INTRO

The Tasks of Peace Await

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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.