- or resistance veterans.

This shows that gendered narratives of war and post-war policy had far-reaching consequences. Women were not only excluded from "male" spheres such as the military and resistance but also denied claims to political participation and influence in post-war society. Instead, they were relegated back into traditional roles as mothers and housewives.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, we have demonstrated that veteran status in post-war Norway and Denmark was not a fixed term, but that it emerged through social,

legal, and political negotiations after 1945. Rather than being a demarcated and protected legal category, recognition of wartime service took multiple forms, reflecting different types of sacrifice and experience. Resistance fighters, war sailors, camp prisoners, soldiers, and others all sought recognition, even if they did not identify or qualify as veterans.

In both countries, the concept of the veteran remained closely tied to material entitlements. Compensation laws, pensions, and welfare provisions became key arenas for defining and contesting wartime service. Although neither Denmark nor Norway created a clearly defined veteran category, their systems effectively established hierarchies of recognised service, thereby functioning as indirect forms of veteran assistance policy.

Another key finding is that recognition of veterans evolved over time. Early post-war legislation in both countries focused on visible, physical injuries and clear wartime damage. Long-term psychological harm and delayed effects were only gradually acknowledged. Reforms in the late 1960s marked a turning point in this regard, as new medical knowledge and political mobilisation broadened both the understanding of what constituted war-related injury and opened up access to compensation.

Finally, we have demonstrated that the concept of the veteran was strongly gendered. In Norway and Denmark, recognition of wartime service was closely tied to masculine ideals of combat and sacrifice, while women's contributions were framed as extensions of domestic or humanitarian roles. Post-war compensation and commemorative practices reinforced this by recognising women mainly as widows or dependents, limiting their opportunities for political influence compared to the men who gained political influence through their ties to the resistance movement.

CHAPTER 12

Entangled Transitions: Trade Unions, Welfare Institutions, and Social Conflict in Post-War Italy, 1943–1948

Michele Santoro

Italy's democratic transformation unfolded through a complex interplay of intentional reform and enduring institutional continuities. Efforts to reconstruct the political, economic and social order coexisted with the survival of administrative structures inherited from the previous regime. The re-emergence of party politics and the revitalisation of trade union activism generated both optimism and profound tensions concerning the reconfiguration of institutions after 1945.¹ Against this backdrop, this chapter examines administrative reform and the reorganisation of power within Italy's social institutions in the immediate post-war period, focusing on the INPS (National Institute for Social Security) from the fall of Fascism in 1943 to the consolidation of its governing structures in 1948. While a substantial body of scholarship has already addressed the broader construction of the post-war social protection system, studies specifically addressing the role of the INPS remain limited. Existing

research has often emphasised institutional continuity, whereas more recent work highlights the importance of questioning this continuity rather than focusing solely on its outcomes.² Building on this historiographical foundation, the contribution presented here considers the reformist ambitions of trade unions and other political actors who sought to redefine both the composition and the functions of the Institute in the contest of the Constitutional transition. While numerous institutional features endured beyond 1948, the overall process sprang from the interaction of multiple and often competing forces:³ trade union aspirations to participate directly in the governance of the Institute;⁴ the resistance of the *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy, DC) to radical social reform;⁵ and the commitment of Alcide De Gasperi to guarantee state continuity within the reconstruction process, while also ensuring the continued protection of selected elements inherited from the Liberal period.⁶

Drawing upon a range of primary and edited sources—such as documents from the INPS, trade unions and political institutions—the analysis presented here addresses two central research questions: What impact did the Second World War exert on the INPS? And. How did administrative functions and power relations evolve in its aftermath, particularly after 1945?

Established in 1933, the INPS administered almost the entire Italian pension system, with policies grounded in social insurance principles. From the mid-1920s onward, the Institute underwent several changes in its composition and scope. The fascist Regime reshaped the structures inherited from the Liberal period and intensified control over its operations and financial resources, especially during the 1930s.⁷ After the regime's collapse, the INPS was first placed under a government-appointed commissioner, Ernesto Maria Romanelli, and later headed by Angelo Corsi, a Social Democrat member of Parliament.

In the immediate post-war years, reform of the Italian social protection system gained prominence, as various actors advocated both radical and incremental proposals. The more ambitious initiatives went beyond addressing wartime social emergencies—such as inflation, poverty, and assistance programmes, representing the 'demand side'—to include structural reorganisation of the institutional framework, or the 'supply side'.⁸ Trade unions advocated the democratisation of the INPS's governance, calling for a workers' majority to serve in its governing bodies and influence the election of the president through the Board rather than by government appointment. These efforts met strong resistance from employers' organisations, the Christian Democrats' conservative stance on social policy, and broader opposition to union control over the pension system.

Although a partial rebalancing of the Board of Directors emerged, democratisation proceeded only gradually. The presidency remained a political appointment, and ministerial representatives—alongside the Board of Statutory Auditors—ensured continued strong governmental oversight. Overall, different political actors prioritised stability and the inclusion of diverse interests, favouring negotiated consensus over structural reform.⁹ By exploring the INPS's development and the role played by trade unions during the Italian post-war period, this study adds knowledge to the historiography of the transition from Fascism to the Republic we know today. It also contributes to the broader debates regarding post-war Europe and the reconstruction and emergence of welfare institutions.

THE INPS WITHIN THE “DEMOCRATIC TURN”: AN OPEN (HISTORIOGRAPHICAL) PROBLEM

The Second World War devastated Europe while also driving major institutional, political, economic, and social transformations. In Italy, it marked a decisive rupture, prompting a reconsideration of the state's organisation and its systems of social provision. The pre-war social protection system had developed in a fragmented and incremental way, excluding many workers from pensions and assistance. Under Fascism, authority was centralised and control exerted over institutions such as the INPS, whose structure and functions were significantly reshaped from their original 1919 framework. The war's social crisis exposed and intensified these structural weaknesses, leaving the system ill-equipped to meet post-war needs.¹⁰ In this context, the social protection system became a focal point of inquiry and political debate, with growing advocacy for comprehensive and universal reform extending to the broader architecture of welfare state institutions.¹¹

Alongside the acute social challenges and structural contradictions of the existing system, internal debates among experts, administrators, and trade union representatives fostered a degree of cautious optimism about reform. These discussions were partly informed by engagement with international models of social security, which provided a comparative framework for institutional innovation.¹² Moreover, the government of national unity, formed by the three main mass parties (Christian Democrats, Communists, and Socialists), appeared capable of overcoming entrenched political divisions and conservative resistance, creating favourable conditions for substantial social reform. Preliminary efforts to restructure the social protection system were undertaken between 1944 and 1945, but they failed to produce decisive results.¹³ Subsequently, the government and Parliament revisited the issue, adopting a dual strategy. Urgent measures

addressed immediate post-war social needs, while more comprehensive reforms were developed within constitutional and legislative frameworks. Principles of social protection were enshrined in the Constitution, and a Committee for the Reform of Social Security, chaired by the Social Democrat Ludovico D'Aragona, was established to draft a systematic proposal. Its final report outlined an ambitious reform programme whose implications would resonate in the years that followed.^{14,15}

The establishment of the Republic after the 1946 referendum marked a formal rupture of old continuities, alongside the election of the Constituent Assembly. Yet this break was accompanied by the persistence of deeply rooted elements within state structures, including bureaucratic apparatuses, administrative cultures, and institutional practices shaped by earlier regimes. Historical scholarly inquiry has increasingly emphasised the transition as a dynamic process, defined by the interplay between continuity and change rather than a simple moment of institutional replacement.¹⁶ Adopting a historiographical approach attentive to these dynamics, rather than focusing solely on outcomes, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the period's political and social transformation. Recent debates on post-war Europe likewise stress the need for methodological renewal in order to grasp the development of European democracies after 1945. Instead of reducing needed analysis to binary narratives of continuity or rupture, scholars emphasise the importance of contingent challenges, institutional processes, and political conflicts in shaping democratic systems.¹⁷ This perspective shifts attention from teleological accounts to the concrete institutional arenas in which reform was articulated and mediated. Although few studies focus specifically on the INPS in the immediate post-war years, analysis of its function in this period offers valuable insight into the Italian democratic transition, illuminating how reform was negotiated, contested, and constrained. Accordingly, this study does not attempt to reconstruct the understanding of the emergence of the welfare system as a whole but instead examines the political and economic dynamics shaping the reorganisation of the INPS during the transition from Fascism to the Republic. The incorporation of trade union forces into state structures, alongside the expansion of social policy, formed a key element of the broader project to democratise public institutions after 1945. In this context, analysing trade union efforts to influence and govern the social insurance system through the INPS provides a useful lens for assessing both ambitions for structural change and the countervailing pressures that shaped the Institute's development.

