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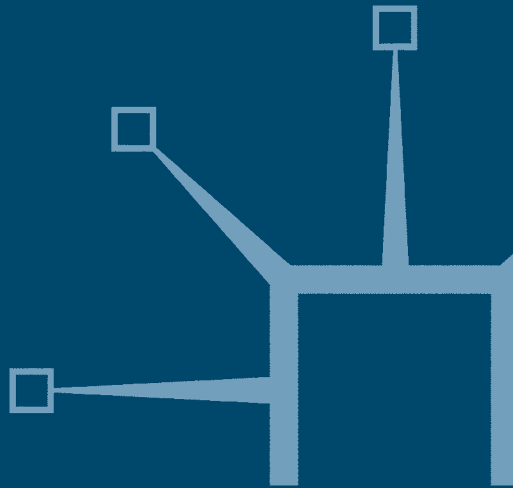
Victims of Stalin and Hitler

The Exodus of Poles and Balts to Britain

Thomas Lane



Victims of Stalin and Hitler

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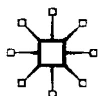

Victims of Stalin and Hitler

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First published 2004 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 1–4039–3220–4 hardback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lane, A.T.
Victims of Stalin and Hitler: the exodus of Poles and Balts to Britain / Thomas Lane.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.
ISBN 1–4039–3220–4
1. Poles – Great Britain – History – 20th century. 2. Balts (Indo-European people) – Great Britain – History – 20th century. 3. Baltic Sea Region – Emigration and immigration – History – 20th century. 4. Poland – Emigration and immigration – History – 20th century. 5. Political refugees – Great Britain – History – 20th century. 6. Great Britain – Ethnic relations – History – 20th century. 7. Immigrants – Great Britain – History – 20th century. I. Title.

DA125.P6L36 2004
940.53′089′9185—dc22 2004044793

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham and Eastbourne.

For Tommy

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Foreword

My earliest interest in the movement of peoples across national boundaries arose out of research into United States' labour history, since the American labour movement was in the vanguard of immigration restriction movements in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While examining the reasons for this, I was drawn into a study of immigration from the south and east of Europe which accounted for around 80 per cent of immigrants to the United States in the two decades before the First World War. I later had the opportunity to meet a number of 'immigrants' to Britain from the east of Europe, mainly Poles and Lithuanians. These people had originated from the territory which, in the eighteenth century, was called the Commonwealth of Poland–Lithuania. In the last third of the century the Commonwealth was partitioned and swallowed up by the three predatory states on its boundaries, Russia, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire. After some 150 years of foreign rule, the peoples of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia regained their independence but, disastrously for them, this independent status lasted for only two decades. Starting in 1939 with the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, these states became the victims of Nazi and Soviet collusion, and once again were removed from the map. As a result of these events millions of the citizens of these countries were uprooted and some of them, a small minority, found their way at the end of the Second World War to Britain. They rejected the term immigrants as applied to themselves. They were not, they insisted, economic migrants seeking a better life elsewhere. They preferred to call themselves exiles or political refugees (nowadays we might call them asylum-seekers but without the recent pejorative connotations). This was an accurate term since they had been forcibly uprooted from their country by the Soviet and German occupiers in a series of deportations and imprisonments during the Second World War. They ended up in penal camps and work settlements (the GULAG) in the depths of Siberia, Arctic Russia and Soviet Central Asia. Others fled as a result of the Soviet advance into the Baltic states and Poland in 1944, when the tide of war turned against Hitler. A few years later, a small proportion of these deportees had, by luck and the exigencies of international politics, found themselves in Great Britain where they had remained for the rest of their lives. They refused to return to communist-dominated homelands and, by the time

that Communism fell in 1989, they were too elderly or too close to their families in Britain to return.

Shortly afterwards, knowing my growing interest in the lives of these exiles, an historian colleague asked me to join him in bringing out a new edition of a classic work on the Polish deportations, Zoe Zaidlerowa's *The Dark Side of the Moon*, published in 1946 with a foreword by T.S. Eliot. A later request further stimulated my interest in learning more about this exile community. I was asked to edit the memoirs of a Polish émigré who had, after his arrest by the Soviets, spent some time in the notorious Lubyanka prison in Moscow, was transported to a penal labour camp in the north of Russia and rather miraculously, perhaps even uniquely, escaped over the border into Afghanistan, from where he moved to Britain, becoming a parachutist and a courier for the Polish Government-in-Exile in London.

At around the same time, the late 1980s, my colleague John Hiden and I founded the first Baltic Research Unit in Britain based in the Department of European Studies at Bradford University. This brought us into touch with the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian communities in the city. Their experiences were different in many respects from those of the Poles but equally remarkable. They shared with the Poles the experience of arriving in Britain at the end of the Second World War, seeking, or being directed to, employment, and saving assiduously to buy their own homes. Both the Poles and the Balts developed their own community institutions, and strove hard to preserve their cultures and identities in a quite alien environment. The experiences of some of them are narrated in the archive of the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, which contains a series of informative interviews, some transcribed, some not, with East Europeans in the city. These are helpful to anyone interested in the Polish and Baltic communities in Britain. Unfortunately they did not provide answers to some of the questions in which I was particularly interested.

Gradually the idea of writing a history of the Polish and Baltic exiles in Britain began to take shape. There were of course already some books and articles on the subject but not in the form I envisaged. My aim was to consider, in roughly equal proportions, the forcible uprooting of the émigrés, their dramatic exodus from their homelands, and the circumstances of their resettlement in Britain. It would also differ from others in its greater reliance on interviews with the exiles and their children. Indeed, some of the story would be told in their own words. This meant in-depth interviews with those members of the communities who were willing to place their memories on tape. Ultimately some 40 individuals

participated in interviews lasting from one-and-a-half to three hours each.

I am indebted to these interviewees for recalling what for many of them were extremely painful experiences: the loss of homes, families and friends, the harshest living conditions imaginable in Soviet and Nazi slave labour camps and other remote settlements, the disaster of the Warsaw Rising, the sense of betrayal by the Allies at Tehran and Yalta, the collapse of their hopes of return after the war, and the difficulties, extreme in some cases but shared by everyone to a degree, in adjusting to British life and work. Many had to take menial jobs far below their professional qualifications. They endured the indifference and absence of curiosity shown towards them by most Britons, which sometimes merged into outright hostility, particularly from factions of the political and trade union Left. To all of them my warm thanks.

In the preparation and writing of this book I am especially grateful for the kind help and co-operation of members of the British-Baltic Association, particularly Gunars Tamsons, Lia Ottan and Erica Sarkanbardis, and of members of the Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian clubs in Bradford. I am similarly indebted to members of the Polish community in the city and to the Polish Ex-Combatants' and Parish Clubs. I also owe much to Michael Krupa, W. Krzystowski and Józef Wojciechowski for their enlightening conversations. I received a warm welcome and great help from Dr K. Stoliński, Chair of the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in Ealing Common, London, from their archivist Mr K. Bozejwicz and secretary Ms S. Zarek. Mrs Schmidt, Chief Librarian of the Polish Library in Hammersmith, kindly gave me access to the papers of Dr Jósef Retinger. I am also grateful to the Public Record Office at Kew for access to the papers of various British Government departments. My warm thanks go to my son Nick Lane and my daughter-in-law, Ana Hidalgo who read the entire manuscript at a time when they themselves were very busy with their own writing obligations, and made many helpful suggestions both as to content and style. Elżbieta Stadtmüller kindly offered me her expert comments, particularly on the first half of the manuscript, and saved me from a number of errors, for which I am most grateful. Her parents Ludwik and Elżbieta Stadtmüller, who experienced both the Soviet and Nazi occupations of their city, gave me a first-hand account of life in Lwów between 1939 and 1944. A number of lengthy conversations with Kazimierz Mochlinski provided much valuable information about the Polish émigrés in Britain. As usual I benefited from the efficiency and helpfulness of the staff of the J.B. Priestley Library at Bradford

University, particularly Grace Hudson, the European Studies librarian. My editors at Palgrave Macmillan, Luciana O'Flaherty and Daniel Bunyard, offered excellent advice and rapid responses to my questions, as well as maintaining a tight timetable which was to my benefit. My final, and very warm thanks go to Jean Lane both for her encouragement and for her tolerance of my long absences, either in libraries or in front of the word processor. It should go without saying that I take full responsibility for the final version of the book.

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Introduction

The victims of Stalin and Hitler ran into many tens of millions. Among them were several million citizens of the independent inter-war republics of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia who were deported, transported, or imprisoned by Hitler's and Stalin's minions in the early stages of the Second World War, or who fled before the Soviet advance into Central Europe towards the end of the war. After the war many Poles returned to their homeland, but a large number did not and made new homes for themselves in Britain and other Western countries. Very few Estonians, Latvians or Lithuanians (or Balts as we shall collectively call them) returned home, and they too formed new communities in the West. This book is the story, sometimes told in their own words, of their uprooting, their travels, their painful experiences in prisons and labour camps, and their attempts to put down new roots in alien soil.

The year 1939 saw the defeat and dismemberment of the Polish state in what became known as the fourth partition of Poland. It also marked the beginning of the end for the independent Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Each of these states had non-aggression treaties with Germany and the Soviet Union, but treaties meant nothing to the men in the Kremlin and Berlin. What occurred was a demonstration of opportunism, profound cynicism and contempt for the weak. The consequences for the victims of this concerted aggression were tragic, but since they were in Nazi eyes *untermenschen*, underlings, inferior beings, and in Sovietspeak, enemies of the people, their sufferings were of no account to their new masters. These two world views allocated people to totally artificial categories, supposedly on social scientific grounds but often arbitrarily and capriciously and, to use a familiar euphemism in this context, eliminated the categories which found no favour with history. But the Polish and Baltic victims of Stalin were not enemies of

the people, they *were* the people. And the people were enemies of Stalinist Communism and Nazism alike. In the Leninist terms of power relationships, Who, Whom? they had to be repressed. Moscow and Berlin were able to dispose of them because power, not decency, spoke. In disposing of them, they converted them into victims and set off an extraordinary chain of events which culminated in the re-settlement of a large number of them in different parts of Europe and the rest of the world.

The Nazis' repression of their subject peoples is well known in the West. Their destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust is a unique example of the genocide inflicted on one ethnic group by another. Everyone who knows about the Holocaust, and that is virtually everyone, is stunned by its scale, awesome ambition and contemptuous rejection of humane values. The Holocaust is not a laughing matter, as Martin Amis has remarked. Certainly the Polish and Baltic exiles in Britain don't joke about it. But neither do they laugh about Bolshevism either, the former ruling dogma of that 'inhuman land' beyond their eastern borders. In that respect they would disagree with Amis's claim 'that laughter refuses to absent itself in the Soviet case', and that the later Bolshevism of Brezhnev and Chernenko was 'painfully, unshirkably comic'. While we can admit that Poland was alive with jokes about the later Communist masters in the Kremlin, this was a type of gallows humour under the ever present threat of force from Moscow. The imposition of martial law in 1981 was probably implemented to forestall direct Soviet intervention against Solidarity. But even if the Soviets had not intended to intervene militarily, the Poles believed that they might, and this possibility was ever-present in their minds. If some Westerners can smirk about the decrepit old men in the Kremlin who ruled the Soviet Union before Gorbachev, it is impossible for them to find anything remotely humorous in Josef Stalin.

The propensity to jest about Bolshevism in the West, despite everything, combined with fond memories of youthful idealism in support of the Communist cause, has created a barrier to familiarising a broad readership with the terror of the Soviet system. Admittedly, the influential work of Robert Conquest and other Western historians, combined with the magisterial revelations of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*, and the punishing columns of the journalist Bernard Levin, chronicled the lineaments of terror, Soviet style. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to argue that these works, powerful and illuminating as they are, have had quite the same impact on Western public opinion as the Holocaust publishing industry, which is represented in numerous books,

popular journal articles, films, TV and drama. A simple question: why have successive German governments apologised for the crimes against humanity of their Nazi predecessor and paid compensation to the victims of those crimes, whereas Russia, as the self-proclaimed successor state of the Soviet Union, has remained stubbornly silent. As David Pryce-Jones remarked, hundreds of thousands of KGB men are living in untroubled retirement on state pensions and there are no dossiers similar to the ones opened on the Nazis in Germany after the Second World War.[1] In December 2003 the Baltic Assembly composed of MPs from the three parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania passed a resolution condemning totalitarian Communism 'because few people have been punished for it'. Many Baltic leaders regret the fact that the crimes of the Soviet Union remain less known than those of the Nazi regime, and are now attempting to place a resolution before the European Parliament to condemn totalitarian Communism. Many see this as the first step in the direction of demanding financial compensation for the occupations and deportations imposed on the Baltic states by the Soviet Union.[2]

This leads to a second question: why doesn't the West demand the same standards of contrition and compensation from Russia as it expects from Germany? This requires a rather complex answer embracing questions of power politics, calculations about nuclear security and economic advantage, and the role of interest groups. However, it is surely indisputable that Western public opinion has not yet fully come to terms with the atrocities which were a central feature of Soviet rule. Communism remained, in Pryce-Jones's words, an 'enormity too awful to be dealt with'. Two recent works, Anne Applebaum's *Gulag* and Amis's *Koba the Dread*, tackle that enormity by advancing and summarising recent scholarship. The Russian press since the fall of Communism has admitted that Stalin, during his time at the helm, ordered the killing of some 50 million Soviet citizens. Coming to terms with such an enormity is difficult enough, but it was made more difficult still by the gratitude felt in the West for the Soviet Union's heroic military efforts during the Second World War. As Solzhenitsyn remarked, the West forgave Stalin his purges 'in gratitude for Stalingrad'. This gratitude nourished Western left-wing idealisation of Soviet Communism for decades after the war, and inhibited a clear-eyed re-assessment of the Soviet record.[3]

It has often been said that the Bolsheviks waged war against the Russian people. It is equally true that they waged war against non-Russian ethnic groups who had the misfortune to inhabit the Soviet Union. Furthermore, they waged war against neighbouring peoples

whom they brought under the Muscovite imperium. Eastern Poland was annexed to the Soviet state as a result of the Nazi–Soviet Pact of August 1939. The Baltic states were incorporated in the Soviet Union in the Summer of 1940 and again in 1944, after a brief German-controlled interregnum. Averell Harriman, the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union during the Second World War, reported a conversation with Stalin about the proportion of a population which had to be killed in order to exterminate a nation. Soviet scientists, said Stalin, calculated that if 5 per cent of the population were eliminated, the nation would be dead. The deportations of populations from Eastern Poland and the Baltic states were designed to erase these nations.[4] Historians have written about these events, but again one has to ask, how widely known are their accounts? 'I have an embarrassing admission to make here', said a Canadian MP to a Polish-Canadian audience in August 2000, 'until [recently] I had never heard that a million-and-a-half Polish people had been torn from their country and exiled in the Soviet Union. I asked other people about it and it is amazing very few people knew about it … We must learn from this and never let it be forgotten.'[5] Perhaps this degree of ignorance is not uncommon.

One of the aims of the present book is to add one more building block to the memorial of the victims of Soviet totalitarianism. But the book has a more specific purpose, as reflected in its title. It has been rare for witnesses to the Soviet penal system to reach the safety of the West to tell their story. Some of the Polish and Baltic victims did so. There are many accounts of their experiences made soon after their escape from the Soviet prison. Those accounts were not the books of witnesses, of which there are not a few in English, but unpublished testaments taken when memory was fresh and raw. And then there are the other accounts, told into tape recorders after decades of living in the West, in which the interviewees try to make sense of the dramatic and cruel experiences which shaped their lives. I was fortunate enough to capture around forty of these stories on tape. Fortunate also to be able to make use of the records of the City of Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, which in the 1980s taped the stories of a large number of East European exiles. Both sets of recordings are uneven in length; some people are more talkative, others are laconic, still others express themselves very vividly. Some are more quotable than others and it is inevitable that these will figure more prominently in the reported extracts. Yet the more prosaic, even if they do not feature so often in the text, offer a necessary check on the accuracy of other accounts. Taken together these records enable historians to reconstruct the experiences of a limited group of people

who suffered under both Stalinism and Nazism, and who were exiled or, more precisely, exiled themselves because they could not stomach living under the Soviet regime for a single extra day.

These accounts are not the testimonies of a self-exiled intelligentsia and upper class, such as the Polish exiles in Paris after the abortive revolts against Tsarism in 1830–31 and 1863, or the fugitives from the Bolshevik revolution in Paris, London or Berlin like Vladimir Nabokov or Isaiah Berlin. Or even the Polish leadership groups in London after the Second World War. Rather, they reflect the ordinary lives of ordinary people, musicians, farmers, students, engineers, pharmacists, ministers of the church, frontier guards, chauffeurs, foresters and soldiers. And the lives of their families, since men, women and children were equally the victims of the totalitarians. This in turn says something about the Soviet regime. Its victims were taken from all social classes, often quite arbitrarily to meet targets, usually in conformity with the twisted logic of the Stalinist dogma, always to strike terror into the hearts of those who had so far escaped punishment. Vieda Skultans writes about her Latvian interviewees that some of them remembered, every day, their experiences in the Soviet prisons and places of exile, and the family and friends they had lost there, and wept for them. But among the British exiles there were individuals who admitted to burying their memories in order to get on with the business of living in a new country and of supporting their families. And for some, the interview was the first time they had opened their minds, 'rekindled their memories', for more than four decades. This could be very painful. Maybe the burying of memories was to do with getting on with the practicalities of life. But it could also have been a way of coming to terms with the loss, the fear, the deprivation and the dashing of hopes. Certainly the second generation often reported that their parents never spoke about their lives in Poland and the Baltic countries. This is entirely understandable, for how could their British-born children or their British or Italian wives possibly comprehend their experiences in Soviet or Nazi prisons or labour camps. Some, of course, made the effort, and it was easier to communicate when both parents had suffered similar experiences.

With stories, we want to know what happens next. In the following chapters we can follow the experiences of these people in the camps and 'places of free exile', on the deportation trains or with the Polish, German or Russian armies, in Warsaw during the 1944 Rising, on the boats and in the tented encampments in Iran, in the Polish Second Army Corps, in Hungarian detention or at Monte Cassino or Arnhem, and in the Displaced Persons (DPs) camps in Germany. But then what

happened? Why did many of them come to Britain and how did they make new lives for themselves there? How were they employed? Where did they live? How did they build their communities? What were their ambitions for their children? How did they see their identity and how did their children see theirs? Will the citizens of Polish and Baltic extraction eventually assimilate under the pressures of conformity, or will a separate sense of identity and community remain with the third or fourth or later generations? So this book is about uprooting, journeys, exile, resettlement and, finally, community building. But before the onset of the violent traumas of the war years which were almost incomprehensible both to the exiles themselves and to Westerners who read about them, there were the more prosaic interruptions to the ordinary lives of the people who were caught in the crossfire of war and invasion. The book, therefore, begins with a chapter on the last days of peace in Poland and the Baltic states on the eve of a period of massive turbulence.

This book does not claim to be an 'oral history'. To be sure, it employs some of the techniques of the genre such as formal taped interviews and numerous conversations with the participants in these outlandish events. But it depends equally on conventional written sources, scholarly articles, books, reminiscences and government documents. These are absolutely necessary to give a perspective on events, and to place the individual accounts in a broad and, so far as possible, accurate context. At the same time the scale of these events, the millions of people involved, the terrible fate which so many suffered, numb the sensibilities and defy comprehension. So personal accounts are essential if we are to grasp the impact of these events on individuals. How, for example, do we get to grips with the following statistics? In four mass deportations in 1940–41 around one million Polish citizens were sent to northern Russia, Siberia or Kazakhstan. Smaller deportations, arrests, executions and the movement East of Polish prisoners-of-war (PoWs) accounted for several hundred thousand more, added to which were around 200 000 Polish conscripts to the Soviet army. All told, the loss of population from Soviet-occupied Poland amounted to around 1.6 million people in the almost two years between the Soviet takeover on 17 September 1939 and the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. Of the deportees, 560 000 were women, 380 000 were children and 150 000 were elderly or sick persons. Out of the total of 1.6 million, perhaps as many as half had died, in fact killed by the severity of their conditions, by mid-1942. Only 100 000 approximately were able to leave the Soviet Union via Iran under an agreement between Stalin and the Polish Government-in-Exile, sponsored by the

British government, in 1942. Simultaneously, in the German-occupied area of western Poland, about 900 000 ethnic Poles and 600 000 Polish Jews were expelled to the General Government with its headquarters in Kraków, or were sent to Germany as forced labour or interned in concentration camps. The total number of workers deported to Germany from Poland during the war was around 2.8 million, and the number of Polish PoWs taken by the German army was some 400 000 (they were used illegally as forced labour). Add to these figures approximately half a million who were taken to Germany after the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 had been crushed.[6] The Soviet campaign against the people of the occupied territories was interrupted by the German attack, otherwise it would have continued until the Polish 'problem' had been solved. There was a similar combined Soviet and Nazi war against the peoples of the Baltic states with proportionately devastating effects. The significance of these figures, their meaning in human terms, is difficult to absorb. We need the help of personal accounts if we are to understand.

Finally, we cannot ignore the question, which will undoubtedly be asked, about the reliability of memory. How can we be sure that what we hear is accurate and 'true', particularly when the interviews take place several decades after the events described. The short answer is that we cannot. Yet the events described were so traumatic, so formative, so impressionable on youthful minds, that it is unlikely they would not be remembered in detail. If inaccuracies creep in, or memory slips, then the narratives can be checked against many other accounts, and against evidence collected by governments and their agents. Sometimes one has the impression that the collective memory has been absorbed by the individual who then repeats it as his own, though he was not a direct witness of the events in question. This does not necessarily falsify the account, but again it requires that it be checked against other evidence. One of the striking features of the interviews was the matter of fact, self-deprecating, unemotional tone in which the most extraordinary and 'out of this world' experiences were conveyed, as though the interviewee were conscious of his or her obligation to go on the record for posterity. An Estonian *samisdat* document to mark the fortieth anniversary of the deportations of 1941, which reached the West in 1981, confirms this. It was, it said, 'the foremost duty of all middle-aged and older people toward their past and toward the young generation to tell the truth about their experiences … frankly and without omissions'. It went on: 'Do not let us delude ourselves. Even if we try to forget the injustice done to us during out lifetime, the KGB will never delete it from our biodata and files, and the KGB will never forget that these youngsters are our children …'

Another factor to be taken into account in assessing oral interview evidence is the possibility that the narrative can be shaped by the line of questioning of the interviewer, and perhaps distorted in the process. In other words, the interviewer gets the answers he wants or what the interviewee thinks he wants. Ignorance on the part of the interviewer can result in brief and uninformative replies. But well-informed questions, followed by intelligent supplementaries, can be very fruitful in eliciting information. Of course, one cannot discount the possibility that the responses were shaped by sensitivity to the interviewer's nationality, background and age. Yet it was my distinct impression that often the interviewees conveyed what they wanted to say, admittedly within a very broad interview structure, and did not allow the agenda to be set entirely by the interviewer. In the end we have to allow for the interpretation of memory by the interviewee in the light of the totality of his or her life experiences. In other words, the narrator is trying to make sense of the dramatic and life threatening experiences of his early life, experiences which helped to make him what he now is. If there is some memory loss or distortion, that can be set against other memories and other evidence for verification. But, above all, if we are to understand the exile communities in Britain, their motives, values and ideals, we need to know about their perceptions of the events which shaped their identities, made them what they are.[7] So we will begin on the eve of the Second World War and follow them, in a succession of chapters, through the catastrophes of the early years and the less eventful period of peaceful resettlement in Britain.

1
'A Timeless and Magical World?'

It would be natural for people who had suffered so much under the Bolsheviks and Nazis to idealise their early lives in order to distance them from the chaos and violence that followed. In her recent interviews with Latvian citizens deported to the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War and, much later, released to their country of birth, Vieda Skultans found that the narrators evoked a 'timeless and magical world' of childhood and youth which formed a yardstick against which all subsequent events were measured.[1] By contrast, it is rare to find this characteristic among the interviewees of Polish and Baltic origin in Britain, whose descriptions of pre-war life are muted and generally unidealised. Nonetheless, the unemotional nature of the narratives is still revealing of a lost way of life and of opportunities foregone. The impact of these interviews is made as much by implication or indirectly as by the overt expression of emotion. The necessity of the exiles in Britain to describe their experiences in a second language, English, while the Latvian group could speak in their native tongue, partly explains the difference in tone. Moreover, the Latvians, after returning to Latvia after many years, had to endure the rigours of the imposed Soviet regime and to witness the dismaying transformation of their country, demographically, economically and ecologically. Their day-to-day experiences would inevitably have sharpened the contrast between contemporary Latvia and the pre-war Latvia of their youth. Those in exile abroad had less reason to idealise their youthful lives; they could see that life in Britain was generally satisfactory, and provided opportunities for their children, if not for themselves, which were at the very least comparable with those of the pre-war world. Conceivably, too, interviewees might think it impolite to lavish too much praise on their home countries since this could, by implication,

appear ungrateful to the country which had received them. On the other hand, this consideration has not prevented some memoirists from creating a picture of an idyllic pre-war life in Poland which was shattered by the war.[2]

If not an idyllic world on the eve of war, it was at least a peaceful and normal world, with normal expectations and hopes, and the chance to realise one's aspirations. It was also a world of economic development, though this was erratic, of increasing educational opportunity, and vigorous cultural activity. The international situation was worrying, and became increasingly so during the 1930s decade; this was largely connected with the coming to power of Hitler and the steady implementation of his revisionist ambitions. But in this respect there was no difference in kind between the anxieties of the Baltic populations and those of Western Europeans, only one of degree.

The world of the Poles and Baltic peoples was also a multi-ethnic world since the populations of Poland and the Baltic states were composed of many nationalities. In Poland barely two-thirds of the population were ethnic Poles, the remainder being mainly Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Jews and Germans, with a smattering of Lithuanians. In Estonia and the other Baltic states there were the autochthonous populations, plus Jews, Baltic Germans, Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians and other less numerous ethnic groups. It was a world in which each ethnic group knew, or thought they knew, a great deal about the other ethnics sharing their space. Above all, the people of these countries, of whatever ethnicity, were only too familiar with foreign rule, by Russia, Germany or Austria-Hungary. The struggles of these newly independent countries for economic and political survival in a world of hostile and revisionist neighbours dominated the inter-war period. As war came nearer they hoped they would receive support from the Western powers of France and Britain, and calculated which of the great powers of Germany and the Soviet Union would be more dangerous to their interests. These were common topics of conversation. But the war, when it came, took a totally unexpected turn. Most of the interviewees in Britain recalled the surprise, indeed amazement, of their families and local communities when they heard that the two great powers on their flanks, the Soviet Union and Germany, had formed an alliance to carve out their respective spheres of influence in the Baltic area. This, in brief, was the backdrop against which people lived their lives. For individuals, the war and subsequent events meant not only chaos and disruption, but also the abandonment of expectations. When the war ended in 1945 the people of most of the belligerents could determine

how they would reshape their collective and individual lives. In the Baltic countries and Poland, they could not do this for two generations. For them the Second World War did not end until the fall of their Communist regimes.

The stories of the Baltic and Polish exiles in Britain are about interruption, like so many others which describe the onset of war. The particular poignancy of these accounts lies in the finality of the interruption. Compare their circumstances with those of conscripted soldiers from Western Europe, for example. If the latter survived the war, they could expect to return to their former homes and lives, to their relatives and friends, to their old jobs and careers. The Polish and Baltic exiles, by contrast, could not normally resume where they had left off since the careers they had trained for, or the educational opportunities they were pursuing, were generally not available to them in their new countries of settlement. Unavoidably they had to make a fresh start and grind out a living in order to build new lives for themselves and their children. To be sure, for some years after the war they had hopes of returning home, but the Soviet monolith did not crack, as they had supposed it might, and the interruption was complete.

One man's story well illustrates the finality of the interruption which took place. A music teacher in Warsaw, he hoped to open his own music school. Called up to the reserve when the Germans attacked Poland in September 1939 he told his wife and three small children that in two or three days he would be back 'to let them have everything they needed'. He was captured, deported and never saw them again.[3] Similarly, a policeman and part-time instrumentalist, also from Warsaw, decided to escape with his teenage son when the German army approached. After many adventures he reached the temporary safety of Lithuania, was later arrested by the Soviets when they occupied Lithuania in June 1940, was deported to the Kola Peninsula in northern Russia, released after the Polish–Soviet agreement in July 1941 and eventually left the Soviet Union for Iran with the Polish army in 1942. His son, having failed to cross the frontier into the safety of Romania, returned to Warsaw to live with his mother, and eventually joined the Polish Underground Army.[4]

An Estonian illustrated the interruption in his own career. Training as a pharmacist in a small town in central Estonia, he was attending evening classes while working in a pharmacy. He was dismissed when the Soviets occupied Estonia in June 1940 and nationalised the pharmacy. He was given a lower level position in a food store. On the eve of the German attack on Estonia he was ordered to join the Soviet army, but went into hiding and escaped conscription. When the Germans

occupied Estonia in the Summer of 1941 he hoped to resume his pharmacy training but this time was forced to work for a potato wholesaler. He was never able to qualify. His fate was mild compared with that of his father who was a policeman at the beginning of the war. Arrested at the onset of the Soviet occupation, he somehow escaped but was not heard from after 1943. His son presumed that the Soviets captured and deported or killed him when they returned in 1944.

Another man whose life was turned upside down was a native of Cieszyn (Teschen), a disputed area between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Having studied at a textile college in southern Poland he subsequently worked for the Polish government as a buyer of textiles. When the war started he returned to Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia where he was employed in a tailor's shop. Eventually he was sent to forced labour in a steel mill in Germany before conscription into the German army. Posted to the south of France, he deserted from the army and joined the French Resistance, eventually slipping over the border into Italy 1944 where he enlisted in the Polish Second Army Corps under General Anders.[5]

A large number of the exiles came from farming families in Eastern Poland. Sometimes the families had been settled there for generations but frequently they were military settlers, people whose fathers had fought in the Polish army against the Russian Bolsheviks in the war of 1919–20 and were rewarded for their service by grants of land in the Eastern borderlands, or *kresy*. These veterans were particular targets of the Bolsheviks when they occupied Eastern Poland in 1939 since the defeat of the Red Army outside Warsaw in 1920 still rankled with Stalin. What the Poles called 'the miracle of the Vistula' was bitterly resented in Moscow since it put a stop to the Bolshevik advance westwards in the name of international revolution. The veterans' punishment, and that of their families too, was deportation to the freezing wastes of northern Russia. One young man lived on his parents' farm in the eastern border areas. His father owned two farms, one inherited from his parents and the other granted as a reward for serving in the Polish army against the Bolsheviks. So the family was comfortably off. When the Soviets invaded eastern Poland in September 1939 his father escaped across the dividing line between the Soviet- and German-occupied areas and stayed there until the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. He feared the Russians not only because he had fought against them, but because he had deserted from the Tsarist army in the First World War. Though temporarily saved, he was eventually caught by the Russians when they re-occupied eastern Poland in 1944. He wrote to his son who was then in West Germany asking for advice. Urged to escape but

reluctant to leave his farm, he stayed and inevitably was arrested. Imprisoned in Grodno some 15 miles from his home, he was never heard from again and was presumed killed, like so many in that area. His son and his wife were deported in 1940, but his sister managed to escape and lived in hiding until the end of the war. However, in 1946 she was caught and her much-delayed visit to Siberia now took place, where she spent ten years in labour camps. Returning to Poland in 1956, exhausted by her experience, she shortly afterwards suffered a brain haemorrhage which left her an invalid for the rest of her life.

There was at least an element of rationality in the repression of the military settlers, but Soviet actions could never wholly escape the taint of capriciousness and arbitrariness. For example, a young man of 17 ran a small farm with his mother in south-east Poland, only 5 kilometres from the Soviet border. His father, who had died a few years earlier, was in the Austro-Hungarian army in the First World War and had no background at all in the Polish army or police. In February 1940 the young man and his mother were part of the first mass deportation to Russia. His three brothers all farmed in the area. One fled to Romania when the Soviets invaded since he had some connection with the police and feared arrest. Another brother joined the Polish Home Army in Warsaw and was killed in 1944. In this way the life of an entire family was destroyed.[6] Later he asked himself why his two brothers who owned farms in the area were not arrested since they were of the same status and the same social group as him. The explanation was curious, but shows quite clearly some of the criteria the Soviets used for selection of deportees. His father and mother had bought land from the estate of a Polish count in 1920. At the time of purchase they were living 100 miles further west. Hence they were thought of as intruders in this border area by the local Ukrainian community. His sister, who married into a local Polish family which had lived in the area for generations alongside the Ukrainians, was treated differently. The same applied to his eldest brother who was married to a Ukrainian woman. But there was another factor which was taken into account in the decision to deport. His other brother, who was later interrogated in Kharkov on suspicion of spying, learned what it was. The Soviet police had somehow discovered that in the course of a pre-war conversation his father had remarked that if the Communists came in he would slaughter his cattle. This projected 'sabotage', what Stalinists would consider behaviour typical of kulaks, was enough to seal the fate of his widow and youngest son.

Another group of people whose hopes were dashed by events were students. Exile usually put an end to their expectations of a good career.

By the time they arrived in Britain, six or seven years after leaving their homes, linguistic difficulties and the normal requirement to re-qualify were major obstacles to resuming their higher education. They were then at an age when their priority was to earn money to support their families, and to achieve some economic stability. Take the case of one man of 19 who, at the beginning of the war, was living in Wilno in north-east Poland. In 1938 he had won a scholarship provided by an army-sponsored organisation to train to become a civil engineer. When the Soviets invaded this became impossible. Similarly, a boy of 15 was attending a grammar school in Narva, in north-east Estonia when the war broke out. His parents bought an insurance policy at his birth to finance his higher education, but his hopes were dashed by events and his parents' 15 years' worth of premiums were wasted.

Two young Latvians were also denied their chance to graduate. One was already studying architecture at Riga University at the onset of war. He continued his studies under the first Soviet occupation and the subsequent German one. But before he could graduate, he was conscripted in 1943 into the so-called Latvian Legion, as part of the German army. Having completed only three years of the five-year course, he thus lost the possibility of his chosen career. Another wanted to take a degree in forestry and follow his father into the career of state forester, but that opportunity was denied him.

Other interviewees had ambitions to be lawyers, electrical engineers, economists and politicians, and all lost out. But there was one exceptional case, a young Estonian woman studying medicine at Tartu University. In the first year of the war the conditions at medical school changed hardly at all. After the Russian occupation she had to attend a compulsory Marxism-Leninism course and take a Russian language exam, but managed to avoid attendance at mass meetings and parades. In fact, she recalls, the Soviet authorities were very lenient with medical students and to her knowledge only three of her fellow students were deported, though none of the faculty. Under the German occupation she graduated on time in 1943 and was sent to work in an isolation hospital in the north of Estonia. She left Estonia in 1944 just before the Russians arrived, spent time in a DP camp in Germany, came to Britain, and eventually re-qualified as a doctor.[7]

Most of these people had some familiarity, directly or indirectly, with other ethnic groups in their countries, or with neighbouring states. They seemed to be well-informed about Russians, both those living in Russia itself and ethnic Russians in the Baltic states, some of whom were refugees from the Bolshevik revolution, others residents since Tsarist

times. What was lacking was knowledge about the Soviet Union of the 1930s, which had successfully isolated itself from the outside world except when it wanted to put on a totally false show for credulous Westerners. Some interviewees claimed that they didn't trust Russians per se, whether Tsarist, Soviet or any other variety. One Polish interviewee hated Russians owing to the experience of his own father who, as a lawyer, had lived and worked in St Petersburg for many years, where he had run a factory, but he could not forgive the Russians for the misery they had caused him and his family. Others, deserters from the Russian army in the First World War and combatants against the Bolsheviks in the wars for independence, feared retribution following a Soviet takeover of their country.

By contrast the parents of other interviewees had lived and worked in Russia and some had married Russian women. One had studied to be a teacher and went to work in St Petersburg where he met his wife. Another had been evacuated from the Daugavpils area of what became Latvia at the beginning of the First World War, and had worked as a language teacher in Russia where she had met her husband, also an expatriate Latvian, when he was serving in the Tsarist army in Kazan. A third was born in Russia after his father, a factory manager, had been evacuated to central Russia at the beginning of the First World War. So there was a good deal of first-hand knowledge of Russia and the Russians among the older generation who grew up under Tsarist rule. A man of Latvian origin recounted how his parents (his father, a Latvian, had met his mother, a Czech, in Russia during the First World War) who lived in Riga, gave parties for their Russian friends. So far as he could tell, not only was there no friction between the nationalities, but unlike after the Second World War, many Russians spoke fluent Latvian.[8]

Furthermore, the children growing up in an independent Latvia were not entirely dependent on parental memories for their knowledge of Russians. In parts of Latvia and Estonia, such as Narva, Daugavpils, Riga and Liepaja, there were numbers of Russians living and working alongside ethnic Latvians. In the border area of Narva in north-east Estonia, the population was mainly Russian across the river to the east, except in the town itself, where it was slightly more Estonian than Russian. The western part of the town was almost entirely ethnically Estonian. Since Estonia practised a system of cultural autonomy, the Russian community had its own schools, so children of the two ethnic groups tended not to mix, except in sporting competitions. There was virtually no knowledge about conditions in the Soviet Union even in border areas such as this; Stalin's self-imposed isolation had resulted in villages just

inside the Soviet frontier being evacuated, removing the slightest possibility of contact. However, in other parts of the Baltic states and Poland children from different ethnic groups attended the same state schools since there were insufficient numbers of any ethnic group to form separate ones. In Liepaja a young Latvian was in the same school as children from German and Russian families. An Estonian, living in Voru, knew some Russian and Jewish children at school, but no Germans since they had their own school. In a state school in eastern Poland there were Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish children intermingled in each class, but each group had separate religious instruction one hour a week, the Roman and Greek Catholics in one class, the Jews in another and the Orthodox in a third.[9]

Since most of the Polish interviewees came from eastern Poland they had had little contact with ethnic Germans. In the Baltic states, however, particularly in Estonia and Latvia, Baltic Germans had been settled for centuries. Despite this, there seems to have been relatively little contact between these Germans and the ethnic Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians, mainly it seems because the Germans had separate schools and churches. It was possible to meet children from the German community in inter-communal organisations like the Scouts and Guides. Holiday towns, like one in southern Estonia, were rather different. Here holidaymakers from many communities, German, Russian, Jewish, mixed with the local people. One Estonian recounted how people of different ethnic groups stayed in their house and how they all played and swam together.

Only two of the interviewees touched on relations with the Jewish community before the war. The Jews in Latvia were 'highly regarded' said one, many of them were in the professions, doctors, lawyers, academics and so on, and the family doctor was an excellent caring person. But, and this was a significant qualification, 'the younger Jews welcomed the Soviets'. This sentence is pregnant with meaning, and there will be more to say about it in later chapters. The second reference to Jews is rather oblique. A young man studying Politics in Warsaw at the outbreak of war became a member of a Catholic youth organisation. He had become very interested in the co-operative movement, whose objective was to help Polish villagers help themselves by setting up co-operative enterprises, both retail and producer. He doesn't say so explicitly but one has the impression that he wanted the co-ops to be established to take trade away from the Jews who owned many shops and took most of the business of the towns and villages. He added that Catholics and Jews co-operated well 'until Hitler', but this seems to have

been rather an afterthought. All in all, though there were contacts between the ethnic groups, these seem not to have been very extensive or intimate, though they were more likely to have occurred in the larger towns and cities. The contacts between the German and ethnic Baltic communities ended almost completely after 1939 since most Baltic German families left Estonia and Latvia under pressure from Hitler. Some elderly people remained and relations between them and the Latvians and Estonians were generally good.[10]

Assessing the Soviet Union was a matter of guesswork because there was little or no contemporary information. Experience of Bolshevik behaviour during the wars for independence after the First World War had left a bad taste in the mouth. Poles and Balts hoped that the Communists had become less brutal in the course of the previous twenty years. But they were unable to update their information even when Soviet garrisons were established in the Baltic states following the Mutual Assistance Pacts of October 1939. The Soviet troops were kept firmly isolated from the indigenous population and were not allowed to fraternise. But the Baltic people could draw their own conclusions from the Soviet takeover of eastern Poland, still more, from the large number of Polish soldiers and civilians who sought refuge in Lithuania and Latvia. They had also observed Soviet soldiers moving to their Baltic bases after October 1939 and on occasion afterwards. The interviewees were generally unimpressed with what they saw, and these impressions seemed to be confirmed by the effective resistance of the Finns in the face of Soviet aggression from December 1939 until the following March.

To one observer the famous Red Army looked very shabby and did not compare in smartness, in the quality of their uniforms, or in their marching style with the Baltic armies. In fact, said another, they looked like a rabble. And they smelled horribly as they marched by on their weekly visit to the public baths. Nor did their equipment seem very reliable since there were lots of broken down lorries by the side of the roads. Another observer was shocked by the low standard of living, not only of the men, who were paid very little, but the officers too. More than one interviewee mentioned the often repeated stories about Russian soldiers using lavatories as wash basins and officers' wives buying nightdresses under the misapprehension that they were ball gowns. These impressions gave rise to speculation that it would be possible to offer some effective resistance to any invasion from the Soviet Union. In the end different counsels prevailed.

For a time the Soviets conformed to their agreements under the Mutual Assistance Pacts not to interfere in the government of the Baltic

countries. But the German invasion of France in May 1940 changed the situation. Taking advantage of the international crisis, Stalin gave an ultimatum to the Baltic governments and began the process of incorporating the Baltic states into the Soviet Union. The subsequent occupation showed unequivocally that the nature of Soviet repression had actually worsened since the wars for independence 20 years earlier. The Poles had already had a year to re-discover that this leopard had not changed its spots.[11] This theme will be taken up again in the next chapter.

