

CHAPTER 4

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

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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 Kjærbøl, 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, Kjærbøl 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 Kjærbøl 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 Kjærbøl 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.