In the immediate post-war period, proposals to reform the INPS's administrative bodies were first advanced by the Socialist Minister of Labour, Gaetano Barbareschi. His initiative was examined by the Labour Commission of the Consulta Nazionale, a provisional consultative assembly (September 1945–June 1946), which supported a governing structure largely composed of workers' representatives.

However, the Labour and Social Protection Committee (IX) revised the proposal, strengthening ministerial oversight—particularly that of the Treasury—while rejecting the election of the President by the Board in favour of government appointment. During the subsequent period of administration by a government-appointed commissioner, the issue was also taken up by the Ministry for the Constituent Assembly, where support emerged for a more balanced, parity-based composition of the governing bodies. With the arrival of the Republic, governing coalitions—later led by the Christian Democrats (DC)—revisited the restructuring of social institutions. Their approach was corrective and incremental rather than transformative. The existing system, organised along professional categories, was largely preserved, with legislation addressing key deficiencies through supplementary laws and partial adjustments rather than through a comprehensive overhaul.

Within the trade union movement, significant voices called for full control of the Board of Directors by workers' representatives and for the election of the Institute's president. By contrast, the government maintained that the president should remain a political appointee. The outcome reflected a convergence of political factors: the priorities of the Christian Democrats and the relative weakness and divisions fraught within the trade unions;¹⁸ and the resistance of employers' organisations to an expansion of labour influence. The resulting scheme (No. 436/1947) thus sought to balance social representation with institutional control, reflecting the broader tension between democratic participation and state management.

NEGOTIATING POWER AND REFORM: TRADE UNIONS, SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, AND POST-WAR POLITICS

In the immediate post-war years, the INPS became the focus of repeated efforts of institutional reorganisation. These were driven by the resurgence of trade unions—long marginalised under Fascism—the expanding debate on reforming Italy's social protection system, and the early political configuration of the governing coalition, which included Socialist and Communist representatives.

Together, these factors prompted a reassessment of both the Institute's functions and the composition of its governing bodies.

The earliest and most substantive discussions took place within the National Council. In this context, the Socialist Minister of Labour, Gaetano Barbareschi, proposed a democratic restructuring of the INPS, emphasising the workers' central role in decision-making: "... a predominance has been granted to the representatives of workers over those of employers [...] as workers have a more direct and immediate interest in the activities of the Institute."¹⁹ The proposed reform recognised the workers' direct interest in administering social insurance funds.

Debates unfolding in mid-1940s periodicals reflected an increasing awareness of the structural weaknesses in the system. In a 1946 report in *Previdenza Sociale*, published by INPS, Giuseppe Santoro described social security legislation as fragmented and lacking coherence, and without a clear theoretical foundation. He emphasised the urgency of reform, but noted that it was hindered by the absence of stable principles which were necessary for a coherent and comprehensive overhaul.²⁰ The Atlantic Charter's (1941) call for "freedom from want" required a break with individualistic and corporative ways of thinking in favour of a universal welfare system. In this vein, Stefano Giua criticised: "... the persistence of traditional conceptions [...] inadequate to new social needs," arguing that the only way forward was to abandon the narrow contractual models which could overcome a system: "... based on a hybrid compromise between social solidarity and individualistic insurance principles."²¹

Reform thus signified not only administrative rationalisation but a rejection of fascist social legislation and a renewed commitment to redistributive justice. Giuseppe Orsini argued that existing insurance and welfare systems failed to meet workers' expectations of social security, as reflected in growing calls for reform. He linked financial constraints to inefficient resource distribution, but more fundamentally, to the continued influence of legislation originating from the fascist era. In his view, only a clear break with this backwards legacy could enable the creation of an institution capable of securing workers a dignified standard of living in times of crisis.²²

The paralysis of the social insurance administrations after July 1943 compounded these structural flaws. Deprived of governing councils and managed by commissioners, they remained suspended in provisional arrangements. While commissioners—as Romanelli at the INPS—had ensured continuity throughout the wartime emergency, their persistence reflected political impasse over the institutional composition and presidential appointment.²³ As debates unfolded

within the governing coalition, the Barbareschi proposal was moderated. In the Consulta, Barbareschi defended the government's adoption of a "middle-ground solution": a balanced composition of the Institute's governing bodies alongside supervisory authority for the Ministry of the Treasury, justified by the financial importance of the INPS. He emphasised that the government's priority was to restore purposeful administration by ending the provisional commissioner system as quickly as possible.²⁴ The debate revealed sharply divergent positions. The endorsement for a worker-centred Board of Directors came from Giuseppe Rapelli, a Christian Democrat, who argued that social insurance funds belonged to workers and that industrialists therefore lacked legitimate grounds for direct administrative involvement. He subsequently qualified his position, conceding that employer's representatives might be acceptable in a strictly supervisory capacity, limited to one representative for industry and one for agriculture.²⁵ In contrast, Tito Pestellini, more aligned with employers' interests, forcefully opposed any imbalance in favour of workers and insisted on maintaining parity between workers and employers. He argued that recent amendments—particularly those expanding representation for agricultural workers—had placed employers at "a structural disadvantage". Given that employers' contributions constituted a part of production costs, they still possessed a legitimate right to oversee the proper administration of those funds.²⁶

Eugenio Laricchiuta, a member of the reconstituted *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL), focused on safeguarding the Institute's autonomy. He proposed replacing government appointments with elected leadership to strengthen the INPS's technical and institutional independence. Specifically, he argued that the Council should elect its own President and two Vice-Presidents—representing workers and employers—and called for the exclusion of representatives from the Ministries of Labour and the Treasury from the Board of Directors. This institutional debate was closely linked to a constitutional question: whether the Ministry of the Treasury should exercise tutelary authority, enforcing hierarchical control, or be limited to function with supervisory oversight only.²⁷

These deliberations reflected broader tensions within the post-war transition, including the restoration of internal democracy in social security institutions, demands for greater autonomy from political interference, and the challenge of balancing competing claims to representation among diverse social and economic groups. The debate over the INPS thus became a microcosm of the wider effort to redefine the relationship between state authority and organised interests in the emerging Republic.

Trade unions advocated a comprehensive reorganisation of the social protection system, particularly a workers' majority on the Board of Directors and the election of the President by the Board rather than government appointment. This position found some support within the political class, and elements of Gaetano Barbareschi's proposal reflected key union demands.

By contrast, Confindustria, the main confederation of industrial representatives, opposed sweeping reforms during the unstable republican transition. It argued that the role of government was to focus on urgent economic and social issues and defer fundamental pension reform to the Constituent Assembly. At the centre of the debate was the governance of social insurance institutions, especially representational parity. Confindustria's president, Angelo Costa, maintained that strict equality between employers and workers was essential to ensure impartial administration of funds and protect all parties' interests.²⁸ In the end, the prospect of a far-reaching structural overhaul of social security was deferred. Reform was made contingent upon future democratic deliberation, grounded in technical expertise and the attainment of broad political and social consensus.²⁹

The question of administrative organisation within the social protection system re-emerged in the deliberations of the Ministry for the Constituent Assembly, notably through "Questionnaire P" prepared by the Committee for the Study of Labour Problems. With around 300 responses—from trade unions, employers' organisations, and Labour Offices and Inspectorates—it provided a broad empirical basis for assessing institutional models.