Many people concluded that the establishment of Soviet bases in October 1939 meant that the days of the independent Baltic states were numbered. The evacuation of the Baltic Germans also suggested that Hitler had ceded the Baltic states to the Soviet sphere of influence, at least temporarily. Certainly the speed of the German advance against Poland and the subsequent carve up of Polish territory between Stalin and Hitler shocked Baltic opinion. Some of the Baltic interviewees were too young to be informed about international politics, though others were very aware of the discussions taking place among their families and friends about what the future might hold. Some feared the Germans and the Russians equally. Others, probably the majority, were more concerned about a Soviet takeover because of their memories of Soviet behaviour during the wars for independence. On the other hand, some Latvians preferred the Russians to the Germans since they felt closer to them culturally, and they could speak the language. Moreover, the centuries'-long Baltic German dominance of the politics and economics of the Baltic states, which lasted until the achievement of independence after the First World War, had aroused great dislike and distrust. German landlords and officials, as one person commented, had been very cruel to the Balts. Most of the interviewees, however, stressed that there was nothing to choose between the two totalitarian threats.[12]

Some people retained a profound confidence that the British would come to their aid if they were attacked. Anglophilia was not uncommon: in one school they went to the extreme of celebrating the British king's birthday. But while some saw Britain as a kind of guardian angel in view of the help the Baltic states had received from her at the time of their independence struggle after the First World War, more realistic voices were sceptical of any help from that quarter. After all, what effective help had the British or the French given to the Poles in their hour of need? The attack on Poland was a shock to Baltic opinion, not least because Poland was popular in the two more northerly Baltic states, though not in Lithuania. Quite a number of Poles worked in the Baltic

states, as agricultural labourers, building workers, or miners in the oil shale industry of Estonia, and some of the Baltic interviewees knew Polish workers personally. Polish literature and films were also very popular among educated Balts. When Polish soldiers sought refuge from the Soviets in Latvia they were not returned to Poland and sometimes they were helped to escape.[13]

These interviews, then, do not suggest that the Baltic world of the interwar years was a 'timeless and magical' one. But neither was it, for most of the narrators, an unhappy one. It was, rather, a complex, multi-ethnic world, developing economically but lapsing into authoritarianism politically, socially constructive and educationally progressive, seeking peace and security but very aware of external threats. These states aimed to preserve their own independence, not to threaten the sovereignty of others. In sum, the mass of people lived normal lives, and experienced all the vicissitudes which accompany normality. The interwar period was not a golden age, but it offered the opportunity to satisfy ambition and to live in peace. The first of the series of events which put an end to this normal world was the aggression carried out by the two neighbouring great powers, and was quickly followed by the occupation and incorporation of their territories at the command of Stalin and Hitler. The chaos and disorder of war marked the transition, from normality to the world of the GULAG and the concentration camps.[14] One survivor, who was a reserve second lieutenant in the Polish army, described his own experience during this transition. Ordered to join his unit, he eventually reached the barracks which by then were under attack from German planes.

> The barracks and the nearby village were an inferno. We were told to make out way another 30 km to another barracks. I got back on my bike until I reached this second town, under equally heavy air attack. I was ordered to set off again still further east to the town of Kowel where I was finally mobilised. But the problem was that they had no uniforms and no arms, and my own uniform was incomplete. To get issued with what we needed we had to take a transport train, made up of about 50 carriages, back south again, where we would be fully equipped … I was put in charge of three carriages on this train. It soon stopped owing to another air attack, but we were partly protected by the cover of trees. Bombs here, bombs there. An officer finally came up, called together all the officers, me among them, and made an announcement. 'Gentlemen, we are in a difficult situation. This train cannot go any further. In front of us is the Soviet army,

> behind us, the German. You must do what you can do in this situation. I suggest you disperse. Don't form groups. If you can hide your rank, please do so.' I was in a poor state, hungry, tired; I had cycled a very long way. I was exhausted and ill. Since I had left Warsaw I had been sleeping in the forests and on the banks of rivers. I had an outbreak of boils on the lower part of my body: very uncomfortable! I stayed for a while on a farm in a nearby village. Then a group of us, all officers, decided one night to set off on foot to Lwów, about a hundred miles south, where we knew there was a Polish army. But I recognised from the very first moment that the invasion marked the end of the Polish state. I knew what Russians were and I knew what Soviets were.[15]

This account is typical of many others. Something cataclysmic had occurred, destroying all normal life and offering instead only a bleak and uncertain future. The Poles and Balts were now impotent to shape their own destinies, which would henceforth be decided for them in Moscow and Berlin.

2
Defeat

The destruction of the independent Polish and Baltic states began with the secret clauses of the non-aggression pact between the Nazis and the Soviets on 23 August 1939. These clauses provided for the division of Poland and the Baltic states into 'two spheres of influence', the German and the Soviet. Although war with the Soviet Union was part of Hitler's long-term plans, he preferred not to have the Soviets opposed to him during his projected conquest of Poland. He was aware that negotiations between Britain, France and the Soviet Union had been going on throughout the Summer of 1939 to try to bring about a tripartite guarantee of Poland and the Baltic states. If these had been successful it would have made the success of a German attack on Poland more problematic. The failure of these talks could be attributed to the reservations of Poland and the Baltic states about a number of Soviet demands, to double-dealing by the British in seeking an agreement with Hitler, and to the reluctance of the British and French to agree to Soviet terms which compromised the independence of Poland and the Baltic states. But the critical factor was the opportunism of Stalin and Hitler, which saw an alliance between these erstwhile enemies as being in their short-term mutual advantage.

Once the deal was agreed the fate of Poland and the Baltic states was decided, provided the German forces could defeat the Poles. In retrospect this seems inevitable but was not quite as straightforward as it now appears. The belief of some Poles that they had a chance of mounting an effective defence was not simply self-delusion, though there was an element of that in it. The belief was also based on confidence that their Western allies, Britain and France, would be able to offer adequate military assistance. After all, they had offered guarantees to assist Poland in case of attack from Germany, and to preserve Polish independence. So,

for the Poles, it only seemed necessary to hold out for a short period to give time for London and Paris to mobilise their forces against Germany's western flank.

Another ground for confidence was that Poland was by far the largest and most populous country which Hitler had so far attacked. It had considerable armed forces at its disposal and a vigorous military tradition. Its victory in the Polish–Soviet war of 1920, though not complete, gave the Poles confidence that they could offer effective resistance to Hitler and inflict serious damage on his armed forces. Although they performed less well than they hoped, yet, when Soviet troops finally crossed the Polish eastern frontiers on 17 September 1939, Polish army units were still offering stubborn resistance to the German forces which had entered Poland on 1 September, and the Polish government was still functioning. Warsaw was holding out and there were fighting forces in the north-east of the country, around Lublin, and in the Lwów area. Considerable losses had been inflicted on the German forces. The Poles had in fact carried out the task they had set themselves which was to hold out until Western assistance could be provided which, unfortunately for the Poles, did not materialise. Instead the Red Army attacked from the rear over the essentially undefended eastern frontiers, foreclosing any possibility of further resistance.

At the onset of the war, then, it was not unreasonable to believe that the Polish strategy might work, but only if the British and French offered military assistance. Berlin's incredulity that the British and French would fight to defend Poland in 1939 proved more correct than Polish optimism, thus destroying any hope of the Polish military strategy being successful. The failure of the West to intervene with military force when Poland was fighting for its life perplexed the Poles at the time. The French were unwilling to move out of their defensive positions in the Maginot Line. The British were not ready to fight a war in mainland Europe until re-armament had prepared them better. The British guarantee of Poland's independence was understood differently in Warsaw and London on grounds of timing. The Poles believed it would have immediate effect; in London it was understood that it would apply when Nazism had been defeated. Furthermore the British were not prepared to guarantee the restoration of Poland's pre-war frontiers. This was an axiom of their policy.[1]

Military analysts have suggested a number of reasons for German success in the attack on Poland, apart from the failure of the West to force Germany into a war on two fronts. It was not that the German forces were more numerous. Poland had approximately one and a half million

trained soldiers, about the same number as Germany, though most of these were in the reserve. The German forces were, however, better equipped, better armed, better provided with air cover and employed far more armoured vehicles, including tanks.[2] Moreover, they had developed the technique of *blitzkrieg*, which was particularly effective in the cloudless sunny days of early September in Poland. The Germans had the additional advantage of being able to launch their attacks from three directions, from Germany itself in the West, from the South through Slovakia and from East Prussia in the North. Also, as we shall see, Polish mobilisation of reserves was generally less than effective, but this was largely through the speed of the German advance and the lack of air cover. Finally, the Polish government had failed to arm the Polish forces adequately, giving front line soldiers insufficient modern weaponry and equipment to provide effective resistance. While it is true that the Polish economy was far less developed than its German rival and incomes per capita were much lower, the available resources for re-armament could have been used more effectively by arming the Polish forces with more modern weapons and equipment. Instead the Polish General Staff seem to have been wedded to outdated military tactics, which had served them well in 1920 but were now obsolete.

In human terms the consequences of this war on two fronts were massive. In the first place large numbers of the population of western Poland fled eastwards before the advancing German troops. The majority of these refugees remained in German-occupied territory after the Polish defeat. Some 300 000 civilians sought refuge in the capital Warsaw but were caught there when it finally surrendered. Second, some 200 000 Jews and about 100 000 other civilians from western Poland succeeded in escaping to eastern Poland before or after it was occupied by the Soviet Union. Other Poles crossed the Polish frontiers, initially some 70 000 into Romania and Hungary and about 14 000 into Lithuania plus a further handful into Latvia.[3] Those who stayed in the German part of Poland often decided to return to their homes. One man, born near Danzig (Gdańsk) was 20 when the war started. He had completed his apprenticeship and was working in engineering. At the onset of the German invasion he escaped to Warsaw.

> People were scattering in all directions. There was total chaos under constant German air attacks. When the Germans reached Warsaw I saw no point in staying any longer and went back home. A bit later I got my job back.

This wasn't the end of his story, however, since shortly afterwards he was drafted into the German army. 'Since they threatened to hang your family if you didn't join, there was no choice.'

An eleven-year-old boy was living in Warsaw at the time of the German invasion. His father, who worked in a bank, was called up from the reserves at the beginning of the war and was captured by the Germans and made a PoW. The boy never saw his father again though he and his family knew he was in a camp in Germany and used to send him food parcels. For unexplained reasons his father was transferred to Auschwitz where he died.

Another rather typical story of this time concerns a 16-year-old youth and his father who decided to escape from Warsaw as the German army approached. They travelled by car but, before they could leave the city, bombing and artillery barrages made it too dangerous to carry on. So they abandoned their car and walked to the Praga bridge over the River Vistula, where they lost contact. Knowing that his father was aiming for the Romanian frontier, he with some companions set off in that direction, walking at night to escape the daily bombing. They stopped in villages to buy food.

> We walked until we were near the Romanian border when we saw a lot of people coming the opposite way. We asked what had happened and they said there was no chance of crossing because the German armies had joined together and closed the border, so we walked back again to Warsaw.

Meanwhile his father, having arrived at the Romanian border by another route and finding it blocked, managed to take a train to Lithuania where he sought refuge.

The final account of chaotic and forced journeys was narrated by a man who was only eight at the outbreak of war. His father was a regular soldier and the family lived in Kraków. There were plans for the evacuation of the families of military personnel to eastern Poland. The train they were travelling on was bombed and the boy's uncle was killed. When night came crowds of people went back to the train after taking cover during the day. But there was total confusion:

> Everybody was getting on and off, and nobody knew what they were doing but everyone was shouting 'Get on the train, get on the train', so I jumped on the train. I thought I was with my mother at this point, because there were some passenger coaches and ordinary

> coaches for the soldiers, and I got on one of the coaches and somebody said 'Well, you can look for your mother in the morning, but in the meantime you just lie down anywhere and have a nap'. The train was going all through the night, and in the morning it stopped because of an air raid, so everybody got out again. I kept asking 'Where's my mother?' and then somebody told me she had stayed behind with my auntie because my uncle had been killed. Anyway there were other families and I stayed with them and they took care of me until we got to Eastern Poland.[4]

In the confusion of retreat, the Polish government considered the options of either maintaining the defence of the country from the south-east corner of Poland or of approaching the Romanian government for permission to pass through Romania en route to France. The news of the invasion of Soviet troops hastened the decision to flee the country before the frontier was finally closed by the combined Soviet and German forces. After crossing the border, however, the government ministers and officials along with senior military officers were interned by the Romanian government.

Soviet troops met virtually no opposition. At first there was incredulity among the Poles that Moscow was in league with Berlin, though some individuals in the eastern borderlands had already anticipated that the Soviets might attack. Troops on the ground were for a brief time confused about the intentions of the Red Army which had put it about that they were coming in to support the Poles.[5] The eastern frontier was virtually unguarded except for three divisions of frontier guards, numbering only around 11 000 men. And it was easy to cross. At six o'clock in the morning or even earlier, a farmer living 5 kilometres from the Soviet border heard some machine gun fire and later in the day he saw the Russians marching in. The border at that point was just a small river so the Soviet troops could come straight over. Since the main road bypassed his village he saw no tanks, just a detachment of cavalry followed by the infantry.

By now it was clear there was no point in further resistance, particularly in the absence of orders from the military leadership. Soldiers scattered throughout Eastern and Central Poland, some trying to reach their homes, others preferring to go underground rather than be captured by either of the aggressors. It quickly became every man for himself in this game of survival:

> Since we were out of food, we used to collect turnips and potatoes from the fields at dusk, eating them raw. Our only possessions were

> the clothes we stood up in, our rifles, a handful of bullets and our horses. During the day we took refuge in the forest, venturing out only when we knew it was safe. Most of the farms en route had been abandoned, their owners in such haste to escape the German advance that they left behind their animals and most of their belongings … At last we came upon a farm where the farmer and his wife were openly tending their hens and geese. When night fell we ventured down to the farmhouse … I explained that all we wanted was civilian clothing and some food in exchange for our horses and equipment. He was too frightened to agree but eventually his wife came to our aid. They found us two pairs of trousers, a long coat, a jacket, and two worn shirts. We immediately dug a large hole in his garden and buried our uniforms and equipment in a large box. There was a haystack in the field nearest the forest which the Germans had checked out several days before … For a week we rested in the haystack and under cover of darkness the farmer would bring us boiled potatoes and eggs. We felt like beggars.[6]

By 21 September Soviet troops had taken Grodno, controlled the Wilno–Grodno railway line, and deployed along the Romanian border. On the following day Polish army units surrendered the major Eastern Polish city of Lwów by prior agreement with the Soviets. As part of the agreement, soldiers were free to make their way home and officers to go abroad. As General Władisław Anders, who later became the Commander of the Polish Second Army Corps in the Italian campaign, described it, the Russians treacherously broke their agreement and, on their entry into Lwów, arrested thousands of Polish army officers and shipped them off East, along with many others from different sectors of the front.[7] In fact they were sent to the three notorious camps, Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov from where they were taken to shooting grounds in early 1940, most notoriously to Katyn, where each of them was murdered by a single shot in the back of the head. Up to 15 000 officers, cadets and NCOs along with some civilians were killed in this way.

Most of the rank-and-file soldiers, about 230 000 of them, were imprisoned in makeshift buildings on former Polish territory until more permanent provision could be made for them.[8] Eventually almost 100 camps are known to have existed in the Western Ukraine. Some of the prisoners were employed on heavy manual work such as construction, forestry or quarrying. Others were sent east at the end of 1939 into Soviet Ukraine where they were employed in industry and mining. However, in May 1940 they were transported to forced labour camps or

lagier in the Russian arctic or sub-arctic regions, notably the White Sea area and the Komi Republic, where they were used in forestry work and in the construction of railway lines and labour camps. Such work in the most appalling climate and the most life-threatening living conditions was in gross violation of international agreements on the treatment of PoWs, but Stalin had refused to be a party to these agreements and, of course, his treatment of the Poles was quite consistent with his treatment of his own people.[9]

The Polish reserve officer we quoted in Chapter 1 decided to come out of hiding and, with other officers, tried to reach Lwów, about a hundred miles south of where they were, on foot. At some point they managed to board a train, but when it stopped at one station they were ordered out by Soviet soldiers on the platform. Before leaving the train he tore up his documents and threw them out of the window so he could feel free to assume any identity he wished. Questioned at the station by an NKVD officer (the main purpose of these interrogations was to identify Polish officers) he was able to answer in fluent Russian, the result of his education in Russian schools. This time he was released to take the train to Kraków where his family, he lied, were expecting him. Alighting from the train in Lwów he found that Soviet soldiers were everywhere in the city and Poles were crying in the street. One lady gave him money. She too was crying. He had one obsession, to get to the Romanian border at any cost. He bought a ticket to the frontier station, boarded the train and scrutinised the other passengers:

> Everyone was suspect. Soviet police accompanied by armed Ukrainians began to work through the train. They questioned me, shining a torch in my face. Then there was an emergency stop and lots of people began to jump from the train and dash for the cover of the forest. I didn't know the area and decided against it. But to be free from the inquisitors on the train I climbed on to the roof. It was raining very heavily. My plan was to get to the engine and clamber on board in the belief that it would be uncoupled at the border station, leaving the train in the station itself. Running and jumping along the roofs of the carriages I finally reached the engine. But the distance between the first coach and the engine was too far and the tender was very high, too far to jump, especially in the rain. Finally we reached the station, the last one in Polish territory. Here there were arc lights and well-lit platforms. There were soldiers everywhere, particularly Ukrainian militia working for the Soviets. Rather foolishly I hid in the guard's van but I was soon discovered. 'Everyone out! Who's there?

> Answer or I'll shoot.' It was impossible. I gave myself up to the Ukrainians, who in turn handed me to the Soviets.[10]

Both Hitler and Stalin wanted the independent state of Poland destroyed. Hitler had long declared his ambition to obtain living space for the German people on the territory of the Slavic peoples to the East. Stalin could not forget Soviet Russia's defeat at the hands of the Poles in 1920 which resulted in the Polish frontiers being pushed east into territory craved by the Russians, namely Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia. But Stalin was reluctant to be seen as an aggressor and attempted to justify the Soviet Union's violation of its non-aggression treaty with Poland. It was, as the Polish Ambassador was informed in Moscow in the early hours of 17 September, that the Polish state no longer existed and therefore that all the treaties to which she was a party were null and void. Since Polish sovereignty did not exist, it could not be violated. Moreover, it was imperative that Moscow offer protection to its 'blood brothers, the Ukrainians and Byelorussians inhabiting Poland who now have been utterly abandoned to their fate and are defenceless'.[11]

Having destroyed the Polish state Moscow and Berlin had to carve out their respective shares, not only of Poland but also the Baltic states, though the latter were not immediately occupied. The original partition set out in the secret clauses of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact of 23 August 1939 provided for the northern frontier of Lithuania to be the frontier between the German and Soviet spheres of interest in the Baltic states. The agreement went on: 'In the event of a territorial and political transformation of territories belonging to the Polish state the spheres of interest of both Germany and the USSR shall be bounded approximately by the line of rivers Narew, Vistula and San.' This statement is a masterpiece of euphemistic prose, its cold-blooded cynicism never ceasing to amaze. As the campaign developed, Stalin decided to bring the state of Lithuania into his sphere of interest, offering Hitler in exchange a greater share of Polish territory. So on 28 September a 'Borders and Friendship Treaty' was signed establishing the Soviet–German frontier further east along the line of the Bug and San rivers.[12] Germany divided its acquisitions into two parts. The western territories of Poland, namely Polish Upper Silesia, Polish Pomerania, the Polish provinces of Łódź and Poznań and the Free City of Danzig were annexed to Germany. The rest of German-occupied Poland became a separate administrative territory under the name of the 'General Government of the Occupied Polish Territory' (GG), comprising the areas around

Kraków, Warsaw, Lublin, Kielce, Radom and Częstochowa. It was subject to the direction of the German government in Berlin. All the area of the former Polish state to the east of the partition line was taken by Moscow and incorporated into the Soviet Union following the request of two fraudulently elected assemblies for West Ukraine and West Byelorussia.[13]

In this way the independent state of Poland was destroyed and its territory absorbed by the two predators on its flanks. The area occupied by the Soviet Union had 13 million inhabitants compared with 22 million in the German sphere. The cost in human casualties and suffering was enormous. It has been estimated that Poland's losses in the campaign were 200 000 men killed or wounded, 400 000 taken prisoner by the Germans and 230 000 by the Soviets. A further 85 000 were interned, only temporarily in some cases, in Romania, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia. Prisoners-of-war were not treated in accordance with international agreements but were sent to forced labour or held in appalling prison conditions in both the Soviet Union and Germany.[14] The following account gives a flavour of the experience of so many Soviet PoWs. After his capture the narrator was taken to a camp at Skole and later transported by train to Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine, without food or water. There he and his fellow deportees were imprisoned in an old monastery, interrogated, and then 'tried' before a number of officers in a makeshift courtroom in the prison. He describes how he was required to sign a confession before being sentenced to eight years in a labour camp. He was then taken to another prison with far worse conditions. There were 40 men in a room the size of an ordinary sitting room. There were no beds. They were squeezed on to the floor so tightly that they couldn't lie on their backs but only on their sides, all facing the same way. When they were tired and cramped, they all had to turn over together:

> Half of us were Poles and half Ukrainians. There were conflicts and fights. They gave us soup, and coffee (or dirty water) and a lump of bread, terrible bread, like a small fist. We were licking this bread. Bread was sacred. Your companion would steal everything from you but bread was taboo. We were moved from prison to prison. All were equally bad. We always had to lie on the ground and only allowed to the latrine once a day. People died all the time. You had to be strong to survive, physically and mentally strong. I tried to remember the names of some of my friends and colleagues but they were beginning to escape me. I tried to remember music. And not only this, I was

> composing poetry. In Poland I had written quite a lot of poetry and some of it was published. In prison one day I started composing poetry in my memory. Long, long poems, putting in all my feelings. I still remember them. All of them I remember. When I became free I wrote them down. I was also a very religious man. Out of any question religion was a great spiritual help to me, it helped me to survive. I prayed. Many times when I survived I called it a miracle.[15]

A significant minority of Polish soldiers avoided the fate of transportation, either to the East or into Germany. They were the ones who were able to cross the Romanian, Hungarian or Lithuanian borders before these were blocked by German and Soviet troops. At the end of September 1939 some 90 000 Polish troops had managed to flee abroad. There were around 40 000 in Hungary, 32 000 in Romania and some 14 000 in Lithuania, and a small number in Latvia. Among the units which crossed was one of the two existing Polish armoured brigades which had been resisting the Germans in the Lwów area when the Soviets came in, and the remainder of the Polish Air Force, around a hundred combat planes. In Romania there were between 6000 and 9000 air force personnel. These numbers increased as the result of late arrivals, many of whom had crossed the frontier by mountain routes, and the numbers were also reinforced by some 17 000 civilians who escaped to Romania and by a further 15 000 in Hungary. It is probable that some of these 'civilians' were soldiers who had dispensed with their uniforms.

The French government had already offered to receive evacuated troops and it was therefore the objective of most of these men to reach France or French colonial or mandated territories. At first they were interned in camps, but with the help of diplomatic missions and in some cases by their own initiative a large proportion of them managed to leave Romania and Hungary. Some 40 per cent of evacuees reportedly left by train through Yugoslavia and Italy to the French frontier. When Mussolini began to tighten up the land route, evacuation continued by sea. The remaining 60 per cent of evacuees sailed from ports in Romania, Greece or Yugoslavia to Marseilles before the route was blocked. Some 43 000 reached France by this method, others managed to do so travelling on their own initiative, but around 23 000 remained in internment. By comparison, only around 500 men were evacuated from the Baltic states using the sea route to Sweden and Norway since the Baltic Sea was controlled by the German navy and evacuee ships were intercepted. The route to Helsinki was blocked at the onset of the Finno-Soviet war in December 1939. So the overwhelming majority of internees in

Lithuania remained there until the Soviet occupation of the country in June 1940, when they were deported to Soviet labour camps. Similarly, when the German army entered Hungary and Romania in 1941 the remaining interned Polish officers were imprisoned, and the private soldiers sent to the General Government for forced labour. Some remained behind in Hungarian camps.[16]

A boy of nine fled before the German advance into Eastern Poland but was separated from his family. He crossed the Romanian border shortly before it was closed by the Soviet troops. Since he was on his own he was taken along by a group of around 20 soldiers with an officer in charge and a couple of sergeants. The officer read the maps and led them across. When they arrived in Romania he was picked up straightaway and put on some civilian transport. After a few days he was sent into Hungary where he was placed in an internment camp, and a few months later was transferred to another near the Austrian border, where he remained until 1944. At first he attended a Hungarian school but then the Hungarian authorities permitted the Polish internees to open a Polish grammar school where they could take the Polish leaving certificate. Generally the Hungarians treated the Polish internees very well. Most of the internees escaped to France.

Since, as a boy, he was unlikely to arouse suspicion, he was given the job of spotting military patrols around the camp area and then, when the coast was clear, taking the absconders towards the border which was only about 6 miles away from the camp. He himself tried to escape in November 1939 but was caught in Zagreb, sitting in a café with four soldiers and an officer, all in civilian clothes. When they returned to Hungary, the authorities treated them very leniently until a Nazi coup in 1944, when they were all handed over and transferred to Germany. He was barely 14 when he was sent to work in a factory which made aluminium parts for aircraft. As he remarked, children grew up very quickly at that time.[17] Another of the Polish exiles was studying to be a civilian engineer in Wilno when the Germans invaded Poland. When the Red Army crossed the frontier the Polish garrison in Wilno (at the time a Polish city) and the police force fled to Lithuania, and he with them since, as a member of a kind of paramilitary organisation which wore uniforms, he was classed as military. The Poles from Wilno were interned in two camps in Lithuania where they stayed for nine months until the Soviets occupied the country. Their fate was deportation to Siberia.[18]

The Poles who escaped to France and, after its fall, to Britain were in comparative terms the fortunate ones. At least they had the opportunity

to form part of a Polish armed force which could fight against the Nazis under the direction of the French and British. But they were separated from family and friends. Worse, in most cases they did not know where their families were. Had they been conscripted into one or other of the occupying armies? Were they doing forced labour in the Reich? Had they been arrested and imprisoned? Had they been shot? Were they now in Siberia? The shock of these separations was great. Most of these fugitives were young men who had never before been out of Poland or perhaps never far from their own villages and towns. Some were little more than children, who were cut off from their families and lived in ignorance of their fate. Of course, being young they had fewer material ties to keep them in Poland. And living in exile was preferable to existence under the occupations or a life in German and Soviet prisons and labour camps. The evocative if understated descriptions of the German and Soviet occupations which follow underline why exile, though very painful for most people, was the chosen option.

3
German Colonies

'Hatred is not too strong a word to describe my feelings for the Germans at that time. If I or my parents had had the means to kill a German we would have done, without question.' The violence of this statement was unexpected, coming in the middle of a calm and unemotional conversation with an exiled Pole about wartime experiences in western Poland under the German occupation. Recollection of one episode had suddenly triggered memories which angered and humiliated him, and the old, long-repressed, feelings of hatred immediately rose to the surface. Unlike hundreds of thousands of his fellow Poles, he was not sent to a concentration camp, his house and property were not confiscated, his family not killed nor deported. He was beaten up from time to time, it is true, but that was not the main cause of his violent feelings. What he seemed to resent and hate most of all was the contempt in which he and his fellow Poles were held by their German conquerors, epitomised by the dismissive and frequently repeated comments that Poles were the scum of the earth.

German attitudes towards the Slavs generally reflected those of Hitler himself. The Slavs were racially inferior peoples who were destined to be slaves, non-persons, simply hewers of wood and drawers of water, engaged in menial tasks, and forever at the mercy of their German masters. When the German occupation of western Poland took place, ethnic Germans already living and working there, who had gone to school with ethnic Poles in the area, showed where their true sympathies lay.

> 'The pre-war German residents of the area never confided in us, saying they were sorry for the German invasion. They never showed solidarity'. In fact they were 'hand in glove with the military'. But before the war 'the young German people with whom I was brought

> up in school were treated for what they were, as people, as human beings under the Polish system'. Though Poland was largely Catholic 'there were synagogues, Lutheran churches and other places of worship. The children of German families who were Lutheran would stay out of religious instruction at school.' But after the occupation Polish schools were closed and Polish priests persecuted, and the Germans, both indigenous and newcomers, showed themselves content with official German racial policies.[1]

In their search for mastery the German conquerors have been compared to the Southern slaveowners in the United States before the Civil War. But unlike the Southerners, there were fewer constraints on their freedom of action. To be sure, manual labour was a valuable asset to both the ruling groups and could not be casually squandered. But there was a difference. The southern planters had invested substantial sums in this human labour power and wanted a return on their investment. Their slaves had to be looked after well enough to perform the necessary physical labour with at least minimal efficiency. Moreover, given the disproportion in numbers between the white masters and the black slaves, the owners had to be careful not to provoke widespread slave uprisings. Their behaviour, consequently, involved a pragmatic mix of violence and accommodation.[2] In the case of the German masters, however, there was less self-restraint, indeed virtually none. Labour was relatively cheaper and the power to repress relatively greater. So, although labour was valuable, as we shall see, it was not so valuable that violent retaliatory punishments, leading to the deaths of thousands of innocent people, could not be inflicted on the conquered population. It was not so valuable that slave labourers deported to Germany could not be almost starved to death before being flung back to their homes in a broken physical condition and unfit for further work. Nor was it so valuable that 6 million Jews could not be exterminated.

Understanding the processes of uprooting and resettlement which created the British Polish and Baltic communities is a central aim of this book. Since most of these exiles fled from Soviet rule, their testimonies will inevitably focus on Stalinist oppression. But our understanding of this tyrannical system will be enhanced if we place it in a comparative context. What better comparison than with its contemporary totalitarian cousin, Nazi Germany, particularly when some of the British Poles and almost all the British Balts experienced the Nazi occupation as well? It is easy to say that there was no essential difference between the two, that one was brown Communism, the other red fascism. But some acute

observers of the Soviet system, who deplored its vicious inhumanity and recognised the close relationship between it and its Nazi counterpart, nonetheless felt, 'in their bones', that the Nazi system was worse. It is not our aim to enter into the rather familiar comparison between these two examples of physical and mental oppression in order to conclude which was the more severe. Our intention is to assess the character of the Soviet repression by comparing it with the policies, behaviour and attitudes of the Nazis in their two colonies of Poland and the Baltic states.

First, the ambition of the Nazis was to destroy for ever the independent Polish and Baltic states. They were convinced that inferior peoples had no right to separate states. They had to be incorporated into the state of their conquerors and all reminders of their former states had to be obliterated. Hence the Polish western regions were incorporated in the Reich in three new districts, Warthegau, West Prussia-Danzig and Upper Silesia, which fused the former German and Polish territories of that name. The more eastern territories within the German zone of occupation were formed into the General Government, not part of the Reich but subordinated to it under a German Governor. The Poles were completely excluded from participation in all levels of government. In this way more than half of the pre-war Polish state came under German domination, and, in turn, about half of that was directly absorbed into the Reich.[3] Similarly, after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Baltic states were absorbed into the overall territorial administration in the Baltic area, the *Reichscommissariat Ostland*, operating under the general direction of Berlin. Each of the former states was relegated to the status of General District. In each of them Directorates composed of ethnic Balts were established but they had only consultative powers, and their task was simply to assist the occupiers in executing policy.[4]

Administrative incorporation was complemented by a policy of Germanisation designed to make the new acquisitions culturally and linguistically German. German became the official language, the use of Polish in public life was banned, and every aspect of Polish culture and identity was suppressed. Polish newspapers and journals were prohibited and publication of Polish books prevented. The names of cities and towns were Germanised and street names changed. Polish schools were closed, a fate they shared with museums, theatres, universities and libraries. Many books in Polish were listed to be destroyed. Performances of music by Polish composers were banned, and works of art displayed in public galleries or privately owned were looted and removed to Germany. In a

public sense Polish culture no longer existed. It could only be kept alive by underground activity. Here is one example of how this was done.

> I was still at school when the war began. In the first year of the Occupation the Germans closed the schools, at least the senior schools, after the first six classes. I used to attend a private school but after the closure there was no formal schooling. But principally as a matter of pride all young people in Warsaw at any rate used to attend what were called *completi*, groups which used to meet in the evenings at people's houses and were taught by Polish teachers. It was a matter of keeping Polishness alive.

The German objective, as succinctly stated by Albert Forster, Gauleiter of West Prussia-Danzig, was to 'eradicate within the next few years any manifestations of the Polish nationality', meaning the destruction of Polish culture and identity and its principal defenders, the intelligentsia and the Roman Catholic Church. The Nazis correctly recognised the Church as a powerful defender of the Polish nation and, historically, an essential component of its identity. Their attack on the representatives of the Church was particularly brutal. Parish priests were rounded up, taken into the forests and shot.

> The parish priest of my sister's village was killed. One of the Germans who lived there came to warn him. He said 'Father, I implore you to go away because they are going to come for you tonight.' And he just said, 'If it's the will of God, then let them do it. I will not desert my flock.' And that was it.[5]

To ensure total demoralisation the Nazis attempted to cut all means of communication with the outside world, such as the banning of radio receivers. The importance of maintaining contact somehow is illustrated by the recollection of this Polish exile who lived in the German incorporated territories:

> My father used to go for miles and miles on a pushbike to listen to a secret radio. There was a penalty of death to listen to that. The radio was at his cousin's which was in a fairly remote part. We felt hope because Britain and France had declared war and we were not alone.[6]

While the Poles never had any illusions about the nature of Nazi rule, the Baltic peoples welcomed the advent of Hitler's troops in the Summer

of 1941. Not only were they replacing the hated Soviets who had been in occupation of the Baltic states during the previous year, 1940–41, but it was hoped that the Germans would restore their independence. 'An overwhelming majority … looked upon the Germans as liberators. Such real sympathies as the Germans met in the Baltic countries immediately after their conquest had certainly not come their way since Hitler's assumption of power. No one could mistake the spontaneity of these heartfelt feelings.' So wrote the Swedish journalist Arvid Fredbord in 1944. Recalling the scene in Riga, the Latvian publisher Helmars Rudzitis wrote in 1984 'Mountains of flowers were laid at the foot of the Freedom Monument. Everyone wanted to place at least one flower at the symbol of Latvia's freedom … That day no one realised that we had gone from one occupation to another.'[7] An Estonian who observed the takeover believed, with many of his compatriots, that it marked the end of hard times and that they could go back 'to the old independence days'.

> 'When the German army came in', he remembered, 'everybody had flowers and carried national flags and our farmers were looking in cupboards for a bottle of spirits or something, and they all came out with two hands and said, take what you want, you are the people we have been waiting for'.

But the welcome was very short-lived and many ethnic Balts felt a real sense of disappointment. The Germans made them feel second class and were 'very intent on subjugating us'. They made it quite clear, at least until their defeat at Stalingrad, that they didn't really need Baltic help.[8] Also a similar process of Germanisation took place there as in Poland, with German becoming the official language and various institutions being renamed. But the universities were re-opened to students who had achieved an appropriate standard of competence in the German language. The Balts were under no illusions that the Nazis intended to subjugate them, but the impression left by the interviews is that the forms of subjugation were less harsh than in Poland, and that individuals had a greater chance of being left alone to get on with their lives, at least until the German armies were forced into their long retreat by the Red Army. Yet there can be little doubt that the cultural objectives of the Nazis in both Poland and the Baltic states were comparable. As T.S. Eliot wrote in his preface to the first edition of *The Dark Side of the Moon* in 1946, in words which apply as much to the Nazis as to the Soviets, the aim of the totalitarian occupations was the destruction of a culture or pattern of life and its replacement by another pattern. 'We do not yet

know to what extent such a transformation can be effected; we do not know to what extent a people can be altered by the power of planned ignorance … Whether a culture can survive systematic destruction from without, depends … upon the stubbornness of the unconscious masses, the tenacity with which they cling to habits and customs, their instinctive resistance to change.'[9]

It was therefore not enough to destroy the intelligentsia, the representatives of the Churches, and the political and social elites. There had to be a violent attack on the masses to break their resistance and to make examples of many of them in order to demoralise the rest. This process was accomplished in an arbitrary and apparently irrational manner in order to strike terror into their minds and paralyse them with fear. Since there were almost 10 million ethnic Poles in the Polish incorporated territories and only a small proportion of ethnic Germans, Germanisation and effective control depended on changing the proportions in favour of the Germans. This meant expelling and deporting large numbers of ethnic Poles. The deportations took place at very short notice and often at night. Deportees were bundled on to trains of goods wagons for their journey to the General Government. Often unable to find employment when they arrived, they depended on the charity of the existing residents. Meanwhile their land and property was taken over by ethnic Germans from different parts of Europe. By 1944 some 800 000 ethnic Germans had been settled in this newly annexed area.

A large number of these settlers were Baltic Germans who fled the Baltic states in the Autumn of 1939 under pressure from Hitler, and were directed to the newly incorporated Polish western territories. In the first two years of occupation about one and a half million Polish citizens – some 1.2 million ethnic Poles and around 300 000 Jews – were deported from the incorporated provinces to the General Government.[10] Prominent among those singled out for expulsion, or in some cases imprisonment in concentration camps, were the wealthy and influential, such as landowners, businessmen and intellectuals. Expellees were compelled to give up their homes, personal belongings, farms, estates, and businesses without compensation, and were allowed to take with them only personal effects and a small amount of cash, but no jewellery, stocks and shares or other valuables.[11] One man remembered how his sister lost everything, her bakery and her grocery shop.

> They were given 12 hours notice overnight to get out but they were not allowed to take anything – the rooms were sealed – except for the clothes they wore and the cots for the children.

Simultaneously, many Poles were recruited for labour in Germany either by persuasion or compulsion. One adolescent boy, aged 14 at the outbreak of war, had volunteered to join a group of anti-aircraft observers. It was for this reason, he supposed, that the German occupiers removed him to the region of East Prussia in Germany to work on a farm. Among his fellow workers were some Polish PoWs, three girls, and a whole family transported from Pomorze (Pomerania) when their farm was taken over by ethnic Germans. They all had to wear the letter P on their clothing to identify them as Poles.[12]

In the General Government all unemployed Poles were subject to compulsory labour service, and everywhere from April 1940 Poles were compelled to register for work in Germany, mainly in agriculture. Failure to register could result in severe punishment. In addition, periodic round ups, spontaneous street arrests, and raids on homes increased the numbers available for forced labour in Germany through deportation. These inflows of labour supplemented the work of the 400 000 Polish PoWs who had been forced to labour for the Reich in breach of international agreements on the employment of prisoners. Recalling the actions of the Nazis on the streets of Warsaw, one man remarked on the arbitrariness of it all. Taking a job at the age of 13, he was learning to be a jeweller, but this occupation did not offer him a German work permit.

> Then the Germans started blocking off streets, closing both ends and anyone in the middle was loaded on to wagons and taken off to Germany. To slavery. The only chance was to get a job that carried documents so I went into engineering which before that I had no intention at all of doing. And somehow I just survived.[13]

Another adolescent was not so lucky. When he was 17 he was taken to Germany, along with a lot of other boys of his age, leaving his family behind. First he and his friends worked on a farm and then the SS directed them to dig trenches for the army in France. They did this for about six months before he tried to escape to join the French Resistance. When he was recaptured he was returned to Germany where he expected to be shot.

In March 1940 compulsory military service was imposed on suitable males in the requisitioned territories, also in breach of The Hague Convention. The alternative to joining the German army was forced labour in Germany.[14] By the closing months of 1940 the forcible recruitment of Polish labour for work in Germany was interrupted since labour

supplies in German agriculture were adequate. It was also important not to reduce any further the numbers of farm workers in the annexed territories for fear of depriving German farm owners there of necessary agricultural labour. One of the Polish exiles said he escaped deportation to Germany because he was working on a German-owned farm in the occupied territories. The occupiers also forced Polish citizens who had some German ancestry to put their names on the *Volksliste*, which was in effect a declaration opting for German citizenship. This gave certain privileges but also made them eligible for conscription to the German army. Those who failed to sign were sent to concentration camps.

> 'My brother was going to be taken to one of these local concentration camps unless he signed a paper', one man recalled. 'He decided to sign because he felt he'd die in the camps and his parents would not be treated any better. The signature was to give consent to taking German naturalization. He didn't sign until late. He was on the train on the way to the camp. The guards told him not to be stupid – that he could go back if he signed. And eventually he did.'[15]

The colonising process, then, was characterised by deportations, forced labour, confiscation of property, conscription and round-ups. 'Whoever belongs to the Polish nation', meaning the racially inferior former Polish citizens, was either expelled from the occupation zones or reduced to slavery. But another essential element of control of the subject population was the frequent resort to terror and physical violence. In this respect, the first priority was to destroy the political, economic and intellectual elites, the most cultivated and influential elements in the population and the bearers of its high culture. The Gestapo, like the NKVD in the Soviet-occupied area, had drawn up lists of members of these elites. These were arrested and shot without trial shortly after the occupation. More than 16 000 people met this fate in the newly annexed territories. Many others were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Sometimes they were released and allowed to return home, often in a broken physical condition. As one man reported,

> I came into contact with people who'd been in concentration camps and then released. And then brought back to the farm to work. I've never seen anyone as thin and transparent as one man who was brought back. They just dumped him outside in a ditch; he couldn't walk he was so under-nourished and badly-treated.[16]

Moreover, there were frequent violent attacks on the population, sometimes in retaliation for underground activity on the part of the resistance, sometimes to spread fear and apprehension.

> Every day you'd see something happen. Say you're going out to work. If you could, you'd get a tram, but they were absolutely overflowing. Then the tram would suddenly stop, German soldiers had waved it down, and they'd pick 100 people, 200, 500, just stood them against the wall and shot them down. And this happened without any good reason, these were people either going to work or passers-by. I was caught just once in one of these selections. I showed my work permit and the soldier just looked, grabbed a gun and hit me across the face with it (I've still got the scar) and he gave me a kick up the backside and that was it – I was lucky. It was possibly my job in engineering that saved me.[17]

Another victim of violence recalled being beaten up a few times by the SS. He was visiting a friend's house some 3 miles from the farm where he worked.

> Late at night there was a commotion outside, the door was ripped open and some German SS men came in. They had Alsatian dogs with them and guns slung from their belts, and they'd been drinking. The merry-making was on the Poles. I was dragged out of bed, along with my friend and his father. We were banged about a bit. I saw stars as a result of the fisticuffs. A lot of people died in the region where I lived.[18]

Another interviewee remarked that, as a young adolescent boy, he hated the Germans but not for any violence inflicted on him or his family or friends. It was the sense of total powerlessness in the face of overwhelming force, the complete inability to obtain education or in other ways to shape his own life.

> The Germans were not brutal to me or to my family. They took a lot of Jews away but didn't select Poles for shooting or camps in our area (near Kraków). They took the Jews in our town to their synagogue and burned them there. They might have shot Poles but I never heard that they did. There was an underground movement in our town and area but I didn't join it. I didn't know anybody who was a member. A lot of people my age didn't have jobs and couldn't go to school.

> Sometimes the Germans would take us off to build huts for them. When they wanted something they just came and took us.