The debate revealed a clear preference for autonomous public bodies over direct control by the state or trade unions. While a broad consensus supported parity between workers and employers, views diverged on the extent of their role, ranging from direct active management to consultative functions. Proposals for exclusive state control or unilateral working-class governance were rejected outright. Overall, the discussions emphasised balancing social partner representation to ensure impartial and independent administration, in contrast to the centralised model imposed under the Fascist regime.

"An absolute majority opposes state management of social insurance and its administration by workers' unions. Instead, the prevailing view favours autonomous public institutions as the appropriate entities for managing social insurance [...]. The majority further maintains that the administration of the social insurance system should be based on the principle of equal representation between workers and employers. Opinions, however, diverge regarding the nature of this

participation: some support a supervisory role exercised through participation in the management bodies, while others would restrict such involvement to the board of statutory auditors. Nevertheless, even under the latter view, the participation of state representatives in boards of auditors must never be exclusive; it must always be complemented by representatives of the directly concerned categories – namely, workers and employers. [...]. Industrial representatives, moreover, firmly reject any proposal that would assign the administration of social security exclusively or predominately to the category of workers.”³⁰

At the same time, although parts of the labour movement continued to advocate a stronger working-class presence within republican institutions, the prevailing approach to reform favoured the preservation and adjustment of existing structures rather than their wholesale transformation. The gradual moderation of Italy’s political framework thus constrained the prospects for radical renewal of the social protection system. Early signs of tension within the national unity coalition had already emerged by late 1946, even before Alcide De Gasperi’s trip to the United States.³¹

The socialist split of January 1947 further weakened governmental cohesion, while a deteriorating economic situation prompted deflationary policies that reversed earlier inflationary measures. On 25 September 1946, the Minister of the Treasury, Giovanni Battista Bertone (DC), outlined the government’s approach to restoring economic and monetary stability before the Constituent Assembly, presenting fiscal consolidation as a precondition for recovery: “... the state’s balance is in disarray: it must be settled [...] Financial disorder means general disorder [...] in the long run [...] a race towards the abyss. [...] Imperative [...] to reorganise the budget.”³²

From the perspective of the DC, and of De Gasperi in particular, resolving tensions with the “fourth party”—the industrial representatives and associations—became an urgent priority in order to restore confidence amongst economic actors in both the Government and the DC.³³ Mounting domestic and international pressures led De Gasperi to form a centrist government that marginalised the left and favoured incremental reform over profound structural change. Social protection was gradually extended to new groups administered by INPS. A mid-1950s ministerial report noted that: “... compulsory insurance for invalidity, old age and survivors” had been repeatedly revised to update benefits eroded by inflation and “... to modify their structure [...] towards greater solidarity.”³⁴

Within this framework, the trade union movement—particularly the CGIL—advanced alternative proposals for the Institute’s structure, outlining a reform trajectory by the late 1940s that would endure for decades. During the Constituent Assembly debates, Giuseppe Di Vittorio argued that: “... social security cannot be separated from solidarity among all workers [...] and only the State can provide for this.”³⁵ While acknowledging high administrative costs, he rejected the notion that inefficiency was inherent to the system’s public character, instead attributing it to bureaucratic and top-down management rather than originating in democratic control by workers. From this perspective, only democratic management with direct worker involvement could ensure both efficiency and equity when constructing social insurance schemes. In its communications with the Ministry of Labour, the CGIL called for a return to the original independence of democratic systems founded on the principle of responsibility. This vision included electing the President through the Board, guaranteeing the unconditional presence of workers’ representatives in governing bodies, granting the Board authority to appoint the General Director, and excluding ministerial officials from management, on the grounds that the Board of Statutory Auditors provided sufficient oversight.³⁶ Through these demands, the CGIL sought to consolidate a model of institutional autonomy and social representation that stood in contrast with the government’s preference for controlled continuity and moderated reform.

The Ministry of the Treasury rejected the trade unions’ proposals, arguing that the system’s fragile condition called for rapid administrative stabilisation rather than far-reaching reform. It supported employers’ demand for equal representation, which aligned with government priorities, and insisted that reorganisation efforts were to be carried out without delay.³⁷

Government efforts to maintain oversight of the INPS’s finances took several forms. The Treasury’s General Director criticised its investment practices, and a request to ease restrictions on real estate and mortgage transactions was denied in order to avoid: “... undesirable repercussions [...] unfavourable to currency stability”.³⁸ Likewise, the General Accounting Office urged regulatory revisions that were in line with ministerial directives on subscribing to nine-year Treasury bonds of 1960.³⁹ Consequently, the labour movement’s calls for redefining core administrative principles were set aside, under pressure from employers seeking to preserve control over resources and representation. Government policy instead prioritised employment stabilisation and social peace through a mix of emergency measures and reforms in the long run.

Although policymakers acknowledged systemic weaknesses in the system, they rejected rapid reorganisation in favour of gradual consolidation. In his statements to the D’Aragona Committee, Alcide De Gasperi did not envisage comprehensive reform or link pensions to broader citizenship rights, but instead sought to rationalise the existing framework. Reform options were thus constrained from the outset by precarious public finances, with budgetary concerns limiting intervention and subordinating social policy in favour of fiscal stability.⁴⁰

This orientation led to proposals advocating the removal of functions deemed extraneous to social security institutions, ensuring administrative coherence and efficiency. Revisions formalised by Legislative Decree No. 436 of 13 May 1947 reflected earlier reform efforts. While workers gained a majority on the Board of Directors, the Decree only partially amended Royal Decree-Law No. 1827/1935, and the Government retained control by retaining presidential appointment rights and ministerial oversight.

Despite increased worker participation, the executive branch maintained decisive influence. As the INPS grew in social and economic importance, successive reforms expanded its responsibilities and financial commitments, making its governance a recurring issue in political and trade union debates and underscoring its central role in Italy’s post-war development.

“It will almost certainly remain evident – and, I believe, generally agreed – that while social assistance should not be diminished but rather strengthened, the implementing bodies must be improved, simplified, accelerated, and streamlined, which ultimately entails a reduction in costs. [...]. Considering this genuine need, it is worth briefly noting that the role of this honourable Board of Directors could be rendered more effective by contributing its own insights and experience to the drafting of the very laws it is called upon to interpret and apply. Moreover, the powers and functions of both the Council and the President should be more clearly defined and expanded, so that they may adequately meet the requirements of effective and active governance.”⁴¹

The evolution of the INPS’s institutional structure must be seen within a broader political and social context. Efforts to reform the Institute’s governance were closely tied to limiting the influence of workers’ organisations over its management and the substantial financial resources found within. Pressure from employers’ representatives, aligned with government priorities, reinforced a principle of political balance, while the growing economic weight of the INPS highlights the close link between institutional change and wider political developments.

CONCLUSIONS

The war profoundly impacted Italian society, economy, and political life, prompting a reappraisal of institutional structures and power relations. The transition from Fascism to the Republic introduced constitutional innovation, yet many traditional features persisted, particularly within the bureaucratic apparatus and administrative culture. This transformation was neither linear nor uniform, but a complex process in which impulses towards renewal coexisted with unmoving and enduring continuities.

In the case of INPS, revisions to the composition of its central administrative bodies, granting greater representation to workers, marked a departure from the corporative principle of parity. The restoration of civil and parliamentary liberties reopened questions of representation and institutional authority. Trade unions claimed social security as an exclusive workers' domain and demanded control over its governance, while employers defended equal representation. The resulting and finalised arrangements reflected a calibrated balance of forces, shaped by employer pressure and governmental directives to contain trade union influence and preserve political moderation.

These developments must be situated within the broader trajectory of the post-war democratisation process, a protracted and uneven procedure extending far beyond 1945. Governments consolidated INPS's role as an implementing agency of social policy, yet reforms remained incremental and sectoral. Coverage for the general public expanded, but the Institute's administrative structure was adapted rather than fundamentally transformed

CHAPTER 13

The “Two-Faced Janus” of Social Collaboration: The Consigli di Gestione in Italy between Corporatism and Industrial Democracy, 1943–1949

Michele Mioni

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of democracy in Italy after the Second World War entailed long transitions within the realm of social policy, where even pre-Fascist legacies persisted long after 1945.¹ Workers’ participation in industry was a hot point of public debate at the dawn of the Republic, being a matter rooted in a long-term search for reconciling and representing opposing class interests into the economic and political institutions. Hence, Italian antifascists in 1945 faced the same issue that corporatist collaboration efforts had tried to solve since the late 1800s, an issue that transversally concerned all European industrial societies during the 19th and 20th centuries.² In this context, the debate on the *Consigli di Gestione* (CdG, Works Management Committees) involved the country’s post-war institutional

and socio-economic organisation.³ The CdG were introduced by the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI, Italian Social Republic), a Nazi puppet government created in Northern Italy in September 1943, after the fall of Mussolini and the Fascist regime. The aim was enforcing industrial collaboration and countering the Resistance's influence in the factories, mostly located in the northern part of the country. At liberation in April 1945, the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Alta Italia* (CLNAI, Committee of National Liberation for Northern Italy), gathering the Resistance movements, repelled all Fascist legislation frameworks except for the CdG. Later, the attempts at regulating the committees during the constitutional debate only led to the reiteration of statements regarding the important principles of worker participation. Eventually, the looming Cold War divisions ended the national unity government in 1947, leading to the dismantling of the CdG beginning in 1948. This topic, however, resurfaced during the debates on planning policy and industrial democracy in the following decades, proving that workers' participation was an issue characterised by undeniable longevity in post-war Italy.⁴

While the 1948 Constitution proclaimed that "labour" was the foundation of the Italian Republic, the fundamental divergences on how to implement workers' participation revealed corporatist legacies that encompassed the institutional and socio-economic aspects of industrial relations.⁵ The non-implementation of the Constitution's most advanced socio-economic principles and the eviction of the workers from decision-making in the factories marked the demise of industrial democracy in post-war Italy.⁶ Albeit short-lived, the documented work of the CdG hence shed light on the scope and limits of the Resistance's projects to integrate the workers into the democratic institutions, offering an opportunity to study the contested visions of industrial citizenship in the post-war period.⁷

TWILIGHT AND RENEWAL OF "FASCIST" CORPORATISM, 1943-1945

Many industrial countries introduced workers' participation to mitigate class struggle and ensure production efficiency beginning in the late 19th century. While Italy did not have similar conciliatory bodies, the *Commissioni Interne* (CI, with comparable functions to the Shop Stewards' Committees) developed from company agreements and granted union representation in the factories beginning in 1906.⁸ After the Great War and the Bolshevik Revolution, factory councils prompted opposite proposals for socialist democracy, union control, or social collaboration in 1920-21.⁹ The socialist and Catholic unions, headed by Ludovico D'Aragona and Giovanni Gronchi, and the employers' association

concluded that workers' participation should be based on the wartime tripartite consultative committees, but they disagreed on their respective responsibilities in the companies.¹⁰ Eventually, Liberal governments failed to legislate on the issue, while fascist violence weakened labour organisations. Once in power, Fascism abolished the CI in 1925 and suppressed free unions to establish a corporatist order that eliminated class struggle in factories through an institutional, bureaucratic, and repressive framework.

The Fascist minority trends advocating for a more participatory model resurfaced only during the war as the corporatist system collapsed.¹¹ Building on the claim that labour was the "foundation and main object" of the RSI, the regime's constitutional drafts made full political, economic, and social rights conditional on the idealised notional category of the worker.¹² The RSI also introduced the so-called socialisation of industry, incorporating the newly established CdG into neo-Fascist corporatist ambitions. Angelo Tarchi, the Minister of Corporatist Economy, argued that the bill shifted the goals of social collaboration from the institutional to the economic sphere. While departing from earlier Fascist policy, it maintained the core aim of enforcing industrial peace, now pursued directly within the factories.¹³ The deliberately misleading notion of socialisation did not entail collectivisation of industry but referred to workers' participation in the CdG, institutional bodies with deliberative and advisory roles with regard to production, collective agreements, welfare, and safety, as established by the legislation adopted in February 1944. The committees also determined profit sharing, intended to dissolve class antagonism and foster solidarity in the factories.¹⁴ Tarchi further conceived the CdG as a corporatist tool for economic planning without incurring direct state control. Organised in provincial and national committees, they were to advise the Minister on industrial planning by providing data on output, labour allocation, distribution, prices, and costs.¹⁵

In practice, completed reforms were limited to CdG and profit-sharing schemes amid internal disagreements over the scope and aims of socialisation. Right-wing factions, alongside German authorities and employers, obstructed these measures, opposing unionists such as Giuseppe Spinelli, who instead hoped socialisation would dissolve class antagonism by abolishing the proletarian condition.¹⁶ These demands went beyond the regime's more moderate aim of reconciling class interests, and the RSI accommodated the unionists only late in the war, when a separate Ministry of Labour was granted to Spinelli in January 1945. He sought to turn the CdG into instruments of union representation, control, and propaganda in the factories, shaping them into a link between

state and unions.¹⁷ Spinelli also sought to accelerate their creation; a year after the law's promulgation, only about sixty large and medium-sized firms—mainly operating in publishing—had approved statutes, while socialisation was being prepared in another sixty, now including heavy industry.¹⁸ The limited scope of socialisation reflected internal divisions and weak implementation in the factories. While some officials saw the measures as too limited to secure social peace and boost productivity, others—including industrialists—argued that participation should not extend to co-management, which they feared would lead to Soviet-style state capitalism, the very outcome neo-Fascist legislation sought to prevent.¹⁹ Also Nazi authorities were sceptical about the committees, fearing they would “cause an almost permanent conflict between Capital and Labour”, disrupting the productive efficiency of the factories that worked for the German war machine.²⁰ Lastly, this measure antagonised the employers who were worried about the collectivisation of their enterprises, while the workers remained indifferent or hostile, swelling the ranks of the Resistance and waiting for a revolutionary outcome of the war.²¹

Benito Mussolini hoped that the RSI reforms would prove to be “social mines” that would explode on the Anglo-Americans and the Resistance after the war.²² Unionists more genuinely saw workers' participation as the basis for a new social order. In the final months of the war, they even sought contact with socialists, believing the conflict had given workers a new role in political and socio-economic life, regardless of what regime remained in power. They looked for common ground with parts of the Resistance, presenting the committees as core institutions of a “true democracy of labour” that would transcend the “liberal-bourgeois” system after the war.²³

“CAPITAL AND LABOUR FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION”, 1945-1946

The antifascist movements discussed workers' participation in their post-war programmes, rejecting the RSI's legislation touting it as a ploy to subjugate workers.²⁴ As the antifascist parties created the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN, National Liberation Committee), free unions and employers agreed on reintroducing the CI in September 1943, the debate on the CdG gained momentum by these developments.²⁵ The Catholics supported co-determination to ensure interclass solidarity, increased productive capacity, emancipation of the workers, while counteracting state control and collectivism.²⁶ Principles of social collaboration also informed Lib-Lab currents within the CLN, which promoted mixed committees to organise clandestine activity in factories and serve as a

blueprint for post-war reconstruction based on self-governance and cooperation, in opposition to state bureaucracy and corporatism.²⁷ The social-communists rejected this collaborative framework, believing that workers should take the economic and political lead after the war.²⁸ From summer 1944 to April 1945, more than 500 underground CLN factory committees were formed in Northern Italy, which protected the plants against the Germans after the employers fled and often supervised production, acquiring new technical competencies in the transition from war to peace.²⁹ On the eve of liberation, the CLNAI repealed the legislation on socialisation except for the CdG, which was deemed necessary to guarantee “the continuity and improvement of productive activity, in the spirit of securing an effective national solidarity”.³⁰