And so, when he was 17, the SS took him to work on a German farm.[19]

The number of Poles whose labour was exploited by German agriculture rose steadily after the mobilisation of German males for the war against the Soviet Union in 1941 and the consequential gaps in the labour force. In the first two years after the incorporation of the Polish western provinces most Polish forced labour was sent to work on farms. In some cases they replaced Polish PoWs who were no longer fit for work and were returned to their homes. Both official German and Polish government-in-exile sources agreed that around 1 million civilian Poles were employed as forced labour in Germany in late 1941 and early 1942, with slightly less than half of these from the incorporated provinces and the remainder from the General Government. About a quarter of these were women.

One woman described her life at this time. She was 23 in 1942 when the Germans intensified their arrests of young people for work in Germany. Her parents hid her in the woods for a time but shortly afterwards she was caught in a round-up in the nearby town and sent to a camp. Eventually she was transported to Bavaria where local farmers selected suitable workers for forced labour. She was chosen to work on a farm which also employed a French PoW.

> I had to work from 5 am to as late as 11 pm on some days. I had brought no clothes with me so I dressed in rags. I used soldiers' shoes for shoes and my stockings were woven by the farmer's wife. But my employer was a Roman Catholic and humane; he was pleased that I was a Roman Catholic too. His elder son was in the SS and the younger one was an army officer.[20]

The proportion of workers employed in industry also rose as German labour became scarce owing to conscription. Later in the war almost all forced labourers worked in industry or construction. Many were used in the Todt organisation, constructing coastal fortifications from northern Norway to southern France.[21]

Probably the largest single transport of Poles to Germany occurred after the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising, when survivors of the intense battles surrendered to the German army. There have been numerous accounts of life in Warsaw under the Nazis, particularly during the weeks of the Uprising. One Polish exile in Britain, who was heavily

involved in this dramatic and tragic event, adds his voice to the reminiscences.

> Everybody, all the young people my age, took part in the Resistance. I started as a messenger and in the evenings went on different courses organised by the Resistance and the Home Army (AK). By 1944 I was a hardened boy of the streets. When the Uprising took place I was 16. Of all my school friends I don't know one that survived. I had a lot of friends. On Sunday mornings, at 9 o'clock, you went to church – everybody went. Afterwards we used to go for walks, along the riverside in the summer and in the winter some skiing or skating. So your group of friends kept growing and growing. On reflection I can't remember one that survived. You didn't think about it at the time – it was a question of day-to-day. You slept in cellars. I was buried a couple of times, stuck two days underground wondering whether they were going to dig you out or not. I don't suppose there was any conscious effort of trying to survive; it was a question of carrying on because there was nothing else to do. We had to capitulate at the end of the Uprising basically through a shortage of food and water. And no ammunition. I never did join my unit because it was in the old town and I couldn't get there, so I went to the nearest unit and explained who I was and they said 'Right, you're in'. We were in some well-known battles in the Uprising, the electricity place and the Post Office. The Germans brought up some crack divisions, some of the biggest bastards in the German army. We knew that if the Uprising was not timed right and the Russians took Warsaw we would be dictated to and they would put their policies into effect. Looking back I had very strong feelings against the Germans. They'd killed my father and destroyed my life. Six years of my life were completely gone.[22]

Another veteran of wartime Warsaw recalled how he joined the underground army where he learned to take apart and reassemble a machine gun. But as a student of graphics he was more useful as a printer of underground papers.

> At graphic school there was an old letter press. My brother did the typesetting and I did the printing. The print shop was rather old. There was a lot of straw and dust around. We could get into the cellar through a trap door. When the Germans came looking we dropped down into the cellar and they never thought of looking underneath because it was all dirty and dusty and they would say,

> 'No, there's nothing over there.' There was a special group who listened to the radio and they wrote the newspaper.

Walking on the street was always hazardous since German soldiers were always around, watching everybody and stopping people to check them.

> A woman with a small dog was walking in the city and she came across a German soldier, and the dog started growling. She warned him not to touch the dog as he was fierce. And the German turned round straightaway and said 'You come with me.' And he took that woman away. You know, you couldn't say anything to the Germans. If you just walked to work or school from home in the morning you would think to yourself that this may be the last time you might see your mother, or your home. You never knew whether you would be back again because often on the streets the Germans were catching people and taking them to Germany.

This man recalled that during the Uprising which lasted for 64 days 'Russia did nothing, didn't help at all and all the time the Poles were being pushed back by the Germans into smaller and smaller areas of Warsaw'. At the end he gave himself up, with his brother, and became a PoW.[23]

Though there were close similarities between the Nazi occupations of Poland on the one hand and the Baltic states on the other, there were also marked differences, notably in the recruitment of Balts to the German army or to Baltic units under German command. The long-term German objectives, however, were not dissimilar from their plans for Poland, incorporation of the territory into the greater German empire and the expulsion of two-thirds of the indigenous inhabitants into the vast territories to the East. The remaining population was regarded as suitable for Germanisation, under the influence of Aryan or Nordic settlers brought in from other parts of the empire. Himmler's *Generalplan Ost* of 1942 envisaged that half the Estonians, over half the Latvians and 85 per cent of Lithuanians would be deported, though these large-scale deportations were not scheduled to take place until after the capitulation of the Soviet Union.[24]

Meanwhile the Nazis arrested and imprisoned many thousands of people on suspicion of hostility to the new regime. Sometimes these were members of the elites, often they were local Communist party members, candidate members, or sympathisers unable or unwilling to flee to the Soviet Union with the retreating Soviet troops. Reportedly

about 50 000 ethnic Latvians were arrested and incarcerated in prisons and local concentration camps. Half of them were released after investigation, but the remainder were sent to concentration camps in Germany in 1943, where many of them died. People who resisted the policies of the Nazis, or were suspected of encouraging resistance in others, were summarily dealt with. Frank Gordon claims that about 10 000 Latvians were shot during the German occupation. When the Germans failed dismally to recruit young people for a proposed Lithuanian Legion following directives from the Lithuanian underground, there were reprisals against prominent people such as civic leaders and members of the intelligentsia who were suspected of encouraging resistance. Their usual fate was transportation to concentration camps in Germany. Most institutions of higher learning were closed and those that remained were taxed more heavily and received other sanctions.[25]

Although mass deportations were not planned to take place until after German victory, substantial numbers of former Baltic citizens were, nonetheless, deported to labour service in Germany. Labour service started off as a voluntary activity when young Lithuanians were invited to work in East Prussia soon after the German occupation. By the end of 1941, however, the Nazis declared labour service obligatory, demanding that all those aged between 18 and 45 should register with the authorities on pain of imprisonment and substantial fines. They also established labour quotas on farms, with the result that surplus labour was required to move to other areas where there was a shortage. This in itself was a form of labour conscription, though a relatively mild one. There was solid resistance to obligatory labour service in Lithuania and relatively few young people were recruited.

There was more compliance in Estonia and Latvia, but gradually resistance to the policy increased and more forceful methods had to be used. It was commonplace for the Gestapo to encircle villages and transport all able-bodied adults to the nearest railway station, from where they were despatched to Germany. In Lithuania it became almost a weekly event for churches to be surrounded during Sunday Mass and the worshippers taken off to labour camps. During the German occupation some 75 000 Lithuanians were compelled by these and similar roundups to undertake forced labour in Germany. Many others were sent to concentration camps. Himmler received a report in July 1944 that altogether about 126 000 people from the three Baltic states had been sent to Germany for compulsory labour. A notable example of such forcible methods was the rounding up, in 1944, of around 10 000 Latvian men who were first confined in the Riga circus arena and then transported to

Germany. Their families were not informed.[26] This is not what the Balts expected when the German army expelled the Soviets in 1941.

> We were still in school in 1943, reported one Estonian, when in March we were brought individual orders at everybody's home for them to report for military service at the beginning of April … But about a fortnight before we were due to report the authorities said that if we joined the labour service we needn't go to the army and that we didn't have to go until October. Most of us went to labour service. We went by train to Germany and ended up at an airfield near Berlin. The whole time we were there we had adequate food. Initially we worked one day on and one day off. The work consisted of either laying drainage at the airfield or digging roads. … However we were brought back to Estonia in July 1944 and straightaway put into army uniform … and we were sent to a school for NCOs in Germany.[27]

In describing the round-ups, the deportations and the numbers sent to concentration camps, there is a danger of assuming that these events were part of normal day-to-day life for everyone in the Baltic states. This was far from being the case. In fact, our interviews show that the most striking aspect of life under the Nazis, at least in the early period of their occupation, was the shortage of food, which seems to have been more acute than under the preceding Soviet regime. The Nazi administration demanded very large quotas of foodstuffs from farmers in compulsory deliveries. Urban dwellers had very little to eat since rations were very low, near starvation levels in fact, at around 700 calories per day.

> To get extra supplies you had to go to a farm and take something like paraffin to exchange for food. I had some relatives in farming but when you came back to town there were police checking your bags. In Riga there were shortages of everything. You couldn't get food. Perhaps people living in the country didn't see much difference but people in towns certainly did. The farmers had to give a certain proportion of everything, butter, meat, eggs and grain.
>
> When the German occupation took place the university (of Tartu) was closed for six months. So I had to go home and we had a small holding about three miles from town where we looked after a cow and pigs and chickens. During the Russian occupation we had so much food in Estonia that even they couldn't take it all away. But the Germans confiscated a vast amount for their army and we became very short. When I went back to university, though my mother sent

> me some food, some days I only had a piece of dried black bread and tea.[28]

On the other hand physical fear was not so acute under the Germans:

> We could say what we wanted and do what we wanted so long as we didn't act against the Germans. Another agreed: 'We were not as worried about informers as under the Soviets. We knew they had informers around, but they were mainly concerned with the Communists and Jews.

There was some resistance in Latvia, one interviewee reported, but:

> not an open one since people just wanted to get on with their lives. There were no mass arrests but we had a strong underground organization which was anti-German so some were arrested but not to such an extent as with the Russians. They were more civilized than the Russians who deported people in appalling conditions. Still, the system was essentially the same.[29]

Also farmers who had been deprived of all or part of their farms under the Soviets got them back again under the Nazis.

> On our farm there was one small place where a shoemaker lived. He received land behind his house and used it for one year and next year he was back again mending shoes. There were only two who received land from our farm and they didn't bother about it. So we had to start from the beginning again, cultivating the land that had been neglected.[30]

An interesting insight into life near the Leningrad front is provided by a former resident of Narva in Estonia, which was right on the former Soviet border, quite close to Leningrad:

> The schools were all turned into military hospitals so we went to school in the headmaster's flat, junior school forms in the morning, middle forms in the afternoon and senior forms in the evening. The school was never closed but because our town was bombed all through the winter I think we only had about two months of actual teaching. We were not very far from the front. We knew about the siege of Leningrad but it was about 20 miles from Narva. The main

> supply line to the Leningrad front was through Narva. The two bridges across the river, the road bridge and the railway bridge were bombed every night by the Russians and we lived only about 150 metres from one of the bridges. We had to send mother away because she couldn't face it.[31]

A repeated charge has been levelled at these victims of Nazi terror, particularly since the fall of Communism. The Balts, it is alleged, were Nazi collaborators and, so far from being simply victims of Nazism, volunteered to fight and labour for the German cause. Furthermore, some of these collaborators were enthusiastic participants in the mass slaughter of the Jewish populations of their countries. It is impossible here to examine these charges in detail, but it is equally impossible to ignore them since they have become an important factor in the contemporary politics and historiography of these states.

The interviews with members of the British Baltic communities are interesting on this point. There are at least three important questions: first, did the Balts voluntarily participate in the Police Battalions and the Waffen SS units set up by the Nazis in the Baltic states? Second, if membership was voluntary, what were the Balts' motives in joining? Finally, what was the role of the Police Battalions and the Waffen SS units? The interviews strongly suggest that membership in the Police Battalions was usually voluntary, though reluctant 'volunteers' could be threatened with forced labour if they refused to join. The membership averaged around 8000 in Lithuania, in Latvia it reached 15 000 and in Estonia 10 000. Members were promised they would be used only inside the boundaries of the former independent Baltic republics to identify and root out Soviet sympathisers, escaped PoWs, and partisans parachuted in from the Soviet Union. In practice, however, they were soon despatched for police purposes behind the German front lines, to 'clear village populations where there was partisan activity', as one Baltic exile euphemistically put it. Later it was quite common for them to be sent to the front line. The particular charges against them are that they fought the partisans with extreme brutality and assisted the Nazis in rounding up Jews for extermination. Recent historical research confirms that some of them, precise numbers still unknown but possibly the majority, took part in the identification, round-up and killing of Jews under the direction of the Nazis.

What were the motives of the volunteers in joining? Some sought revenge against the Soviets for the killing of family members during the Soviet occupation, others were genuine Nazi supporters, others may

have joined to avoid accusations of being Soviet collaborators. 'I knew a man' one interviewee recalled, 'who was a home guard, and his family had been deported to Russia and he wanted to join the Germans to kill as many Russians as possible'.[32]

One who volunteered remembered:

> In October a few from our school volunteered to join an Estonian unit in the German army, me included. We wanted to do our bit to destroy the Red Army, perhaps revenge could be one motive ... We hoped that by making our contribution to the war we would have the gratification of having independence in Estonia. I was in the Estonian field battalion in the northern area but we were always mixed in with other German units or on special duties. Most of the time we were around Leningrad, detailed to security duties, and using our woodcraft skills. The Germans were very good in the open country but were frightened of the closed parts. I don't know why, but whenever we took over from the Germans we had all sorts of problems. We would be attacked right, left and centre. When the Germans moved in nothing happened. The story was that we went after the partisans, the Germans never did, merely defended and then stuck. Regarding the local population I cannot recall that our battalion created any atrocities. In Spring we used to lend Russian and Finnish farmers our horses to work in the fields for which we got something in return, and twice a week we had a dance in the vicinity. We never had any firing squads or hangings.[33]

In early 1943, as their need for manpower became more acute, the Nazis called for volunteers for the Baltic Voluntary Waffen-SS Legions, but almost at the same time introduced conscription. Conscripts were given a 'choice' between the Waffen SS units or forced labour. Since the latter had a bad reputation, more than half the Latvian and slightly less than half of the Estonian conscripts joined their respective Legions. There was considerable resistance in Lithuania to joining up, and the Nazis' attempt to form a Lithuanian Legion had to be abandoned because the leaders of the Lithuanian underground urged young men not to respond to the conscription on the grounds that a Lithuanian army should only be used 'for the protection of Lithuanian state interests'. The Estonian Legion eventually numbered some 11 000 men, or one division, the Latvian reaching a strength of two divisions. The Germans insisted on the title 'Voluntary Waffen-SS Legions' to avoid accusations of conscripting populations of occupied territories, which was in violation of

the Geneva Convention. But in fact the Legions were neither voluntary nor the Latvian equivalent of the German SS.[34]

It is true that a small minority of the Legionaries were genuine volunteers, often transferred from the Police Battalions or German SD (security police) units in late 1944. But the majority were conscripts who fought because they had to. There were severe punishments for evading conscription, and desertion was punishable by death. However, when the Nazis began to suffer defeat after defeat after Stalingrad, and the Red Army began to approach the former frontiers of the Baltic states, many ethnic Balts, though technically conscripts, joined the Legions willingly, with the aim of defending their territory from re-occupation by the Soviets. Balts drew a distinction between fighting for the Nazis and fighting against Communism. They were quite clear they were fighting Communism. Unfortunately for them they were compelled to wear the General SS uniform, with SS markings on their collars, death's heads on their caps and their blood groups tattooed on their armpits. After the war, when the survivors were in camps in Germany, they faced accusations of war crimes owing to their identification with the SS. Gordon argues, probably correctly, that the majority of the conscripts 'were typical front line soldiers who do not have to be ashamed of fighting a war, having been conscripted under foreign flags'. As Juris Sinka pointed out, these people, whatever the label, 'and the label was not of the Baltic people's choosing', were ordinary conscript armed forces which received ordinary army training and were used exclusively for fighting against Soviet armed forces. They had nothing to do with the political SS units which received specific training in German SS schools and carried out special assignments'.[35]

What do the British Balts say about these events? One man was called up to the Latvian Legion in May 1943 when he was 21.

> At the beginning the officers were Latvian but afterwards when we went out fighting the officers were mainly German, not all but especially in the technical units. In December 1943 we were sent north into the Soviet Union. In January 1944 further north again and then after a few weeks further south. In July 1944 there was a general retreat and in mid-August we arrived in Riga. We were engaged in fighting with the Soviet troops quite a lot. We had no heavy equipment, no tanks or anything like that. Then the Germans arranged an evacuation for us and got us out to Germany. But one division didn't get away at all and were taken prisoner.[36]

This reference was to the 19th Division which defended the last piece of Latvian territory not in Soviet hands, Kurzeme (Courland), until the end of the war in May 1945. One Baltic exile was in that Division and describes his experiences:

> The Russians overwhelmed us with numbers. At that time the front was retreating but a part of Latvia called Kurzeme was cut off by the Russian army in Lithuania and was surrounded like a fort, the only way out being the sea. Some of the fiercest fighting took place in Kurzeme where our unit was. It was Christmas time 1944. It was estimated there were 25 German divisions including us, and more than 100 Russian divisions involved. We didn't have tanks or aircraft but we had artillery. I think we fought in a more committed way than the Germans at that stage. From the end of September/beginning of October to the end of the war there were about 5/6 kilometres of land changing hands. The Russians suffered a lot of casualties. When they attacked the commissars were behind them. If they met resistance and couldn't go forward and retreated they would be shot by their own people. They had about 20 rifles for 100 men and if these 100 men made an assault the men without rifles would watch and pick up the rifles of the men who were killed. I was wounded towards the end of March and was placed in a field hospital. There were Latvian units who decided to go into the forests and prepare for guerrilla work after the Germans had gone. I didn't return to my unit. The idea was to escape over the Baltic to Sweden. We got a small boat but it didn't go to Sweden but to Germany. It was a German boat. We didn't have to pay.[37]

The 15th Division by contrast lost so many men in the retreat from Russia that it was sent to Germany to regroup. One member of this division recalled

> We didn't fight for the Russian cause or the Nazi cause. We fought for our own land. We remembered in the First World War, on allied instructions, we fought together with the Germans to beat the communists. When we got the communists out the Germans wanted different things, they wanted Latvia. So we also had to fight the Germans then. It was very hard but we did it. We thought that in this war history might repeat itself. We had a marching song with the words 'We are fighting the lousy ones (Russians) and then we turn

> to the blue and grey'. When we were in the army we thought we would be able to repeat the lesson of history but it didn't happen[38]

At the same time an eight-year-old boy was settled by his father in a village in eastern Germany with the rest of his family. His father then returned to the 19th Division in January 1945 and more than 40 years later the son recalled:

> My father was then sent to Courland in Latvia and he disappeared there. We were told he died on 10 October 1945, [five months after the end of fighting in Courland] which was after the Russians took over completely. I don't know if he joined a resistance unit. I haven't managed to find anything out. I've been back to Latvia twice but I've not even found out where he is buried.[39]

Our final question relates to the participation of Balts in the Holocaust. To what extent were Baltic civilians or the Police Battalions involved in the slaughter of the Jews, either Baltic Jews or Jews transported from other parts of Europe for extermination? Failure to give proper consideration to allegations of ethnic Baltic participation in the destruction of the Jewish communities has left a cloud of suspicion hanging over these three states since they restored their independence in 1991. What many Balts regard as wild and exaggerated charges can only be rebutted, if rebutted at all, by a careful examination of the known facts. We do know that as the Soviets withdrew from the Baltic states in the face of superior Nazi force in the Summer of 1941, Lithuanians, to take one example, perpetrated pogroms against Jews even before German troops arrived. Later the Lithuanian security police (there were around 20 Police Battalions at the disposal of the Reich) were charged with having helped the Nazis to round up Jews, and were allegedly involved in mass killings of Jews in Ukraine, Belarus and Poland, as well as acting as guards at concentration camps.[40]

The central question is, how many Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians were actually involved in the genocide? This is a very complex question and a full answer awaits further research by historians. Perhaps the most authoritative recent study, a collection of articles and documents edited by the Lithuanian historian Alfonsas Eidintas, shows the extent of ethnic Lithuanian involvement in the massacre of Lithuanian Jews. In his speech to the Lithuanian Parliament on 20 September 2001 Eidintas summarised some of the findings of historians, and they make grim reading.[41]

> In the summer and autumn of 1941, 130 000 Jews – an absolute majority of the 209 000 Lithuanian Jewish community – were killed. According to data from German and Lithuanian archives, local perpetrators were most instrumental in the massacre; some suggest that Lithuanian collaborators alone killed about 70 000–80 000 Jews … Lithuanians should know … that the majority of Lithuanian Jews were killed by local police forces (battalions) under the supervision of the Nazis. This means that not several hundred but 2000–3000 or even more thousands of Lithuanians participated in these events.

The handful of survivors of 220 Jewish shtetles (settlements and small towns) have testified that Lithuanians perpetrated most of the torture and killing, 'generally without any German officials on the spot'.

Eidintas concluded, however, 'that the majority of Lithuanians condemned the helpers of the Germans and dissociated from them. The others were afraid for themselves and their families. However, not many Lithuanians tried to protect and hide Jews.' But those that did (there is a list of almost 3000 names) faced the death penalty if they were caught. Despite that they saved some 3000 Jews. As Eidintas correctly observes, they are today Lithuanian heroes and have a special place in Lithuanian history. Most people were not heroes, however, and their attitude has been characterised by one interviewee as one of evasiveness. In Riga, he recalled

> The Jewish situation arose and everyone who could tried to avoid getting involved with the Germans. What normally happened was that a notice came in saying that volunteer policemen were required by such and such a time, and anybody who wanted just disappeared. Those who didn't have the sense to go were taken in by the Gestapo. They were taken as drivers, guards and such like. They took anyone who happened to be there[42]

These comments suggest that members of the police units were not invariably volunteers, as the Nazis described them, but conscripts who had not taken evasive action. This is an interesting interpretation of ethnic Balts' involvement in the round up and killing of Jews. But in general there are few other references to the genocide in the British interviews. Either the interviewees were not aware of what was happening or were unprepared to discuss it. When the subject was raised, the responsibility for the fate of the Jews was placed entirely on the Germans. Describing events in his home town of Narva in Estonia, one

man remembered that the Germans rounded up Jews very early, but in any case there were few Jews in Narva, many younger ones having escaped to the Soviet Union during and after the withdrawal of the Soviet army. The older ones, 'though they knew it would be hard, didn't expect concentration camps and extermination camps'. In Riga the interviewees 'noticed' when the Germans started rounding up the Jews and putting them in ghettoes. One of them remembered doing two weeks work on overhead power lines but was totally ignorant of the purpose of his work, which was to prepare for the setting up of a concentration camp for Jews. His older brother worked as a railway conductor on goods trains taking supplies to Leningrad. At one big junction he saw trains coming in with Jews from Austria and other European countries. He discovered that they were shot in Latvia.[43]

However, one interview directly raised the question of Baltic participation in the extermination of the Jews, and threw a clear light on the motivation of one at least of the participants:

> I remember one Latvian who I went to school with for three years. His father was a captain in the army, his mother was a Sister in a Red Cross hospital, and his sister was still at school. He somehow happened to go to a birthday party and didn't return home until the morning. His family were gone and neighbours said that young Jews had taken them away. The war was only ten days away, the Germans came to Riga on 1 July 1941. He was so mad he didn't look for justice, he looked for revenge and he said 'Give me a shooter and I will shoot every Jew on sight'. When you multiply that by the 20 000 who were deported, there were a lot of young men with the same feelings. I met him later. I was going to evening school and somebody shouted my name and it was him. I didn't go to school that night but sat with him at his post and he said 'It's a pity that I can't go to sleep without drinking a bottle of vodka to get me drunk because I have nightmares about all those Jews I shot'. There were about 200 or 300 people in his company who took part in executions of Jews and the whole Latvian nation got blamed for them.[44]

Though this estimate of the actual numbers of ethnic Latvians involved is almost certainly too low, the graphic description both of this man's role in the killing and the reasons why he became involved confirm what is known from other sources, namely that Jewish Communists and fellow-travellers played a prominent role in the Soviet administrative and police apparatus and used their positions to punish those defined

by the Soviets as 'enemies of the people'. Relatives and friends of these so-called enemies extracted revenge against the Jews when the opportunity presented itself after the Soviet withdrawal.

Self-evidently the Baltic people's role in the Holocaust cannot and should not be ignored. Equally, however, assessment of this role should not detract from their own persecution at the hands of the Nazis and the Soviets. Their sufferings were acute and very long-lasting since they remained under Soviet occupation until the restoration of their independence after the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union in 1991. In this chapter we have attempted to strike a balance between the experiences of ethnic Balts and Baltic Jews. It was not our intention to demean in any way the bravery and self-sacrifice of the ethnic Balts under the rigours of the Nazi occupation. Yet, while the Nazis were in occupation for little more than three years, the Soviets kept control for 48 years. The first year of this 48 (1940–41) was experienced by the Baltic exiles in Britain (they left for Germany and Sweden when the Soviets returned in 1944, which in itself is a revealing comment on the comparative severities of the two occupying regimes). The Polish exiles lived under Soviet occupation for varying periods of time between 1939 and 1941, depending on the date of their deportation to the Soviet Union, and then experienced another year or two in the harshest of repressive regimes in the camps and places of exile in the Soviet north, Siberia and Soviet Central Asia before some of them were permitted to leave for Persia in 1942. The recollections of both groups, along with the discussion of the Nazi occupation in this chapter, will help us to evaluate the particular characteristics of the Soviet occupations and to place them in a comparative context.

4
Soviet Fiefs

From 1939 to 1941 the Germans and the Russians occupied their respective areas of control in Poland until the Russians were pushed out of Eastern Poland by the Nazi invasion of June 1941. The Russians occupied the Baltic states from the Summer of 1940 until they were displaced by the Nazis a year later. The occupations inevitably invite comparison since they were either simultaneous or sequential. The comparison is not straightforward, however. The most notorious aspect of the Nazi occupations was the act of genocide, the extirpation of millions of Jews. Since this was a unique event, it cannot be compared with any aspect of Soviet actions in this region during the Second World War. Nonetheless, if the comparison is confined to the treatment of ethnic Poles and Balts, some meaningful conclusions can be drawn with respect to objectives, methods and results. Understanding the process of Sovietisation, by which Soviet policy was applied in the newly acquired territories, is the key to comparing these two occupations. It will reinforce our earlier conclusion that Soviet rule was extremely harsh in application and devastating in consequences for a multitude of people. In fact, Sovietisation involved no less than the application to the new fiefs of the policies which had characterised Stalinist and Leninist rule in the Soviet Union since the Bolshevik Revolution. This is sometimes seen as a positive, or egalitarian, aspect of the occupation; after all, Stalin oppressed the Poles and Balts no more severely than he did the Russians. While true, this was a claim to virtue that could only have been made in the perverted logic of the Soviet system.

It is well known that many left-leaning intellectuals in Britain between the wars were notoriously ready to offer support to the Soviet Union and either ignored, or were blind to, the real character of the Soviet regime. For similar ideological and political reasons they were

unprepared to condemn the Soviet Union for its actions in Eastern Poland. But Churchill's wartime government was equally unready to engage in condemnation. From the outbreak of war to the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, it was in the national interest, the British government believed, to win the support of the Soviet Union in the struggle against Nazi Germany. Although the British were determined to help the Poles as much as possible within the terms of the Anglo-Polish agreement, they felt that condemnation of Sovietisation in Poland would be counter-productive, would obstruct the achievement of British war aims, and wouldn't help the Poles. The British government found it easy to maintain this position when evidence about Soviet behaviour was either incomplete or misleading. In November, 1939 the historian Lewis Namier, an adviser to Sikorski, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, told R.A. Butler, then a junior minister in the Foreign Office, that conditions in Soviet-occupied Poland were relatively tolerable and that oppression was limited to a quite small number of people, mainly landowners, officials and priests. By contrast, conditions in the Nazi occupation were 'downright appalling', even leaving out the 'agony of the Jews'. Along with other similar evidence, this made it impossible for the British government to equate Nazi and Soviet methods in their respective occupation zones.[1]

When, in the Summer of 1940, the evidence of Soviet brutality in Eastern Poland became impossible to ignore, the British had to choose between condemning Soviet actions unreservedly or continuing to follow the existing policy of seeking closer relations with the Soviet Union. An indignant Foreign Office official recommended a press campaign 'to show up the state of affairs in Soviet-occupied Poland and to denounce in particular the deportations'. He was quickly reminded by his colleague, Frank Roberts, that the bases of British policy were national interest and the protection of the rights of the Allies. Public opinion would not tolerate an indictment of the Soviet Union, which remained a *potential* ally. Consequently, full publicity was not given in the British media to what was happening in the Soviet sphere of Poland, and British public opinion remained relatively ill-informed.[2]

But even inside the Sikorski government itself, there were voices, including Sikorski's own, urging *rapprochement* with the Soviet Union as a means of reconstituting the Polish state at the expense of Germany. It was much harder to argue this case after the early Summer of 1940, when evidence was forthcoming of widespread Soviet oppression. By then the Polish Ambassador in Washington, Jan Ciechanowski, was claiming that conditions in Soviet-occupied Poland were considerably

worse than in the German sphere, and more and more comparisons were being made between the methods of the NKVD and the Gestapo.[3] Informed observers found it increasingly difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Soviet Union was engaged in the same kind of brutal and inhuman activities for which the Nazis had been condemned in Western public opinion. It was impossible to avoid it after the submission in May 1941 of a comprehensive report on Soviet occupation policy in Poland by the Polish Foreign Minister, August Zaleski, to his British counterpart, Anthony Eden. This drew the measured conclusion that the two totalitarian states were equally in violation of the most basic rules of law in their treatment of the population of their respective areas of occupation.[4] Shostakovich confirmed this to Solomon Volkov when he said 'Hitler is a criminal, that's clear, but so is Stalin. I feel eternal pain for those who were killed by Hitler, but I feel no less pain for those who were killed on Stalin's orders … There were millions of them in our country before the war with Hitler began'. Stalinist methods were exported to Eastern Poland after the occupation with the result, as Jan Gross testifies, that 'Life was more dangerous in many respects under the Soviets than under the Nazis'.[5]

What were the main features of the Soviet occupation which gave rise to this condemnation? As we saw earlier Eliot summed up Soviet policy, Sovietisation, as the destruction of a culture or pattern of life and its replacement by another pattern. Accordingly, institutions were demolished and people were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, shot or deported, in order to break the power of the preceding 'bourgeois' society. In their place came Soviet Russian systems of government, economy and society, and loyal Soviet citizens to run them, replacing the government personnel of the former regime. The term 'replacement' in connection with personnel is of course a euphemism, since most of the Polish and Baltic officials and prominent persons were imprisoned, murdered or deported, in Sovietspeak, eliminated. Let us look in more detail at the twin processes of destruction and construction, in part through the recollections of exiles who lived through these events. Very shortly after the Soviet occupations took place the NKVD, the secret police predecessor of the KGB, began the process of arresting those whom it called variously, 'enemies of the people', 'counter-revolutionaries' or 'socially undesirable elements'.

Within a few days, and in accordance with previously drawn-up lists, anyone engaged in official activities in the former Polish republic was arrested. This category included MPs, civil servants, ministers, army officers, judges, prosecuting lawyers, police officers, mayors and town

councillors, and representatives of political parties and trade unions. Residents of the city of Lwów in south-east Poland observed that all the leading personalities of the city were arrested immediately and replaced in government offices by Russians. General Anders remembered that all retired military officers living in the city were also arrested. In addition, many other prominent figures in Polish life, such as large landowners and proprietors of big commercial and manufacturing enterprises, were apprehended. Public service was construed by the Soviets as a crime against the interests of 'the working masses' and the international revolution. The lists of enemies of the people were comprehensive, containing 29 different categories. These lists had been prepared in advance, though other names were probably added by local informers. The arrests of the leading figures may have had another motive, namely to ensure that they could not exert influence in the October plebiscites to determine whether the two occupied areas of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia should join the Soviet Union.

Arrests almost always took place at night. Some of those arrested were shot immediately in prison. After the initial flurry of arrests, the pace of detention steadied, in each of the Baltic states at around 200 to 300 per month. Those arrested were often the victims of informers who denounced them to the authorities, sometimes for personal advantage, sometimes out of malevolence, or sometimes through blackmail by the secret police. Other arrests took place at the frontiers when people trying to cross illegally were captured by border guards. Those attempting to leave were accused of anti-Soviet activity. Incomers, in comparison, were assumed to be German spies and subjected to severe interrogation. A refusal to confess might mean a transfer to the Lubianka prison in Moscow for further inquisition.[6]

The accused were customarily sentenced by special courts whose proceedings were secret. They were refused defence counsel and the right to call witnesses on their behalf. The verdict of the court was usually determined by the 'confession' of the accused which was extracted by hard interrogation, blackmail or torture. Deportation to a forced labour camp was the habitual sentence, normally for a minimum of eight years:

> After a number of days we were taken out to the court, a room in the prison. There were a number of officers, all of them asking questions. Then 'X, you are sentenced to eight years in labour camps. Proceed. Sign this'.
>
> 'No, I will not sign this. First of all you must tell me on what grounds you are sentencing me? On what grounds are you prosecuting

> me? I am not a Russian citizen and only the Polish government can take me to court and sentence me'
>
> The judge said to me 'If you cannot see your ear without a mirror, you cannot see Poland any more'. I was so angry I had to retaliate. 'What is past we know. What is present, not everybody knows, but about the future nobody knows, not you, not me, only God'. I told him this with a very strong voice though I thought this was probably the last moment of my life. I could say anything and I wasn't afraid. I was angry, indignant, reckless. After this he was stunned, I could see that. But, again 'Sign'. I could see it was hopeless. I said I'd sign but my signature was worthless.[7]

Others were luckier:

> I was at grammar school and I was once arrested by the NKVD who interrogated me to see if I had heard my parents talking about anything. It was Latvians who interrogated me, though there was a Russian in charge. The Latvian said 'He is bad, without a doubt', but when the Russian came in he said I was too small and I could go, so on that occasion it was a Russian who saved me.

This incident illustrates very well one aspect of the arrests, the attempt to find out about a family's beliefs or behaviour from their children, and in many cases to turn the children into informers on their families and their local communities. This young person was lucky; others were imprisoned, deprived of food and sometimes tortured to force out of them information about their friends and families.

Another person who eventually proved to be lucky was arrested in Lwów because he was a member of a well-to-do business family. He was interrogated by an NKVD officer who established that he was quite wealthy and spoke German reasonably well. The interrogator then suggested that he should go to Berlin as a spy. He refused, excusing himself on the ground that he was not suitable for such work. Another attempt was made to persuade him, again he refused. He thought his end had come. But he was released, maybe because the interrogator was persuaded that he would be incompetent in the role assigned to him. But perhaps more significantly, as he later explained, he had never been actively engaged in politics, had always shown sympathy for the political Left, and had enjoyed good relations with Jewish and Ukrainian neighbours.[8]

Many of the arrested simply disappeared and could not be tracked down. It was assumed they had been deported to Russia without records or had simply been killed in prison. The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia reported that the names were known of 5976 prisoners in the Baltic states who were transported to Russia and there were 1100 other names recorded as vanishing without trace. The bodies of some of them were discovered in prisons after the Soviet withdrawal in June and July 1941:

> A few people disappeared, first they were there, and then they weren't, and no one knew where they went. Some of the 'disappeared' were policemen who were first of all dismissed and then presumably arrested. Many older officers who had fought in the war of independence also went.
>
> We were aware of what the Soviets were up to because people started disappearing. We lost one of my school mates. He was a bit older than me. To this day we do not know what happened to him or even why because he was a very quiet unassuming person. He never opened his mouth to say anything. There was no pattern. People who were arrested and were lucky enough to survive were never told why they were arrested.

In Zaleski's words, 'a wave of excess' rolled across the region, carrying before it tens of thousands of victims, more than a million if you include deportees.[9]

Murders carried out by the security forces and their accomplices, the militia units, were commonplace. The victims of summary execution were, above all, representatives of Polish authority. Zaleski mentioned in particular members of the judiciary, barristers and civil servants while, according to Malanowski, the main targets were Polish landowners, political and social activists, and priests. There was a surge of assassinations shortly after the Soviet forces entered Poland. In Polesie, 150 officers were shot, the rest were arrested. In Rohatyn and Grodno everyone arrested was shot and a heap of corpses lay in the squares. Murders also took place when PoWs were force marched to transit camps. Anyone unable to keep up through weakness, wounds or age was shot by the escorting guards. Similarly, on the eve of the Nazi attack in June 1941, owing to a shortage of transport, prisoners were marched East at great pace in so-called 'death marches'. Those who could not keep up or who tried to escape were shot or bayoneted. But even before

this, those who were too ill or weak to set off were shot. Around 7000 to 8000 prisoners in Lwów were despatched in this way.

The same thing happened in the north-east part of the Soviet zone. Prisoners were assembled in prison courtyards and killed by machine gun fire. In the Baltic states the bodies of many prisoners were found in prison yards, in cellars and in mass graves after the Russians withdrew. Many of them, as photographs testify, had been subjected to hideous violence and torture. Former government ministers who had been imprisoned until that time were shot before the Soviets left. For example, in Estonia Otto Sternberg was shot in Tallinn on 23 June 1941, a week later Ado Anderkop and Aleksander Tonisson met the same fate, and former Head of State Friedrich Akkel was shot on 3 July. Calculations vary slightly but there seems to be broad agreement that the number of bodies found was as follows: in Estonia, 2185, in Latvia, 1355 (the Latvian Red Cross estimated 1488) and in Lithuania 1400. Szawlowski rightly refers to these acts as war crimes which would have fallen within the criteria set out by the Charter of the International Military Tribunal of 8 August 1945, which provided the basis for the prosecutions at the Nuremberg Tribunal in September 1946.[10]

Our Baltic interviewees observed some of these events. When the Russians were withdrawing in June/July 1941 one man who had just escaped conscription returned to his home and found that:

> My grandmother had been killed, shot in my uncle's farm. Shot in the farmyard, the Russians did it for no reason. She was 92. We found a man we got to know; he too had been shot but had escaped with a wound. When we were waiting to come through the front line in our village, nine men were shot by these special troops, who then left.[11]

Another account tells how a friend of the family, a forester, was mutilated and killed in early June 1941. 'Somebody who had a grudge against him informed on him to an NKVD man and that was enough. He disappeared and was discovered after the Russians left, mutilated and shot.'[12]

> There were two teachers, a man and a woman, an exile recalled. 'This was when the Russians were retreating. They stole the teachers' horse. One of the teachers had a pistol and threatened the Russian. The horse came to a halt and the Russian got off. The teachers ran into the school and barricaded themselves in. The Russians set fire to the school and when the teachers came out they shot them.[13]

The experience of prisons is indelibly etched in the minds of those who suffered this fate. There were too many prisoners for the available prison accommodation, so prison quarters had to be improvised from any buildings, however unsuitable, that could be taken over. Even then there was gross overcrowding. Prisons were crammed with people with a hundred or more persons being put in cells designed for ten or twelve. Piesakowski reports that a prison in Bialystok in Poland designed for 1500 prisoners held 8000 in 1940. In Drohobycz up to 20 people were crammed into single cells. As Michael Krupa recalls:

> Our collection point ... turned out to be a disused stable at the side of the railway track. The windows had been boarded up so that only the occasional gleams of sunlight penetrated the room. The floor was of bare cobble stones ... We were ordered into three stalls, ten or more prisoners being squeezed into a stall big enough for one horse. This was to be our home for as long as it took the other prisoners to arrive.[14]

But, as Krupa implicitly admits, this was superior accommodation to the filthy cellar in which he had previously been confined. Although prison overcrowding was partly the result of too many arrests, it was also integral to Soviet penal policy which was to humiliate the prisoners by stripping them of all dignity and self-respect. There was a steep learning curve to the point where they recognised that they were worthless individuals in the eyes of their tormentors, that their previous position and status counted for nothing, they could expect no help from outside, and were completely in the power of the NKVD. When their resistance had been broken they would be ready to confess to crimes under the Soviet criminal code which they had not committed.

The first part of this process was to soften up the prisoners by creating almost unbearable conditions in the prison cells. Adding to the misery of overcrowding, sanitary arrangements were primitive, and the all-pervasive stink of excrement and urine was something all prisoners remembered vividly. Food was in extremely short supply, in fact at starvation levels, and consisted of one small portion of bread a day, perhaps supplemented by watery soup, sometimes by a herring. This could not satisfy the prisoners' 'animal sensation of hunger'. There was a lack of water for drinking and washing. Depending on the season the cells would either be freezing cold or insufferably hot and stuffy. There was usually very little light or fresh air in the daytime, but at night the lights would be switched on to deprive the prisoners of sleep. From

time to time prisoners would be removed for lengthy and sometimes brutal interrogations featuring every kind of mental torture, including threats to family and friends. In their weakened and confused state prisoners could often not resist long the demands for self-incrimination. Their most frequent 'crime' was membership of a social group or an occupational category defined as anti-Soviet.[15] From a Communist perspective these people would indeed be the most inveterate opponents of the new regime, if they remained at liberty.

If degradation was the mark of the imprisoned, a deep permanent fear and anxiety was characteristic of the population outside. This apprehension began shortly after the occupation. The Bolsheviks proclaimed the takeover of Poland an act of class justice and national liberation. Class justice, in Soviet terms, meant removing the power of the Polish landowners and bourgeoisie over 'the toiling masses of peasants and workers', and national liberation involved the freeing of oppressed ethnic minorities such as the Ukrainians, the Byelorussians and the Jews, from the alleged tyranny of the dominant Poles. Nationality was set against nationality. From the very beginning of the occupation ethnic Ukrainians were encouraged by the Soviets to rob and loot the property of Polish farmers and landowners and to divide up their land among themselves. Mobs inflicted brutal and sometimes murderous treatment on the Poles and spread fear among potential victims. There was deep resentment among the minorities at Polish government policy in the region between the wars, and there was a well of suspicion and even hatred directed at local Polish settlers. The Polish defeat released, in the words of Irena and Jan Gross 'the destructive force of long-downtrodden pride and repeatedly injured sensibilities'. Krystyna Kawecka described how people from neighbouring villages went to her grandparents' farm and helped themselves to the livestock, farm tools and all the equipment, as well as the fields around the farm, which they divided among themselves. The situation was made worse because many of those who stole and looted were well known to their victims, sometimes neighbouring small farmers, sometimes farm hands, bricklayers, joiners and general craftsmen.[16]

On the other hand, not all testimony points in this direction. In Lwów, for example, some Polish interviewees had good experiences with the minorities. It was true that Ukrainians and Jews joined the militia, but this Polish family was not aware of pilfering of houses or taking over property by gangs of Ukrainians. Nor did they find that Ukrainian or Jewish neighbours became remote or suspicious. Further east, a Polish farmer was driven off his farm by Russians, but was protected in his escape by Ukrainian farmers.[17]

The situation was not dissimilar in the Baltic states. There the appeal from the Soviets emphasised class justice:

> In the summer of 1940 I was still working on my father's farm. But then in June the Soviet army took over the whole country and the occupation began. Some Estonians who had been living in the Soviet Union for years came in with the additional troops and started to agitate our people. Their message appealed to those Estonians who were not so well off; they were led to believe that the Russians were their friends and certainly they promised that the big farms like my father's would be taken away and divided between people who wanted them. This was what many of our farm workers had been waiting for, to get a piece of land of their own and they even put new posts up to show which land belonged to whom. They took my father's farm, only the farm building and the garden and perhaps one quarter of the farm land was left, the rest was confiscated and given to whoever wanted it. They even started to give new farmers building materials from the forest to build their houses. The occupation had a great effect on my father's farm and the way we lived.[18]

The Soviet authorities enlisted the support of the national minorities in the form of citizens' committees and militias, some of which had been established spontaneously before the Red Army arrived. The militias were employed to maintain order and to ferret out 'counter-revolutionaries'. They acted, in essence, as a form of police, assisting in the round-ups of anti-Soviet elements and in carrying out deportations. Most Polish and Baltic accounts stress that members of the militia generally came from the lowest and poorest classes of society, including criminals released from prison to join the new forces of law and order.

> The Russians gave orders to local people, committees, local government. Local communists were appointed to positions of authority. In my mother's shop was a woman I knew personally. She could hardly write but she was in charge. A large proportion of them were poorer people. A lot came out of prison. They were not political prisoners. But they were given positions.[19]

The Soviets believed, correctly, that these people would be strongly motivated to implement the policies of the new regime, having much to gain from them, if only in the short term.[20]

One factor which had important repercussions for future ethnic relations was the role played by some members of the Jewish minority. As we saw in the previous chapter, many younger Jews greeted the Soviets warmly, and were recruited into police, Party and administrative positions where they helped to identify and apprehend the so-called 'enemies of the people'. Although many of the better-off Jews fell into that category themselves, and many were arrested and deported, it was the young Jewish enthusiasts for Soviet rule who achieved notoriety in the memories of the Poles and Balts for their denunciations of numerous individuals, and for their part in organising arrests and deportations. These acts inevitably increased anti-Semitic feelings among ethnic Poles and Balts, and, as noted earlier, drove some of them to participate in pogroms when the Soviets left in 1941 and to co-operate with the Nazis in the Holocaust during the subsequent German occupation.

Also adding to the all-pervading fear among the Polish and Baltic populations was the regular disappearance of family members, friends and neighbours, without explanation and without warning. Sometimes these arrests did not appear to conform to a specific and rational pattern but seemed quite arbitrary, which added to people's demoralisation. Moreover, they could have a devastating effect on families, since parents, usually fathers, disappeared, leaving their families unprovided for. Without news of them and not knowing whether they were alive or dead, their wives and children feared that they themselves would be the next to be arrested. Furthermore, the disappearance of the father very often meant that mothers who had no profession or job outside the home were forced to take on low-paid work or to sell their possessions to support their families.

This produced a deep sense of insecurity, compounding the loss of status resulting from the arrest or disappearance of the male head of the family. Sometimes women whose husbands had been arrested were prevailed on to become informers, fearing that their interrogators would carry out their threats to make life difficult for their imprisoned menfolk. Informing on others may not have generated masses of useful information but it heightened suspicion and aroused distrust among the population.

> The year of the Russian occupation was horrible. You couldn't speak to another person without knowing if they would inform on you. In the workplace they would take something and then say you had stolen it and they would threaten to take you to court and have you sent to Siberia unless you informed on your friends. There were all

> kinds of incidents like that and they put fear into people and in the end you couldn't even speak to some of your family. There was a young communist who denounced his father and the NKVD came and took his father away. In the end we were always looking over our shoulders.[21]

The strain was increased by the repeated forcible intrusions into private homes to check documents, usually at night. Worst of all was the stress occasioned by the fear of arrest and deportation, and the worry about one's children's welfare, health and education should you be taken away from them. For many this produced a deep sense of helplessness in the face of overwhelming power. In these extremely trying circumstances people became suspicious of everyone, even neighbours and friends of long standing. Caution and reticence in conversations was the norm, and children were urged not to talk about their families outside the home for fear of revealing information which could be used against their parents. As we have seen, this was no groundless apprehension.[22]

The disorientation and terror generated by the imprisonment and disappearance of thousands of people was compounded by the economic policy of the new regime. The first step was the destruction of the existing system of private property and the redistribution of assets, either to the new state authorities or, temporarily, to some of the poorer elements in society. Second, the policy resulted in the rapid decline of the standard of living of most of the population. This dramatic fall resulted in part from the incompetent economic management of the new governments, but partly from the deliberate intention to reduce prosperity to the level of the Soviet Union so as to conceal the inferiority of the Soviet system. The descent into poverty also enabled the regime to shape the population more easily to the demands of Sovietisation, by removing the resources which might be employed in resistance, and by further demoralising the subject population. A good example of the imposition of an alien pattern was the reported deterioration of the urban environment. Streets became dirty and unswept, piles of refuse lay around on the footpaths, trees were felled or damaged, lawns ruined.[23]

Owners of property, whether of private houses or the means of production, suffered most from the occupation. There was plunder on the grand scale leading, as was intended, to the reduction of Polish and Baltic standards of living to Soviet levels and to the destruction of the property-owning classes. Property was simply confiscated. Most of it went to pay the expenses of the Red Army units, the new police forces and the bureaucracy, and the rest was transported to Russia. Many

factories had their machinery removed and shipped off to equip Soviet factories further east. The same was true of raw materials and merchandise. The effect of other economic policies such as the devaluation of the Polish currency, the złoty, was to create enormous demand for goods in the shops, mainly from Soviet soldiers, with the result that the shelves were totally cleared. Replacing sold stock became extremely difficult since takings were appropriated and became unavailable for re-investment. It was reported that 6500 out of 8500 shops in Lwów closed when they ran out of goods for sale.

> When the Soviet troops came in they could exchange their wages into Latvian money at an exchange rate of 1 to 1. So, for example, a lieutenant might get 1200 roubles a month. He received 1200 lats in our money, which was quite a lot in those times, so the Russians practically emptied all the shops. They weren't just buying one pair or things they needed. They would buy from wall to wall.[24]

As well as shortages of manufactured goods and fuel, supplies of foodstuffs to the towns were also reduced since peasants were unwilling to bring food to market unless there were goods to be had in exchange. This prompted the contemporary British comment that the 'transfer to occupied Poland of the most important achievements of the Soviet system has been brilliantly successful'.[25]

Houses were taken over in whole or in part for the housing needs of the Soviet administration. In Latvia and Estonia all houses whose useful floor space exceeded 170 square metres were nationalised, the former owners being evicted or required to live in a small section of their old homes. The contents of their homes were inherited by the new residents since the former owners, if required to move out altogether, were permitted to take with them only items for their personal use.[26]

> During the Soviet occupation we lived in a former school building which had been partly converted into flats but soon after we went there it was taken over by the Red Army and we had to leave. We found a flat in the very old part of town. The houses were cold stone houses and the city centre area was occupied mainly by Russian generals and colonels. So we got a very spacious flat very cheaply, but at the same time, because each person was entitled to nine square metres of floor space, very soon we had to take people in. We then shared the flat with two grammar school teachers and one very large Russian family, from the east side of the river in Estonia.[27]

Another effect of the devaluation of the złoty was the dramatic reduction in the value of savings. At the same time some factory workers lost their jobs after the removal of equipment from the factories, while those remaining in work experienced reductions in pay which was now linked to the achievement of newly established quotas. The productive capacity and efficiency of factories, banks, insurance companies and wholesale traders was further impaired by the nationalisation of these enterprises. The rule of thumb for nationalisation was that firms employing ten or more workers (though it could be fewer) were brought under public control. The former owners were expropriated without compensation but were compelled to stay on in their former positions until the company's books had been audited. They would then be required to pay the outstanding debts of their companies. Moreover, their personal bank accounts were frozen and in 1941 nationalised, except for 1000 roubles, which they were permitted to draw on to a maximum of 100 roubles per month. All valuables held in bank safes were also expropriated by the state. Replacement of former owners and managers by inexperienced and inexpert Communist trusties led to the introduction of the usual forms of Communist personnel management combining terror, high piecework quotas, the use of informers and political indoctrination. Trade unions were abolished and workers lost many of their former rights and benefits. The incompetence of these commissars hastened the decline of output in the enterprises under their direction.[28]

An exile remembered the transition from private to state ownership:

> Every business that employed more than five people was nationalised. If the owner was very good and if someone put in a good word for him then he was allowed to work there but more often than not he was kicked out. A lot of people came in to manage those businesses who had no business knowledge at all. A lot of Russian people came as well to manage those businesses.[29]

In countries with millions of peasant holdings, Soviet agricultural policy was of prime importance. In the immediate aftermath of the occupation smaller peasant farmers benefited, up to a point, from the redistribution of land. The general rule was that larger farms were permitted to keep only about 30 hectares of land, and the rest was redistributed among smaller holdings. In Lithuania some 75 000 smallholders or landless agricultural workers received small allocations from the land pool, too small in fact to support a family, as was admitted. The loss of land by the larger farms reduced the supply of fodder for existing

herds with the result that two to three times the usual number of cattle were slaughtered in the Winter of 1940–41. However, long-term Soviet policy was to collectivise agriculture, so land held privately in the interim remained in what was called perpetual tenure, meaning that it could not be bought or sold. Agricultural produce was extracted from the peasants by heavy taxation in kind. The medium and larger farms were subjected to a requisitioning regime under which 30–50 per cent of produce was delivered to the state at about one-sixth of the market price. But the overall availability of food declined, in the Soviet zone of Poland at least, since peasants were less willing to market their produce owing to the shortage of manufactured goods for exchange.[30]

The new masters of Eastern Poland and the Baltic states identified the churches as likely to be the most fervent opponents of the Soviet regimes. Through their influence over the believers, and as a symbol, at least in Poland, of national identity they had great power to resist the process of Sovietisation. Inevitably, therefore, the churches and other religious establishments became primary targets of the Stalinists. A report in March 1940 from the Orthodox Archbishop of Grodno showed that several priests had been assassinated on the order of the Communists, and superiors of monasteries were arrested and deported. But, generally, instead of mass executions of priests, as in the German-occupied area, the economic foundations of the churches were undermined and pastors were removed from their parishes. To this end many churches, monasteries and convents were closed, and the buildings often converted for other uses such as cinemas or museums of atheism. Enormous taxes were imposed on church properties, which many could not pay, and as a result their buildings were confiscated. Seminaries which trained the next generation of priests, and schools run by religious orders, were shut down. All told, in Soviet-controlled Poland some 4000 churches of all denominations were closed or destroyed. Some priests were arrested, some beaten and murdered. But far more were simply expelled from their parishes and deported to labour camps in northern Russia or Siberia.[31]

But for the Soviets, persecution of religion was not sufficient to break the ties of belief which continued to resist the imposition of Soviet ideology. Consequently, the authorities created the so-called League of the Godless in 1940 to propagandise for atheism. Receiving a government grant of 3 million roubles, its function was to publicise atheistic ideas in the press and radio and to appoint special commissioners to prevent religious teaching in schools and to promote atheism. The responsibility of the Church for the registration of births, marriages and deaths

was removed and religious marriage ceased to have validity after May 1940. In all these ways the familiar world of faith was undermined and a new model of secular belief imposed. The weakening of these bastions of Polish and Baltic life inevitably lowered the collective morale of the populations of these areas.[32]

The weakening of Polish identity was also attempted through a process of educational and cultural transformation. The key to success here, it was believed, was the conversion of youth to Communist ideas. In this respect there was a critical role to be played by schools and universities. The first step was a radical reform of the curriculum to reflect Soviet priorities. As we have seen, religious teaching was ended and theological faculties in universities, as well as a number of arts faculties, were abolished. Humanities subjects, such as History, Geography, Law and Literature which reflected a non-Communist world view, had to conform to Marxist–Leninist interpretations. In Poland children were compelled to learn Russian as well as either Ukrainian or Byelorussian, and instruction in Polish was increasingly limited. Where it remained the language of instruction, its study was restricted to a maximum number of hours in the week. In many secondary and primary schools teachers were replaced by Soviet teachers or not replaced at all. Similarly, Polish textbooks were withdrawn, sometimes being replaced by Soviet texts, but sometimes not, since there were insufficient to go round. Soviet political doctrine was taught and pedagogical commissars were attached to schools to ensure that Soviet educational policy was carried out. It appears that the level of education fell as a result of these changes but this was of secondary importance to the new rulers whose priority in the first instance was indoctrination.[33]

> Life in school changed. We didn't learn any more about our history, we didn't learn about capitalist countries because we had to learn all about Russia. In Geography and History virtually all the facts were wrong, according to our knowledge. We knew about our War of Independence, but now it was all turned upside down. They didn't bring in Russian or Soviet teachers. Some of our teachers left, maybe they had to leave or left of their own accord. Anyway, some new ones came. They had to teach us as the Russians saw fit. The Russians brought in textbooks. The language remained Estonian but we had to learn Russian from the beginning. There was a lot of anti-religious propaganda in the schools. It was against the law to celebrate Christmas. We didn't have a Christmas holiday.[34]

A slightly different perspective on the school experience is given in the following extract:

> One or two new teachers came to the school. Russian became a compulsory subject and our Russian teacher was an ethnic Estonian from Russia. We went to school and had fun there. We did not learn at all. The headmaster himself used to teach us the history of the Soviet Communist Party. Without saying anything he made it very clear to us his anti-Bolshevik attitude, but he survived the Soviet occupation and the German occupation.[35]

More radical changes seemed to take place in another Estonian school:

> The school altered drastically. Our headmaster was transferred perhaps because he was very straight, outspoken even. Our school had a very good reputation and a very good educational standard. Now Russian became the first foreign language. We were still taught in Estonian, but Russian was first, English the second and German the third. We had to spend two periods a week learning and discussing the shortened version of the Party constitution. We had to start history again from a different perspective. I think the world started with the French Revolution. Prefects ceased to exist and were replaced by committees of three.[36]

Though the new authorities made education a priority, they pursued Sovietisation in the wider world too. Re-education was not confined to schools or universities. Poles had to get used to Russian being the official language in government offices and other public places and to seeing the Polish national colours of red and white, and Polish emblems such as the white eagle, replaced by Soviet symbols. Cultural centres such as theatres and literary associations were kept open but came under the supervision of the state authorities. The crucial functions of broadcasting, the press and publishing were taken over by the state as well, so that all areas of cultural diffusion came under the control of Soviet organs. Conscription of large numbers of young men into the Red Army in violation of the Geneva Convention, both facilitated the Sovietisation of young men and at the same time deprived civilian society of a potentially vigorous element of underground resistance. In all, about 150 000 young men were called up and sent to units in the interior of the Soviet Union. In addition, women who had attended courses in First Aid and nursing were forced to register to become auxiliary nursing personnel in the Red Army.[37]

Occasionally, it is gratifying to note, the all-embracing control of the totalitarian system broke down as the following extract shows. The narrator was conscripted into the Soviet army just as the Nazis attacked Estonia, in July 1941:

> We messed about for several days and were then put on a train in the evening. But the line was cut off. So we were just kicking our heels, doing nothing, no supplies and no food. At one time my friend and I decided to get out of it altogether and we got on a train but we didn't like the look of one or two of the people on this train, so we jumped off again. On the third or fourth day the train came to take us. If it hadn't been so filthy I might have liked the journey but it was absolutely filthy. We only stayed on it for a minute. I got on, put my gear on the floor, and thought I'm not stopping here. So we decided to jump off as soon as we could. In fact when the train set off from the station, we jumped. It wasn't going very fast. Some people said we were shot at but though there were guards on the top of the train I don't think they shot. We rolled down the banking and got under cover of the wood as soon as we could. We were advised by local people to keep off the roads so we lived for two weeks in open country, in the woods or the meadows. Of my school friends, many went into labour camps where the casualty rate was over 40%. Those who survived were recruited into the Red Army. One of my friends was playing cards in the railway truck. When I said, let's go, he said, hang on a minute. Unfortunately he died later. I had the opportunity and I took it and I didn't think any further.[38]

This man no doubt shared the view of a young contemporary of his who abhorred the Soviet occupation and looked forward to the arrival of the Nazis in Estonia in July 1941. Why this preference?

> My feelings about the Germans arriving in Estonia were, the sooner the better. It was very painful to have the Soviets occupying Estonia. Personally the hardest thing was to read the lies in the papers every day, to see how the teachers suffered at school having to say something, repeat it day after day, which they didn't believe. Having to lie yourself when you were not at home. I found it very difficult. We did not know quite as much about the Germans.[39]

But even after more than three years of German occupation, those Balts who could leave with the retreating German forces before the Soviets

resumed control in 1944 did so. It seemed that for them the experience of the first period of Soviet rule, 1940–41, was so traumatic that it was impossible to think of enduring it a second time. The key events in that period for the Balts were the mass deportations, which took place right at the end of the Soviet occupation in June 1941, and the contemporaneous prison massacres and tortures, which showed the unmistakable character of the Soviet regime. Moreover, it was correctly assumed that, had they not been interrupted, the Soviets would have deported far greater numbers. Those who escaped this fate the first time believed they would not do so again if the Soviets got a second chance. Soviet actions during the second occupation from 1944 onwards proved that the Balts' fears were justified. Those who came to Britain almost invariably experienced both occupations and could compare them. The experience of the Poles from Eastern Poland was different. Their arrival in Britain was a direct result of their being deported to the Soviet Union during the Soviet occupation. Their unexpected release and ultimate settlement in Britain meant that they did not experience both forms of occupation. In their turn, most Poles from western Poland who lived through the Nazi period or who were deported to Germany before arriving in Britain, had no experience of Soviet rule, and therefore no basis for comparison.

It follows that if we rely exclusively on interviews to compare the occupations we shall depend on the testimony of the Baltic people who lived through both forms of totalitarian rule. The fact that many tens of thousands of Balts left their countries for fear of their lives before the Soviets took over again in 1944 is not in itself proof that the Soviet occupation was more terrible than the Nazi. After all, far more Balts remained in their countries than left. On the other hand, perhaps those who stayed believed that the Soviets would be forced to withdraw by their western allies at the end of the war, and therefore gambled on the Soviet occupation being short-lived. Possibly, too, they came from less vulnerable social and economic categories than those who escaped, and believed they would not risk imprisonment or deportation if they remained behind. Like the self-exiled Balts, many thousands of Poles and even some Jews too, who found themselves stranded in Soviet-controlled Eastern Poland in the Autumn of 1939, applied to be re-patriated to the German zone of occupation. Their decision, though made out of hatred of the Soviet regime, was probably ill-informed since they had very little direct knowledge of the Nazi occupation. In this connection Gustav Herling, who was imprisoned in a Soviet labour camp, wrote that it was 'a measure of the bestiality and despair to which the new system of

slavery reduces its victims that not only the thousands of simple Russians, Ukrainians etc. for whom the Germans were the natural ally in their struggle against the hated labour camps but also almost without exception all European and Russian Communists, worldly, educated and experienced men, waited from day to day with impatience and excitement the coming of Nazi liberators'.[40]

If we concede that the desire to leave the Soviet occupation areas is not in itself a reason to conclude that the Soviet tyranny was more severe than the Nazi, nonetheless it is probable that many more Balts would have escaped West if they had had the opportunity. Some were caught up in the fighting and were unable to leave their home areas, and the number of places on the ships and trains carrying the exiles westwards was severely limited. Moreover, many of those who stayed felt themselves too old, or too rooted, to leave their homes, and were prepared to endure the return of the Soviets rather than go into exile. Perhaps the most telling evidence was the creation of underground resistance movements in each of the Baltic states (and in Poland too) which fought the occupiers with resourcefulness and courage for half a decade after the war. Their survival as a fighting force, hiding in the forests by day and carrying out guerrilla warfare at night, was attributable not only to their own loathing of the Soviets and to their determination and courage, but also to the widespread support they received from the urban and rural populations of these states. The hatred and fear of the Soviet occupier, we might conclude, was as strong among those who remained behind as among the exiles, and perhaps only practicalities prevented their leaving.

A firmer, less supposititious comparison, however, depends on other evidence from a variety of sources. It is important, first, that we compare like with like. It is invalid simply to enumerate the numbers arrested, deported, resettled, killed, imprisoned or sent to forced labour in each of the occupied zones, unless the comparison is for a similar period of time. The first Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland lasted only two years, the Nazi occupation of western Poland five years. The first Soviet occupation of the Baltic states lasted only one year, the Nazi three years. If we compare similar time periods, the number of victims from the ethnic Polish and Baltic communities during each of the occupations was at least as great, and probably greater, under the Soviets as under the Nazis.

The methodology of the two regimes also showed a marked similarity. Arbitrary arrests, torture, shootings, seizures of property, cultural oppression and, above all, massive displacement of populations, were

common to both. The techniques of the NKVD and the Gestapo in carrying out deportations bore strong comparison, as we shall see in the next chapter. If we are measuring human misery, it is arguable that the lot of the Soviet deportees was harsher owing to the vast distances they had to travel en route to Siberia, Arctic European Russia and Soviet Central Asia, and the extreme climatic conditions to which they were subject, both during their transportation and after their arrival.

Those who, in the end, find the Nazi terror more loathsome, advance three main points. First, the Nazis were racists who labelled Slavs, Balts and Jews as inferior, unregenerate and contemptible peoples whose destiny was extermination or slavery. The Soviets, by contrast, 'did not permanently stigmatise the local population as a group of outcasts'.[41] This contention carries some weight. Second, Soviet behaviour was less heinous because it was simply reducing Poland and the Baltics to the level of the Soviet Union. Similarly, the Soviets could claim, with a modicum of justification, that they were not exploiting the Poles, but actually liberating them from the oppression and backwardness of their former rulers, modernising their economies, and freeing the working class from the dominance of class enemies and counter-revolutionaries. To do this required harsh and brutal methods, but at least the objective was economic progress and equality not, as in the Nazi case, a reduction of the population to a permanent condition of slavery. Russia and her satellites, as Ian MacDonald observed, marched under a progressive banner, 'and forward-looking intellectuals are prepared to make endless allowances for anyone claiming to be walking their way'. Solzhenitsyn bitterly noted that the land of Socialism 'can be forgiven for atrocities immeasurably greater than those of Hitler, for its victims are offered up on a resplendent altar'. The force of the Soviet argument depends on whether the stated end of economic and social improvement, assuming it to be genuine, justified the appalling means which were used to effect it.

Third, the Nazi terror seemed particularly repulsive owing to its un-European nature, appearing to lack the scruples entertained by European states over the previous century at least. It was uncivilised and barbaric. By contrast, the Soviets were *expected* to be uncivilised – their behaviour was a reflection of Asiatic primitivism – and therefore it was quite illegitimate to measure them against the best European standards.[42] From the perspective of the victims, however, cruelty and persecution felt much the same whether conducted by so-called civilised Europeans or primitive Asiatics.

One Lithuanian commentator, writing in the middle of the Nazi occupation of his country (which in itself says something about the loopholes

in Nazi control) reached the judicious and compelling conclusion that the Germans and Russians were

> as inseparable as the Siamese twins. The Russians might be using more unpolished policy, which is more characteristic of the East, while the Germans might be executing their dirty work in a more subtle, more intelligent way … But even this difference is fading out … All means are equally good to both the Germans and the Russians as long as they lead to the achievement of their purpose which is to incorporate Lithuania … into Russia or Germany, as the case may be. The Russians as well as the Germans are of the opinion that this can be accomplished only when Lithuania is inhabited either by Russians or Germans, but not by Lithuanians.[43]

The key to achieving this outcome was forcible population movement to the East. The Soviets intended to move hundreds of thousands of Balts to the interior of Russia if they regained control of the countries, the Nazis to expel them to the lands of east as soon as the Soviet Union was defeated in the war. How the Soviets prepared and executed the mass deportation of Poles and Balts, the source of so much anguish for the victims and their families, is the theme of the next chapter.

5
Deportations

Deportation, the forcible removal of persons from a country or region, may or may not be justified in law or morality but, whatever the circumstances, it is sure to be an unpleasant experience for the deportees. Yet if we take the contemporary example of the deportation of illegal immigrants from the countries of Western Europe, popular sympathy for the deportees is likely to be extremely limited. Deportations in the Soviet context are quite another matter. In approaching them we need to remove from our minds the term's contemporary connotations. In regions under Soviet control we are discussing the deportation not of individuals, but of hundreds of thousands of people removed simultaneously in massive expulsions. The removal is not from countries or regions where the deportees have recently settled, but from their own homes in the country of their birth. Whole populations such as the Crimean Tatars or ethnic Germans were forcibly expelled from their traditional homelands in one part of the Soviet Union and transported elsewhere, usually to a bleak and inhospitable terrain in Soviet Central Asia or Siberia.

A similar terrible situation confronted the Poles and Balts. In their case, more than a million and a half people, about half of them women and children, were taken from their homes in 1940–41,and shipped East across the old Soviet frontier. This was not deportation by comfortable plane with in-flight meals, but transportation by rail in overcrowded and unheated cattle and freight trucks, with little food or water, no medical attention and with the most primitive sanitary arrangements, on journeys usually lasting several weeks, or even months. During it many people, including many infants, young children and the elderly, died or became seriously ill. All suffered from the trauma of forcible removal from their homes, occupations, property and position. Most were in despair, though some clung to the hope that they might, one day, be

able to return. These deportations only stopped in 1941 because the Soviets were pushed out of the areas they occupied by the Nazi advance. Available evidence suggests that the deportations already undertaken were only the first stage of a planned massive removal of Polish and Baltic citizens from their homelands. The resumption of forcible population movements after the Second World War confirms this. Furthermore, no time limit was set to the deportations. Since mortality rates in the forced labour camps were extremely high, surviving victims not unreasonably concluded that the purpose of the deportations was the 'liquidation', or ethnic cleansing, of the deportees.

There were four mass deportations from Soviet-occupied Poland during the Second World War, in February, April and June of 1940 and June 1941. There was one such deportation from the Baltic States, beginning on 14 June 1941. These victims were not arrested and sentenced. They were identified as being actual or potential enemies of Soviet authority, seized in their homes, and sent into exile without formal trial. Simply adding up the numbers for each of these mass movements actually underestimates the total number of people removed from these areas and sent East. We must also include in the totals Polish PoWs, Polish and Baltic conscripts to the Soviet army, and numerous individuals arrested, tried and sentenced to imprisonment or forced labour in the Soviet Union. The best estimate of the number of Polish citizens who were victims of the mass deportations is around 900 000. But the numbers could be as high as 1 million. Calculations of the number deported in each of the deportations are as follows:

First deportation 11 February, 1940	220 000
Second deportation 13 April, 1940	320 000
Third deportation 29 June, 1940	240 000
Fourth deportation June 1941	200 000–300 000

Add to these around 230 000 PoWs of all ranks who were either imprisoned in the Soviet Union or, in the majority of cases, sent to penal labour camps there, and 210 000 conscripts for the Soviet army or recruits for Soviet industry. Finally, there were people sentenced to imprisonment, death or a period of years in corrective labour camps. Of these perhaps 250 000 were deported to the camps. Thus a conservative estimate of the total number of deportees from Soviet-occupied Poland would be in the vicinity of 1.5–1.6 million, more than 10 per cent of the pre-war population of 13 million, and all within 18 months. Of these just over a million were women, children and elderly persons.[1]

The Soviet occupation of the Baltic states began almost a year later than in Poland, so the first and only mass deportation before the Nazi attack took place in the several days after 14 June, 1941. The best estimates of numbers involved are around 11 000 from Estonia, 15 000 from Latvia and 34 000 from Lithuania. However, if we calculate the total losses of population in the entire year of Soviet occupation we have to add significant additional numbers. A careful estimate by Juhan Kahk in 1991 suggested that over 7000 people were arrested, imprisoned, executed or deported from Estonia, and over 33 000 were mobilised into the Soviet army. This figure for mobilisation is higher than the equivalent totals for Latvia or Lithuania, largely because the latter were occupied more swiftly by the Nazis, leaving less time for Soviet mobilisation. If similar calculations are done for Latvia and Lithuania we arrive at a plausible total of 120 000 Balts who were either deported or imprisoned in the Soviet Union 1940–41. Add to this a few thousand more who went missing without trace, and the total number approaches 130 000.[2]

In all, then, some 1.6–1.7 million persons were deported from the Baltic States and the eastern regions of Poland within 18 months of the first transport in February 1940. The logistics of these operations were complicated and required detailed, indeed meticulous, planning over many months. However, the Soviets had been accumulating experience of transporting vast numbers of people very long distances ever since the establishment of the Soviet Union, having inherited some of the techniques from the Tsarist governments. The sheer numbers of freight wagons which had to be assembled in several embarkation points, the costly diversion of these wagons from normal freight duties, the provision of armed guards for the trains, the careful planning of the arrest procedure, the compilation of detailed lists of deportees, the preparation of camps and special settlements to receive the deportees deep in the Soviet interior, and the allocation of labour tasks for the newcomers demonstrate that deportation was part of a high-level strategy for securely incorporating eastern Poland and the Baltic states in the Soviet Union.

If we look at some of the figures we can more easily appreciate the scale of the operation. For example, Hope reports that in the first deportation from Poland in February 1940, 110 trains each carrying around 2000 deportees were assembled. Survivors tell us that there were, at a minimum, around 40 people to a wagon, so each train would be made up of around 50 wagons. This means that some 5500 wagons must have been assembled at embarkation points. In the second deportation in April the total number of trains increased to 160.[3] By contrast, arithmetic

suggests that there were fewer persons in each wagon in the Baltic deportations. One estimate puts the number of wagons required to transport around 15 000 persons from Latvia at 662, an average capacity of 23.[4] This would be near to the recommended number of persons per wagon in official Soviet documents. Hence, if the number of persons per wagon on the Polish trains is reduced to nearer the Baltic level, the number of wagons required for the Polish deportations would be even higher than in our initial calculation. On the other hand, some witnesses suggest that the number of people in each Baltic wagon was similar to the Polish figure. We should remind ourselves that this enormous number of wagons had to be removed from normal freight operations for a considerable time since trains were waiting in stations or sidings for varying periods before the embarkation took place, and once underway, the journeys took a minimum of two weeks and often quite a bit longer. This in itself is an indication of how important the deportations were to the Kremlin, and how much time and organisational skill went into this mammoth transportation task. As Zoe Zaidlerowa speculates: '… great skill and much brain must have been required for the working out of all these timetables: all those dates of departure, freights and lines; the number and type of wagons, the locomotives and personnel, the centres for fuelling and refuelling, the strictly necessary trains to be kept running on their side … When a train is withdrawn somewhere, because it will be wanted in Poland, a pin is pulled out and stuck in again further west. The pins are all moving westward'.[5]

Clearly such a major logistical operation was not launched for trivial reasons. Indeed, it was officially described as 'a task of great political importance'. What then were the objectives of the Kremlin in pursuing this course of action? Consider, first of all, the officially stated purposes of the deportations set out in the instructions of Colonel Serov, deputy Commissar for Public Security dated 11 October, 1939 and in a follow-up NKVD document. Deportees, wrote Serov, were 'enemies of the Soviet people'. They were, 'by reason of their social and political background, national-chauvinistic and religious convictions, and moral and political instability … opposed to the socialist order and thus might be used for anti-Soviet purposes by the intelligence services of foreign countries and by counter-revolutionary centres'. In other words, they were guilty through background and belief, and therefore likely to form centres of resistance to Soviet-imposed rule.[6] Deportations were regarded as necessary because the Kremlin's search for security and stability in the recently occupied regions could not be achieved solely by arrests, trials, convictions and sentencing of leadership groups in these

areas. These methods could deal with only a relatively small proportion of the people whose 'disappearance was thought necessary for the subjugation of [these areas]'.[7] It was therefore imperative to draw up nominal rolls of people who could be construed as 'anti-Soviet elements' using the reports of informers, investigations by security forces, depositions of prisoners and denunciations by citizens. This sounds systematic and even legalistic, but in practice deportees could be chosen simply because a neighbour who had a grudge against them denounced them to the authorities. Or because some people on the list had gone into hiding, and others were taken simply to make up the numbers.

Still, the most important criterion for selection in these first deportations was whether an individual fell into one of the twelve political and social categories outlined in NKVD instructions. These included members of political parties, former army officers, policemen and prison officers, political émigrés, people maintaining personal contacts and correspondence abroad, priests and pastors, former noblemen, merchants and bankers, and even stamp collectors and Esperantists. Yet the question immediately arises, why were more than half of the deportees women and children? There were two reasons for this. First, the fact that their husbands, sons, and brothers had been executed, imprisoned or deported made them, in the eyes of the security police, actual or potential oppositionists and supporters of resistance groups. Second, they came from the same social, political and cultural environments which had produced their male relatives. Unless destroyed, these environments would continue to produce 'enemies of the people'.[8]

These were the declared purposes of the deportations, but others may be deduced both from the consequences of these operations and from Stalinist and Leninist convictions. The probable consequences were not unknown to the Soviet authorities since they already had considerable experience in carrying out mass deportations. The techniques used, such as the knock on the door in the middle of the night, will be described later in this chapter. Their effect was to strike terror into the minds not only of the victims but of the mass of the population not yet directly affected. The official rationale for these methods was to ensure efficiency in a very complicated set of procedures, and to avoid any resistance on the part of the population. However, it was a Leninist article of faith that terror should be ruthlessly used against opponents, and that fear would produce quiescence in the population as a whole. The brutal methodology, the vast size of the deportations, and what seemed the arbitrariness of the selection, seemed to have the required impact since no one could be sure that they were not next on the list. Soviet

calculations were indeed correct. The deportations had a traumatising effect. They 'shocked the three [Baltic] nations so badly' wrote Vardys, 'that they will forever be ingrained in their historical memory'.[9]

Another purpose behind the deportations may be deduced from precedent, existing evidence and subsequent Soviet activity. The Soviet intention was to cement their control over their newly acquired territories, as the Party had done on several occasions before in regions of the Soviet Union. Their control would be most effective if large numbers of indigenous inhabitants were removed and replaced by Russians who had been sufficiently indoctrinated to remain loyal to the regime. This was the precedent. The evidence comes from a claim made by Jurgis Clusauskas, a Commissar in Lithuania during the first Soviet occupation, who reported having seen a document envisaging the deportation of 700 000 people from Lithuania. The long-term aim of the Kremlin was to replace the deported Lithuanians with Russians. In view of what happened in Lithuania after the war when some 350 000 Lithuanians were deported between late 1944 and Summer 1949 the claim has a ring of plausibility to it. Everyone left in Lithuania, and the other two Baltic states, must have appreciated that the Soviet authorities were waging a war of extermination. As one Soviet apparatchik put it, there would be a Lithuania without Lithuanians. Similarly, ethnic Poles in Western Ukraine and the Wilno region were moved en masse after the war, both to Siberia (some 100 000) and to the new Polish territories in the west carved out of German territory.[10] Hence there is substance to Hope's claim that, though the criteria listed above were applied, the randomness of the selection, even in the first deportations, suggested that one of the aims of the project was to denude the population of the occupied regions in the long-term interest of Sovietisation.[11]

Judging by actions and their known consequences rather than by stated objectives alone we cannot avoid the conclusion that the Soviet authorities intended that the deportees should not survive their ordeal. Of course, the NKVD was interested in using their labour power in the penal camps, mines, and collective farms, and it parroted the idea that deportation was part of a process of re-education. Yet, if it kept the deportees in conditions where they did not have a reasonable chance of surviving, if it subjected them to the harsh climatic conditions of Arctic and sub-Arctic Russia and Siberia where they were forced to work exceedingly long hours, with inadequate clothing and on rations which could not keep most of them alive beyond two years, we are entitled to conclude that the Soviets willed their deaths. Those who survived usually remark that they were released just in time and could not have lasted through another Winter.

Various estimates have been made of mortality rates of the deportees. One suggests that 20 per cent of those exiled to the taiga and steppe regions died each year from under-nourishment and exposure and 30 per cent of those held in prisons and camps, though the proportions were vastly higher in camps in Kolyma where, according to Piesakowski, only 583 of the total of about 11 000 sent there in 1940–41 survived until August 1941. Of the total of 440 000 Polish citizens sent to penal camps as opposed to other settlements, 270 000 perished by August 1941. Information accumulated by the Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev in 1942 suggested that over 760 000 Poles exiled in the Soviet Union died in the year 1941 alone. However, this figure is not consistent with the numbers of deaths recorded by the Polish Social Information Bureau in December 1943, which totalled 200 000. The discrepancy probably results from the different assumptions made by the enumerators, whether, for example, they calculated that those who could not be traced had perished or whether they remained alive in remote camps. In the latter case, it is unlikely that very many would have survived the war, and so the total number of mortalities might well have approached the higher figure. This conclusion would be compatible with the number of Poles repatriated from the Soviet Union in 1945–48 and 1955–56, some 600 000.[12] As we shall see subsequently, an agreement between the Soviet government and the Polish government-in-exile in July 1941 led to the release of substantial numbers of deportees, prisoners and PoWs, but they too suffered very high losses through disease and infection and only a relatively small number were evacuated from the Soviet Union into Persia.

Each of the four Polish deportations had a different composition, whereas the Baltic deportations included together all the categories outlined in the NKVD lists. The first of the Polish removals in February 1940 was composed mainly, though not exclusively, of so-called military settlers and foresters, and their families. As we noted earlier, the military settlers had been allocated land in the eastern areas of Poland as a reward for their service in the Polish legions during and after the First World War. Their loyalty to the Polish state was total and, from the Soviet perspective, they constituted potential centres of resistance to Moscow's control. Foresters included everyone connected with forestry, from managers to ordinary forest rangers. Deportation of these people was aimed at denying places of refuge in the forests for a potential Polish resistance movement. In addition to these two main categories, civil servants, local government officials and lower-ranking police officers were also deported. Generally speaking, these deportees were not the powerful,

the rich or the influential, but farmers with small amounts of land and wage earners employed by central and local government. As one village teacher remembered, the NKVD did not spare the sick who were frequently dragged from their beds, nor the poor, nor peasants and farm labourers burdened with large families. He listed the names of over a dozen villages where the entire population was deported.[13]

The second deportation in April 1940 was composed almost entirely of women and children and some old people. These were the families of PoWs, and of people who had been arrested or who had 'disappeared', either because they had been taken by the NKVD or because they had fled abroad or into German-occupied Poland to escape arrest. These families were defined as 'counter-revolutionaries' or 'anti-Soviet elements'. The definition of 'family' for this purpose included anyone living in the missing person's house or a house belonging to his nearest relative, usually his wife. For example, Maria Smolek and Bronisława Gembarowicz, both over 70, were deported just because they were staying in the house of relatives in Delatyn who had been chosen for deportation. Close relatives living in different households were not chosen.[14]

> My aunt and her brother were deported and two sisters from a neighbouring farm. The sisters were deported because their brother was chief of the parish council. He managed to escape but the sisters were taken. If the head of the family managed to escape or had disappeared, they took the rest of the family.

In June 1940 the third mass deportation took place. This was made up of different categories again, mainly refugees who had fled before the German onslaught and had sought safety in the Russian occupied area. They were identified by the Soviet authorities by the simple expedient of requiring any refugees who wished to return home to register in a special office. Tens of thousands did so. Alternatively, they could renounce their Polish citizenship in favour of Soviet citizenship. Those who did not were deported, along with those who had applied to return to their homes. It has been estimated that 59 per cent of this deportation was Jewish, 41 per cent Polish. Largely because of this, the overall percentage of Jews among Polish citizens in the Soviet Union as a result of all the deportations was around 20 per cent. Joining the refugees in this deportation were members of the professions, small merchants, and speculators who came within the definition of 'counter-revolutionary'.[15]

The fourth and final deportation before the German attack on the Soviet Union took place a year later in June 1941, simultaneously with

the deportations from the Baltic states. It included members of the Polish army who had been held in Lithuania and Latvia, and members of Serov's 12 categories who had been missed in previous deportations, particularly Polish citizens and refugees in the Wilno region and Western Byelorussia. The Soviets were also careful to deport as many as possible of those people who had either witnessed their actions or who had collaborated with them in carrying them out, such as members of local committees of Communists and fellow-travellers, and of the workers' militias.[16] The mass deportation from the Baltic states starting on 14 June 1941, included representatives of all the categories outlined in the NKVD lists. It was not as specific as the Polish deportations; whole families were taken together. A second deportation was planned for 24 June, but the rapid advance of the Germans put paid to it. Instead, the retreating Soviets murdered several thousand prisoners in the prison courtyards or in the cells.

The number of victims would have been higher if families on NKVD lists had not succeeded in concealing themselves until the Germans arrived. Unlike in the Soviet zone of Poland where the deportations occurred over a lengthy period and people missed first time round could be included in subsequent removals, the Baltic deportation was the only one until the Soviets returned in 1944. Moreover, Balts were alerted by what was happening in Poland and had the time to take evasive action. Knowing that the Nazis were advancing rapidly, it was practical for people on the lists to remain in hiding until the Germans arrived. There are a number of accounts confirming this:

> I don't know why some people were chosen and not others. It could have been for political reasons. But my father would have been taken because he was a policeman and quite a few of those taken were policemen, but we escaped before the Germans came. We went to a farm in a lonely place surrounded by marshland to escape detection by the Soviets. We got food from the farm – they all helped us. There were quite a few people hiding there as well as ourselves. During that time my father was not at home at all, and so was my older brother, otherwise he would have been taken too … When we knew that things were bad for the Russians was when Russian tanks started to come through near the marshland place where we were. When the Germans came, we went straight back home, and nobody stopped us. We were less afraid of the Germans at that stage, certainly less afraid than we were of the Russians.[17]

One family had a narrow escape. In Latvia another round of deportations was planned for 28 June. In the late afternoon of 28 June they saw that their forestry house was surrounded by a cordon of soldiers. They waited for the inevitable but by 1 a.m. nothing had happened. When they looked out they couldn't see any vehicles, and they found that the troops had withdrawn in face of the German attack. 'So we were that close to finding ourselves in Siberia', said one family member.[18]

Another family learned that they were about to be arrested on 18 June. So they left home for the forest. They made a shelter from pine tree branches since they didn't have a tent. They stayed in the forest for 10 days until they heard that the Germans were arriving. 'We were delighted and displayed the Latvian flag and we walked out and back to the farm'.[19]

But how did people get to know that they were on the deportation list? It seems that they received word from insiders who didn't want to see decent people sent away to a cruel fate. One woman explained how she and her husband managed to save a number of people.