After the war, many CdG officials in medium and large companies oversaw corporate welfare and advised on production measures and modernisation efforts. They were coordinated by industry-based committees at the provincial level all across Northern Italy, which sought supervisory roles granting influence over individual firms and national policy.³¹ These requests aligned with the strategy of the social-communists, who wanted to frame the CdG as a force for grass-root democracy in the political, administrative and socio-economic spheres.³² Social collaboration hence should serve “the common interest of the reconstruction, enhancing the workers’ sense of national responsibility” through participatory bodies, rather than to instigate corporatist particularism.³³ In autumn 1945, all Resistance movements in the CLNAI agreed to regulate the status of the committees.³⁴ This compromise did not resolve fundamental divisions between Catholics, liberals, and employers who found themselves on one side of the struggle and the social-communists on the other. The former confined the CdG to technical advisory roles within the industry, while industrialists opposed them outright, arguing they undermined economic freedom and efficiency by allowing excessive opportunities for workers’ demands. The left, by contrast, maintained that the CdG promoted collaboration and national solidarity and should therefore be granted regulatory powers and a supra-company structure.³⁵ This controversy fell within the scope of the concerns regarding the socio-political stabilisation of the country after the war. The Allies solicited the abrogation of the RSI’s reforms, harmonising Northern Italy with the more moderate social legislation present in the South, fearing that the CdG escaped the control of the new authorities and jeopardised the normalisation of industrial relations.³⁶ The experts at the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour worried that the CdG were a social-communist scheme to introduce collectivism under the guise of

class collaboration rhetoric.³⁷ The CLNAI commissioners were likewise wary of abolishing all neo-Fascist social provisions outright, despite their “demagogic” aims. They argued that indiscriminate repeal of provisions legislation already in place would make the new democracy appear more conservative than Fascism, risking alienating workers from the new institutions.³⁸

The dualism between Rome and Northern Italy persisted until the CLN absorbed the CLNAI in February 1946, and the June 1946 elections for the Constituent Assembly brought the CLN to an end. The constitutional debate in turn strengthened the CdG movement, which had already established a coordinating committee in the North in November 1945 to advocate its position across party boundaries and promote the creation of committees nationwide.³⁹ This unified direction reflected the organisational growth of the CdG, which had already developed territorial and sectoral coordinating bodies in Northern and Central Italy and expanded across private, semi-state, and municipal medium and large companies, as well as sectors such as hospitals, farms, banks, and schools. This expansion underpinned their ambition to shape the reconstruction process of Italy following the war, as the “converging interests” of productive forces were expected to influence the socio-economic provisions of the Constitution under discussion.⁴⁰ The CdG movement proclaimed to be non-partisan, non-class and non-revolutionary, and maintained its only aim was social collaboration.⁴¹ However, its agenda moved closer to that of the Marxist parties, which supported legal recognition of the committees and their role in participatory planning. At the same time, the CdG’s goal of settling industrial conflict aligned with the social-communists’ legalist approach, which sought to dissuade tensions that could jeopardise the unity government and the democratic transition.⁴² The first national congress of the CdG in October 1946 upheld the line of autonomy from parties and social partners’ organisations, arguing that the committees’ aims were incompatible with sectionalism. It endorsed a supra-company structure—vertical (by industry) and horizontal (by province)—to advise the government on industrial planning, maintaining that integrating workers into policymaking would prevent a return to harmful collusion between industrialists and ministerial bureaucracy and ensure more democratic and participatory representation.⁴³ The committees’ call for legal recognition and regulation within the democratic state was taken up by the attending ministers: the socialist Rodolfo Morandi (Industry), the communist Emilio Sereni (Post-War Assistance), and the reformist D’Aragona, now Minister of Labour and Social Insurance.

THE WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE, 1946-1947

In the same period, two commissions on labour and economic issues examined workers' participation from January to June 1946 in preparation for the Constituent Assembly. Members of the CdG, along with workers' and employers' representatives, took part in these technical and political discussions.⁴⁴ The report for the labour commission, prepared by a former supporter of corporatism, argued that work committees and employee share schemes had not historically resulted in industrial democracy. Within a capitalist framework, such institutions could neither transform ownership structures nor overcome the divide between political and social representation. The report concluded that "social democracy [...] the natural and necessary complement to political democracy" should integrate workers' political and socio-economic rights.⁴⁵ Interviews with workers, employers, and experts revealed broad support for establishing the CdG, but disagreement over its functions. Employers sought to limit its officials to technical advisory roles, while workers and civil servants supported deliberative powers in industrial management and the inclusion of worker representatives in governing bodies—an option employers firmly rejected.⁴⁶ The commission ultimately recommended the legal recognition of the CdG and the constitutionalisation of workers' participation to mark: "... a decisive and irreversible step towards the collaboration among productive forces in the higher interest of the nation and its economy."⁴⁷ It also proposed involving unions in the CdG and creating a national coordinating body, modelled on existing structures in Northern Italy, to prevent corporatist practices within companies.

The newly elected Constituent Assembly appointed the Third Sub-Commission to discuss social, economic and labour matters in July 1946. There, the communist leader of the union argued that the recognition of CI and CdG allowed the working class to exercise its "social function of general interest" in the factories against capitalist and particularist vested interests.⁴⁸ By contrast, Catholic unionists such as Gronchi supported co-determination and profit-sharing initiatives to link workers more closely to the companies they worked for. Marxists opposed this as undermining working-class solidarity, accusing Christian Democrats of reintroducing a corporatist model that bound employers and workers within the company.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the ministers who attended the first CdG congress followed through on their commitment. D'Aragona's more moderate bill was merged with Morandi's December 1946 proposal, which endorsed the CdG's role in national economic planning.⁵⁰ The socialist project conceived the CdG as a tool of grassroots industrial democracy complementing political institutions and

granting workers political and economic rights. The introductory report rejected revolutionary aims, arguing that similar measures in capitalist countries did not subvert the socio-economic order but on the contrary improved productivity and political stability. Morandi's proposal was nonetheless torpedoed among growing opposition to workers' participation and a change of course in the public debate that signalled a more tense political climate between January and May 1947. The employers stiffened their position against the committees, which they regarded as a threat to the existing socio-economic order and to the post-war recovery because they introduced bureaucratic overreach and disrupted productive efficiency.⁵¹ Industrialists and committee leaders accused each other of pursuing a sectionalist policy. The former argued that only full restoration of free enterprise defended the general interest, scaring the middle class with "tyrannical" expansion of the state and renewed social divisions.⁵² The committees, on the other hand, claimed that the employers' organisations wanted to continue a consociational strategy as was observed during Fascism, hindering national solidarity.⁵³ Divergences also widened within the labour movement. Unions feared corporatist overrepresentation if the CdG became too independent and sought closer ties with the CI to secure representation in both social and economic matters. By contrast, CdG leaders favoured a separation between class demands pursued by the CI and the interclass collaboration promoted by the CdG.⁵⁴

In the same year, a national agreement on the CI confirmed unions' preference for centrally negotiated industrial relations over company-level arrangements. Catholics and liberals also resisted granting supra-company advisory roles to the CdG, fearing this would enable state control of companies. They instead saw the committees as technical bodies created to rationalise production and improve welfare within individual firms, thereby mitigating class conflict.⁵⁵ The controversy over the CdG led to a compromise in the Constituent Assembly and the adoption of Gronchi's proposal, which framed workers' participation as collaboration to improve productivity, without specifying how it should be implemented.⁵⁶ The constitutional article no. 46 passed in May 1947, the same period in which the national unity government ended due to growing domestic and international tensions.