> A lot of people were taken to the Soviet Union in the deportations. My husband and I had been warned beforehand. We went to the country. There was an accident and my husband was asked to do the burial in a particular parish and a young girl came from the grammar school and said 'Don't come back to the town, stay out'. A policeman came round to where we were staying. He said, 'Now I know you and your husband, can you help me?' He had to go to Valmiera and write a list of people to be deported. He put the gun on the table and said 'Whose names should I write?' He said he couldn't go round telling these people to disappear but we could because we were strangers, and so we did. There were some from the parish. The pharmacist was on the list. We rode round and told them to disappear. Fifteen people were on the list and the distances were quite great.[20]

In contrast with the countries of mainland Europe, Britain's experience of deportations is largely confined to the removal of illegal immigrants and the extradition of people charged with criminal offences. In Poland particularly, and in the Baltic states to a less extent, there is a long and tragic history of mass deportations. There are, it is said, some 14 words in Polish for forcible emigration. Deportations from Russian-controlled Poland in the nineteenth century took place after the failed uprisings of 1830 and 1863, and there were many other occasions when deportation was used as punishment for offences against the Tsarist regime. So, in

1940, when deportations to the Soviet Union began, the Poles had some idea of what was likely to happen to them. But nothing in their history quite prepared them for the actuality of their removal. The Soviets had refined the Tsarist techniques to make them more brutal and more inspiring of terror. The large proportion of women and children and old people among the deportees was unprecedented. A brief description of the process, illustrated by the first-hand accounts of some of the survivors, reveals the awfulness of these events.

Our earlier description of the detailed planning involved in organising the transport over thousands of miles showed the complexity of the operation. There was equally complex planning required in the arrest of 'anti-Soviet elements' involving the identification of potential deportees, the timing and method of their arrest, the means of conveying them to the nearest embarkation point, the separation, where relevant, of the husbands from their wives and children, the amount and type of personal possessions they were allowed to take with them, and the precautions necessary to prevent any popular resistance to this process. Commissar Serov provided detailed instructions to 'district operative headquarters' in eastern Poland as early as October 1939. These took account of every possible eventuality.

The detailed personal accounts may differ in detail but they conform to a broadly similar pattern. The later deportees were slightly better prepared since the techniques used in the first deportation became widely known among the population. So, they might have packed some possessions ready for the journey and for their life in exile. The weather in the later deportations was better than in the extreme cold of February 1940, but the warmth created new problems of disease. Some of the NKVD personnel were more humane than others in their treatment of the deportees at the time of the arrest. But these slight variations do not change the essential character of the experience. Loud knocking at the door in the middle of the night rudely awakening the sleeping occupants, the demands that the door be opened, the rough entry of one or two NKVD NCOs accompanied by a couple of soldiers and a member of the militia in civilian clothes wearing a red arm band. According to Serov's instructions the entire family was to be assembled in one room and required to give up their weapons. All the deportees should be searched, and the premises too, in order to discover any hidden arms. Any resistance would lead to the family's being sent to the district Commissariat of Public Security for sentence. After the search was completed the deportees would be notified that they were being deported, and that they would be permitted to take with them household necessities not exceeding 100 kilograms in weight,

including clothing, bedding, kitchen utensils, cutlery and crockery, a month's supply of food for a family and a trunk or box in which to pack articles. This regulation was frequently not observed. If the deportees lived in rural areas they could take with them small agricultural tools which would be loaded onto special goods wagons on the train. The whole operation of arrest and preparation for the journey was not to take more than two hours. The family would then be transported on carts or sledges, either their own or those provided by the authorities, to the nearest railhead. There they were loaded onto the trains in company with thousands of others, many of them friends and neighbours.[21]

> They came for us about three o'clock in the morning and gave us ten minutes to pack our luggage (only as much as you can carry!). We were allowed so much food, so many clothes, and the essential thing was to take as many tools as you could. We still thought, when the Russians came for us, that we were going to the German part of Poland. There were a lot of people settled in our area of North East Poland who had moved there after the First World War, having been given plots of land as a reward for their military or other service. They took us to the station where there was a filthy train. There was no food, only what we took with us. Perhaps two or three loaves of bread and a few sacks of flour. Some frozen meat. This was on 10 February, 1940.[22]

The next account offers a more vivid description of the arrest procedure:

> At four o'clock in the morning on 10 February, 1940 a Russian NKVD officer came with his documents and two soldiers with fixed bayonets, accompanied by two Ukrainians who were on a local committee, and a Jewish interpreter. When they banged on the door I was the first to open it and I was facing a soldier with a fixed bayonet poking into my chest. The NKVD man asked if I was so-and-so. I said, 'Well, I'm the son, my mother is the owner of this property'. So they told me to open the door and once inside the NKVD man took a document from his briefcase. I can still remember my amazement when I saw that a major document which related to our deportation was written on a cement bag. Just brown paper from a cement bag. He read the document which accused us of being hostile to the peace-loving Soviet Union and that we were going to be deported for re-education.

> We were not expecting anything like this. Up to this time there had been no deportations. OK, some people had started to talk – why were the trains of cattle trucks waiting at the local railway station? But the train had been there for some time and people stopped being bothered about it. Since my mother and I were the only two living in the house at that time we were lucky. They gave us more time and the NKVD officer was a good man. In a panic you don't know what you're doing, so he said 'Take your food, take your clothes – things you'll need in the future. Your tools, your saw – there's plenty in Russia – don't bother about those'. And we took all the food we could carry. But all the farm equipment and livestock we had to leave behind of course. Before I left, the last job I did was to let the guard dog off the chain and to take some hay for the animals. They took us to the station on a sledge.[23]

Another deportee records how her mother thought of future needs even in this dire situation by taking with her some wall hangings, like tapestries or carpets on the walls which were traditionally Polish, and velvet bedspreads. 'That was a treasure which helped to keep us alive, because my mother was able to sell them later.' But she also remembers that her father was as if paralysed. 'He knew he'd lost everything in a split second.'

> When I think of my parents now it makes me very sad because I know they lost *everything* (interviewee's emphasis). They were happy, they'd been working. For us younger people there was usually someone to take care of you, either your parents or someone who took on the responsibility. We were also physically stronger. For the older generation it was terrible.[24]

But there was no time to reflect. At the station the deportees found that hundreds of others had already arrived and hundreds more were following. Nominal rolls were quickly read, identities checked and the families bundled into one of the long line of goods wagons. Inside it was almost totally dark and the floor frequently filthy. During the February deportation it was bitterly cold, minus 30–40 degrees celsius. Outside, guards lined the train. Their role was not only to prevent escapes, though this was almost impossible since the doors of the wagons were barred, but also to prevent relatives and friends from storming the train. Some accounts recall hundreds of people, having heard the news, assembling by the tracks trying to find out where their relatives were, and

bringing food and other items to ease their journey. But the guards refused them the opportunity to hand over their gifts. The deportees were penned in these wagons for hours, a day, sometimes two days, before the train left, usually without any food, apart from what they brought with them. While they waited, the prisoners had plenty of time to find out about their home for the next few weeks.

The train journey was in two stages, the first was in Polish narrow gauge trucks until the old Soviet border was reached when the prisoners were transferred to broad gauge Russian trains. But conditions inside the wagons were not dissimilar. At either end of each wagon were two rows of wooden bunks, each sleeping eight persons, if they slept head to toe. But the wagons, which were supposed to hold 25 people, frequently held 40 or even 50, so any persons in excess of around 30 had to sleep on the luggage which was scattered round the floor. In the floor was a hole for sanitary purposes which the prisoners usually screened with an old curtain or other material. Some wagons had a small stove, according to some accounts, but mostly there was absolutely no heat. Some deportees of the February 1940 group believed that this kept them healthier than if they had travelled on later deportations in April or June when the warmer weather made the prisoners more vulnerable to diphtheria or dysentery. Most accounts refer to the infestation by lice and fleas, even in the depths of winter. There was virtually no light since the only apertures, two ventilation grilles by the doors, had been boarded up. But prisoners could sometimes see out through narrow gaps in the sides of the wagons. This meant that they were aware of the route they were taking because they were able to read station signs – Smolensk, Kaluga, Tula, Ryazan, Penza, Syrzan, Kazan, Ufa, Omsk and the destination, Pavlodar, in the case of one train from north-east Poland. Trains from the south-east would often pass through Kiev on their way east.[25]

A feature of the journeys was that the trains would often stop for a day or more at a time waiting for a clear line ahead since other trains had priority. The further east the train travelled, the greater the chance that the guards would allow the deportees to get out and move around during one of these enforced stops. There was no point trying to escape into the emptiness of the taiga or the steppe. But overwhelmingly the prisoners stayed locked in their wagons, with no opportunity to wash themselves or their clothes. An average journey of three weeks was sometimes considerably exceeded, and some prisoners report that their journeys lasted three months. The stench of unwashed bodies, unwashed clothes and the primitive latrine permeated the wagons, and

the relief at reaching the end of the journey when they could breathe fresh air was profound. Numbers of people died en route, particularly the elderly and the very young. Their bodies were taken out and laid by the side of the track where they might or might not be buried.

To depict this terrible experience in prosaic, matter-of-fact terms cannot capture the overwhelming sense of shock and misery which afflicted these people, particularly the elderly and the parents who had responsibility for their children and did not know whether they could support them. The most resilient physically and psychologically were the teenagers; women tended to be more resilient than men. To lose everything was bad enough; to endure the horrors of the journey and then the total uncertainty of the future, to be separated from spouses and children, not knowing whether they were alive or dead, was traumatic in the extreme. The Russian guards had little sympathy – the usual encouraging phrase was 'Accept the conditions and adapt or you'll croak'. This was good though brutal advice, and the ones who took it were more likely to survive.

Some of the survivors recall their experiences:

> They took us to the station and we were like animals. Sometimes when you watch a film on TV of people in carriages, or truck, in trains, it was just exactly the same. It was a horrible experience because there were children and old people, people of all ages, all mixed up, and all packed against each other. And the journey was very bad because we were short of food and there wasn't enough hot water. If anyone wanted to go to the toilet, we just had to use the hole in the floor. When we stopped at certain places to get our food and water the guards would come and unlock the doors and would say 'Two or three come out with me for food, bread, soup'. It was awful to see young, old and middle aged people dying and being taken away and their bodies being thrown in the snow. You never forget such things, and I think that's one of the worst memories I have. I was lost twice when I went for water in a bucket because I was only a young girl and I couldn't walk so fast in the snow, so they left me and I lost my transport. That was terrible! I didn't know the language, I didn't know where I was. So I stayed there on the station and I cried. So they just put me in another transport, the next one that came along. When we came to a big station I looked out for the other train. People used to put green branches on the truck if someone had been lost from it. It was just like that for me; I found my parents' truck by that method.[26]

> We were given hot water occasionally from the engine – it stank of oil. It was a completely different world – you could not imagine. For two months, no baths, no soap, so we used the collect snow which came in through the grilles and when they stopped the train we filled buckets and sacks with it and melted it later. But there was a stench. You can't have proper hygiene in those conditions. It partly depended on the state you were in when you left home. If they came for you after clothes washing you would be better than if you were taken before you had time to wash. So some people took a sack of dirty clothes with them. Conditions were very harsh but what saved us was the harshness of the winter. This helped to prevent disease. If you put your shirt on the edge of a case or bunk, it would have moved after a few hours because of all the lice and fleas inside it. In those trucks there were millions of fleas and body lice – you were covered with them.[27]
>
> The women on the train were often wives of Polish prisoners-of-war or of people arrested and then deported. They generally didn't know what had happened to their husbands. Our journey took three weeks altogether. I just lived from day to day and never thought about what was happening. But the older people, the middle-aged people, realised what was happening. So I just lived on a daily basis and thought that some day we'd reach our destination. There was no point being depressed. People had to cope with their lives – how to eat, how to get enough hot water, how to get rid of lice. There were two babies who survived because they were being breast fed.[28]

Deportees could end up in one of two types of location. So-called first-degree deportees were sent to penal labour camps in many locations across the Soviet Union, from the northern parts of European Russia around Archangelsk, Kotlas and Vologda, to the Pechora River and the western and eastern sides of the Urals, on into northern and southern Siberia, and from there to north of Magadan in the Kolyma River area of the Soviet Far East. The camps were surrounded by barbed wire fences with sentry posts at intervals and armed guards in towers in the perimeter fence. The prisoners worked on NKVD development projects which were managed by the GULAG, the Russian acronym for Principal Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Labour Settlements. Second-degree deportees were sent to special settlements which were in locations under the direct rule of the NKVD. Depending on the location, the deportees might work on collective farms, in brickworks, or in lumbering work in the forests. They could work normally and enjoyed some

freedom of movement in the vicinity but were not allowed to travel beyond the nearest market town nor to change their employment, though many ultimately did. These settlements tended to be in the Urals, southern Siberia, northern and southern Kazakhstan, and on the southern Yenisei river in the area of Krasnoyarsk. A few were in northern European Russia.[29]

The Polish Embassy conducted a census of Poles in the Soviet Union in December 1941 using Polish government delegates' reports, letters and telegrams from settlements, and individual accounts of former deportees who had moved to Polish army centres in the Soviet Union after the 'amnesty'. This census left at least three quarters of a million people, about half of the total Polish population movement into the Soviet Union, unaccounted for. But of the three quarters of a million who were counted in the census, the largest concentrations were in Arkhangelsk, the Komi Republic, Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarski Kray, Altayski Kray, Akmolinsk, Aktyubinsk, Dzhambul, south Kazakhstan, Semipalatinsk, the Turkmen Republic, Uzbekistan and Pavlodar.[30] Of the survivors interviewed some were sent to the Tomsk Region in the vicinity of the Ob River, others to the Irkutsk region, near Lake Baikal or to the White Sea near Arkhangelsk, still others to the area of Novosibirsk and on the river Usa in northern Siberia.

When they arrived at these places after weeks or months on the trains, the deportees were faced with another, often long, journey by lorry or river boat or narrow gauge railway. They felt relief to be off the trains, but acute apprehension about the future and dismay at the physical environment which greeted them. Many were too exhausted, too numb, too ill to be very conscious of their surroundings. All the survivors stress the desolate emptiness and the climatic extremes of these locations, whether in the forests of the far north, or the taiga or the steppe. Let two rather typical descriptions stand for the experiences of hundreds of thousands. Michael Krupa, after walking in shackles for 280 miles from the railhead through deep snow, finally arrived at a camp in the Pechora River area, which he described as a network of newly built barrack blocks, with wooden observation and guard towers rising into the sky. The whole area was surrounded by a double bank of barbed wire. And for miles and miles around there was nothing but forest and snow. Eugenia Huntingdon was sent to a settlement in Soviet Central Asia. When the train on which she was travelling reached its destination on 1 May 1940 the doors opened and what greeted them was a depressing sight. 'As far as the eye could see there was not one tree, not even a single bush. Just a hopeless, monotonous expanse of desert, but instead of

sand and sun, there was dirty looking snow just beginning to melt and cloudy grey skies. They had been brought to the extreme north of the Kazakh Republic. The name of the railway station was Fedorovka, in the province of Kustanai.' This was, she soon discovered, a primitive region, with a harsh climate of long, extremely cold winters and short, hot and dusty Summers. Inadequate communications ensured that the sparse settlements were isolated from each other and from the rest of the world. In thousands of settlements and camps like this were scattered the exiled Poles and Balts. It was a remote world, the dark side of the moon, in Koestler's phrase, where no light would ever penetrate.[31]

6
Penal Camps and Settlements

There was a blatant contradiction between penal theory and practice in the Soviet Union. This contradiction enabled apologists for the Soviet system to maintain that deficiencies in practice were the result of faulty application of the principle. The principle, after all, was a noble one, nothing less than the re-education of the offender. Whereas the Nazis' objective was either to eliminate the racially unfit from society by the most efficient methods or to enslave them, the declared policy of the Soviet Communist Party was the regeneration of corrupted individuals to make them fit to be Soviet citizens. The dichotomy between theory and practice provided some Westerners with an additional reason not to pressure the Soviet government to bring to justice those responsible for criminal acts. It also enabled post-Communist Russian governments to avoid their responsibility to make amends to the surviving victims of Soviet terror, and to punish those responsible for the murder of millions of slave labourers. There is still a significant number of Russians who believe that those consigned to camps must have deserved their punishment, and there are many others who wish to forget and to wash their hands of responsibility. Russia, in fact, is in denial of the inhuman and brutal acts committed by the state of which it claims to be the successor. But as the successor state it cannot simply claim the benefits of this status, it has to acknowledge its responsibilities as well.

Public awareness in the West of the Holocaust and other Nazi criminal acts has been heightened by intensive media coverage. Although publicity for Soviet state terror has not been so overwhelming, there can be no excuse for ignorance of the penal camp (*lagier)* system in the Soviet Union. Great books have been written about it and widely translated. Pride of place must go to Solzenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* and his distinguished novels on the subject, Gustav Herling's vivid memoir,

the compendium of Zoe Zaidlerowa, the personal testimony of Irena Ratushinskaya, and most recently Ann Applebaum's book on the Gulag. There are many other recollections which, together, provide more than enough information about life and death in the camps. Since the end of the Cold War, however, and despite Applebaum's work, it seems that the level of general interest in state-sponsored mass murder in the Soviet Union has begun to fade, although there was a brief flurry of newspaper articles about it on the 50th anniversary of Stalin's death in 2003. It is important to preserve the memory of the camp system for two main reasons. First to ensure that new generations, either in Russia or the rest of the world, should not be ignorant of the fate of so many millions of people at the hands of a brutal and inhuman regime. Second, to continue to bring before world and Russian public opinion the moral responsibility of Russia for the murderous actions of its predecessor. Nothing less is required of the Russian government and people than was expected of the West German government and the German people, namely to accept responsibility for their state crimes and to recompense the families of their victims. The recollections in this narrative of non-Russians, such as the Poles and Balts, are important because these victims came to the camps with different perspectives and expectations from Russians, and were not even partially acculturated to Soviet norms. Since the Balts and Poles shared in Western humane traditions, their responses to the completely alien environments of the penal camps and settlements are more easily understood and identified with by Westerners.[1]

The theoretical justification of the role of penal camps and settlements was to destroy false beliefs and to convert the prisoners into willing adherents of the Soviet system. This educative process resulted from 'the ennobling process of man's own labour'. This had 'purifying and regenerative' qualities which helped the reception of Marxist–Leninist doctrine and the rejection of false beliefs. New men would emerge from the purifying fire of the camp experience. In response to criticism in the British press about Soviet 'corrective labour' methods, a Soviet lawyer wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* in August 1949 defending the Soviet penal system as superior to that of Western countries. The purpose of work in the corrective labour camps, he asserted, was the re-education and correction of offenders. The prisoners were engaged in useful labour, were free to mingle with one another and to move about the area of the camp. Confinement in a camp was, he admitted, a severe punishment, but 'not as tormenting as confinement in a prison cell as practised in west European countries'. Hostility to the camps in the West, he

concluded, was a cover for whipping up an aggressive spirit against the Soviet Union. This type of rhetoric was very useful in diverting criticism, enabling Soviet sympathisers in the West to mount a defence of the Soviet penal system.[2]

If such was the principle, what was the reality? One can do no better than summarise this in the vivid words of Zaidlerowa, who speaks for all who were consigned to the camps. Existence in a penal camp, she said, reduced people to 'the abysses of moral stupour and animal need'. Every single influence on the individual was aimed at his overthrow as an individual. 'All privacy, decency and gentleness are deliberately liquidated' and 'the human being within the carcass dies progressively'. If you survived and came out, you would not have remained yourself. 'Nobody leaves *lagier* behind. *Lagier* is for ever.'[3] All accounts of camp life agree on the moral degradation and physical deterioration caused by malnutrition and excessive physical labour in extreme climatic conditions. As Herling remarked, in discussing the indifference of prisoners to the fate of others as they struggled to keep alive themselves, man can be human only under human conditions, and it is nonsense to judge him by actions which he commits under inhuman conditions. Surviving in the camps meant abandoning previous standards of behaviour and morality, 'forgetting how he had once thought, how felt, whom and why he had loved, what he had disliked and to what he had been attached'. Apart from being less physically robust, intellectuals succumbed to camp life more quickly because they had richer imaginations and 'helplessly gave themselves up to their memories'.[4]

Death came quickly to the older people, to those with 'white hands' (the intellectuals and professionals), to the physically frail, all of whom found it difficult to reach even 50 per cent of the work norms. But everyone, however youthful and strong, was vulnerable, and few of those engaged in forest or mining work in the northern regions could survive beyond two years. Poles incarcerated in penal camps and settlements suffered extremely high death rates, as we saw earlier. The point is that there is no evidence in these extreme conditions of the noble and redeeming effects of labour. Nor is there any indication that re-education was taken seriously or was at all effective. When news of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union reached Herling's camp near Archangelsk, his fellow prisoners 'awaited … with impatience and excitement the coming of the Nazi liberators'. There was, furthermore, absolutely no evidence of attempted re-education in the execution of 15 000 Polish officers and NCOs at Katyn and other killing fields in 1940. In 'cutting off the heads of the poppies', to use Stalin's phrase, the Soviets were achieving

directly, immediately and without ideological obscurantism the same outcome as the camps, but without the economic advantage of slave labour.[5]

If re-education was not being carried out, the declared justification for the penal camp system was irrelevant. What then was its real purpose? Nothing less than the employment of slave labour to work in the various enterprises operated by the NKVD to meet the economic needs of the Soviet state. The slaves were identified as being enemies of the Soviet people in order to provide a modicum of justification for their imprisonment. Their removal from society was described by Solzhenitsyn as a process of 'social prophylaxis', filling the sewers of the social organism with waves of class enemies, which then entered into the countless islands in the GULAG archipelago strung out across the continent.[6] All the deportees fell into this category, though they were never subject to a criminal charge and were not convicted under the Corrective Labour Code, as the Soviet lawyer falsely claimed. The deportations which took place before the Nazi invasion were only the first of a projected series of population movements with the object of exercising political control over the newly acquired territories. They served a dual purpose of ethnic cleansing in the western regions of the Soviet state, and labour provision in areas of the Soviet Union where there was a labour shortage. Those sent to labour camps after a 'trial' under various articles of the Soviet penal code were usually convicted only after brutal interrogations designed to secure a confession for some non-existent crime. Self-evidently, only persons found guilty by the judicial process or who were guilty by association, such as the deportees, qualified for re-education. Only a guilty person could meet the slave labour needs of the Soviet state. And since anyone and everyone could be found guilty, there was no requirement on the NKVD who ran the camps to economise on labour. As Bertrand Russell said, there was nothing to stop these 'wretched men and women being slowly done to death by hard labour and starvation in the Arctic cold'. We can only conclude that the purpose of the camps was to extract as much labour as possible from the prisoners at the lowest possible cost before they succumbed to their fate.

The Poles and Balts whose accounts form the basis of this discussion were sent either to penal camps known as *lagier*, or to penal settlements, sometimes referred to as 'areas of compulsory residence' or *posiolki*. Most of the *lagier* were situated in remote areas and experienced great extremes of climate. Their remoteness accounted for the very long rail and boat journeys endured by the Poles in particular. Concentrations of camps were to be found in the area of Archangelsk on the White Sea, the

Komi Republic to the east and the island of Novaya Zemlya off the coast of northern Russia. Camps were to be found along the railway line from Vologda north of Moscow, eastwards to Kirov and on to the Urals. In Siberia there were numerous camps in the Kamchatka Peninsula, in territories running inland from Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Sakhalin and Magadan, and in the most deadly region of all, along the Kolyma River flowing north into the Arctic Ocean. In the nine-month-long winters, temperatures of minus 40 degrees Celsius were common, and in Kolyma could fall to minus 70 degrees Celsius. The camps were grouped into zones extending over hundreds of kilometres. All told, there were in 1940 some 2500 penal camps in the Soviet Union, which were composed of different sub-centres. For example, one prisoner, Gustav Herling, was sent to the Kargopol camp near Archangel, which in 1940 consisted of several camps sections, the largest being Mostovitza, Ostrovnoye, Krouglitza, Nyandoma, the two Alexeyevkas and Yercevo, where he himself was incarcerated. These sub-centres or sections were distributed within a radius of about 35 miles and contained altogether some 30 000 prisoners.[7]

While Herling wrote an entire book about his traumatic experience in the Yercevo camp, the comments of other Polish survivors are terse in the extreme, even though their narratives of exile are generally quite expansive. One can only speculate about the reasons for this. Possibly they doubt their capacity to explain to anyone who has not been a prisoner the reality of the camps. Possibly, too, the experience was so painful and shocking that they refuse to re-visit it for fear of the ghosts which might re-appear. Two brief quotations illustrate the extreme economy of their descriptions of the camp period.

> Eventually I was taken to a labour camp. This was on the river Usa, northern Siberia, in the Arctic circle. Darkness day and night. We were laying railway tracks. I didn't work very hard. They bribed me to work hard, promising more bread. My friends were very hard-working and wanted this bigger lump of bread, but they were never given any more. I stayed in this camp nearly two years, until the 'amnesty' in fact.

Very matter of fact, but then he refers in an aside that they were 'in such misery'.

The second description was equally concise:

> I was sent to a labour camp near Irkutsk, in Siberia, in the area of Lake Baikal, not so far from the Chinese border. I would prefer to call this

> a penal camp, or a concentration camp. It was all barbed wire and sentry boxes.[8]

To get a real feel for what it was like to arrive at a camp one has to turn to Herling again, who creates a haunting picture of the prisoners' new and perhaps their final home. We should recall that Herling and most of his fellow prisoners had already been in overcrowded prisons for many months, or had endured the agonies of the deportation train, suffered from malnutrition and lack of exercise, and had borne the pains of prolonged interrogations. In this enfeebled state prisoners arrived at dawn at the railway station at Yercevo, near Archangelsk. Dismounting from the carriages 'amid the howling of bloodhounds and the orders of the guards', they could see the silhouettes of four crow's-nests placed on wooden stilts and surrounded by barbed wire, and inside lights gleamed in barrack windows.

> … All round the horizon stretched the dark wall of the forest. The paths through the camp zone were made of two planks laid side by side; they were swept every day by the priests, who cleared away the snow with large wooden shovels … outside the kitchen stood a queue of ragged shadows, in fur caps with flaps over their ears, their feet and legs wrapped in rags and tied about with string.[9]

Since the whole point of the camps was to extract labour from the prisoners or *zeks*, the new arrivals were soon put to work. Almost all the tasks were extremely arduous, debilitating and ultimately life-threatening. Skilled workers and professionals, such as engineers, were valued for their expertise, and often enjoyed marginally better work conditions and food allocations than their fellow prisoners. But most camp inmates were forced into unskilled work. In the Yercevo camp, you could be allocated to lumbering work in the forests, to the saw mill, to the food warehouse, to road building, to the water works or to the electricity plant. Elsewhere prisoners might work in gold or lead mines, or on building railways and roads. The forestry work at Yercevo was the most arduous since it involved a walk of 3 miles to and from the work site, through heavy snow drifts and around deep pits designed to catch wolves. The prisoners worked twelve hour days up to the waist in snow; they were often drenched to the skin, and were always hungry and exhausted. Herling never came across a prisoner who had worked in the forest for more than two years. Generally they left after a year with heart disease and were transferred to lighter work, but their health never recovered

and they were destined for an early death.[10] Herling himself dreaded this work and was able to get himself allocated to a railway porters' group by selling his high officers' boots to the porters' group leader for a small amount of bread. This helped to save his life, since though the work of unloading railway trucks was very heavy and sometimes prolonged to 20 hours at a stretch, the supply centre or warehouse was beyond the camp zone and it was possible to steal food there. Also, he was issued with a full set of clothing, which was not the case with the foresters.[11]

Workers were organised into brigades which were marched to their place of work by NKVD guards but then supervised by an *urka*, a non-political offender, usually a hardened criminal who had been in and out of camps all his life. In the barracks, too, the *urkas* had a position of dominance which they exercised by violence and intimidation. In most cases they received shorter sentences for the crime of murder than the 'politicals' did for the fictitious offence of being counter-revolutionaries. The official attitude to the *urkas* was that they would reform, and that their redeeming quality compared with the politicals was that they were not enemies of the people but rather an integral part of the people, and social allies of the Party. This was as great a fiction as the ideology of re-education through labour. Generally the NKVD turned a blind eye to the violence, theft, rape and murder which the *urkas* perpetrated in the GULAG. The *urkas* had great power as brigade leaders and would drive the prisoners on to vigorous efforts since their own position depended on their brigade meeting its work targets or norms. The brigade leader decided what proportion of the norm each member of his brigade had accomplished, and this would determine his food ration. But in the case of prisoners working in teams, the prisoners drove themselves on since the norms were calculated collectively by dividing the total work done by the number of workers. Since the norms determined the amount of food workers were allocated, an ineffective worker could be forced into working harder by his brigade or simply dropped from the brigade, which would lead to a reduction in his food allocation, and bring the day of his demise nearer.[12]

The norms were calculated in such a way that they were virtually impossible to achieve. Herling's evidence on this point is convincing. The norm for the forest brigades was said by Finnish prisoners, reputedly the world's best woodcutters, to be excessively high even for free and well-fed workers, and impossible to achieve without different forms of cheating or bribery of the brigade leader or the technical expert. Bribery was a very significant feature of camp life. If you had 'pull' or good *blat* it was possible to obtain certain advantages which helped to

prolong your life. *Blat* would consist of having something to sell or exchange for something else. Herling got his job in the porters' brigade through the good fortune of having excellent boots which the *urka* in charge wanted in return for the offer of a job in his brigade. Similarly, one of the Polish exiles in Britain seemed to have used *blat* to obtain a better job for himself in his camp.

> My first job was in the bath house; my friend and I used to wind up the water in buckets from a well so that people could take baths. I will never forget that because in my village in Poland we used to say that when we died the Devil will have you winding the buckets like that all the time. I worked there for perhaps three months and then I was happy to transfer to the bakery where I was making bread for all the camp inmates, maybe a couple of thousand. That was a lucky break for me since the alternative was working in the forest for about 12 hours a day in a very bad climate. I was warm and I was never hungry. I don't know exactly how I got this job, I can't really remember, but I think I approached somebody who worked there and asked him if I could have a job.

It is highly unlikely that this preferential treatment could have been obtained without having something to trade. As we saw earlier, Poles who were deported were allowed to take some possessions with them and it was these which stood them in good stead when they were bargaining for work.[13]

Theoretically there was payment for work done, but in practice there was virtually no payment because the prisoner had to exceed the norm to qualify, which was almost impossible. The only way for most prisoners to approach the norm was by *toufta*, a system of cheating and bribery by which the amount produced was falsified in the brigade reports. For example, forester brigades could stack the logs in certain ways to ensure that the day's output looked greater than it was. Even so, the scope for increased food rations by this method was very limited, and discovery of cheating resulted in punishment, such as a reduction in the food ration, which could exacerbate malnutrition and physical decline. Similarly, prisoners who tried to defeat the rules by stealing, or smuggling forbidden objects into the camp when returning from work, were usually discovered by the daily searches of the work brigades as they re-entered the camp. When this happened the entire brigade would be stripped almost naked in the frost and snow, and the search could be prolonged from 7 p.m. until 10 p.m. as a deterrent.[14]

Although the norms were set at excessively high levels and the working conditions were extremely harsh, most reasonably fit men could conceivably have survived provided they were well-fed. This was not the case in the camps, where food was in very short supply and exceedingly limited in range. For those prisoners who reached 125 per cent of the norm, a tiny minority, breakfast at 6 a.m. consisted, in Herling's account, of a spoonful of thick boiled barley and a scrap of salt fish. Those prisoners who reached 100 per cent of the norm received a spoonful of barley without the fish. Those, the great majority, who didn't reach the norm, received a spoonful of the thinnest barley. In the evening there was a portion of weak soup and a bread allocation, 700 grams for the most productive prisoners, 500 grams for those who reached the norm and only 400 grams for those who failed to achieve it.[15] Hence the whole basis of camp life was the norm. The inducement to meet it was a slightly better food ration, failure led to smaller portions of food, greater physical weakness and an even lower chance of meeting the target.

Malnutrition soon began to show itself in physical symptoms and illness, such as scurvy and other diseases associated with vitamin deprivation, problems with the kidneys and skin, diarrhoea, pylagra and night-blindness. Heavy physical work for long hours in extremes of climate on inadequate food led to lung and heart disease. Frost bite was always a danger and had to be guarded against. This was difficult since prisoners' clothing was what they brought with them unless they happened to be employed on special types of work, when clothing would be issued by the camp. The wretchedness of most prisoners' clothing, mere rags by most accounts, was, as Zaidlerowa said, 'unimaginable'. Feet and legs were wrapped in rags or plaited straw, torn felt boots, or bits of car tyres, all tied around with string, covered with mud and then plunged into water so that the coating of ice then formed would guard against frostbite. Good clothing brought by the exiled Poles was a source of excellent *blat;* it was advisable to bargain with it as soon as possible otherwise it might be stolen anyway, or the owner killed for it during the night.[16]

In these conditions it is not surprising that prisoners in desperation reported sick or mutilated themselves in order to gain entry into the camp hospital where they could rest and try to regain strength. The hospital was a clean, warm and well-maintained place. Most of the doctors and nurses were also prisoners, but they had limited flexibility in the treatments they could offer. They were also strictly bound by rules and to break them could mean being sent back to the work brigades. So,

according to regulations, they would not release a prisoner from work unless his temperature exceeded a certain point. Moreover, they were short of drugs and were unable to treat most illnesses. The standard procedure was to prescribe drugs to reduce the temperature and to allow a short period of bed rest. No attempt was made to treat most afflictions such as advanced vitamin deficiency, which produced body ulcers and the loss of hair and teeth. Hence, prisoners who were too enfeebled to work, who were old or had incurable diseases, could expect to be transferred to a special barrack, called the mortuary, where they were fed on smaller rations and waited to die. In some camps prisoners who were too enfeebled to work and had not reported to the hospital in time were shot by the guards on the work site.[17]

This was essentially a life without hope. There were many examples of prisoners who survived their sentence and were immediately re-sentenced since their re-education was deemed to be incomplete.[18] The Russian prisoners expected nothing and could look forward to nothing, except perhaps a visit from a member of the family on rare occasions, and often these visits were a source of grief and despair. Partners not infrequently wanted to end the marriage, since to be associated with a 'political' was a source of suspicion in the outside world. And from the relative comfort of the 'House of Meetings' it was impossible for the visitor to comprehend the purgatory of the partner's daily existence. There was in fact mutual incomprehension. Compared with other prisoners, the Poles were an exception in two ways. First, they did not have any visitors. Second, they had hope, unreasonable and unreasoning hope in the eyes of their Russian fellows, that they would be released one day and return to Poland. There was endless talk – 'Oh, we won't be here long: we'll get out. But we were hopelessly optimistic really, but this thought kept us going.' When their release eventually happened, it was regarded as a kind of miracle, and the Polish Premier Sikorski, who had negotiated the agreement with the Soviet government, a miracle worker.[19]

If having a degree of hope distinguished the Poles from the other prisoners, in every other respect their experience was identical. Like the Russians, their 'springs of feeling' froze and ceased to flow. Their desperate fight for survival and the misery of their condition overwhelmed them. Physically exhausted, ravaged by disease, treated pitilessly by most other prisoners, they were above all tormented by such an acute sensation of hunger that it cannot be explained to anyone who has not experienced it. As Herling explained, after 12 hours of work with hardly any food, most prisoners just wanted to rest on their bunks in the

evening, too broken to stir. But this was a recipe for demoralisation. Inertia and apathy, he believed, hastened death while any form of activity, for example, visiting other barracks and talking to other prisoners, postponed it for a time. But for many, perhaps most, death was a welcome release and it could come very quickly. In Kolyma, one of the worst areas to be imprisoned, 16 out of 20 Poles in one witness's group died in the first two-and-a-half months. The average mortality rate in penal camps was 30 per cent per year. Of the 440 000 Poles sent to the camps, 270 000 died in the period Autumn 1939 to Autumn 1941. In northern Kamchatka, 90 per cent of the 3000 Poles sent to work in a lead mine died, and by July 1942 none remained alive.[20]

The second major destination of Polish exiles in the Soviet Union were the 'areas of compulsory residence', alternatively referred to as penal settlements, or 'free exile' to use Zaidlerowa's euphemistic term, since there was little freedom there. There were around 3000 of these settlements in the northern areas of Russia, to the east of the Urals, and in Kazakhstan. Most of the deportees were sent there rather than to the *lagier*. Given the composition of the various deportations, this meant that the majority of the settlers were women, children and elderly males. Living conditions were generally harsh, though mortality rates were lower than in the penal camps. Nonetheless, most accounts of this existence emphasise that life there was a 'living hell' in the 'inhuman land' of the Soviet east and north. Yet when these exiles came face to face with the Polish men recently released from the penal camps after the Polish–Soviet agreement in 1941, they recognised immediately that the conditions in the camps had been much worse than their own. One Polish woman making her way to the location of the Polish army in Russia met some former Polish prisoners on a train.

> The impression they made was shattering. What I saw was a collection of skeletons covered in rags, their feet wrapped in newspaper or dirty cloth, kept in place with pieces of string, although many had nothing on their feet at all. There was not a normal looking face to be seen. They were either very thin, the colour and texture of yellow parchment, or bloated and shapeless like the face of a drowned man. Their eyes were sunken and either completely lifeless or glowing feverishly. They all looked old and shrivelled ... [21]

Some of these deportees were sent to villages far from railway lines or towns. One young man and his mother were told to leave their train at a point 150 kilometres east of Novosibirsk, from where they were taken

by narrow gauge railway for 20 kilometres into the surrounding taiga. At the end of the line was a hamlet with some wooden barracks. Though this was not a penal camp it was so isolated and remote it would have been impossible to escape.

> We weren't prisoners exactly but without a pass from the NKVD you couldn't go to the next village to meet local people because the Soviets were terrified that the local people might get to know that life was better somewhere else than it was in Russia. But people did sneak out because there were three settlements and only one NKVD officer and a militia man. They couldn't supervise all three settlements at once. My mother used to go to the village to trade something, to exchange some clothes for potatoes or a little bit of butter and so on, to make life easier.
>
> The huts we lived in were generally quite old, though there were some newer ones. They were built of logs and between the logs they put moss to keep the draught out. There was no ceiling, just a roof. Down the middle of the hut was a corridor, and on both sides of it were cubicles, some small, some larger for large families. So my mother and I got a very small cubicle, and you could hear people talking so there were no secrets there.[22]

A quite different location was a settlement near Archangelsk to which another family was taken. From Archangelsk they travelled by lorry to a brick factory about 20 miles away and were accommodated in a barracks next to the factory, where as many as five families shared a room.[23]

Completely different settlements both in terms of terrain and accommodation were located in northern Kazakhstan or just over the republic's northern border in southern Siberia. Here deportees lived on collective farms on the barren steppe, where they were subjected to great climatic extremes in a depressing environment. There were long very cold winters and short baking-hot summers. All accounts refer to the disorientation suffered by the newcomers after their arrival in one of these settlements. Dropped off the train in the middle of nowhere after a three-week journey, weak, undernourished, anxious and depressed, they saw the steppe 'rolling away on all sides like a sea' with not a tree or shrub breaking it vertically and almost no life to be seen, apart from a few birds passing overhead. This was a complete contrast to their native Poland. After being driven for two hours into the steppe by lorry, one family was deposited in a seemingly empty place. The driver pointed out to them a hut they had not noticed, it was so low to the

ground, and then they could make out other huts, all looking desolate and poor and built of mud. The nearest centre was a small village some miles away with a few official buildings and a post office. There were hardly any roads and a very inadequate railway system. The exiles could move about freely in certain specified areas. They had to find their own accommodation living with Kazakh or Russian families. Those who had been fortunate or thoughtful enough to bring plenty of family possessions were able to survive for the first few weeks by trading them for food, but it soon became clear that the younger and fitter of the deportees were expected to work if they were not to starve.[24]

The workers on some of the collectives were ethnic Russians but most were Kazakhs who, some time before, had been forced out of their erstwhile nomadic lives as shepherds and compelled to eke out a miserable existence on the farms and to live in the most primitive conditions. Their small huts made of mud sat out on the barren steppe and were shared with their animals. Heating was by means of stoves burning *kiziak* or dried cow dung, the smoke from which filled the huts and burned the eyes and throat. Their huts were infested with lice and bugs which it was impossible to get rid of even with the most vigorous efforts. The Kazakhs had few possessions, sleeping on sheepskins on the floor of their huts and cooking their food in a large iron bowl. There were no sanitary facilities of any kind and in most settlements water could only be obtained from a well in the vicinity of the huts. In Russian huts there might be some primitive toilets erected outside but the Kazakhs relieved themselves outside their huts in full view of any passer-by. It was in these huts that the exiles were forced to live.[25]

At first it was possible to bargain for food with some of the possessions the Poles brought with them. However, they knew that this could only be a transitional process and they would have to work on the farm if they were to survive. This work could not provide them with adequate food, adequate either in amount or variety. On some farms each working person received 16 kilograms of flour per month and children half that amount. The flour was heavy and dark and the bread made from it 'bore only a faint resemblance to real bread'. Flour could also be put in boiling water with some salt added, and a little fat if available, to make a kind of porridge. Milk and eggs could occasionally be bought from other families on the farm and to give variety half frozen potatoes were cooked in a mash. Since these deportees, unlike the prisoners in the *lagier*, could send and receive letters and food parcels from home, they were able to supplement their diets from time to time with the luxury of bacon, salted pork fat, real tea as opposed to the ersatz tea of the Kazakhs, sugar, butter and biscuits. It was sometimes

possible to buy something from the shop in the nearest village, but this might be as far as 10 kilometres away. Having survived one winter which was desperately hard, the deportees were afraid that they would not get through the winter of 1941–42. Many of them were saved by the 'amnesty', but others, particularly the old and the very young, died before their release. 'Krystina' described the effects of malnutrition: abscesses on the body followed by skin rashes, decaying teeth, discharging ears. 'our stomachs seemed to be tied in knots, pressing and demanding food'. The children were the most pitiful victims, their 'eyes sunk deep into their sockets and their mouths hanging half open, watching and waiting, old beyond their years, deprived of all the joys of childhood, warmth, good food, smiles and loving care'. They began to forget their fathers who were already dead, or in the camps but not allowed to write, their mothers were absent from the hut all day working on the farm, and they were looked after by older siblings or grandmothers.[26]

While the children stayed at home the mothers or grandfathers worked 12- or 14-hour days, taking into account the time for travelling to work which could be as much as one and a half hours. They turned their hands to a variety of tasks: guarding cattle or looking after flocks of sheep in the summer; digging irrigation ditches, carting manure, weeding crops and earthing up potatoes; bringing water from the river to the cowsheds on ox carts. One family took with them a sewing machine so that one member was able to take in sewing for the women on the farm and the other did embroidery in exchange for items of food.[27] One young man drove a pair of oxen and did some ploughing as well as transporting wheat on ox carts. On his farm near Alma Ata in Kazakhstan, payment was in labour days, that is days worked on the farm during the year, so many kilograms of wheat or potatoes per labour day. There was some flour and a few potatoes in advance. But without the ability to trade most exiles did not know how they could have survived, particularly during the winter when temperatures fell to minus 40 degrees Celsius, and snow drifts sometimes 6 metres deep blocked the tracks and buried the huts.[28]

Those deportees exiled to remote villages, brickworks, saw mills and other enterprises had different, but equally rigorous, conditions to cope with. They received wages for working in the forests or on road-making, but if they worked in saw mills, for example, the NKVD took 10 per cent of their wages. Workers here received no food but had to purchase their supplies in the local village shops. Alternatively, they could cultivate allotments, growing potatoes and onions.[29]

> When we arrived at this camp they gave us Monday off for a rest. Then on 5 March, 1940 they told us to march to the hamlet where

> there was an office. The people there would take us to the taiga and show us what our work would be. We started work on 7 March. At first I worked rolling big logs of pine trees towards the railway line. When you finish one layer of logs you put some long pieces of wood across, and then you built another layer. The first part was easy because you only roll the log, but on the fourth layer, that was very hard because you have to lift that log nearly two metres high. So it was very hard and we were paid according to the work done – it was piece work and we were paid in cubic metres. However, the basic pay was according to the norm – if you exceeded it you were paid more, if you were below you got less. The norms were always set impossibly high.[30]

Although work began at 8 a.m. in the forest, there was a two-hour walk to the work site and another two-hours walk at the end of the day, making a 12-hour day in all. This was a hard and tiring life on relatively little food. Moreover there were harsh penalties for being late for work or absent without a doctor's note. For the first offence the local court could impose a reduction of wages of 25 per cent for three months. This could have very serious consequences on the health of the worker. Further offences were punished more severely still.[31]

A girl of 14 was set to work loading wet bricks on to a trolley and then wheeling the trolley along rails about half-a-mile to a barracks where the bricks dried. The bricks were heavy and it was bitterly cold. Later however she experienced worse conditions when she was sent to another settlement for four months as a punishment. She slept on the floor in a big hall, initially without a blanket, and in the morning had to queue for a cup of boiling water. The previous evening she was given some bread.