FROM POST-WAR COLLABORATION TO COLD WAR DIVISIONS, 1947-1949

After being ousted from government, left-wing parties used the CdG movement to denounce what they saw as "collusion" between capitalist interests and the state, pursuing a corporatist, anti-labour policy in continuity with Fascism and shifting

the costs of post-war reconstruction onto workers.⁵⁷ Committee leaders accused this political bloc of betraying Resistance promises to give workers a leading role in factories and the national economy. At the second CdG congress, Morandi and Sereni abandoned collaboration in favour of socialist transformation based on workers' control, nationalisation of key industries, democratisation of state economic bodies inherited from Fascism, and legal recognition of the CdG.⁵⁸

These demands clashed with government's tighter monetary policies and repression of industrial action from mid-1947. In response, the CdG movement shifted from collaboration to confrontation, aligning more closely with unions and the CI. It advocated expansion of provisional measures and full employment against the austerity championed by the government, which brought rising unemployment, low wages, deflation, and underinvestment.⁵⁹ The CdG also criticised Italy's decision to join the US-sponsored European Recovery Program and the early European integration, which the committees believed had a harmful impact on the country's productive capacity and strategic choices in the international economic policy in favour of US interests.⁶⁰ The CdG aligned now with the left-wing parties against the domestic and international positioning of the Christian Democrats that anchored Italy to the Western Bloc, whereas the CdG movement wanted to maintain political and economic relations with both camps operating across the Iron Curtain.⁶¹ In this phase, the CdG coordinating committee acted mainly as a link between socio-economic and political spheres. It supplied the social-communist parties and unions with data on industrial production, used in opposition to Italy's alignment with the West, which was portrayed as a betrayal of national interests in favour of transnational capital and NATO's belligerent policy.⁶²

Between 1947 and 1948, abandoning the initial collaborative strategy pushed the CdG towards a more explicit class approach when operating within factories. The movement drew closer to the union-controlled CI, traditionally used to advocate for workers' demands. Whereas the CdG had earlier distinguished themselves from the CI due to differing roles and composition, employer resistance and the Christian Democrats' shift forced them to rely more on the *Commissioni Interne* to maintain a presence in the factories.⁶³ The latter, indeed, was a more established institution with a larger following amongst workers and the only recognised workers' institution by a national agreement between social partners.⁶⁴ The shift led the CdG movement to absorb several union demands and endorse the Marxist view that post-war state capitalism favoured trusts and monopolies, producing anti-labour policies and sectional interests rather

than safeguarding the common good.⁶⁵ While the committees did not abandon social collaboration, they argued that only labour organisations pursued participatory, decentralised, and democratic approaches to production and planning, as opposed to corporatism and state control.⁶⁶

The third CdG national congress in December 1948 highlighted both the movement's growth and the limits of possible action without the backing of a legal framework. Nearly 600 committees operated in medium and large firms in north-western Italy, involving about 750,000 workers and coordinated by bodies organised by territory, industry, or company.⁶⁷ This growing entrenchment led the movement's leaders to focus on organisation and drafting a CdG statute. Congress also confirmed the strategy of working through party representatives to advance the committees' agenda. The committees' new proposals dropped supra-company coordination, stepping back from Morandi's proposal and acknowledging that planning was no longer feasible in the new political context.⁶⁸ The Christian Democrats' victory in 1948 and subsequent splits of Catholics and social democrats from the trade union confederation in 1948–50 reflected shifts that blocked the CdG's implementation. From 1949, the committees were dismantled, while the government pursued anti-labour policies, sidelining industrial democracy. Unions instead strengthened the more established CI to maintain a factory presence. Left-wing parties also withdrew support, viewing the CdG as either too radical in a rightward climate or too corporatist in promoting cooperation with employers.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

The dual nature of the *Consigli di Gestione* was illustrated by the image of a “two-faced Janus that said “revolution” on one face and “pacification” on the other”.⁷⁰ However, the true alternative was not class struggle versus interclass cooperation, but what form of social collaboration that was desirable to achieve. The dualism between corporatism and industrial democracy crossed the debate on the committees, regardless of the political government systems that succeeded one another in Italy from periods of war to peace, due to the structural needs to govern the economy and ensure the representation of social interests. The RSI introduced the CdG to pursue the “third way” between capitalism and collectivism that Fascism had already sought for twenty years, by shifting corporatist conciliation from political institutions to the factories.⁷¹ The Resistance and the CdG movement also wanted more collaborative industrial relations, but they framed the committees as a grassroots democracy that complemented parliamentary

institutions and union representation.⁷² During the Constituent debate, this vision gave way to a political compromise that shifted focus on political democracy and union freedom to further workers' interests, while the Catholic corporatist conceptions influenced the discussion on workers' participation.⁷³ Lastly, Italy's pro-western orientation after 1948 prompted the development of a mixed economy that dashed the CdG movement's hopes to co-determine industrial policy.

Although the CdG's experience showed that corporatist legacies shaped the Italian industrial, institutional and ideological frameworks after 1945, neither corporatist nor industrial democracy versions of the *Consigli di Gestione* were embedded into the model of industrial relations in Italy.⁷⁴ This outcome fell within the generally limited application of the socio-economic democratic aspirations of what the public debate often called the "unimplemented Constitution".⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the social ideas of the Resistance had a fundamental importance in post-war Italy. The debate on workers' control in the late 1950s and the quests for direct democracy during workers' struggles in the 1960s and 1970s reignited the claims already made by the CdG in 1945–48.⁷⁶ The 1970 Statute of the Workers that democratised industrial relations was viewed as the achievement of the 1948 principles on workers' participation.⁷⁷ The antifascist Constitution hence gave direction for expanding the boundaries of industrial democracy in Italy after 1945.

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Notes

Intro: The Tasks of Peace Await

- 1 *Democracy back in action: the first sitting of the Storting after liberation.* (n.d.). <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/historical-highlights/the-storting-during-world-war-ii/democracy-back-in-action-the-first-sitting-of-the-storting-after-liberation/>.
- 2 Henrik Lundtofte, ed., *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede: Danmark efter Befrielsen* (Copenhagen: Nord Academic, 2026).
- 3 *Social-Demokraten* (June 6, 1945).
- 4 See chapters 6–7 of this anthology.
- 5 See chapters 12–13 of this anthology.
- 6 Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); Herbert Obinger, Klaus Petersen, and Peter Starke, *Warfare and Welfare: Military Conflict and Welfare State Development in Western Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 “De Udstødte, De Uvelkomne Og De Beundrede. Resocialisering, Velfærd Og Demokratisering 1945-1950.” VELUX FONDEN, <https://veluxfonden.dk/da/project/de-udstoedte-de-uelkomne-og-de-beundrede-resocialisering-velfaerd-og-demokratisering-1945>.
- 9 Henrik Lundtofte, ed., *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede. Danmark efter Befrielsen* (Copenhagen: Nord Academic, 2026).
- 10 Søren Werther Kjær Rasmussen, “Conference Report: From Warfare to Welfare?,” *H-Soz-Kult*, February 13, 2026
- 11 Lundtofte, *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede*, 14-28; Judt, *Postwar*, 31-50; Obinger, Petersen, and Starke, *Warfare and Welfare*; Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Peter Romijn, Sandrine Kott, and Olivier Wieviorka, eds., *Seeking Peace in the Wake of War: Europe, 1943–1947* (Amsterdam: NIOD, 2015); Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij, eds., *The Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European Countries* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2010).
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Martin Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). 1–5, 176–195, 283–317.
- 14 Søren Werther Kjær Rasmussen, “Conference Report: From Warfare to Welfare?”
- 15 For more on this subject see: Alan Malpass, *British Character and the Treatment of German Prisoners of War, 1939–48* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Dorte Kook Lyngholm and Henrik Lundtofte, “Vi maa ikke gøre dem til en Pariakaste: Resocialisering af landsforræderdømte,” in *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede: Danmark efter besættelsen*, edited by Henrik Lundtofte (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag/Nord Academic, 2026), 32–61; Anika Seemann, *The Quislings: The Trials of Norwegian Wartime Collaborators, 1941–1964* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).
- 16 See chapters 3–6 of this anthology.
- 17 See chapters 9–10, 12–13 of this anthology.
- 18 See note 6.