> We were then taken to lay railway track. The ground was frozen as hard as a stone. You dug as best you could with a pick and shovel and loaded the earth on to a wagon. All day you worked like that, and at night we came back to a sort of café where we were given soup, if we were lucky. If not you just got the 400 grams bread ration. The soup was made of fish heads boiled in clear water. After this 'meal' we went back to the barracks to sleep on the floor.[32]

In the forest settlement near Novosibirsk, though you could buy supplies at the only store in the hamlet, everything was rationed. A working person received 1 kilogram of bread per day, children and wives 300 grams.

> Once we got a supply of vodka. The whole of the shelves in that store were filled up with vodka – nothing else, only vodka. The local Russian women who didn't work travelled with their vodka about 150 km to Novosibirsk and sold that vodka at a good profit. But all the shops there were filled with matches so the women bought them and went to Tomsk where there was nothing but toilet soap. There they sold some matches, some vodka, and bought the toilet soap which they brought back to the hamlet. That's how they made a living.
>
> We got enough food at the beginning, but after a while what's a kilo of bread? You have no butter, no meat, no fat. You could buy soup for dinner, usually cabbage soup with some noodles. There was no fat in it. Sometimes if you got a piece of meat it was as big as a sparrow's head, but it was treble the price, so it was still no good. My mother spent her days trying to make ends meet. She collected fire wood one day, and then the next she went to the village to trade or looked after the allotment. And that's how we survived.[33]

Naturally getting enough food became an obsession. On his way to hospital in a town about 30 kilometres away on the Trans-Siberian railway, one man was 'dazzled and amazed' by the sight from his railway carriage of a shop full of hams, bacon, brawn, salami, some with paprika, some without. When his appointment was delayed he went in search of the wonderful shop. Eventually he found it.

> And do you know, all those hams and pieces of bacon were excellent paintings on wood. I could not understand. When I got back to the settlement I told someone this story. 'Ah' said one older person, 'I can explain it. Along the Trans-Siberian Railway go many important people between Vladivostock and Moscow. And where there are shops in view of the trains the Russians paint these pictures of food to create an impression of abundance. And then these travellers go back home and say, these Polish fascists are liars when they say people starve in Russia. There's lots of food.' And yet, in all my time there, I did not see one single slice of ham or brawn or bacon.[34]

One ex-prisoner, however, remembered a wonderful meal in her settlement.

> I remember our first Christmas there. My Mum took my Dad's treasure box. There were a few suits and army uniforms. She sold these

> things in the village so we could buy potatoes and beetroot for our meal. My Mum cooked them and it was wonderful. Everything was best for our first Christmas. As usual we had our Polish Christmas Eve followed by a good meal. You can imagine how lovely it all was. I think that nothing will ever taste as good as that meal with potatoes and beetroot.[35]

Although the Polish prisoners were optimistic that they would be free to leave the camps and settlements one day, there was no rational basis for such optimism. Of course, they were overjoyed, though careful not to show any emotion, when they heard of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. Herling describes listening to Stalin's broadcast to the Soviet people, the broadcast 'of a broken old man', and every prisoner was filled 'with a spasm of hope'.[36] Although all longed for a Nazi victory, there was no certainty that the Soviets would ultimately be defeated, even though their armies might suffer a series of defeats as they retreated further and further East. But there was another possibility for the Soviet Union in these desperate circumstances, namely an agreement with western governments, including the Polish Government-in-Exile, to fight together against their common enemy. When Sikorski and Maisky concluded such an agreement in London under the auspices of the British government on 30 July 1941 the way was open for the release of Polish prisoners from the camps to enable them to join a new Polish army in the Soviet Union. Their dependants in the penal settlements were also to be freed. The agreement was implemented imperfectly, even at the beginning, but significant numbers of prisoners were liberated to begin their trek across Russia to reach the newly established Polish army bases, initially between the southern Volga and the Urals.

All prisoners remember quite vividly the time when they heard the news of their release. One woman was summoned by the NKVD. Anxiously fearing the worst, she was instead told that all Polish deportees in the village were free to leave. A former soldier in a camp in northern Russia remembered that his barracks was not roused from sleep as usual before 6 a.m. No Soviet guards appeared until 10 a.m. when the prisoners were addressed by the commanding officer and told they were free to leave to join the Polish army or the Red Army. Among the prisoners in the camps, there was little doubt that they must escape as quickly as possible if they were to live. But among the residents of the penal settlements, a large proportion of whom were women, children and grandparents, there was some uncertainty, as one woman described it. 'Some did not have the energy and enterprise to consider leaving.

Many were afraid to embark on a journey into the unknown. Others advised patience in the belief that the authorities would organize their departure.' But this woman had no doubts, being convinced that life in a town, any town to start with, would be better and 'the prospects of getting away from Russia brighter than in this outlandish village'.[37] This was a correct assessment, but the path to freedom was more complex and tortuous than even they could have imagined. It began with the agreement between the Polish and Soviet governments. The next chapter will examine the terms of this agreement, how it was implemented, and its consequences for the hundreds of thousands of surviving Polish exiles in the Soviet Union.

7
Release

The term 'release' in the context of Polish–Soviet relations during the Second World War is full of ambiguity. Several hundred thousand Polish prisoners and deportees were, it is true, freed from camps and settlements, but many thousands were not. Of those released, some were never able to reach the military camps allocated to the Polish army in the Soviet Union, and many thousands died en route or after arrival. In total, only slightly more than 100 000 Poles were ultimately permitted to leave the Soviet Union for Persia. The majority were compelled to take Soviet citizenship and to work in industry and agriculture. An unknown number were never freed from the penal camps and many perished there. At the end of the war, perhaps another 100 000 Poles were deported after the Red Army re-entered Polish territory. However, there was soon to be some movement in the opposite direction. Some 270 000 Poles were repatriated between 1945 and 1948 and another 300 000 in 1955–56, around 15 years after they had been forcibly removed from their homes. The point to stress, however, is that the number returning, combined with the number who reached the West during and immediately after the war, totalled only around one-third of the 1.6 million who were taken from the Soviet-controlled part of Poland between 1939 and 1941 and between 1944 and 1945.[1]

This grim reality conflicted with the relative optimism of some members of the Polish Government-in-Exile after the conclusion of the important Polish–Soviet agreement, the Sikorski–Maisky Pact, on 30 July 1941. This pact came about only as a result of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, which threw Moscow into the arms of Britain. But without the determined leadership of the Polish Prime Minister, General Sikorski, and the active intermediation of the British government, it is doubtful even then if an agreement could have been

reached. Indeed, the pact papered over important differences between the Polish and Soviet governments which soon became evident. In trying to explain these differences, one cannot ignore the fact that the Soviet government faced enormous difficulties in meeting its obligations in the crisis of the early months of the war. At the same time, however, the totality of evidence suggests that the Kremlin did not make the agreement with the Poles in good faith. It did so as a concession to the British government, whose support it dearly wanted. Numerous examples of Soviet deceit, concealment and obstruction suggest that the Kremlin used every opportunity not to fulfil its part of the bargain. In human terms, the euphoria of the Polish prisoners which had accompanied the news of impending release was quickly followed by despair and disillusionment at the realisation that Soviet promises were unreliable. Only for the relatively few lucky ones who landed on the seashore of Pahlevi in Persia was despair succeeded by an enormous sense of relief at the end of their ordeal. But this relief was tempered by the memory of family and friends who had died in camps or settlements, or had been left behind to an uncertain fate. Large numbers of Polish citizens remained in, or were returned to, camps and prisons. Others were conscripted into the Red Army or sent to labour battalions, factories and farms.[2]

In discussing the prolonged and complex negotiations between the Soviet and Polish authorities and the role played by the British government in those discussions, we should not lose sight of the human consequences, both of the agreements and the failure to implement them. From the outset it was clear that General Sikorski was motivated by a strong desire to save as many Polish prisoners as possible. As news reached the Polish government of the deportations, the arrests, the interrogations and imprisonments of its citizens by the Soviets there was a deep sense of shock and outrage among those Poles who had been fortunate enough to reach the West. But Sikorski was aware that expressions of indignation would achieve nothing. It was imperative that his government keep the support of the British. When the opportunity presented by the Nazi attack occurred and the British pressed the Soviets for a united front against Hitler, Sikorski saw the chance to free the deported and imprisoned Poles, and to create a Polish army in Russia. In order to achieve this, he was prepared to make concessions to Moscow which were opposed by some of his government colleagues, who believed he should drive a much harder bargain. But though Sikorski was prepared to compromise, he was under no illusions about Soviet behaviour. As he later told Churchill, he had to close his eyes to

the 'monstrously barbarian' treatment of the Polish population by the Russians, and to what he called the 'unbelievable brutality and refinement in the tortures inflicted by the Bolsheviks on many Poles'.[3] It was the knowledge of this brutality, and his desire to alleviate its effects, that guided Sikorski's actions between June 1941 and April 1943, when the Soviets once again broke off diplomatic relations.

Even as early as a year before the Nazis' attack on the Soviet Union Sikorski had begun his attempts to ameliorate Soviet treatment of Poles in Russia and to prevent any further deportations. He asked the British government to intervene with the Kremlin to try to help the Poles. He was also interested in the possibility of forming Polish military units in Russia to be used against the Germans. This initiative was condemned as 'an unwise pro-Soviet action' among Polish circles in London. There was a move for Sikorski's dismissal. He was saved by the British government who opposed his replacement. A year later, shortly before the German attack, he had modified his position in line with his critics, asking Britain's ambassador in Moscow to discuss setting up a Polish army in the Soviet Union, but only after Moscow had 'repaired all injustices against the Polish people' and acknowledged Poland's sovereign rights, with particular reference to her pre-war boundaries. This meant that the Kremlin should repudiate the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and confirm the Polish frontiers established in the 1921 Treaty of Riga between the Soviet Union and Poland.[4]

Immediately after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union Sikorski reiterated his belief that the prime elements in Polish policy towards the Soviet Union should be the freeing of the 1 500 000 Poles in Soviet camps and settlements, the replenishment of the Polish army, and the cancellation of the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. His objective was to extract as many concessions as possible while the Soviet Union was still in shock from the *blitzkrieg*. It soon became clear, however, that the Soviets had not lowered their guard to the extent that they were prepared to make major long-term concessions on the boundary question. Sikorski knew then that he would have to choose between helping his fellow Poles or standing firm on the complete repudiation of all Soviet policies towards Poland since 1939. In the end he chose the former, while trying to extract as many concessions as possible from Moscow in Poland's interest.[5] Sikorski also took a strategic view of Polish–Russian relations, believing that fruitful co-operation at a time of crisis would pave the way for good relations in the future, for example, over frontiers, and might even gain Russian backing for Sikorski's plans for federal blocs in East Central Europe.[6]

The early Soviet negotiating position in July 1941 conceded much of what the Poles were seeking, but not all. Moscow was ready to abrogate the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, to resume diplomatic relations with the Polish government, and to agree to the creation of an autonomous Polish army in the Soviet Union under the operational direction of the Soviet High Command. The repudiation of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was not as significant as it might at first appear, since it was not accompanied by an acceptance of Poland's pre-war boundaries. Moreover, it later became clear that the Soviets based their claim to former Polish territory, not on the pact, but on the decision of the puppet assemblies of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia to seek admission to the Soviet Union in the Autumn of 1939. Even more important from Sikorski's point of view was the Soviets' omission of a critical point, namely the liberation of Polish political prisoners, Polish conscripts in the Red Army and Polish deportees. The Polish side wanted these people to be released and to have the right to move within Russia, receiving help and support from the Soviet authorities. After further tortuous negotiations on these points, an agreement was finally signed on 30 July 1941.

The Sikorski–Maisky Pact provided for the release of incarcerated Poles, which was a major achievement. According to Józef Retinger, who acted as Poland's representative in Moscow before the Ambassador, Stanisław Kot, arrived, there was an error in the English text of the treaty in which the word 'amnesty' was used instead of the word 'release', implying that imprisoned Poles in the Soviet Union had committed offences which could now be pardoned.[7] The wording of the Soviet decree stated that an amnesty was granted 'to all Polish citizens in Soviet territory at present deprived of their freedom as prisoners-of-war or on other adequate grounds'. This form of words ensured that the Soviet Union would reject any imputation that imprisonment and deportation might have been illegal or that Poles were innocent victims of a gross injustice. Even though the term 'amnesty' crept into the record, for which the Polish side must take some of the blame, Sikorski's determined and occasionally furious advocacy shows without doubt that the release of his fellow citizens was his guiding star in these and subsequent negotiations.[8]

This partial concession by the Soviets on the release was not matched by their willingness to face the problem of frontiers. Sikorski certainly wanted the agreement to recognise the pre-war Polish borders but he was unable or unwilling to defy the wishes of the British government which was pressing hard for an agreement to weld the Soviet Union and

Poland into an anti-Nazi alliance. Sikorski feared that the British would cease to support the Poles if they rejected the agreement. Moreover, he desperately wanted to recruit from the liberated Poles a large Polish military force which could make an effective contribution to the Allies' efforts. Three members of his government, Sosnkowski, Zaleski, the foreign minister and Sejda resigned, since for them Soviet recognition of the Riga borders was a precondition for any agreement. Sikorski was more convinced than they were that the Soviet Union would be able to hold out against the Wehrmacht. In any case, he didn't think you should argue for rigorous preconditions when the Soviet Union was fighting for its life against the common enemy of Nazi Germany. For his opponents, that was exactly the time to do it.[9]

Regardless of the rights and wrongs of this internal dispute, it is evident that Sikorski gave a higher priority to the release of his compatriots than did some of his colleagues in government. He also feared, as Tadeusz Romer[10] argued, that if the agreement had not been made, the Soviets might have created alternative Polish government centres and armed forces in the Soviet Union entirely under Soviet control, without any participation of the Polish government in London. The British threw the Poles a fig leaf in the form of an assurance that Poland's frontiers would not be negotiated until after the war. Meanwhile, Britain would not recognise any territorial changes in Poland after August 1939 while hastening to add that non-recognition did not imply any guarantee of the former frontiers. Such 're-assurance' would hardly have inspired confidence among the Poles that the British would ultimately support the Polish case on frontiers.[11]

Sikorski's concern for Poles in the Soviet Union did not end with the agreement of 30 July 1941. He was very frustrated, as we shall see, by the failure of the Soviet government to abide by the terms of the agreement, and made strenuous efforts to ensure that Moscow met its obligations. In negotiations between successive Polish ambassadors in the Soviet Union and representatives of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (PCFA), or between General Anders, the commander of the Polish forces in Russia and Soviet officers, Sikorski insisted that the Polish side give priority to saving as many Poles as possible from imprisonment and death. A second major objective was to recruit to the Polish army in Russia anyone who was fit and eligible. This was a key element in his own discussions with Stalin in the Kremlin in early December 1941. Let us consider first the problems of recruitment and the supply of food and equipment to the Polish army.

Sikorski's first approach to the problem was to ask for its evacuation to Persia where it could be supplied and fed from British or American

sources. After training, the army would return to the Soviet Union to take its place alongside Soviet troops in the fight against Germany.[12] Stalin professed to be hurt by this proposal, believing it would show the world that the Soviet Union was incapable of feeding and supplying the Polish troops. Accordingly he offered a new location for these troops in Soviet Central Asia to facilitate training and supply. In return Sikorski agreed not to evacuate the army, except for a small contingent. His basic reason for doing so was, as he confessed to Churchill, that insistence on evacuation would have put an end to the recruitment of Poles in Russia to the Polish army, inhibited further releases of civilians, and weakened the position of those already released since there would be no Polish army to offer them support.[13]

As it turned out, a major evacuation could not be delayed indefinitely in the face of further difficulties on the ground and the refusal of Stalin to provide rations for more than 44 000 men when there were almost twice that number either in, or in process of joining, the Polish army, not to mention the thousands of civilians in the vicinity of the army camps who depended on the army for food and supplies. Anders wanted an evacuation since he believed, correctly, that without adequate supplies of food there would be widespread mortality among the troops and their families. Sikorski accepted this, and the need to build up reserve forces in the Middle East to support Allied armies in North Africa. At the same time, however, he asked the British government to pressure the Kremlin to continue recruitment of Polish forces. For him a large Polish army in the Soviet Union fighting alongside Soviet forces had an essential role to play in the liberation of Poland from the Nazis.

Still, at the forefront of his mind was the welfare of Polish citizens in Russia. When Anders, later in the Summer, suggested a total evacuation, in the belief that an adequate Polish fighting force could not be developed in the Soviet Union without satisfactory supplies of rations and equipment, Sikorski resisted. He believed that the new German offensive would weaken the Soviets and make them more amenable to Polish wishes. He was also fearful that an evacuation of the rest of the army would place the hundreds of thousands of Poles who would be left behind without protection and adequate assistance.[14] Under pressure from the British who were keen to have Polish reinforcements in the Middle East theatre, and in the light of the failure of the German offensive, Sikorski finally consented to a total evacuation. He fought hard to evacuate with the troops as many women and children as possible and demanded that a recruiting centre be left open in the Soviet Union. The latter proposal was rejected. His hope that 50 000 children and orphans

could be evacuated along with the troops also proved fruitless. But he was able to save 25 000 family members of Polish troops, who were permitted to embark for Persia.[15]

A key element for Sikorski in the Polish–Soviet negotiations was the number and size of the Polish units to be formed in the Soviet Union. He believed that an army of 100 000 Poles, even 150 000, could be created. After all, Polish PoWs in the Soviet Union numbered some 200 000 according to early Soviet estimates, and there were over 100 000 Polish conscripts serving in the Red Army. In addition there were young men in the camps and settlements who were old enough to be recruited. It was therefore extremely important for the Polish government that no limits should be placed by the Soviets on releases and recruitment. The Polish–Soviet Military Agreement of 14 August 1941 partially met this point. It specified that the number and strength of Polish military units would depend on the manpower, equipment and supplies available, but otherwise set no limits to expansion.[16] Since the Poles expected that substantial amounts of equipment and supplies would be provided by the British and the Americans, they anticipated that the number of men released would determine the size of the army. The Soviets, on the other hand, had reasons for limiting the number of Poles recruited and were able to restrict the number on the grounds of shortage of equipment.

This was a major point of dispute in the discussions between Stalin and Sikorski in Moscow in December 1941. Sikorski finally gained Stalin's agreement to the creation of 6 Polish divisions, some 96 000 men, in addition to the 25 000 who would be permitted to leave for the Middle East and Great Britain, where they would be used to strengthen existing Polish units.[17] Soviet hesitation about supplying this number was overcome by assurances that the United States and Britain had promised to make provision for the needs of the Polish army. Faced with a further reduction in food rations in March 1942 and then the cessation of recruitment in May, Sikorski tried to hold the Russians to the terms of their agreements, but without success. According to his calculations, 45 000 troops were saved in the second evacuation in August 1942, but this was barely half the number which could have joined the Allied forces in the Middle East if Stalin had kept his promises.[18]

Behind all the disputes and disagreements between the Soviet and Polish sides there was an underlying distrust. A major contribution to this was continuing Soviet evasion about the fate of Polish army officers. The Polish High Command was able to piece together information from the relatively few Polish officers who joined the Polish army in Russia about their missing comrades. Lists of names were prepared, and

discussions were held with senior Soviet officers. At his meeting with Stalin in December 1941 Sikorski raised the question of around 4000 officers who were known to have been imprisoned or in camps and had not shown up at the Polish army headquarters in Buzuluk. Moreover this list was still incomplete. It was then that Stalin made the notorious statement that they must have escaped to Manchuria, to which General Anders replied, incredulously, that it was impossible that they could all have escaped. When it became clear, some months later, that these officers were unlikely to join their colleagues in the Polish army, the suspicions of the Polish government were aroused that something dreadful had happened to them.[19]

In May 1942 the Polish Foreign Ministry summarised what they knew about the missing officers to the American ambassador. These men had been kept in three camps, Kozielsk near Smolensk (4500), Starobielsk near Kharkov (3900) and Ostashkov near Tver Kalinin (6750 prisoners of whom around 400 were officers, the rest NCOs and cadets) but almost all were removed between March and the end of May, 1940. Of these prisoners, only 3000–4000 were regular officers, the rest were reserve officers, who in peace time had been members of the professions – doctors, lawyers, academics, journalists, school teachers, 'the flower of the Polish intelligentsia'.[20] One of the very few who survived recalled:

> Later we learned of Katyn, where Stalin ordered Polish officers killed. Right until now I cannot pardon Russia for what happened, to Poland, to the Polish officers, to Polish scientists. I myself was condemned to death in Russia. They wanted me to confess that I was a Polish officer. They stood over me with a pistol to my head. 'You are an officer, a professor, you don't look like a beggar.' It was a miracle that I survived. Many of my friends and close colleagues were on the list of Katyn.[21]

For a time the Poles professed to believe, perhaps in the interest of good relations with the Soviets, that these men had been taken north to labour camps and had died there of hunger and cold. Danuta Teczarowska's husband was in Starobielsk camp and was in one of the last transports to leave. For inexplicable reasons he, along with a few hundred others, was sent to a camp at Grazoviec, from which he was released, along with 300 other officers, to join the Polish army in 1941.[22] The number of Polish officers held in captivity in Russia was estimated to be 9227 both by the Soviet army newspaper and by Molotov in a speech to the Supreme Soviet in October 1939. General Anders in

November 1941 informed the NKVD that 8722 of his officers were missing. Since around 400 officers had actually arrived at the Polish army, these figures are remarkably consistent. It gradually became clear that Poles who were released from labour camps all over Russia had no knowledge of these officers being sent to such camps. Inevitably suspicions were aroused that in this, as in other matters, the Kremlin was acting in bad faith.

The truth began to emerge in a German radio broadcast on 13 April 1943 which announced that the bodies of 10 000 Polish officers had been found in a mass grave in Katyn forest near Smolensk (this was a gross over-estimate), each with a single bullet wound in the back of the head. It was alleged that they had been murdered by the Soviets between March and May 1940. The Soviets counter-alleged that they had been killed by the Nazis in 1941. On investigation by international commissions it appeared that the murdered officers in Katyn had come from Kozielsk camp, that the number of bodies at Katyn was about 4500 (not 10 000), and that it was almost certain that the officers from the other camps had met a similar fate. This information appeared many months after the détente between the Soviet and Polish governments had broken down. Yet even when relations were at their best the unanswered question about the fate of the Polish officers hung in the air, increasing suspicion and distrust.[23]

For an army officer like Sikorski whose aim was to save as many of his compatriots as possible from detention, and to build up the Polish army to participate in the fight against the Nazis, the worry over the fate of his fellow officers must have been acute. His concern for his men was shown in the restrictions he placed on the use of Polish troops. In the face of Soviet pressure to throw a Polish division into the front line when, according to Anders, training had been inadequate owing to a shortage of equipment, supplies and proper facilities, Sikorski stuck to the position he had adopted in the negotiations with the Soviets in August 1941, namely that Polish units would be moved to the front only after they had been properly prepared for action. Second, Polish forces would only be used operationally as a whole under Anders' command. Placed on the Russian western front, they would be swallowed up in the Red Army and would have no separate role to play. Sikorski wanted them to be allocated to a particular sector where they could make a distinctive contribution, if possible in close collaboration with British forces to the South. Stalin's accusation that Polish troops didn't want to fight was belied by the subsequent outstanding contribution made by Polish troops in North Africa, Italy and in Western Europe. But, as

Anders commented, Polish troops in Russia had just emerged from almost two years in prisons and camps, undernourished, physically weak, wracked with diseases, and allocated to areas of the Soviet Union where it proved impossible to train properly. Sikorski was determined that these men should not become cannon fodder for the highly efficient German forces.[24]

The condition of the men after their release leaves one in no doubt that they would be fit to fight only after adequate diet and proper equipment and training had been provided. The Polish camps in the Soviet Union offered none of these. The Polish–Soviet military agreement of August 1941 allocated an area east of Kuibyshev, in the vicinity of Orenburg and Saratov for the formation of Polish units. The headquarters of the army was to be in Buzuluk, with the 5th Division at nearby Tatischevo and the 6th Division and a reserve regiment at Totskoye. It turned out that these were inadequate Summer camps, in which soldiers were expected to live in tents or dugouts, and therefore completely unsuited for the harsh winter conditions of the area. Anders reported as early as September that the physical condition of the men, so recently freed from the camps, was ‘appalling’ and that typhus and dysentery were common. As one contemporary account described them, the men ‘came exhausted, in rags, impoverished, covered with sores, louse-infected, without hair, having come through typhus, and resembling rather some strange creatures more than human beings’.[25] Many men had died en route to, or on arrival at, the Polish army reception centres. As Winter drew on conditions became still worse, with food supplies very low and ice and snow covering the ground. In December, 1941, rations were limited to 26 000 men but the number reporting for duty had already reached 44 000, and these men shared what rations they had with women and children who had arrived in the area after their release to be near the army. An inadequate amount of clothing, boots and weapons had been provided. It was impossible to undertake adequate training.[26]

Danuta Teczarowska, a medical doctor and wife of a Polish officer, recalled life in the Tatischevo camp. There was snow on the ground and everything was damp, since there was no heating. The army’s inadequate rations were shared with civilians. Water from outside taps was ice cold. ‘Starved ragged Poles’ were constantly arriving from prisons and camps, ‘covered with sores and ulcers … with frost-bitten feet, without shoes, feet wrapped in rags’. The majority of them were skeletons, fit only to be hospitalised but they had to live in unheated tents. If the men went out to collect wood they got frost-bite or contracted colds and bronchitis.[27]

Conditions failed to improve after Stalin agreed to relocate the Polish army to areas where it would be easier for supply and training to take place. The new headquarters were in Yangi-Yul, near Tashkent, in Kazakhstan, and the army was divided in different locations in the Kirghiz, Kazakh and Uzbek republics. Though the climate here was in some ways more suitable, it was at the same time conducive to the spread of a variety of diseases. The army and civilian personnel were racked by typhus, typhoid, dysentery and malaria, and there were cases also of yellow fever and sleeping sickness. At one stage between January and June 1942 one person in two was affected by a contagious disease. From February to August, there were 47 411 cases of infectious diseases and almost 30 per cent of army personnel were ill. Thousands of men, women and children died of various illnesses. At Guzar in Uzbekistan (the so-called 'regiment of death'), to take one example, there were about 120 deaths per day. These figures failed to take into account the numbers of people who died en route to the Polish camps from exhaustion and infection.[28]

> Don't forget at this time we were very hungry, everybody was in shreds of clothing and many of my companions died on this journey from Siberia to the army. On one stretch of the journey I was travelling with five Polish men, one captain, one engineer and one philosopher. We were all on our last legs and one by one they died and we buried them in the fields. Died from starvation. I fortunately survived, probably I was stronger.
>
> But once in Kazakhstan I fell very ill. Half conscious I was taken in a truck to a hospital for the dying. Many Poles were there, among them officers, professors, high-ranking people. We were put to bed, looked after by Russians. There were terrible conditions in this hospital. I lost consciousness. For eleven days. I was emptying everything into the bed. Finally I woke up. Others in the room shouted to the nurses – this one is awake. The nurse came. 'Aha, you are awake, you are alive. We were counting you dead already. But you are lucky.' When I went into this hospital a lot of people I knew were lying in beds near me, or on the floor. When I woke up I said 'Where is this man who was lying here?' 'Oh, he died.' 'And this one?' 'He died.' Almost all died. And I survived. I had dysentery and did not eat or drink for eleven days. I was a strong man. My father had been very strong and lived to an old age.[29]

This account was corroborated by a Polish soldier who had a much more comfortable journey, but observed the illness and mortality en route.

Some travellers survived better than others. As this soldier explained, some prisoners and deportees were fortunate enough to be provided with transport and ration cards, as set out in the Polish–Soviet agreements. Other local authorities did not provide this support because they did not wish to lose labour. Some of those released had been too impatient to wait for support to be forthcoming and set off without adequate provisions or train tickets. It was the latter who were particularly vulnerable to exhaustion and illness en route.

> None of us got ill on the journey and we reached Tashkent fairly fit. But we did see people dying like flies. It was a hot climate. That was where the Poles started disintegrating. A lot of people lost their teeth. Typhus, typhoid, malaria, you could see 50 or 60 men lying on stations waiting for trains and in the morning only ten would get up. Those organized in a large group were alright but of those who'd been walking I can say that 70 per cent died.[30]

In addition, those men who had arrived in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan and then took jobs on collective farms or in other local enterprises and had been able to eat reasonably well were in quite good physical shape when they joined the army. One man described his initiation into the army:

> I worked on this farm [near Alma Ata] from September 1941 to February 1942. One day a man came and said that in the next town there was a Polish doctor and the Polish authorities were conscripting people to the Polish army. So all the young men left the farm. I left my mother behind and walked about 30 kilometres to the next town. I was seen by a Polish doctor, by a Russian doctor and by an NKVD officer. I was young and healthy and my surname was a typical Polish surname. However, if there was a surname that sounded Ukrainian or Jewish, the NKVD man asked a lot of embarrassing questions. He tried to stop Ukrainians joining the Polish army. The same happened to Jews – if they had a typical Jewish name they had some difficulty. But some of the Ukrainians and Jews were caught trying to pretend they were Poles. … The Ukrainians looked like Poles, but if they stumbled and made mistakes [in the language] they weren't permitted to join the Polish army.[31]

If you survived the hazards of the journey, other dangers awaited you in the Polish camps.

> I had been in the Polish army for a few months when I caught typhoid, not the type that affects the stomach, but phlegm typhoid. I was preparing at the time for the transportation of my unit to Iran. But a couple of days before my departure I was taken to hospital and spent some time there. After the typhoid I picked up malaria. When I returned to the army I was in various army camps working as a male nurse in army hospitals. I was appalled by the mortality rate. There was so much dysentery. I remember about ten soldiers a night died in that hospital and I witnessed many deaths myself on my duty round. It was exhaustion that caused them. And of course there was not enough food provided, or at least not enough of the right kind. I was absolutely amazed how many young people died unnecessarily, often crying out for food. There was virtually no medicine available.[32]

One interviewee alleged that some at least of the illness and mortality was caused by the training methods adopted by the Polish army. There was heavy discipline, a lot of marching, but the recruits were very weak and half-starved, and the training was often too rigorous for men in their condition.

> Some of the officers were stupid – they thought they could simply recreate the conditions of before the war. They sent soldiers out on training up into the hills in the heat of the day. In one unit the officer in charge was a doctor. He was a marvellous person, the kind you come across only once in a lifetime. He knew, of course, being a doctor that you can't take soldiers for exercises or drill when it was about 35 degrees C. So he allowed people to stay in their tents, going out in the evening when it was cooler. He looked after the food himself and took special responsibility for the sick. The other officers could have done that but didn't. Some people won't admit this but I saw what was going on.[33]

Sikorski was fully aware of the condition of the troops and civilians and tried by various means to improve their lot. An evacuation made a lot of sense on both humanitarian and military grounds. As early as the previous Autumn the British had been pressing for an evacuation of Polish personnel to Persia where they could be properly supplied and equipped. Stalin was sceptical that the Poles would ever return once they had left Russia and believed that the British had ulterior motives in advocating this course of action – 'I see, however, that the English need Polish soldiers', was his reported remark.[34] The British government

consistently argued for evacuation during the following Spring, and Anders was a persuasive ally. Finally, in the Summer of 1942, the British and Soviet governments reached an agreement over the heads of the Polish government to organise a second evacuation. The British urgently required reserves in the Middle East to support their defence of Egypt against the German forces led by Rommel, and Stalin could see the military importance of a British victory in the North African sector.[35] Sikorski had to give in though he fought to retain the right to continue recruiting in Russia. He knew that if he lost that right there would be no hope of rescuing the hundreds of thousands of Poles who remained in the Soviet Union, nor any chance of influencing the Soviet government, through the Polish Army, to keep its promises under the various inter-governmental agreements.

It has to be admitted that Sikorski's policy of recruiting as many Poles as possible to the Polish army in the Soviet Union, with the long-term objective of fighting alongside Soviet forces to defeat fascism, was a failure. His evacuation of Polish troops and some civilians was a major achievement, but was second-best to his long-term aim. However, he recognised that he had another major responsibility, namely to ensure the release of civilian Poles from camps and settlements and to secure humanitarian treatment for them after their release. By humanitarian treatment he meant adequate food, health care, educational and cultural provision, and social welfare, as well as work if they were fit to undertake it. He expected that the provision of care would be organised by the Polish Embassy in association with the local Soviet authorities. He envisaged the Embassy being able to draw on British and American sources for some of its supplies.

Right from the beginning of the Polish–Soviet negotiations Sikorski had told Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, that a humanitarian commitment from the Soviets was a condition of any agreement. The Soviet side was reluctant to agree, and then dragged its feet over several months, introducing adequate arrangements in the spirit of the agreement only at the beginning of 1942. A few months later they began to interfere with the humanitarian work of the Polish Embassy's delegates and, finally, in early 1943, terminated it.[36] So, despite his best efforts, Sikorski lost another battle with the Soviet government, though at the outset what he had achieved looked very promising. Why did Sikorski fail in the second, civilian, strand of his policy? To answer that question we need to look in a little more detail both at the agreement, and at the way in which the Soviet government wriggled out of implementing it.

In the Sikorski–Maisky agreement the Soviets conceded that so-called welfare delegates appointed by the Polish Embassy in Moscow should be entrusted with the care of the hundreds of thousands of Polish civilians to be liberated from the camps and settlements. Moscow agreed that they should be resettled in areas of 'suitable climatic conditions', preferably in the region of Polish military camps. Work appropriate to their qualifications would be provided. Those unfit for work, especially women and children, the elderly and invalids, would receive adequate food and accommodation and the Polish Embassy would be permitted to open a sufficient number of welfare agencies to offer proper care, drawing on clothing and medical supplies provided from abroad. Sword suggests that the vague wording in the agreement permitted the Soviets to believe that the major responsibility for the welfare of the released civilians rested with the Polish government.[37] Writing to the PCFA on 22 August 1941 Retinger suggested a systematic procedure for dealing with those released, drawing attention to the assistance which could be given by Polish government agencies and welfare organisations. In turn, the Soviet government promised that those released would receive railway and waterway passes to a place of residence chosen by them (within certain limits),15 roubles for every 24 hours they spent on the journey, subsistence allowances and, where possible, employment, but no commitment to care for those unable to work on arrival in their new location.[38] In any case, Soviet promises were only partially kept owing to the non-compliance of some local governments. Many of those released had to rely on their own very limited resources, travelling on foot or jumping on trains illegally.

> I heard that not far from this hospital a train was leaving, taking Poles to the Polish army. In the station I had a cup of boiling water, no tea or coffee. But I had to buy a ticket and now I had no money. But on the station there were some small boys, local thieves. They told me to go to the track, hide in the bushes at the side and when the train came, jump out and climb on. There were five stations and the fifth was for the Polish army. But at each station I must jump off the train, hide in the bushes at the side of the track, and climb on again when it started. I did this. I must tell you that when I came out of the bushes many people did the same, all like me, in shreds, and jumped on the train. Finally, we came to this station, Kermine, not too far from Tashkent. That was where my regiment was. The station was illuminated very brilliantly and there was a big notice 'Welcome to the Polish Army.'[39]

After the amnesty one group in a penal settlement were told they were free to leave, but no arrangements were made for them by the NKVD and they had to rely entirely on their own initiative. By chance they received information from a Russian woman that the Polish army was forming in the south and they became 'quite mad about it'.

> We held a sort of meeting and chose one man to go to Tomsk who would find out about the possibility of hiring some railway trucks to get us to the Polish army. He was successful. I think it was about 200 roubles per person for the trucks and at that price nearly everybody could afford it (they had been doing forestry work and could also sell some of their remaining possessions). We didn't bother where we would be taken to. We simply hired a train and said 'Take us to the Caspian region' because we knew there was a Polish army organised somewhere there, but we didn't know precisely where. In about a week they brought the transport up the line and we packed up our belongings and loaded them on to about five or six wagons. [Eventually these wagons were connected to an evacuees' train going east]. It took us seven or more days of travelling to get to near Alma Ata in Kazakhstan. We were told to get out with all our belongings and wait for transport to a collective farm. We simply had to work to support ourselves until we could find out precisely where the Polish army was.[40]

Others who were released were required to use far less initiative, being provided with most of the help they needed. Some Polish soldiers in a camp in Byelorussia were told by the commanding officer that they were free to leave and had the choice of joining the Polish army or the Soviet army. Those who chose the Polish army were given railway tickets, travel documents, large portions of bread, some soup and such property as they had. Within a few days they were in Kazakhstan searching for relatives before joining the army.[41] Two months after the Polish–Soviet agreement around 300 000 Poles had been released. Many had the means, the determination and the initiative to make successful journeys, even without formal Soviet support. But it was known that many others were stranded during their journeys and no one knew precisely what had happened to them.[42]

A second failure to implement the agreement on civilians was the slow progress made in appointing Polish Embassy delegates to care for those who arrived successfully in the vicinity of the Polish army. Without them, there were grave difficulties in establishing reception

centres, and providing adequate accommodation and care. Some of the new arrivals were given work in the cotton fields, others were forced to dig irrigation ditches, still others could find no work at all. Without help from the Soviet authorities or from Polish delegates, many suffered from starvation and disease or died en route. Those lucky enough to reach the immediate vicinity of the Polish army shared army rations and received some basic medical attention, but this was inadequate to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.[43]

From the Soviet side it could perhaps be argued that the Poles were making unreasonable demands on a Soviet government which was fighting for its life under the German onslaught. Transport facilities had been commandeered for the needs of the army and for the masses of evacuees from western Russia. The release of hundreds of thousands of Poles who made their way in droves from the north and east towards the south of Russia placed enormous strain on the transport and organisational capabilities of the Soviet authorities. At one stage the Polish Ambassador appealed to Poles to remain in the areas where they were released owing to overcrowding and a shortage of food and accommodation in the South, particularly in Uzbekistan. In November, Vyshinsky complained to Kot that the 'wandering' of the Polish people was completely planless and disorderly, and this accounted for many of the deaths. Doubtless the Soviet administration was labouring under considerable difficulties and it would have been unreasonable to expect perfect organisation. On the other hand, the Polish–Soviet agreement had been signed on 30 July, Retinger had suggested detailed ways of implementing it in August, and only in mid-November, after earlier opposition from Molotov, were the Soviets ready even to 'admit the possibility' that the Polish Embassy could appoint delegates. Kot also had to insist to Molotov that the delegates also had the right under the July agreement to gather data and information about the Poles in their areas.[44]

Even then virtually no progress had been made when Sikorski met Stalin in early December. Under pressure Stalin quickly conceded that Polish Embassy delegates should have the right to enter Polish communities and take up the responsibilities envisaged in the Sikorski–Maisky agreement. He also agreed to make a loan of 100 million roubles to assist Polish civilians. Finally, by 23 December 1941, a formal agreement was reached between the Polish Embassy and the PCFA defining the scope of the delegates' activities.[45] After this belated concession, rapid progress was made in meeting the acute needs of the Polish civilian population. Local Soviet authorities were instructed in January 1942 to co-operate with the Polish delegates, and the government ordered special rations

for hostels and nurseries, and food allocations to all Polish citizens unfit for work who were not living in this type of accommodation. Poles in employment were to receive rations on the basis of the normal ration card system.[46]

At last, six months after the agreement between the Soviet and Polish governments, the Polish delegates were able to carry out their duties effectively. A functioning relief system was established in the first months of 1942 under the direction of 20 appointed delegates, who were able, in most cases, to co-operate efficiently with local Soviet authorities. Piesakowski reports that by the end of March the delegates, in association with their assistants, the so-called 'men of trust', had established 24 orphanages, 35 nurseries, 68 feeding centres, 12 care homes for old people and invalids, 15 mobile clinics, 11 hospitals and 13 night shelters. By the beginning of 1943 some 300 000 Poles were being cared for by the Polish relief organisations.[47] The delegates were able to draw on the substantial funds made available by the Polish government in London, and also controlled generous charitable donations in money and kind from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. In April and May of 1942 some 1500 tons of various commodities for the Polish army and civilians arrived in Archangel, and a still larger total arrived in June. These supplies were forwarded to Polish centres in the Soviet Union where they were used or stored as needs dictated.[48]

However, the effectiveness of this humanitarian aid was soon undermined by the actions of the Soviet government which seemed determined to weaken and then break the Polish relief network. For example, as early as April 1942 Raczyński, the Polish Foreign Minister, complained about obstacles being placed in the way of goods imported from abroad and destined for Polish civilians. In June the NKVD forbade the Polish Embassy delegates to issue passports to Polish citizens. But an all-out attack on the Polish relief system began in July 1942 when the Soviets announced that the Polish Embassy delegations in Vladivostok and Archangelsk would be closed down on the grounds of redundancy since, it was claimed, the number of Polish citizens remaining there was insignificant.[49]

It seems that the Soviet authorities were unhappy with the unprecedented situation in which the representatives of a foreign state were operating on Soviet soil and were able, through their humanitarian work, to glean information about the Soviet system at first hand. Their distrust is not surprising given the advance of German armies to the vicinity of Stalingrad at that time. The Soviet Ambassador to the United States

stated the Soviet position in surprisingly frank terms: 'we suspect [foreign welfare institutions] of wanting to investigate internal problems, to control our politics, to pry into our affairs'.[50] Subsequent Soviet actions show clearly that the Kremlin was seeking ways of terminating the compact as soon as possible. The effective implementation of the humanitarian provisions, therefore, lasted only a few months before, beginning in July 1942, the Soviets began to squeeze the life out of the programme, removing the responsibility of the Polish government for Polish citizens in the Soviet Union, and placing the fortunes of Polish exiles entirely in Soviet hands. Looking back there is an air of inevitability about this process, despite the initial optimism of the Polish delegates that they could co-operate effectively with the Soviet authorities to meet the desperate needs of the Polish deportees.