Chapter 1: From Revenge to Probation Service: Convicted Wartime Collaborators in Denmark after World War II

- 1 Jon Elster (ed.), *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Same: *Closing the Books. Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004). Hans Frederik Dahl: “Indledning: Oppgjøret som rystet Norge”, Hans Frederik Dahl og Øystein Sørensen (ed.), *Et rettfærdig oppgjør? Rettsoppgjøret i Norge etter 1945* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2004), 9–29. Ditlev Tamm, *Opgør og retfærdighed. Oppjøret efter besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2025), 62–68.

- 2 Elster, *Retribution*, 51.
- 3 Anika Seemann, *The Quislings. The Trials of Norwegian Wartime Collaborators, 1941-1964*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), 15–20, 141–142, 151–152, 194–200. In her comprehensive analysis, Seemann introduces *transitional politics* as a better interpretative framework than *transitional justice*.
- 4 Helen Grevers, “Re-education in times of transitional justice: the case of Dutch and Belgian collaborators after the Second World War”, *European Review of History*, 22:5, 2015, 772.
- 5 Grevers, “Re-education”, 771–790.
- 6 The study is based on: Dorte Kook Lyngholm and Henrik Lundtofte: “Vi maa ikke gøre dem til en Pariakaste”, Dorte Kook Lyngholm: De små landsforrædere. Udstødelse eller reintegration?, Henrik Lundtofte: ”Judas’er lader sig ikke resocialisere”. Strengt straffede kollaboratørers resocialisering. All chapters in Henrik Lundtofte (ed.), *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede. Danmark efter besættelsen*, (Copenhagen: Nord Academic, 2026), 32–61, 62–97, 98–125.
- 7 Ditlev Tamm, *Retsopgøret efter besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag, 1984), 69–82.
- 8 *Rigsdagstidende 1944/45*, Tillæg A, col. 102. Tamm, *Retsopgøret*, 441. All translations are made by the authors.
- 9 For a detailed analysis of the debate and the ideas concerning resocialisation of convicted Danish wartime collaborators, see Dorte Kook Lyngholm and Henrik Lundtofte, “Vi maa ikke gøre dem til en Pariakaste”, 32–60.
- 10 *Frit Danmark* September 14, 1945. The article is also mentioned in: Tamm, *Retsopgøret*, 441.
- 11 “Forhandlingerne på Dansk Kriminalistforenings Årsmøde i København den 20. og 21. november 1945”, *De Nordiske Kriminalistforeningernes Årsbok 1944–1945*, Stockholm 1947, 207–300.
- 12 ”Forhandlingerne 1945”, 222. Cf. Tamm, *Retsopgøret*, 253.
- 13 ”Forhandlingerne 1945”, 237–238.
- 14 Lyngholm and Lundtofte, ”Vi maa ikke gøre dem til en Pariakaste”, 43–45.
- 15 *Foreløbig Betænkning afgivet af det af Justitsministeriet nedsatte Udvalg til Behandling af Spørgsmaal vedrørende Fuldbyrkelse af Fængselsstraf m.v.* (Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz A/S, 1946), 5–8.
- 16 *Anordning angaaende Fuldbyrkelse af Fængselsstraf i Statsfængsel 10. maj 1947*, nr. 364. *Lovtidende A. 1947*, 1062–1072. *Anordning angaaende Fuldbyrkelse af Fængselsstraf for Personer, dømt efter Lov Nr. 259 af 1. Juli 1945 om Tillæg til Borgerlig Straffelov angaaende Forræderi og anden landsskadelig Virksomhed. 10. maj 1947*, no. 363. *Lovtidende A. 1947*, 1061. Peter Fransen, “Hvem styrer fængslerne og fangehåndteringen i Danmark? Stillingen som direktør for fængselsvæsenet/kriminalforsorgen gennem 111 år”, *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Kriminalvidenskab*, no. 1 (2021): 82–83. Hans Jørgen Engbo, ”Hundrede års fængselsfaglige udfordringer – belyst gennem udviklingen i dansk fængselsret 1910-2010”, *Direktoratet for Kriminalforsorgen 1910-2010*, ed. Martina Henze et al. (Copenhagen: Direktoratet for Kriminalforsorgen, 2010), 179. See also Tamm, *Retsopgøret*, 442.
- 17 Tamm, *Retsopgøret*, 432, 441–461.
- 18 *Retsopgøret med Landssvigerne*. Beretning til Justitsministeriet afgivet af Det Statistiske Departement, (Copenhagen: Det Statistiske Departement, 1958), table 10.
- 19 Lyngholm and Lundtofte, “Vi maa ikke gøre dem til en Pariakaste”, 54–60.
- 20 *Betænkning nr. 631, 1972, afgivet af Arbejdsgruppen vedrørende den fremtidige fordeling af arbejdsopgaverne på kriminalforsorgens område mellem Dansk forsorgsselskab og fængselsvæsenet* (Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz Bogtrykkeri, 1972), 8–11.
- 21 K. Leudesdorff, ”Forsorg for Lovovertrædere”. *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Strafferet*, 34. (Copenhagen: G.E.C. GAD: 1946), 107–127, quotation 126.
- 22 *Rigsdagstidende, Tillæg A, 1946-47*, 1947, sp. 1366. Reference is made to: Skrivelse fra Justitsministeriet af 14. juni 1946 and Skrivelse fra Justitsministeriets Finansudvalg 28. juni 1946 (Aktstykke 621). Betænkning nr. 2 fra det under 14. april 1947 nedsatte udvalg vedrørende fængselsvæsenets forhold, p. 123, 158–167 (Can be found as Appendix 7 to 5. *Betænkning fra Forvaltningskommissionen af 1946*. 1949).
- 23 Hans Tetens, ”De fængselsmæssige foranstaltninger overfor Landssvigerfangerne i Danmark”, *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Strafferet*, 35(1947): 193–196; See also Søren Billeschou Christiansen and Rasmus Hyllested, *På den forkerte side. De danske landssviger efter befrielsen*. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011), 66–67.
- 24 For a detailed analysis of resocialisation of convicted Danish members of “Hipo” (Hilfspolizei) in practice, see Henrik Lundtofte, “Judas’er lader sig ikke resocialisere. Strengt straffede kollaboratørers resocialisering”, Henrik Lundtofte (ed.): *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede. Danmark efter besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Nord Academic 2026), 98–125; Jens is a pseudonym; all convicted individuals mentioned in this chapter have been assigned pseudonyms.