Still worse, from the Polish point of view, was the Soviet announcement ending the diplomatic immunity of those Polish delegates who were embassy officials, on the grounds that they were not carrying out diplomatic duties. This was quickly followed by the arrest of the delegate in Vladivostok (who was the Embassy's First Secretary), and of delegates in Barnaul, Samarkand, Kirov and Petropavlovsk. The Polish Embassy protested against these arrests, the closure of delegations and the seizure of official papers. What seemed like an all-out attack on the Polish relief network was confirmed by the freezing of Embassy bank accounts and the closure and searches of warehouses containing relief goods from the Western allies. In total four of the twenty delegates' offices were closed and five others were unable to function.[51] As Sokolnicki, the new Polish *chargé d'affaires*, pointed out to Vyshinsky, 45 per cent of the activity of the Polish delegates was paralysed in districts where there were more than 170 000 Polish citizens needing food, clothing and medical treatment. Where so-called 'men of trust' were appointed to assist the delegates or to take their place after their removal, they were not recognised by the Soviet government, and local authorities refused to co-operate with them.[52]

These closures and arrests meant that relief operations had to be curtailed or discontinued, at the same time as the contents of warehouses, such as food, clothing and medicines, were left without any protection and were subject to pilfering. Preventive vaccination was interrupted and orphanages and invalid homes were inadequately supervised. The Poles rejected the allegation that relief work was now complete and that the needs of Polish citizens had been met. This was far from the truth. Living conditions of most Polish civilians were desperate; they were physically exhausted, subject to infections and

contagious diseases, half-starved, often unable to find work or too old and sick to take a job, and separated from their families. There was still, in July 1942, much work for the relief agencies to do, including as a priority the care of the numerous Polish children orphaned by the war. But in August 1942 the Polish Embassy reported that Polish orphanages were being closed down and the children transferred to local Soviet orphanages.[53]

When Tadeusz Romer, the new Polish ambassador in Moscow, met Molotov on 2 November 1942 to discuss the problems associated with the Polish relief operation, he was told in Molotov's customary brutal manner that the Soviet government would not change its policy, adding that it was the Soviet government's aim to cut the deportees' contacts with the Polish government. A few days earlier the Soviet Embassy in London had launched a vigorous defence of Soviet conduct, listing the various kinds of assistance the Poles had received from the Soviet government: an interest free loan of 100 million roubles to help with Polish relief efforts; the removal of duties on imports of goods destined for the Polish relief organisation; and reduced railway tariffs for the transport of these goods. In addition, the Soviet authorities had provided ration allowances for Poles, both for those in work and those in hostels, invalid and old people's homes, and orphanages. Going on to the counter-attack, the Embassy then accused the arrested delegates and men of trust of engaging in espionage and anti-Soviet activities on behalf of the Polish Embassy, as well as spreading lies and disinformation about the Soviet Union. There may have been a grain of truth in these charges. As Piesakowski admits, relief personnel sometimes did not possess the appropriate qualifications and occasionally engaged in espionage and other illegal activities, providing the NKVD with the excuse to condemn the entire relief operation.[54] Yet it is difficult to believe that the motives of the vast majority of relief personnel were not humanitarian and patriotic, and that the real charge against them was that they were able to observe the workings of Soviet bureaucracy at first hand, breaching the veil of secrecy which traditionally enveloped the activities of Soviet officials.

So, starting in July 1942, arrests and closures continued for the rest of the year and increased in number in January and February 1943. On 15 January all Polish welfare organisations were placed under Soviet administration, and residents of orphanages and old people's homes were required to accept Soviet passports. Those who refused were arrested and imprisoned.[55] Answering a charge of illegally confiscating Polish property Molotov's disingenuous response was that when the

Soviet authorities discovered that Soviet citizens were living there, it was entirely within the law for the Soviet government to take over the responsibility. The meaning of these actions was now crystal clear: the détente between the Soviets and the Polish government in London was over. The Kremlin had decided to withdraw the concessions it had made during the negotiations with the Polish Government-in-Exile in July 1941, and to revoke the assurances Stalin had given Sikorski the following December about the full implementation of the Polish–Soviet agreement. As a result the Polish authorities ceased to have any practical responsibility for the well-being of Polish citizens in the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, the London government still retained a formal legal responsibility for Polish citizens. For the Kremlin, therefore, the next logical step in breaking the link between the Polish exiles and the Polish government was to remove their Polish citizenship and compel them to accept citizenship of the Soviet Union. This would ensure that any future intervention by the London government on behalf of its former citizens would have no standing in international law. The process of imposing citizenship had begun on 19 November 1939, when it was decided that all residents of the western regions of Ukraine and Byelorussia on 1/2 November 1939 had acquired Soviet citizenship. In the interests of recruitment to the Polish army in 1941 the Soviets agreed as a gesture of good will to recognise deportees of Polish ethnicity as Polish citizens.[56] The Polish government contested the Soviet claims. It denied that the Soviets had a right to determine who were and who were not Polish citizens, and re-affirmed that everyone residing on the territory of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia in September 1939 had Polish citizenship and thereby qualified for amnesty and relief, and the right to join the Polish army.[57]

So, in January 1943, when the Kremlin decided to wind up the Polish relief organisation, it turned the screw on Polish citizens of Polish ethnicity by compelling them to take Soviet citizenship.[58] Poles who refused to accept Soviet citizenship were imprisoned. In order to break their resistance they were frequently deprived of food and drink, and told it was pointless to resist since Poland no longer existed. Those who continued to hold out were sent back to forced labour camps, while men who submitted were conscripted into the Soviet army.[59] The Polish Ambassador in Moscow protested at this 'entirely unjustified attempt to force foreign citizenship upon a considerable part of our nation, and this against their will, sentiments and traditions …'. Foreign Minister Raczyński complained to Eden that the Soviets had taken an 'entirely uncompromising and unfriendly attitude in regard to most essential

Polish interests' and could only be stopped by a firm reaction on the part of Poland's allies.[60]

As everyone recognised, decisions about citizenship had a direct bearing on the all-important question of Poland's future frontiers. After the Sikorski–Maisky agreement the Polish government hoped that the Soviet repudiation of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, accompanied by the desperate Soviet need for allies in face of Hitler's aggression, might ultimately produce an agreement on Poland's eastern frontiers favourable to Poland. But though the Soviets had disavowed the pact, they had not relinquished their claim to Poland's eastern borderlands. In Moscow's eyes, therefore, the imposition of Soviet citizenship on ethnic Poles from these regions was not a violation of the Sikorski–Maisky agreement at all, but simply the logical consequence of the 'voluntary' incorporation of these territories in the Soviet Union. The refusal of the Kremlin to recognise the Poles in the Soviet Union as Polish citizens implied that after the war the Soviets would draw Poland's frontiers on roughly the same line as had been agreed between the Soviet Union and Germany in August 1939. This would mean the loss of Poland's eastern territories including the Polish cities of Lwów and Wilno.

A sober demographic accounting of the Poles' forced residence in the Soviet Union would come to the following tentative conclusions. The number of military personnel and civilians permitted to leave the Soviet Union across the Caspian Sea to Persia in the 2 evacuations totalled some 113 000, of whom 43 000 left between 24 March and 4 April 1942 and just over 70 000 between 8 August and 30 August. Of this total, around 36 000 were civilians, mainly women and children, and around 77 000 were members of the Polish armed forces. Altogether they constituted no more than around 7 per cent of the number of Poles deported to the Soviet Union. Of the remainder, some 530 000 were allowed to return to Poland after the war. Perhaps as many as one half of the deportees died as a result of their experiences in camps and settlements by 1942, and a further indeterminate number were killed during service in the Red Army, making a total of around 800 000 who lost their lives. As many as 200 000 have not been accounted for.[61]

The evacuees were profoundly grateful for their release, but deeply troubled by their experiences and the loss of relatives and friends who had died or had been left behind. As they set off to various destinations from the shores of the Caspian Sea they hoped, or even expected, that they would be able, one day, to return to a free and independent Poland within its pre-war boundaries, and to be re-united with their families.

But before that hope could be realised, the war against Hitler had to be won. Most of the soldiers who left the Soviet Union formed part of the Polish Second Army Corps which, after training in the Middle East, became integrated into the Allied forces which landed in Italy, and made a major contribution to the Allied victory there. But while most of the Polish soldiers ended up in Italy, many of their female relatives and children journeyed to British colonies in Africa or India to await the end of the war. As the war drew to a close, Poles in German forced labour camps, factories or farms moved westwards to escape the advancing Soviet army and gathered in camps for Displaced Persons. At the same time, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians uprooted themselves from their countries to escape another Soviet occupation and trekked west ahead of the Red Army to reach similar camps in the western regions of Germany, where they were determined to stay rather than return to their homelands. These flights and displacements constitute the next stage in the journeys of the Poles and Balts from forced exile to life in a new country.

8
Soldiers and Refugees

The thousands of Polish troops and civilians released by Stalin in 1942 were, as we saw in Chapter 7, a very small minority of the Poles who were forcibly transplanted to the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1941. On their release, the soldiers had two main aims. The first was to fight alongside the Allies to defeat Nazi Germany. The second was never, in any circumstances, to live in the Soviet Union or a country controlled by it. Their experiences had made them both fiercely anti-Nazi and determinedly anti-Soviet. A major military contribution in the war against Hitler would, they believed, reinforce Poland's demand in post-war negotiations for the restoration of the Polish state within its pre-war boundaries. This was a condition of their returning to their homes in the eastern regions of Poland. They knew they could not achieve this objective without close collaboration with the Western allies of Great Britain and the United States. Yet they, and the Polish government in London, feared that the Soviet Union would become more important to the Allies than Poland owing to the Soviets' enormous military potential in the war against Hitler. Since the Poles coming out of Russia depended entirely on the British and Americans for arms and equipment, and on the British for training and deployment, they dare not allow their sentiments to rule their interests, despite temptations to the contrary. Their position was even more delicate since agreements already concluded between the Polish and British governments in London subordinated Polish forces to British operational control. Hence, the contribution of the Poles to the war against Germany was, and would be in future, directed and controlled by the British General Staff. This dependence placed the Poles in a relatively weak position when it came to post-war political decisions about the form of government in a restored Poland and the boundaries of the Polish state. But to

have taken an independent line by publicly condemning the Soviet Union would have deprived the Poles of what limited influence they had with their Western allies.

These victims of Stalin soon discovered that they were not alone in their exile from their native country. There were, at the time of their release, several thousand Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen in Britain, most of whom had already fought in the war against Hitler. There were also more than a million Poles working as forced labourers in Germany at the end of the war along with numerous Polish PoWs who were being subjected, against the rules of the Geneva Convention, to compulsory labour in rigorous conditions. Polish and Baltic conscripts to the German army were fighting in various theatres of war from North Africa to northern Europe. As the war drew to an end Baltic refugees from Stalin fled west before the tide of the Red Army could engulf them, and joined the 8 million or so other DPs who existed hand to mouth in Germany as Allied troops from East and West converged on the Elbe River in the Spring of 1945.

The 'Siberian' Poles, the people released to Persia by Stalin, would gradually have learned about the experiences of their compatriots in reaching the West. Wretched as they were in their own exile, they would have empathised with their fellow Poles in Britain who grieved for their families and friends in Poland. They would have admired the spirit and determination of fellow soldiers in September 1939 who, forced to flee across the border into neighbouring Hungary and Romania, set their sights on reaching either France or French-mandated territories and colonies. France was chosen as a result of the Franco-Polish military agreements of September and October 1939 permitting the formation of Polish military units in France and the reception of evacuated Polish troops. The Romanian and Hungarian authorities were generally prepared to turn a blind eye to the escape of Poles from internment camps. Nor did they seriously obstruct the activities of the Polish embassies in Budapest and Bucharest in issuing civilian clothes and travel documents to their nationals, and in assisting them to travel by train or boat to France or to the French mandated territory of Syria. In all around 43 000 Poles reached France by train or ship from the ports of Piraeus, Constanza or Split. Some 4500 arrived in Syria and linked up with French military units there. Travel by boat to southern French ports became the preferred method of evacuation after Mussolini began to prevent travel by train across northern Italy. The evacuation continued for around nine months.[1]

> I was interrogated in Hungary with my air force unit, having been placed in an internees' camp. I was there until early 1940 when I was

> taken from the camp to the Polish Embassy in Budapest. Five of us decided to try to reach France. We had been given some papers and had acquired civilian clothes. We travelled to Italy from Hungary by train. In Milan we had to be very careful. We walked one by one, or in twos, certainly not five of us together. I remember that on 5 March 1940 I was sitting eating dinner in France, just over the border from Italy. From there we travelled to a Polish camp where there were Polish officers, doctors and other Polish people who took records.[2]

Another internee in Hungary escaped from his camp and acquired a passport and some civilian clothes. He was told to make for the river border with Yugoslavia where he had difficulty crossing owing to the unstable ice.

> The next morning we met up with a lot of Polish soldiers who had also crossed the river during the night and we went to the nearest railway station to get a train to Zagreb. There the Polish consul gave us some Yugoslav money and we took the train to Split. Shortly afterwards we took ship to Marseilles in France. There we joined up with the rest of the Polish army. Some of them had come out through Hungary like me, others through Romania, others through Turkey. Many recruits were Poles who'd lived in France before the war as miners and so on. We spent time training these new recruits. I was then sent north. As we know, the Germans attacked through Belgium and the Netherlands and got round the French Maginot Line.[3]

At the end of this evacuation some 23 000 Polish soldiers and civilians still remained in internment in Hungary and Romania. When the Nazis occupied the two countries in 1941 the Polish internees were either imprisoned or taken to forced labour in Germany. Those who survived remained in Germany until the end of the war when they joined the ranks of DPs.[4]

When the Polish troops reached France they found that a Polish Government-in-Exile had been established under Article 24 of the Polish constitution of 1935 which conferred emergency powers on the President to appoint a successor. Under this Article President Mościcki had transferred his presidential powers to Władysław Raczkiewicz, a former minister, then living in Paris. He in turn appointed General Sikorski, who had travelled to France from Romania, as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of Polish forces. It was agreed with the French government that Polish military and air force units would be under

French operational command. Until May 1940 Poles continued to arrive in France either from the Balkans or, in a trickle, from German- or Soviet-occupied Poland. By the onset of the Nazis' attack on France Sikorski had under his command over 80 000 soldiers and some 7500 members of the Polish Air Force. Substantial numbers of these were recruited from ethnic Poles working in French industry. Around 40 000 Polish troops took an active part in the battle for France.[5]

When French and British resistance was quickly swept aside, once again the Polish soldiers were on the run. Churchill was willing to help the Poles escape across the English Channel and some 20 000 Polish soldiers reached Britain by small boat from the beaches of Dunkirk or from the French ports of La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Bayonne, Brest and St. Malo.[6]

> We went to a beach. As the Germans approached we jumped in the water. I was a poor swimmer. An English chap gave me a piece of wood and with this wood and his help he got me to the ship. These were the beaches of Dunkirk. To get there we had walked about 120 kilometres since we were short of petrol. People got blisters on their feet and of about 200 of us, maybe only 80 reached the coast. Maybe the rest came in later but by then the Germans would have been there before them. Anyway I was transferred from this little boat to a big barge. We slept on the floor and on 28 June I arrived in Plymouth. We went into a camp after a day or so. I remember some people went off before me but my feet were very sore and I couldn't take my shoes off. They put my feet in water because everything stuck in the shoes. After I had been one or two days in special soft slippers I was given boots two sizes bigger.[7]

Some of the Polish troops who were unable to reach the coast in time crossed into Spain where most were interned, but some 3000 were able to reach Gibraltar. Another 2000 were taken off by boat from Port Vendres, near Perpignan. Two Polish divisions which were marooned in Eastern France made for Switzerland where they were treated as refugees. Some of these followed clandestine escape routes using special evacuation posts in unoccupied France, Spain, Portugal and North Africa and eventually joined Polish units in Britain, North Africa or the Middle East. The majority remained in Switzerland, however, since the Polish government wanted to keep two divisions intact for possible future operations.[8] Most of the Polish troops arriving in Britain were sent to Scotland for recuperation and re-training, and were allocated to coastal defence duties. Their numbers were augmented later by some of the

'Siberian Poles', mainly those suitable for training for the parachute brigade, and by a relatively small number of volunteers from Polish settlements in North and South America. Ultimately these troops formed the First Polish Army Corps, numbering some 51 000 men in 1945, which took part in the D Day invasion and the advance of Allied armies across Western Europe. Of the approximately 8000 Polish air force personnel in France in June 1940 some 4200 escaped to Britain where they joined around 4000 others who had arrived in the previous year from Romania, Hungary and the Baltic states. Additional recruits were released by Stalin and came to Britain via Murmansk in 1942. All these men were integrated into Royal Air Force units. The early arrivals made a major contribution in the Battle of Britain and all of them played an important role in subsequent air operations. They were joined in Britain by some 1500 seamen from the Polish navy, whose numbers were augmented to 4000 by 1945. Add to these some 3000 Polish civilians who arrived in the early Summer of 1940, mainly family members of military personnel or government employees.[9] This factual summary of the formation of Polish military units in Britain is necessary to set the context for the personal accounts and the personal miseries of the Polish participants in these events:

> When we got to Scotland it was a terrible time for us because we remembered our families in Poland. My friend had a wife and two children in Poland. We went many times into the Scottish hills and we cried like babies because of all that we had gone through. We remembered how people had drowned in the Channel. It seemed inhuman, catastrophic, and we had this hatred in our heart for Germany, what they had done to us, and not only us but the British, the French, everybody. I can't speak about it because I am still so mad and upset about how the Germans killed so many people. I had a brother who was killed – he was a sailor. He had been sent to a German camp. But he refused to sign to go into the German army. So they tried to starve him. He was really broken down. At the end of the war he escaped from the camp and was blown up by a mine. Another brother spent all the war in hiding. His wife later broke down with nerves and died. Somebody looked after their two daughters. We were angry and really wanted to fight the Germans. From 1940 I was part of the Polish Armoured Division.[10]

There were many other Poles on British-controlled territory after 1940. Among fighting units there was the Carpathian Brigade in the Middle

East commanded by General Kopański. These men had escaped from Poland into the Balkans and from there had made their way to the French mandate of Syria, where they assembled at Beirut and Homs. At the time of the Nazi invasion of France the Brigade numbered over 4000 men and 485 officers. After the fall of France the Brigade left Syria, prepared to fight the French forces there if they had tried to detain them, and marched to the British-mandated territory of Palestine. After training they were deployed for the defence of Alexandria and then participated in the siege of Tobruk. When the soldiers evacuated from the Soviet Union reached the Middle East in 1942 they merged with the Carpathian Brigade to form a new unit which in July 1943 became known as the Second Polish Army Corps. It was assigned to the British Eighth Army but under the command of General Anders. Its initial strength during training was around 67 000 men.[11] One reserve officer who was considered too old to fight recounted the anxieties which many of his compatriots must have felt about their relatives left behind in Poland or the Soviet Union.

> After leaving Persia I lived in Jaffa in Palestine for five years. I left the Polish army when there was nothing left for me to do. I took a job teaching in Arabic in Arab schools. It was impossible to return to Poland and I did not know other countries. I kept trying to contact my family in Poland, my wife, my children and my mother. Eventually we made contact. My wife sent me a telegram saying they were all alive. She asked me to send them supplies which I did many times. Then I learned what happened. My wife died during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the result of a bombing raid. My children were loaded on to a train by the Germans to be taken to Germany but the Polish underground attacked the train at Częstochowa, released all the children and persuaded local people to take them in.[12]

There were many other soldiers released from the Soviet Union who were unfit for training owing to their physical ordeal and the diseases contracted both in Russia and in the Middle East. Malaria was a common scourge. Fusing and training a number of separate units into an efficient fighting force took some time and the Corps suffered many deaths resulting from physical weakness and disease. It was not until December 1943 that the first units of the Second Corps were transferred to Italy. Here they played a vital role in the liberation of the country. Their capture of the German stronghold at Monte Cassino was both heroic and tactically adept. Subsequently they were an integral and

important part of the Allied advance up the Italian peninsula. Towards the end of the war the Polish Second Corps held 30 miles of the front line. Its losses in the Italian campaign were 2197 dead, 8737 wounded and 264 missing.[13]

In the final months of the war the strength of the Second Corps was augmented by arrivals from north of the Alps. These were Polish deserters from the German army and the Todt labour battalions, liberated PoWs, and refugees from Switzerland and Germany. At the onset of the Italian campaign Anders was asked about the limited number of reserves available to replace losses in the Polish Second Corps. He was confident that there would be no shortage once the Corps reached Italy. He was proved correct. The strength of the Corps rose from 45 276 in April 1944 to 75 581 in May 1945. Most of the 30 000 increase was composed of conscripts in the German army who took the first opportunity to desert. By December the Corps numbered 112 000 men and special camps had to be opened to house them.[14] The first Polish deserters from the *Wehrmacht* had joined Allied units in North Africa in 1941–42, to be followed by many others during the Normandy and the Italian campaigns. Most were simply given a change of uniform and drafted into Polish units. Between the end of 1943 and May 1945 some 89 000 men were incorporated in Polish forces. Most of these men had been drafted by the Germans for military or labour service and came entirely from the German-occupied regions of Poland. By contrast more than 80 per cent of the men of the Second Polish Army Corps who had landed in Italy in late 1943 and early 1944 were from the Eastern regions of Poland then under Soviet control.[15] This deserter from the *Wehrmacht* tells a not untypical story:

> We were sent to guard a road (in Belgium) and were told that the tanks would come from that side, but they came from the other! We were also being shot at by snipers. I thought, you stupid man, I'm on your side. But to him I was just a German like everyone else. When we saw the tanks coming I said to the other Poles, when the Germans begin to retreat we'll meet in that wood over there and we'll do something. When I saw the tanks getting nearer with their guns trained on our trenches I started to run towards a farm about half a mile away. I scaled a six-foot wall without any help with a full pack on my back. I looked round for somewhere to hide and stayed there until the morning when the British troops came. I handed over my rifle and ammunition and they took me off. They didn't escort me under armed guard or anything like that. They gave me chocolates, cigarettes

> and so on. We were then joined by some German PoWs and they saw that I and the other captured Poles had taken off our badges and insignia. They were bitter. You swines, you traitors, the German forces will be here and you'll be shot! After a period as PoW in Belgium and Scotland I eventually returned to Germany with Polish troops.[16]

Tens of thousands of Polish civilian refugees and dependants were also living in British imperial territories at the end of the war where they had been transported after a relatively brief stay in Iran. They were to remain there for varying periods of time before coming to Britain to join their relatives in the Polish armed forces. In 1943–44 some 35 000 civilian refugees were being looked after in camps in the British dominions and colonies or in Iran. There were three camps in India and around 22 settlements in Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya and Rhodesia, varying in size from 350 to 4000 persons. Most of the residents of the camps were women and children, with a few males who were too old or unfit for the Polish army. With help from the colonial authorities the Poles set up schools, youth organisations such as scouts and guides, and Catholic churches. In some camps Polish missionaries who had been working in Africa for years supplied the schools with books, pens and pencils, paper and English primers. The major objective was to prepare the young people for life in a new country, although they hoped their stay would be temporary, and to preserve the culture and traditions of Poland. Most people stayed in these camps for around six years before being transported to Britain or other countries which had agreed to receive them. The British Governor of Tanganyika promulgated a paternalistic law preventing Polish women 'who were of the unsophisticated peasant type' entering into mixed marriages with Africans or from marrying European males who were 'known to be bad characters or [had] no steady source of income'.[17]

By far the largest number of exiled Poles were to be found in the British and American zones of occupation in Germany. A sizeable proportion of these were PoWs confined in German camps and released by the Allied armies as they advanced into Germany. There were several categories of such prisoners. There were those captured in the German campaign against Poland in September 1939, and others who helped defend France against the German blitzkrieg in June 1940. There were also the internees from Romania and Hungary who had not escaped to the West and had been imprisoned or put to labour service in Germany in 1941. The final group of PoWs were members of the Polish Home Army which had defended Warsaw during the Uprising in August/September 1944. They,

along with civilians from Warsaw, numbered some 67 000.[18] One estimate in August 1945 put the total number of Polish PoWs in the British and American zones at around 159 000. All told some 21 000 Polish PoWs joined Polish army units in Germany and Italy. The Polish government in London hoped to incorporate as many PoWs and deportees as possible in the Polish army in order to strengthen their bargaining position at the end of the war. The policy of the British Cabinet, however, was much more cautious, limiting numbers to those who could make a useful contribution to the war against Germany. The British expected that the remaining PoWs would either be repatriated or become Displaced Persons.[19] A much larger number of Poles in Germany was composed of forced labourers and concentration camp victims. Some of the former had been conscripted by intimidation and blackmail via labour offices in Poland, others had been deported as a result of seizures and mass round-ups, and still others were members of the underground. At the end of the war there were some 80 000 Polish survivors of concentration camps.[20]

Our focus so far has been on the Polish exiles. But in the British and American zones of Germany there were, proportionate to population, as many citizens of the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. These, too, were composed of PoWs, ex-members of the *Wehrmacht*, and forced labourers released from camps. Some Balts were too late in escaping west from the Soviet zone and were forced to return to the Baltic states or were sent to the GULAG. The largest number of Balts in the three Western-occupied zones of Germany arrived in late 1944 and 1945 as they fled before the advancing Red Army. It has been estimated that some 240 000 Latvians, around 14 per cent of the total population, left Latvia to escape the second Soviet occupation. A similar proportion of the British population leaving the country would have amounted to about 8 million people. It is claimed that many more would have left but they delayed too long, and then found the frontiers closed by the Soviets. At least half of the 240 000 who left Latvia were caught by the Red Army and failed to reach the West.[21]

> When in the summer of 1944 we heard that the Germans were being pushed back by the Soviet armies we decided to move out and we left our forestry house on 23 September, 1944. We were just outside Riga on 1 October, 1944, having travelled by horses and carts and a couple of bikes. On the journey it was autumn. Many of the farmsteads along the road were derelict, the corn had been cut and gathered but not threshed. There was plenty of vegetables and fruit. Food didn't

> seem to be short. The Latvian farmsteads had stored everything up for winter so we didn't suffer any hunger. As for money, we didn't spend it since there was nothing to spend it on. We spent October in a house in the western part of our country (Kurzeme or Courland) and then on 1 November my father took another forestry job in the region. But having been burgled twice by Communist partisans we decided to leave Latvia. On 14 December we boarded a ship in Ventspils and after being bombed en route in Liepaja harbour we arrived in Germany on 18 December. We were all depressed at the thought of leaving Latvia, we looked at Liepaja burning in places, and we cried a tear or two. Then I tried to think calmly about our situation, where we were heading, what people would be like. But we had all got one head, two arms, two legs and I had seen some Germans before and I thought we might get by. There was a great feeling of sadness, my parents were pretty quiet.[22]

The Pocs family had a similar journey, travelling first to western Latvia where they stayed for 2 months. When they heard that Soviet troops had blocked the escape route by land they boarded a German military boat carrying wounded soldiers to Danzig. They had the good fortune to travel with another family who had previously managed a creamery and this enabled them to buy favours en route with portions of butter. In this way they got on the boat, bought railways tickets from Gdansk to Berlin, and then onward tickets to Oldenburg, north of Hamburg. Butter was also used to purchase food along the way.[23]

Another family took the dangerous land route from Latvia to Germany and were lucky to survive. On 23 September they caught the last train from their town to Riga, less than a day ahead of the advancing Russian troops. On 9 October they were able to leave by train for the port of Liepaja where they hoped to take ship. When this proved impossible they boarded a train reserved for the army.

> We were able to get on because one of our party was a doctor whose husband was in the army. We passed through Lithuania where we were bombed and the rear part of the train was immobilized and fell into Russian hands. We were in the front part and were able to carry on. A few times we were shot at by low flying Russian planes. Eventually we were made to disembark from the train in the forest near a German military unit. As the Russians came ever closer we just had to find a way to leave. A sergeant said that though there was no way we could survive they would hide us on the lorries which were

> leaving. They had to send all the machinery and equipment back to Germany and we were put on the lorries under blankets, children as well. There was a terrible air raid one night, it never stopped. But we managed to survive and kept going in front of the Russian advance.[24]

Eventually this group reached Germany and met up with American troops who helped them to reach Bremen.

It is difficult to establish the exact number of Latvians in the western zones of Germany when the Nazis surrendered. According to Putnins there were some 120 000, composed of refugees, forced labourers, members of the Latvian Legion, and inmates of concentration camps, plus some Latvians who had migrated to Germany at the beginning of the war after claiming German ancestry. The PoWs were mainly members of the 15th Division of the Latvian Legion under German command. They fought near Leningrad and covered the retreat of the German army from Russia through Latvia. In late 1944 the remnants of the division were transferred to Pomerania to re-group and replenish their ranks.[25] One Latvian conscript in the division describes what happened:

> On 4 November 1943 I was called up into the army and on 1 December I was in Russia. I was in a Latvian unit but under the command of the German army. There were two divisions, the 15th which I was in up near Leningrad and the 19th. When we retreated from Russia in 1944 our division lost so many men that when it was sent to Germany to re-group there were new young recruits brought in. Our division was split, one regiment was sent to Berlin and a German major commanded them. They remained there and the Russians took them prisoner when they arrived in Berlin. The commander of my regiment was a Latvian. He got all the regiment together and said: 'The war is lost, there is nothing for us here, only to die or be put in prison, so let's go to the western front.' We had no transport, we marched at night. At one crossroads we came across 20 military police who had the power to shoot. They approached us with machine guns and our colonel went up to them. They said he had to go with them, but he said 'If you look all around you will see that the war will be over in a matter of days. If you want to die you will take some of us with you but you will be dead as well, so make your choice.' They said 'Alright, we haven't seen you'. In the end we passed through the German lines and surrendered to the Americans.[26]

The escape routes of Estonians fleeing the Soviets were slightly different from those of the Latvians. A much larger number of Estonians escaped

by sea to Sweden 'using every type and size of water craft'. Even so, the number of Estonian refugees in Germany was greater than the Swedish contingent. Estimates of the numbers of Estonian refugees in Sweden range from 25 000 to 28 000 plus around 6500 members of the Swedish minority in Estonia. Kahk puts the number of Estonians in DP camps in Germany and Austria on 1 October 1946 at 32 219, with about 6000 in PoW camps and a further 4000 or so who were working outside the camps. Thousands of Estonians lost their lives en route through Soviet bombing of the trains or the sinking of their boats crossing the Baltic.[27] One Estonian family travelled by train through Latvia and Lithuania to Danzig from where they were taken to an old army barracks in Brandenburg. The father was employed for a short time as a fireman in the Opel factory which was repeatedly bombed by the British and the Americans.

> We were not there very long before we had to escape again as the Soviets approached from the East. The high ups in the Opel factory said that we had to escape since the Russians would kill or deport us since we had escaped from Estonia. In Soviet eyes we were Soviet citizens. We just got on the train. Nobody asked for papers, nobody asked for money, and we started to escape West like all our people. We got as far as Hamburg. There the bombing started. The English were bombing. My mother was killed there. That's where we stopped. We had to bury her. Then we went to a big German farm nearby. They took in all people who had escaped from the Russians. Many people slept in outhouses, any place they could find. Again, one night the Germans were there, the next morning we woke and it was the British there. There was my father, myself and my youngest brother. Our family was all separated; one brother was captured by the Russians, the other one was taken to Germany but we had no idea what had become of him.[28]

Most Estonian PoWs in Germany had been conscripts in the German army before giving themselves up. One young man was in an Estonian battalion ordered from Denmark to defend Berlin in April 1945:

> There were a lot of air attacks on the train. We had an Estonian battalion commander who took us off the train before we reached Berlin and started marching west and every two miles he wrote out a new marching order for the battalion so that if we got stopped by the German military police we could just say we were moving from one

> village to another. The idea was to keep moving west until we met American troops. The colonel must have thought no way was he going to kill these 400 boys. There were millions of people walking to the West, all the roads were just crowded with people, some with horse and carts but mainly walking. Finally we met the Americans and were taken to a huge field, about 30 000 PoWs mainly German.[29]

But not all Estonian PoWs had fought with the Germans. One man was called up by the Soviets in July 1941 and eventually was part of the Soviet army which pushed across northern Estonia in 1944. After crossing the river at Narva the first man he met on the far side was a fellow Estonian whom he had worked with before the war. He said 'Hello, how are you getting on?' He was in German uniform. 'Our chaps behind took him to prison.' But this narrator shortly afterwards gave himself up to the Germans on one of the Estonian islands after having been in the water for eight hours. As he left the water to surrender he fully expected to be shot from behind, which was the normal Soviet practice. Taken to Germany he worked as a PoW in a camp full of Russians. One night when the Allies approached he ran into some bushes with friends and tried to cross the river to the British troops. A bullet went through his cap, narrowly missing his skull. Eventually he reached the British lines.

> Anybody would recognise us as PoWs because we were just in rags and bits of army clothing. They just put us behind the lines. Nobody asked any questions. They couldn't speak the language anyway. They treated us as Russians. We learned Russian a bit in the army but in our unit we spoke Estonian.[30]

Estimates put the number of Lithuanian citizens in the western zones of Germany at the end of the war at around 60 000, all but 10 000 of these being refugees who fled in the Summer of 1944. The remainder comprised concentration camp victims, those who had 'repatriated' to Germany at the beginning of the war claiming German ethnicity, forced labourers and PoWs conscripted into the German army. Krisciunas says that a considerably larger number of Lithuanians left Lithuania in the second half of 1944 but were trapped by the Red Army in Poland and Eastern Germany, and never reached the West.[31] The total number of Baltic citizens in the western zones of Germany at the time of the German surrender is usually estimated to be around 200 000, but may be as high as 220 000 if the figures given above are accurate. Of this total, about 19 000 Balts in the British zone had fought as conscripts in the *Wehrmacht*.

All told there were some 6 million DPs in the western zones of Germany at the end of the war. This enormous number of refugees was a massive burden to the occupation forces. The Allies' main objective was to ensure that as many as possible of these people returned to their homes as quickly as possible. The 3 million or so DPs of French and Belgian citizenship were repatriated rapidly, and 2 million Soviet citizens in the western zones of Germany and Austria were shipped back to the Soviet Union before the end of 1945. The return of Soviet citizens followed the Yalta agreement of February 1945 providing for the exchange of PoWs and civilians between the Allies at the end of the war. After these departures there still remained over 1 million DPs and PoWs in the western zones, many of them Poles and Balts. These people constituted a major problem for the Allies and an irritant in the post-war relations between the Soviet Union and the western powers.

For the Kremlin the situation was quite clear. DPs who inhabited Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia after the Soviet takeover in September 1939 were Soviet citizens and should be returned to the Soviet Union in accordance with the Yalta agreement. The same was true for Baltic DPs who were resident in the Baltic republics after these states were admitted to the Soviet Union in the Summer of 1940. If these people did not return voluntarily, the Soviets argued, the United States and Britain should return them forcibly. Moscow used a variety of arguments to convince the Allies to repatriate them. The Soviet Union, it claimed, had a right to control its own nationals. By retaining them the Allies were providing a refuge for war criminals who should be returned to the Soviet Union for punishment. Moreover, the refugee camps were becoming centres of anti-Communist propaganda. Besides which, the West was using the DPs as cheap labour to its own advantage.[32]

The Western Allies were responsive to these arguments, for a time at least. Their policy was to co-operate with the Soviet Union as much as possible, particularly since they needed Soviet assistance in the continuing war against Japan. In May 1945 the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) declared that Soviet citizens identified as such by Soviet repatriation representatives would be forcibly repatriated. This put at risk Poles and Balts originating from territory occupied by the Soviets at the end of the war. General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, believed that if a successful joint government were to be established in Germany the West would have to overcome Russian suspicions. Returning DPs claimed by the Soviets would contribute to that. But more important still, the Americans and British feared that without this co-operation, the Soviets might refuse to

repatriate American and British PoWs liberated by the Russians in Poland and the Soviet zone of Germany.

However, arguments to the contrary were strong. Those who had been involved in repatriating some 2 million Soviet nationals had discovered that many of them were passionately anti-Soviet and justifiably feared for their lives if they went back. A number had been living in the West since the failure of the Whites in the Civil War in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, and should never have been returned. Some were citizens of third countries such as Yugoslavia. In desperation a number committed suicide or mutilated themselves rather than return. On occasion the Allies used force and deception to send back unwilling people to imprisonment, execution, or consignment to the GULAG. The most notorious 'victims of Yalta', to use Nikolai Tolstoy's term, were the Cossacks who had allied themselves with the Germans against the Soviets. A pressing question for the Western Allies was whether the Poles from Eastern Poland and the Balts should also be forcibly returned.[33]

Both groups were acutely apprehensive that this might be their fate. A Lithuanian refugee publication, for example, expressed their fears:

> The Lithuanians who had suffered so much do not have a free country to return to. Nor is their present position in any way secure, nor is there a guarantee that the Americans and the English will not betray them to a new slavery.[34]

A number of factors ensured that they escaped forcible repatriation. First of all the numbers were substantial. The amount of force required in the case of these people resolutely refusing to leave would have been considerable and a cause of scandal. There was growing awareness that these refugees were genuinely terrified of returning to countries under the control of Moscow, and that the only way to ensure that they did was at the point of a gun. This would have required Allied soldiers to carry out an extremely distasteful task, the prospect of which became less and less acceptable as Cold War tensions mounted. Moreover, forcible repatriation violated the tradition of granting asylum and protecting the rights of PoWs. The key argument for the Western Allies was that Polish exiles who grew up in the Polish eastern territories before the war and had been Polish citizens had not now become Soviet citizens as a result of forcible boundary changes. The same was true of Baltic exiles who had also been citizens of independent states. An authoritative directive, issued by SHAEF in May 1945, declared that the British and United States Governments 'had not recognized any territorial changes

brought about by the war and that all persons from such areas will not be returned to their home districts nor treated as Soviet citizens unless they affirmatively claim Soviet citizenship'. In October this was confirmed by a further SHAEF memorandum noting that forcible repatriation was applicable only to those persons who were Soviet citizens before 1 September 1939. This of course exempted Eastern Poles and Balts from classification as Soviet citizens.[35]

Generally, if a person claimed not to be a Soviet citizen, his claim was accepted unless it could be proved to be false.[36] General Eisenhower banned forcible repatriation of any kind in the American Zone in October 1945 and Field-Marshal Alexander in Italy refused to remove Poles in the Polish Second Army Corps from his command, as the Soviets were demanding. But for the Poles and Balts in DP camps in Germany there was continued worry and uncertainty, even though a resolution passed the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in February 1946 stating that 'no refugees who [had] … expressed valid objections to returning to their countries of origin … shall be compelled to return …'. In 1946 the United Nations Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) which was responsible for administering DP camps in the western zones of Germany, issued an order calling for the speediest possible repatriation of DPs. It proposed to isolate those who were most influential in discouraging their fellow DPs to return, and offered material inducements to those willing to be repatriated. There were so many protests at this order that it was quickly withdrawn. Yet it showed the DPs from eastern Poland and the Baltic states that the shadow of possible repatriation was still hanging over them.[37]

Their main reason for not wishing to return was their hatred and fear of Soviet Communism. There were political, religious and economic reasons for this. Almost all of them had lived and suffered under Communism and had lost relatives and friends to imprisonment, execution or deportation to the GULAG. Furthermore, those Balts who had fought in the *Wehrmacht* could expect no mercy from the Soviets should they return, even if they had been conscripted. At the very least they would have to accept Soviet citizenship if they returned home, which was anathema to them. Their experience of living under Soviet administration in the early years of the war offered no inducement to return. Moreover, reports coming out of the Baltic states spoke of the resumption of deportations. Returning refugees would almost certainly meet that fate.