- 25 Henrik Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 103–110; Rigsarkivet (Copenhagen) (hereafter "RAC"), Møgelkær Statsfængsel, fange charteques, landssvigerne, B-210-2001-312, F. 653.
- 26 Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 103–110. RAC, Møgelkær charteques, F. 653.
- 27 Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 107, 109.
- 28 Dorte Kook Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere. Udstødelse eller reintegration?", Henrik Lundtofte (ed.): *De udstødte, de uvelkomne og de beundrede. Danmark efter besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Nord Academic 2026), 73–75.
- 29 Henrik Skov Kristensen, *Straffelejren. Fårhus, landssvigerne og retsopgøret*. (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Arnold Busck, 2011), 462–466.
- 30 Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere", 74.
- 31 "Forhandlingerne på Dansk Kriminalistforenings Årsmøde i København den 14. november 1946", *De Nordiska Kriminalistforeningarnas Årsbok 1946-1947*. Stockholm 1948, 171.
- 32 Tetens, "De fængselsmæssige Foranstaltninger", 196–197.
- 33 RAC, Møgelkær charteques, F. 850.
- 34 Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere", 74–75.
- 35 RAC, Horsens Statsfængsel; B-205, journalsag 141: "Vejledning for Tilsynsførende med Personer, der er dømt i Henhold til Straffelovstillægget af 1.6.1945 med Ændringer angaaende Forræderi og anden landsskadelig Virksomhed".
- 36 For a detailed analysis of resocialisation of 'small' collaborators convicted in Denmark and how it was done in practice, see Lyngholm "De små landsforrædere", 62–97.
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- 38 Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 121–122.
- 39 RAC, Kriminalforsorgen, file 2103/A 615.
- 40 Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere", 82. Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 110.
- 41 Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere", 86–87. Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 118–119.
- 42 Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere", 82 and Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 110.
- 43 RAC, Faarhuslejren, fangejournal, domfældte (1945–1949). F 2834.
- 44 RAC, Kriminalforsorgen file 6312 / S 203.
- 45 Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere", 82–85.
- 46 Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 113.
- 47 Lyngholm, "De små landsforrædere", 89.
- 48 RAC, Møgelkær charteques, F. 258.
- 49 Lundtofte, "Judas'er", 113. RAC: Møgelkær charteques, B-210-2001-312, F. 653.
- 50 RAC, Kriminalforsorgen file 3988 / S 132.
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Chapter 2: The Braintree Experiment: Demonstrating the "British Way of Life" to German Prisoners of War in Post-War Britain

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Chapter 3: Adult Education in German Refugee Camps in Denmark following the Second World War: Study Circles and Democratic Learning

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Chapter 4: Teaching Democracy: Denazification and Democratisation among German Refugees in Denmark, 1945–1947

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 - 31 Claus Moldt, *Skolen og flygtninge in Hverdagen skiftede – Skolen i de onde Aar*, ed. Inger Merete Nordentoft and Aage Svendstorp. (Copenhagen: Carl Allers Bogforlag 1946), 161.
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 - 33 Moldt, *Skolen og flygtninge*, 159f.
 - 34 *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-49*, 173.
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 - 36 Lehr- und Stoffplan, 4ff. These teachers’ guides, as appears from a draft manuscript in *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-49*, were prepared under the supervision of the Education Committee by skilled German educators in the large camps, duplicated by the refugees themselves, and subsequently distributed to all schools: RAC, Diverse Sager, Oplysningsvirksomheden. Flygtning i Danmark 1945-49/1, archival package 104. Flygtningeadministrationen 1945–1949.
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- 41 The camps included in this investigation: Oksbøl, Aalborg Vandflyveplads, Silkeborg Bad, Karrebæksminde Ferieby, Krokodille-lejren and Øster Farimagsgades Skole.
- 42 The figures are based on research in connection with my thesis: *De må opdrages til at forstå...*
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Chapter 5: In the Absence of a Plan: The Rehabilitation of Non-German Displaced Persons in Denmark, 1945–1953

- 1 This chapter draws extensively on my Danish study of the same topic: Morten Baarvig Thomsen, 'De ikke-tyske flygtninge i Danmark 1945–1953 – Fordrevne i efterkrigstidens Danmark. 'Leveforhold, resocialisering og udrejse', in *De udstødte, De uvelkomne og De beundrede*, ed. Henrik Lundtofte (Copenhagen: Nord Academic, 2026).
- 2 Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: Vintage Books, 2011), 58–59; Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 3; Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted - European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 297.
- 3 For a detailed discussion of forced and voluntary repatriation efforts see: Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 72–94.
- 4 See also: David Nasaw, *The Last Million Europe's Displaced Persons from World War to Cold War* (New York: Penguin Press., 2020).
- 5 Flygtningeadministrationen, *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949* (Copenhagen: Forlaget Fremad, 1950), 304; As of 2026, the newest monograph on this topic is: Thomas Harder, *De uønskede - De tyske flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2020).
- 6 An exception to this is Wyman who briefly mentions Denmark: Mark Wyman, *DPs : Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 49.
- 7 Flygtningeadministrationen, *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949*, 258.
- 8 About 3,000 French, Dutch and Belgian DPs left Denmark before they could be registered: Flygtningeadministrationen, *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949*, 258. There were few Jewish displaced persons in Denmark and thus, the question of establishing Jewish DP camps never came up. Neither did a strong Zionist movement manifest like the ones seen in many other European countries.
- 9 The first monograph was published in 2025. Before then, the only overview was found in two unpublished MA theses: Brian Traantoft Rasmussen and Thomas Græsbøll Svaneborg, *Flugten fra Stalin. Historien om de baltiske flygtninge i Danmark og den lange vej hjem* (Gads Forlag, 2025); Lone Hvid Jensen and Jacob Walter, 'Dansk Asylpolitik i skyggen af den kolde krig maj 1945-december 1956' (MA Thesis, Roskilde Universitet, 2003); Gudrun Lund-Jensen, 'De ikke-tyske flygtninge fra anden verdenskrig under dansk forsorg i Danmark maj 1945-november 1948, Oktober 1950- april 1953' (MA Thesis, Odense University (University of Southern Denmark), 1995).
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- 11 Flygtningeadministrationen, *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949*, 257; Thomsen, 'De ikketyske flygtninge', 42; E. Juel Henningsen, 'Dansk Røde Kors Samarbejde med SHAEF', *Tidsskrift for Dansk Røde Kors* Nr 7. (August 1945): 119–21.
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- 13 RAC, *Report by EA 25 March 1947*, Box 71-71A, Flygtningelejrenes afvikling I Danmark 1947, Hovedarkivet, DRK; *DRK report 1 July – 30 September 1945*, Box 1148, Periodiske Beretninger 1945-1947, DRK, p. 11.
- 14 Bente Thomsen, 'De Baltiske Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949', *Historie/Jyske Samlinger*, 1977, 152.
- 15 Official documents set the date to 1 October 1947. There is a typo in the official report: Flygtningeadministrationen, *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949*, 257.
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- 18 Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 340–345.

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- 30 Flygtningeadministratoren, *Flygtninge i Danmark 1945-1949*, 264–65.
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- 32 RAC, *Meeting minutes* 27 and 28 October 1945, Box B5, Folder Principielle skrivelser angående flygtninge og indberetninger 1945-1947, UNIRO, p. 5.
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- 34 Ida Kjær Larsen and Søren Werther Rasmussen, 'De knap så uønskede: allierede flygtninge på Esbjerg Flyveplads 1946-1948', *Levende viden : kulturhistorisk årbog for Esbjerg-Ribe-Fanø området* 8, no. 8 (2021): 73.
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- 43 RAC, *Meeting minutes* 31 July 1945, Box B3, Folder DRK lejrmateriale – flygtningeafdeling I.R.O, UNIRO, p. 2-5.
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Chapter 6: Sacrifice, Service and Reciprocity: The Moral Economy of Resettlement in Post-war Finland

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- 3 Strictly speaking, the Karelians discussed in this chapter were internally displaced persons rather than "displaced persons" in the original post-World War II sense of the term, which referred to civilians located outside of their country of origin. The term "displaced Karelians" is used here because it succinctly describes the Karelians' lived experience instead of more technical terms such as expellees or forced migrants, used by Pertti Ahonen in Pertti Ahonen, "Taming the Expellee Threat in Post-1945 Europe: Lessons from the Two Germanies and Finland," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–21.
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Chapter 7: From Hiding in Darkness to Entering the Spotlight: Finnish Military Deserters and Their Return to Post-War Society

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Chapter 8: From Criticism to Celebration: Intelligence Officers, Memory Wars, and the Recasting of Honour in Post-war Denmark

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Chapter 9: Compensation Policies for Danish Resistance Fighters and World War II Victims 1941–2026

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Chapter 10: Social Aid and Gender in Post-War Denmark: Women and the Practices of the Compensation Law, 1945–1948

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Chapter 11: Defining Veteran Status in Post-war Norway and Denmark 1945–1969

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Chapter 12: Entangled Transitions: Trade Unions, Welfare Institutions, and Social Conflict in Post-War Italy, 1943–1948

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