Poles from the German-occupied regions of Poland, on the other hand, could at least return to a Polish state, albeit one under the control of Moscow. Not all chose to go back however:

> I realised that the Russians were in control of Poland. Some Polish soldiers returned to Poland because their families were there but they did not know whether there would be a free Poland or not. I had a family too, my mother and two sisters. It was a difficult decision for me but I had heard a good deal, too much, about how the Russians are – so I thought I would wait and see if something changed. Nothing did. Anyway, I did not want to go after my mother died. My wife hasn't been back to Poland either. Her home was near Lwów in eastern Poland. She could not go back. And she had no family there either. The Russians took all her family into the Soviet Union in 1941.[38]

Some who did return decided not to stay as a result of their experiences. Back in Germany they were able to give first-hand accounts of Communist rule, including the arrests and imprisonment of some of the returnees. In September 1945 a senior British officer reported that three out of four Poles who had recently arrived at a DP camp in the British zone had returned to Poland after the war but had found the conditions intolerable. Russian soldiers roamed the countryside plundering at will, and anti-Communist partisans in the forests waged frequent pitched battles with the Soviets. Murder and rape were commonplace and food was in short supply and very expensive. There was no coal and little immediate prospect of any. In addition, the worsening experience of the Cold War showed that the possibility of good relations between the erstwhile Allies had become remote.[39]

Meanwhile, the representatives of the former London government, which ceased to be recognised by the Allies in July 1945, continued to operate in the German DP camps until the Spring of 1946, and discouraged Poles from returning home. It was in their interest to keep as many Poles in the West as possible, both to strengthen the Polish constituency there and to help in the maintenance of traditional Polish culture. Some army officers also believed that in the Cold War world there might be a role for a Polish army of the West if Communism began to unravel in Eastern Europe. Members of the Polish Second Army Corps who came out of Siberia and originated from Eastern Poland had a very strong *esprit de corps*. 'We are one big family', claimed General Anders in an

order to his troops 'born through a mutual devotion to duty for a common cause, and such a family, freely united by bonds of friendship, we desire to remain'. In Italy the Corps offered education and cultural programmes, circulated publications, and maintained a strong political awareness. For most of its members, to return to an undemocratic Poland which had been illegally stripped of its eastern territories would have been a betrayal of their deepest convictions.[40] Of those who had come from Russia and been in the Corps ever since their release, only 310 applied for repatriation. But if one includes those who joined the Corps after it reached Italy, mainly from the western regions of Poland, out of 112 000 members at the end of 1945, 14 200 men wanted to return. The division was broadly between those who had experienced Soviet rule and those who had not.[41] The following interview bears this out:

> I was given the choice whether I wished to go back to Poland from the Second Corps. I didn't want to go back. Nobody in the Polish army said straight out that it was better for us not to go back – no officers, for instance. But the Polish paper was against it. Also there were army shows with actors, and though this was not pressure exactly, an atmosphere was built up that we should stay. There were two groups in the Polish Army in Italy at that time. The first group had joined the Polish army in Russia or the Middle East possibly. Then the other group had been drafted into the German army and become PoWs, or had deserted from the German army. Quite a lot of the second group went back to Poland. Perhaps it was that they'd not experienced Soviet rule. But those of us who'd been in Russia didn't trust Russian promises. Very very few who had been in Russia went back.[42]

Most of the DPs and soldiers in Germany and Britain, however, had homes in western Poland, and there was an upsurge in the numbers returning in the Autumn of 1945 and throughout 1946. The highest number of Polish DPs in the western zones of Germany was 1 055 000, in late Summer 1945. This fell steadily in the course of the next 18 months so that by December 1946 only 272 712 remained. In Britain some 86 000 members of the Polish forces, almost half the total number, were repatriated to Poland.[43] This decline was both dramatic and unexpected. What accounted for it? It resulted from a combination of push and pull factors. The push factors were homesickness, a dislike of the DP camps, and apparently only limited possibilities of finding a new

home in Britain, the United States, or other parts of the world. The choice was a painful one between giving up their homeland and settling in a strange and unfamiliar country far away from home, or returning to Poland to face a highly problematic future. The pull factors included the prospect of free and fair elections in 1947, the incorporation in the Provisional Government of some non-Communists such as Stanisław Mikołajczik, a former Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, a slight improvement in the Polish economic situation, and the fact that the majority of the Polish DPs were relatively poor peasants and industrial workers who could hope for egalitarian economic and social policies under Communist or reformist governments. By contrast, almost none of the Baltic exiles returned. Almost half of them were well-educated businessmen, middle-class professional people, academics, artists, officials and substantial farmers. They could expect expropriation of their property, probable imprisonment or deportation and, if they escaped that fate, limitations on personal expression.[44]

Fortunately for them, they were not put under heavy pressure from the British government to return to their homelands. In London, officials were acutely aware at the end of the war that 'the ownership of these Balts [was] an outstanding issue between the Soviets and ourselves'. They agreed in May and June 1945 that the British government should only send back those who wished to go; the remainder would be held by the British occupation authorities until a decision was reached about their eventual disposal. Foreign Office officials had been discussing whether a possible *quid pro quo* for recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic states in the Soviet Union might be to make a distinction between Baltic citizens who went abroad at the time of the first Soviet occupation in June 1940, and those who remained until 1944. The latter might be regarded as possessing Soviet nationality and hence eligibility for repatriation under the Yalta agreements. This option was rejected by Thomas Brimelow of the Northern Department in September 1945. Even if London were to recognise the legality of the Soviet incorporation he said, it should not be prepared to repatriate persons who did not want to go. The exception to this, one official argued, should be Baltic nationals captured in German uniform, since it was impossible to distinguish between volunteers and conscripts. This was the solution adopted by the Swedish government which in January 1946 sent back to the Soviet Baltic republics 167 Baltic refugees who had served in the Wehrmacht. Fortunately for Baltic refugees in West Germany, the decision about their future was made by Field-Marshal Montgomery who disbanded their units and put the men in DP camps.

This removed the anxiety of the men but almost certainly permitted some alleged war criminals to escape prosecution, as we shall see in a Chapter 9.[45]

At the end of the war there were high hopes among the exiles that they would be able to return to their homes. Substantial numbers refused to go back to countries ruled by Communists. They believed, however, that Communist power would collapse under Western pressure, and that the post-war settlement would provide for self-determination for the East European states. 'When the Soviets invaded Latvia we felt they might later retreat to Russia and we could return but it never happened', as one émigré put it. By 1947 when relations between the Soviet Union and the Western powers were becoming increasingly frosty, refugee Balts believed that a war between the Great Powers would be the means of the Baltic states recovering their independence.[46] The exiles over-estimated both the weakness of the Soviets on the one hand, and the determination of the Allies to overthrow Communism on the other. They placed too much faith in the Atlantic Charter, and drew over-optimistic conclusions from the refusal of the Western allies to recognise the incorporation of the Baltic states in the Soviet Union. 'The principles [of the Atlantic Charter]', noted one Lithuanian, 'are close to us. These principles were accepted by the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference. Presently we expect the implementation … We can expect that the Atlantic Declaration will be fully implemented and that it will serve as a beacon in the lives of nations …'[47] Consequently they considered their stay in the West to be purely temporary, but while they were there they should do all they could to preserve their native cultures and languages, particularly among their young people, in preparation for life after their return. So, in the DP camps in Germany, in the settlements in Africa, in the army encampments in Germany and Italy, in the hostels and camps established for the first arrivals in Britain, extensive cultural and educational programmes were established, churches were organised, vocational training courses were offered and domestic skills were taught to young women. Folk dancing groups, dramatic societies and choirs were set up.

The exiles also believed that even if they had to stay in the West for a few years the education they were receiving, particularly language training, would help them to adjust to the conditions of life in their new homes. Many refused to leave Europe for the United States, Canada, Australia and Latin America because they wished to remain in geographical and spiritual proximity to their homelands. But even those who moved further afield still hoped to return home. This was true of

the majority of Estonian refugees to Canada in the late 1940s and early 1950s, who refused to call themselves immigrants, but rather refugees or exiles. It was not until the late 1950s that this hope of return to a free and independent homeland began to be extinguished. The elimination of partisan groups in the Baltic states and parts of Poland, and the crushing of the Hungarian insurrection in 1956 showed Moscow's ruthless determination to retain control of its East European satellites. The exiles concluded that their temporary homes in Western countries were more than likely to become permanent. But, marooned in the DP camps in West Germany after the war, their first task was to find countries which would accept them for settlement. This was to prove an exceptionally difficult and prolonged process.[48]

9
'Midway to Nowhere'

When Poland eased its way out of Communist rule, with great finesse, in the summer of 1989, and the Baltic states re-asserted their independence from Moscow as the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, it was widely remarked in these states that the Second World War had finally ended for the eastern part of Europe. To be sure, some of the adverse consequences of the war were to persist for a long time in the West, but the Western Allies' major objective during the war, namely to destroy fascist aggression, had been achieved. In 1945, western refugees and military personnel could also return home to countries enjoying democratic institutions and human rights. By contrast, Displaced Persons (DPs) from Poland and the Baltic states existing in camps in West Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1945, or members of the Polish armed forces in Britain, Germany, Italy and the Middle East, did not have the luxury of this choice. To be more precise, those who had experienced Soviet misrule between 1939 and 1941 felt they had no option but to remain in exile, though refugees from western Poland, who had never lived under a communist regime, had fewer qualms about returning. The Balts, who had suffered under two totalitarian systems, were as adamant as the eastern Poles in refusing to rejoin the Soviet empire.

Yet the future of the refugees in the West was far from secure. A major anxiety was whether they could count on the Western governments and the UN to protect them against forcible repatriation. After all, the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union had been allies since 1941 and Franklin Roosevelt, the US President, believed that the great powers would be able to co-operate after the war in creating a secure and peaceful world. The refugees feared that such co-operation would mean the interests of small states being compromised. Only a few months before the end of the war, in February 1945, the Big Three had confirmed at Yalta

that eastern Europe would be part of the Soviet sphere of influence. Great Britain and the United States professed to believe Soviet promises that in Poland free and fair elections would be held, and that there would be a political role in Poland for members of the Polish Government-in-Exile. Refugees who had lived under communist control were rightly sceptical that Moscow would loosen its grip and establish a truly democratic society. Moreover, the Soviets were already demanding that those it claimed as Soviet citizens, such as the Balts, should be repatriated by the Western powers in accordance with the Yalta agreement. The refugees were, therefore, very sensitive to their dependence on Western protection. At the same time, they still hoped that Soviet rule would collapse in any future war, and therefore wanted to be ready to return to their homes if this were to happen. Permanent resettlement elsewhere was not on their agenda immediately after the war. In short, their lives were characterised by impermanence, uncertainty and fear. They had become uprooted, but were unable to put down new roots. The door was closed behind them, but no door had opened up in front. They were, in E.F. Kunz's memorable phrase, 'midway to nowhere', and would remain in that undesirable and perilous state until their future was resolved: either they returned home or resettled in the West.[1]

The stark reality of their situation was brought home to them by the return to their home countries of millions of other DPs. Some 7 million of them were repatriated from the western zones of Germany and Austria, and from Italy, by 31 March 1947. Of these some 3 million returned to France and Belgium by the Autumn of 1945 and 2 million to the Soviet Union. Add to this total some 5 million others who were repatriated from the Soviet zone of Germany and from other Moscow-controlled territories in Eastern Europe. The Poles and Balts in Western Germany who refused to return saw themselves, and were seen by others, as exceptional. They saw the other DPs returning home, but knew that not all the Soviet repatriates returned willingly. Indeed, some did so only at the point of a gun. Not surprisingly they felt isolated and vulnerable. The fact that they had not been forcibly returned gave them cause for hope. At the same time, they could never be entirely sure that Western countries and their agencies would continue to support them. Still, their numbers declined between 1945 and 1947 as Poles from the western regions of Poland decided to return, 667 000 in total. Estimates of Poles remaining vary, but the totals seem to be in the order of 320 000 in March 1946, declining to around 200 000 by March 1948. The Baltic figures by contrast remained pretty constant, declining slightly to around 170 000 in March 1948. but these figures are inevitably imprecise.[2]

Three years after the end of the war, then, some 370 000 Poles and Balts remained in West Germany. Their continued presence represented a heavy financial burden to the western occupying powers, a standing reproach to the Soviet Union and Poland, and a challenge to the West to devise efficient and humane refugee policies.

So far we have used the terms Displaced Persons and refugees interchangeably, but for purposes of clarity we should make a distinction between them. A report of the UN Special Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons of 6 June, 1946 defined a DP as someone who, as a result of the actions of the Nazis or fascists, had been deported from, or obliged to leave, his country, and compelled to undertake forced labour. It might be assumed that such a person would wish to return home at the end of hostilities, as the French and Belgian and other western DPs had done. By refusing to return, large numbers of Poles and almost all the Balts converted themselves into refugees. The latter may be defined as people who have left their country of nationality because they were the victims, or probable victims, of persecution, and refuse to return for the same reason. Refugees flee through fear, not like most immigrants, through anticipation of economic gains. Dominated by the need to save themselves, they give little thought to the future until after they have reached a place of refuge.[3]

At the end of the war refugees had to convince the authorities in the western zones of Germany and Austria that they were genuine asylum seekers. They felt, however, that the dice was loaded against them. The authorities, first the military in the form of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), and then the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) which took over responsibility for DPs in the late summer of 1945, were committed to the speediest possible repatriation of the millions of Nazi victims and PoWs. For the military the DPs were a nuisance, a 'black spot', more troublesome than the Germans, according to one British officer, and the sooner they were returned to their homes, the better. The process seemed unstoppable; nationality was checked, ID papers if they existed were scrutinised, DPs were segregated in assembly centres by nationality, repatriation lists were drawn up, and transport to the frontiers, including the frontier with the Soviet Zone, was arranged. Removal of the DPs would economise on scarce food and resources in war-damaged Western Germany and comply with the Yalta agreement for the exchange of nationals at war's end. Poles and Balts who claimed refugee status and refused to be repatriated, though the Soviet Union and Poland claimed them as citizens, created a major problem for the authorities. At the

same time, those who sought refugee status were suspicious of registration procedures, partly because they were reminiscent of Nazi controls and partly owing to fears that the information collected might be used against them, or their relatives back home.[4]

Worse was to come. The Soviets alleged that among the people claiming refugee status were many war criminals seeking to avoid the retribution which would inevitably occur after repatriation. It was therefore imperative, Moscow argued, that a rigorous process of screening should be implemented to ensure that people suspected of war crimes should be returned to their countries of origin. This did not imply that Moscow gave up its claim that all Soviet and East European nationals should be returned home under the terms of the Yalta agreement.

When the UNRRA mandate expired in the summer of 1947, it was replaced by a UN special agency, the International Refugee Organization (IRO). Unlike UNRRA, whose main responsibilities were relief and repatriation, the IRO's brief included resettlement of refugees in Western countries. The Soviet Union fought a long battle against the IRO, refused to take part in its work, and insisted that all claimants to refugee status should be subjected to a thorough screening process on an individual basis to ensure that no war criminals or collaborators were resettled. A British official pointed out that individual screening of several hundred thousand refugees would be practically impossible given the small size of IRO staff and the limitations of its budget. Sir George Rendel, Britain's representative at the UN, voiced the British assumption that the onus of proof that a refugee was a collaborator or war criminal lay with the country of origin. It seemed to him that the Soviets were condemning as collaborators large numbers of refugees whose sole offence was anti-Communism.[5]

A particular example of Soviet practice was Moscow's attempt to label all members of the Latvian Legions as volunteer members of the German SS, claiming that there was no distinction between the Latvian Legions, the Latvian SD (the German security police) and the Latvian Police Battalions. If this charge had been proved, no members of the Latvian Legions could have escaped repatriation since they would have been ineligible for refugee status. Although there were some volunteers in the Legions, the vast majority were, as we discussed in Chapter 3, conscripts who were coerced into joining under Rosenberg's labour law of December 1941. These conscripts saw themselves as anti-Communist rather than pro-Nazi, whereas the Nuremberg investigators, initially at least, identified the Latvian SS legion with the German SS.[6] It is now widely accepted that the Latvian SD and Police Battalions were complicit in war crimes and that some members of these units had

transferred to the Latvian Legions in 1944, and were able subsequently to conceal their past. So it is correct to say that some members of the Latvian Legions should have been screened out.

On the other hand, as Ezergailis stated in 1997, up to that point nobody had been able to document any atrocity committed by the Legions. Moreover, the rump of the Baltic diplomatic corps in the West and the Latvian Red Cross were able to convince the Western authorities that the Latvian soldiers were not Nazis. It is true that they were labelled 'Waffen SS', but a distinction has to be made between these units and the German SS. Harry Rosenfeld, the UNRRA Commissioner wrote that the Baltic Waffen SS Units (the Baltic Legions) were 'to be considered as separate and distinct in purpose, ideology, activities and qualifications for membership from the German SS'.[7] On the other hand, Jacobmeyer wondered whether the task of demonstrating complicity with the Nazis on the part of the SS volunteer formations was being 'put aside by the overriding political considerations of Cold War origin'. While there is some truth in this, what he overlooks is that the Legions were neither volunteer nor SS as the latter term is generally understood. They were in fact main line infantry formations who fought against the advance of the Red Army into Latvia.[8]

In these circumstances the screening process was set on foot first by UNRRA and then the IRO. The task of the organisations was to establish who was eligible for refugee status, and therefore for UNRRA and IRO assistance. At first UNRRA officials lacked agreed criteria and procedures for determining eligibility, with the result that different groups of interrogators reached different decisions. By July 1946 the eligibility questionnaires had been standardised and Review Boards set up. But when the IRO took over it was dissatisfied that the earlier screening had been effective in identifying bona fide refugees. So it initiated yet another round of screening. But both organisations laboured under the disadvantage of having an acute shortage of skilled personnel who could carry out effective interrogations. The results of all this activity were, first, that there was a failure to identify a number of Latvian war criminals who were allowed to join the Legion's veterans and enjoy denazified status. This failure, as Ezergailis comments, 'muddied the waters of the Latvian Legionaries for decades to come'.[9] Second, the repeated screenings, though not efficient in their primary purpose, had a very damaging impact on the morale of the bona fide refugees who were, and no one denies this, in the overwhelming majority.

Let us remind ourselves of the situation in which these bona fide refugees found themselves. The Balts had fled before the advancing Red

Army, giving up their homes, their careers, their property, their livelihoods and, in many cases, separating themselves from family and friends. They had nothing in mind except escape to a safe refuge. They generally travelled in family groups which added to the nervous anxiety of parents who had responsibilities for their children. They arrived in the chaos of post-war Germany, found their way after many difficulties to assembly centres and DP camps, and survived in what were initially very primitive living conditions. Sometimes members of their families died en route. A small proportion had fought in or with the German army, usually as conscripts, and almost always against the Soviets rather than for the Nazis. The Poles were either freed PoWs, some of whom had been in camps since 1939, former slave labourers, or inmates of concentration camps. They were half-starved, emaciated and exhausted; they had not seen their families in Poland since they were deported from the country. They were then registered and re-registered, and finally subject to repeated screenings to demonstrate their eligibility for refugee status.

This process lasted more than a year and constituted 'a source of mental suffering', 'a time of terror', according to one Lithuanian journalist. 'A changed answer, a forgotten date, a charge of collaboration – any fact that nameless and faceless officials might seize on became a nightmare for DPs.' The reason? The ever-present possibility of an unfavourable decision leading to deportation or a war crimes trial. Apparently the 57 question screening was conducted in English, Russian and German exclusively, regardless of a lack of knowledge of these languages among the refugees being interrogated. No interpreters were permitted. A particularly difficult and stressful requirement was the demand that refugees provide the names and addresses of family in their home countries, which the DPs feared might leak out to Soviet and Polish liaison officers in the camps and place their relatives in danger. There were also rumours that Soviet or pro-Soviet personnel were members of the screening panels. Another anxiety arose from the ignorance on the part of many of the interrogators of the history and politics of central and eastern Europe, and of Soviet methods. The refugees feared that this might lead to an entirely erroneous conclusion being drawn by the interrogators. At the same time, this ignorance was the saving grace of real collaborators and war criminals who were adept in concealing their pasts, drawing on the widespread industry producing false ID papers. The anger of the refugees at their treatment found an outlet in protests, petitions, refusals to submit themselves to further screenings and hunger strikes. Many of the refugees never lost their fear of forcible

repatriation, despite official assurances to the contrary. This apprehension increased when they learned of Stalin's resumption of mass deportations in the Baltic states.[10]

If the doors behind them were closed, the doors in front showed few signs of opening. A few hundred Poles were employed as miners in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, but generally the vast majority of refugees stayed in the camps for a minimum of two to three years, and others were unable to leave until 1950 or 1951. Fear of return to their homelands was balanced by anxiety about the future. Where would they live, could they obtain work, what was the future for their children, would they be able to adjust to unfamiliar societies, could they learn new languages? These were some of the questions which began to dominate their lives. Meanwhile, they had to survive in the camps and make the best of the conditions in which they found themselves. This was far from easy since the camp environment presented many problems.

The initial responsibility for the care of refugees fell to SHAEF. The military authorities in the western zones of Germany had to provide shelter, food, clothing and health care for at least 6 million DPs at the end of the war. These people were living wherever they could find a place – farm buildings, damaged factories, ruined homes, tents and PoW camps. It was impossible for the military to look after them in an orderly and efficient manner unless they were concentrated in assembly centres. SHAEF's aim was to establish separate camps for different nationality groups, though this process was aided by the tendency of the nationalities to cluster together. This permitted the military to distribute food and supplies in an orderly manner and to provide medical assistance and proper sanitation facilities. Persons suffering from typhus, diphtheria, typhoid, smallpox and scarlet fever could be effectively isolated. Dispensaries set up in the camps combined with army field hospitals offered the basic minimum of health care. It would be a mistake to suggest that there was a uniform standard of care throughout the camps and centres; many of the centres were makeshift and it took some time to establish proper water supplies and sanitation. There was a shortage of beds, blankets and straw in some locations, and soap and disinfectant were difficult to obtain. Yet, the Allied armies carried out a hugely complex logistical exercise in a relatively brief period and with a high degree of efficiency. The acute difficulties some DPs experienced in finding a place even in a quite primitive camp are illustrated by the following Latvian account:

> When we arrived near Bremen someone told us of a refugee camp but it turned out that it was for Dutch people. Luckily there was a Latvian

> secretary to the commandant who was a Canadian and he said we could stay for a few days but had to find somewhere permanent. We went somewhere else but someone told us that this camp was next to a Russian camp and we would be sent back to Latvia if we stayed there. So we moved again during the night. We travelled to near Munster but we found nowhere to stay. In a camp there were Poles, Latvians and Estonians. One of the Latvians came out and said that my daughter and I could share their hut. They said they had nothing but we could stay. The Commandant was Czech; he was not very friendly and he was unhappy with us staying because the camp was full. He was searching for illegal residents and when he came into my hut I was bathing my daughter who was four, and he was quite taken and he asked how I happened to be there. He felt sorry when he saw my daughter because we were on a straw floor and it was very primitive. He asked who my husband was and I told him he was a pastor. The commandant said he would find living quarters for us. We were given one room and felt quite privileged. There were so many people in one room and many people came from different parts of Latvia and it was demoralising.[11]

Some camp residents compared conditions unfavourably with German labour camps. The initial assumption of the military authorities was that refugees would be repatriated, so there was no necessity to establish semi-permanent assembly centres. When it became clear under UNRRA that there would be no rapid solution to the refugee problem, conditions in the camps began to improve in some, though not all, respects especially after the departure of around 5 million DPs to the Western countries and the Soviet Union in the second half of 1945. Food supply was initially more than adequate at 2000 to 2500 calories per day. This, and supplies of clothing, were taken from well-stocked German military depots. But in the first winter, food shortages began to occur as German food production fell considerably below pre-war output, and calorie levels were reduced to 1850 and later to 1550 in the summer of 1946, not rising above this level in the severe winter of 1946–47. This had adverse effects on the general health and energy of the refugees, and the incidence of tuberculosis increased. Thirty per cent of Lithuanian children had contracted the disease by 1947. Latvian and Estonian PoWs shared the deprivation.

> On 18 November [1945] the rations were cut. It was very hard then particularly when the snow came and the bad weather. The week

> before Christmas we got cigarettes from the Canada Red Cross. In the end it was 280 cigarettes a person but at first they gave us 10 cigarettes each and there were 120 people in the barracks. That night everyone lay down and smoked, there was absolute silence, and everyone smoking, and the smoke rising, it was like a film. After Christmas we got one blanket for two people. We had to sleep two together, back to back. It was very cold. There was one bucket of coke which lasted about two hours. A few weeks after the New Year we got blankets, two each, and it was like paradise.[12]

By 1947 when the number of refugees had fallen dramatically from its initial level, the least desirable camps and centres were closed and the space allocated per person was increased. Under UNRRA and the IRO nearly every centre had medical offices and nurses and other medical personnel, many of whom were appointed from among the DPs themselves. An Estonian doctor was living in lodgings in a small town in Bavaria, after having fled Estonia in 1944. When the Americans liberated the area she was appointed to a DP hospital in a Polish camp. She stayed there for the rest of her time in Germany before she left for England. 'The hospital was very cosmopolitan', she later recalled 'with doctors from various countries and its chief was a Hungarian'.[13] A Latvian refugee recalled how she qualified for work in a camp hospital.

> I took a first aid course for six months and then I worked in a hospital in the camp. They were not serious cases. Sometimes people came after operations and needed looking after. There was also an emergency section. Since I had been a pharmacist I was given an administrative job there because I could at least write the prescriptions properly. I was then asked if I would like to work in the HQ of the British military in Munster. I became an assistant interpreter there.[14]

Concentration of refugees in old army camps, disused factory buildings and former forced labour centres facilitated control over them preparatory to repatriation. An aspect of this which irritated and depressed refugees was the contrast between their 'liberation' from Nazi oppression and the fact that some camps had the appearance of penal institutions, surrounded by high walls or rolls of barbed wire, and often patrolled on the outside by armed guards. The mobility of the residents was restricted by a nightly curfew and passes were required to leave the camp. This confinement contrasted with the freedom of movement allowed to German civilians. The controls were designed to reduce crime

and to limit friction between the refugees and Germans. As we shall see later, Germans were at least as responsible for lawlessness as the DPs, but nonetheless criminality among refugees existed and had to be reduced. On the other hand, some former refugees have testified that their camps were not guarded. 'We weren't guarded at all in these camps. Why should anyone guard us. If we had wanted to leave we could have done. Nobody would have stopped us. We stayed in the camp because we had nowhere else to live and we didn't want to go back to Estonia.' Perhaps criminality and conflicts with local Germans did not exist in this camp and there was therefore less need for guards and general restrictions.[15]

No one disagreed about the nature of daily life, at least in the early years. The camps were overcrowded, there was little employment initially, indeed DP unemployment ran at 90 per cent in 1945–46, there was a gross absence of privacy owing to the number of families in one room, and a great deal of noise. For most people life was very monotonous. As one resident said, this was particularly demoralising for professional people who were used to an environment in which they could study, or at least think. Moreover, only a few people, such as doctors, were able to use their skills and expertise. This emphasised the refugees' loss of status and their dependent position. As time passed, more and more people were able to work, UNRRA claiming that 70 per cent of the DP labour force was employed, though not usually at their earlier professions or crafts. This was a foretaste of what was likely to happen in the new countries of residence after resettlement.[16]

Refugees were employed in three broad fields, namely in the camp administration, in the military and in German industry and agriculture. According to IRO figures, out of 242 406 refugees employed in September 1947, around 140 000 were working in the camps, hospitals or central IRO administration, 31 282 in the military outside the camps, and 32 520 for private employers, again outside the camps. In addition, around 28 000 were receiving vocational training. Inside the camps, refugees worked as firemen, janitors, teachers in camp schools, nurses and doctors. They might also be employed on building and construction work, as secretaries and interpreters, or in service occupations such as shoe repairing, tailoring, dressmaking and hairdressing. Those who worked for the military had a variety of roles: as storemen, in road and railway construction and repair, guarding warehouses, supervising PoW work details, and working as kitchen orderlies and cleaners in military camps. In the German economy, DPs helped get in the harvest, cut timber, demolish German factories for reparation payments and construct new factories.[17] Sometimes workers in the German economy were

able to live outside the camps. For example, one Latvian DP lived in a German village where he worked loading timber that had come from the mountains onto canal barges. Following that he worked dismantling a narrow gauge railway and, when that finished, on barges. 'It was not the money that made us work', he said, 'it was boredom. When you are 23 and have nothing to do, you feel useless.'[18] Another Latvian refugee reported how he became employed:

> We did nothing for a while then the English organized works companies and we tried to build an airport near Aldenburg. Later there was a workshop for electrical and mechanical engineering. I had some basic skills in this area since had learned about tractors and engines while working on the farm. We were all Latvians in the workshop and gradually we all learned from each other. We were repairing surplus army vehicles to sell to the Dutch. They would put a job card on the window to say if a part was missing or what needed doing.[19]

Refugees who worked were paid very little and their main incentive was extra rations. Some were paid in cigarettes, which they could then sell on the black market. As one woman recalled, 'they gave us extra food and we had a meal in the office. This was the main reason why I went back to work because food in the camp was very poor.'[20]

Both UNRRA and the military authorities in the British Zone tried to find work for the refugees and to encourage them to find work for themselves. Keeping them busy, British officials thought, would distract them from political activity and help to improve morale. The camp residents were encouraged to run their own welfare services, to elect camp committees to assist in administering the camps, and to choose their own judges for a newly created court system. Ever watchful of expenditure the British tried to keep British administrative personnel to a minimum and to replace them, where possible, with DPs.[21]

The refugees needed no encouragement to establish and support their communities' educational and cultural activities. Being 'midway to nowhere' did not mean that ultimately they would not find themselves somewhere. Wherever they might be it was their duty to preserve their culture and to hand it on to the next generation in true and unalloyed form. Furthermore, there was a widespread feeling that this responsibility was all the greater since the next generation in the Baltic states and Poland would be subjected to cultural and educational objectives set from Moscow, and the preservation of indigenous culture would be all

the more testing for them. For refugees in the camps preservation of their cultures was only one part of the equation, they also had to equip their young people with the skills and professional qualifications for material success in western Germany, or in their new countries of settlement, or on their return to their own countries if and when Communism collapsed. Education and culture were part of the refugees' inheritance, but looking back in grief for what had been lost – homes, jobs, careers, families, property and expectations – was balanced by a deep commitment, 'an historic responsibility' in Kunz's phrase, to preserve and bequeath this invaluable legacy. At a time when many of the refugees were suffering from depression, the energetic pursuit of educational and cultural objectives helped to restore self-esteem, utilise dormant talents and enhance collective morale.[22]

Cultural activities were a remarkable demonstration of the capacity of individuals to act creatively in the most depressing and deprived of environments, and to assert their ethnic individualism in an impersonal, largely indifferent, and probably uncomprehending world. These exile communities had the advantage of skilled artistic and intellectual leadership. It is remarkable that, according to reports, some 75 per cent of university and upper school teachers had fled Lithuania, plus 80 per cent of the doctors and a large part of the writers, painters and musicians. Similarly, according to one scholar, 70 per cent of Latvia's writers, artists and musicians made it to the western zones. Most Estonian singers and musicians congregated in Blomberg, and in Oldenburg an Estonian theatre was founded. Almost the entire Latvian ballet theatre fled to the West. Many of the actors from the Latvian National Theatre ended up in Meerbeck DP camp. In Blomberg the Riga film company started producing newsreels and films. Perhaps most remarkable of all, the entire company of the Lwów Opera house in the former eastern Poland was on vacation when the Soviets retreated in 1941 and ultimately found their way to Western Germany. A smaller proportion of the Polish artistic elite than the Baltic one was to be found in the DP camps. Many Polish artists and writers lost their lives in the Resistance, while others returned from their forced exile in the West to help rebuild the artistic life of their country.[23]

The talents and skills of these professionals, though they no longer had a home in the 'high' artistic environment of the home countries, could nonetheless be employed in the performance of traditional Baltic and Polish folk music, as well as in concerts and operatic productions. The Relief Society for Poles put on five concerts a week on average starting in 1947. Many refugees were conscious of a duty to preserve indigenous

culture and to transmit it to the younger generation. As Mark Wyman commented, 'To protect and to build on these enduring fragments was to be the major task for many DPs'.[24] This was ultimately a question of preserving and heightening a sense of ethnic identity, through every possible means of artistic expression. The famous Baltic choirs with their extensive repertoires of traditional folk music were recreated, along with groups performing the familiar and much loved ethnic dances. Classics of the national dramas were performed and national days were tenaciously celebrated, though they must have been bitter-sweet occasions commemorating, as they did, the achievement of an independence which had now been taken away. Polish émigrés changed the words of a Polish patriotic song to reflect this loss of independence: from 'God Bless Poland' of the inter-war period to the pre-1918 version 'O God return our freedom'. Art and sculpture exhibitions were mounted to preserve indigenous traditions and enhance people's memories of the culture of the homeland.[25]

Literary activity was equally vigorous. Amazingly, Lithuanian exiles had established 16 publishing houses in Germany by 1950, reprinting folklore and classics of national history, as well as the work of new writers. Polish DPs had published some 300 books by the Autumn of 1946, including volumes of Polish classics. In a number of camps newspapers were published by the residents though the British authorities frowned on such activity, fearing that the press might dissuade the refugees from returning to their own countries and annoy the Russians with anti-Communist propaganda. For the same reasons the British recommended that a request to establish a Lithuanian broadcasting service be refused. Despite these restrictions the Baltic and Polish refugee communities seemed to have created a vibrant and wholehearted cultural life which must have done something to raise the spirits and to provide a sense of purpose in what was, for most people, a demoralising existence. The same outcome was achieved by sporting activities. The British, being major advocates of the idea of 'a healthy mind in a healthy body', were keen to encourage participation in all kinds of sport, though cricket never seemed to catch on. But soccer, basketball, volleyball, gymnastics and swimming were all pursued enthusiastically by younger camp residents.[26]

Last, but certainly far from least, religion played a vital part in camp life. Churches were rapidly established in barracks and any available empty buildings. Priests and protestant pastors were refugees themselves and had shared in the hardships and deprivations of their flocks. Not only did they, through their church rituals and preachings, fortify a

sense of national identity, but they were also channels for charitable donations from abroad. Camp residents turned to religion as a source of solace in their separation from relatives and friends and in their loss of homeland. Looking to the next generation, the churches created theological centres to train young people for the priesthood. For ardent nationalists among the refugees the Church helped to preserve the uniqueness of the national cultures from the dangers of 'materialism, nihilism, atheism and cosmopolitanism'.[27]

The creation of educational opportunities in the camps can only be described as a triumph over adversity, though the occupation authorities and the UN agencies did offer great encouragement. The initiative and the energy required to establish courses and institutions came from the refugees themselves. Parents saw that the education of their children would help to counter some of the bad influences of the camps. Placing children in German schools would, it was believed, mean assimilation and the loss of the ethnic heritage. 'National' schools, by contrast, would raise national consciousness and help transmit the ethnic cultural inheritance.[28] Most of the children had experienced severe interruptions to their education and both they and their parents were keen that they should return to the classroom to prepare for life 'somewhere'. Young adults were interested in higher education or vocational training, whilst many older people sought to retrain, believing it would be impossible to resume their former careers and occupations in places of resettlement, not least owing to language difficulties. Accordingly, the DPs created three segments of educational provision: primary and secondary schools, vocational courses and higher education.

Kindergartens were established in all the camps, and in the British zone of occupation there were 30 Estonian primary and 9 secondary schools. Each of the nationality groups usually had its own schools and the west German educational authorities gave them recognition. Schools set up by the Lithuanian community taught 12 000 pupils over a six-year period. Needless to say there was a severe shortage of textbooks and other equipment in the early stages but this was unable to diminish the enthusiasm and seriousness of both teachers and pupils.[29] A Latvian boy attending one of the DP grammar schools recalled in later life:

> We then moved to a Displaced Persons' camp near Bremen where we stayed until May 1947. I was a grammar school boy all the time and I almost managed to finish. It was basically a Latvian grammar school which still exists now. The teachers were mainly Latvian supplemented

> by a few others, for example a German language teacher. In 1947 I was a year away from completing my examinations. The camp commandant had a particular interest in recruiting volunteers for the UK. There was negotiation with the grammar school to see if we could be treated as having finished but the ruling was no. We decided to leave and come across anyway.[30]

Vocational training courses were set up soon after the end of the war and continued under the IRO, which reported that 28 786 persons were receiving vocational training in September 1947. The first Estonian professional school in the British zone, an agricultural school, was established in Perdoel, Schleswig-Holstein, in the Spring of 1946. Shortly afterwards a School of Navigation and Naval Engineering was set up in Flensburg, and there was a DP school for handicrafts in Buxtehude. The range of institutions available can be illustrated by the following list: Home Making Schools, an Art and Music School, a Polish Technical School in Hamburg, a Polish Teachers' College at Lübeck, a Baltic Technical School at Geestacht and a Welfare Workers' Training School. In 1947, 10 689 persons attended 401 courses organised by the Executive of the Polish trade unions, the most popular being courses in mechanics, driving, radio maintenance, agriculture, tailoring and needlework. Clubs of various kinds were attached to the schools and technical institutions.[31]

A university education was available for qualified candidates. The occupation authorities required German universities to reserve 10 per cent of their places for DPs. In May 1946 DP enrolment in German universities was 600 from each of the 3 occupation zones.

> There were men and women who had started their university studies in Latvia like me, so it was possible to enter university providing we could speak German and provided we could prove our previous studies and knowledge. I had my students' book with details of my examinations, both oral and practical. The professor called me in and asked me about the subjects I had studied and what I wanted to study there. I got a scholarship so I didn't need to pay for my studies. There was laboratory work and lectures. Since the British army colonel in charge of my unit was a chemist he said he didn't mind me going there as long as the interpreting work was shared out so there was always someone around. So I went backwards and forwards until 1948 when I had to leave Germany for England.[32]

If you lacked the requisite language skills it proved impossible to get into a German university but there was a very credible alternative in the so-called Baltic universities. These were established by refugee scholars and enthusiastically supported by students. The Baltic university in Munich enrolled 1400 students in 1946 but its status remained 'problematic', and there were conflicts with UNRRA and little support from the US occupation authorities. It closed down in 1947, probably because the authorities wished to discourage anything which prolonged the stay of the refugees in Germany. In the British zone a Baltic university opened in Hamburg also in 1946. Owing to its emergency character it was not permitted to award degrees and there were restrictions on its staff and equipment. Finally it was transferred from Hamburg to Pinneburg where it was renamed the DP Study Centre, specialising in pre-university courses preparing students for transfer to German universities.[33] It closed in 1949. The Polish Union of Students in Germany had 360 members in the British zone, 740 in the American and 60 in the French.[34] Taken together these were remarkable educational achievements in the circumstances, but they probably involved only a minority of the younger refugees. Most adults took jobs to help support their families and probably saw little point in re-training until they had found a more permanent place to live. That in turn depended on the resettlement opportunities provided by Western countries, which were only becoming available in 1947.

There was a darker side to camp life which the cultural, educational and religious activities could not conceal. Contemporary accounts of the camps referred to a phenomenon called 'DP crime'. This needs to be placed in context for it to be properly understood. It would be strange if, in very large groups of people, there were not some who were engaged in crime. Questions arise, however, as to the proportion of lawbreakers in this population, the nature of the crimes committed, and the accuracy of the statistics and reporting. Account has also to be taken of the extraordinary situation in which the refugees found themselves, living among people who were collectively responsible, during the course of the war, for the murder, imprisonment and consignment to concentration and labour camps of large numbers of people from the occupied countries. It would have been surprising if some DPs had not tried to gain revenge.

Criminality was at its worst during the final stages of the war and in the months immediately following the Nazi surrender. DPs accounted for up to one quarter of the population of west Germany at the time of the cease fire. Before the assembly centres could be organised, DPs

roamed around the city streets during the day and slept at night wherever they could find a place. There was great hatred for the Germans and little compunction about looting German property, stealing food and farm animals, and assaulting civilians. One raid on a Lithuanian and Latvian camp discovered 109 live pigs hidden in three different areas. A search of the barracks revealed 'a huge stash' of corn, wheat, barley, oats, bacon and meat. Apparently the meat confiscated equalled the standard weekly meat ration for 90 900 people.[35] The most serious crimes of arson, rape and murder were not uncommon. It was for these reasons that the Allies repatriated as many of the DPs as possible, as quickly as possible, in the Summer of 1945. They combined this with establishing secure camps, imposing curfews and handing down death sentences in military courts for the most serious crimes. Owing to these measures and the dramatic reduction in DP numbers, the incidence of crime among DPs in late 1945 and in 1946 fell markedly and was well below that of the German population. However, the DPs continued to be known for their involvement in black market operations, trading in cigarettes and other scarce commodities, to the extent that UNRRA ordered the suppression of this illegal trade in November 1946.[36]

Although DP criminality fell below that of the German population, it was difficult to weaken the stereotype of the criminality of the refugees. Unsolved crimes, for example, were often blamed on the refugees. According to Jacobmeyer, German officials cultivated 'the distorted view of lazy and criminal DPs'. The German police and civilians reportedly despised and were hostile to the 'inferior foreigners'. They were accused of theft, violence, licentious behaviour, arson and general destruction. Poles had the worst reputation, but a local Lübeck paper conceded that the reputation of all Poles was being besmirched by 'a few bandits'. Apparently police and civilian complaints to the zonal authorities were listened to sympathetically. Suspicion was heightened by an official US military publication directed at the German public which asserted that most Baltic refugees fled to Germany because of sympathy for the Nazis, and they were the ones most responsible for crimes and disturbances. But the basis for the allegations against the refugees was fatally flawed: crime statistics for the indigenous German population were based on court convictions only whereas for the DPs the statistics reflected the number of arrests made. Comments in British government records suggest that the Baltic refugees, at least, were admired for their responsible behaviour. A Foreign Office minister, Hector McNeil, accompanied by a senior civil servant, visited the British zone in July 1946 and reported that the Balts were 'an entirely satisfactory community', and would

make 'excellent domestic servants' for British women. Whether the Balts who contained a large proportion of middle-class professionals were flattered or demeaned by this patronising observation is not revealed. The British delegation had greater reservations about the Polish refugees who were the 'most unruly element' among the DPs, and were more heavily engaged in black market operations than other DP groups. The reason for this, the officials surmised, was that the Poles had suffered more at the hands of the Germans than any other group.[37]

Another dark side of the refugee experience was the widespread incidence of neurosis, paranoia and depression. Much of our information on the Baltic, Polish and other refugees comes from the investigations of H.B.M. Murphy and Eduard Bakis, and the more general analysis of Edward Shils. The consensus of these accounts suggests that a large number of the DPs were suffering from psychological traumas arising out of their recent experiences, their current unhappiness and their apprehensions about the future. The proportions affected by neurosis are not entirely clear, but the strong impression left by these analyses is that during the period 1945–50 most refugees were, at one time or another, subject to some form of nervous illness and depression. It is hardly surprising that the interviewees were reluctant to comment on this subject.[38]

The investigations suggest that many DPs were racked with guilt about the past, particularly that they had left behind family and friends whom they might have saved if they had acted more speedily or decisively. Moreover, by fleeing, they had cast suspicion on those who were close to them and possibly put them in danger. They dare not write to them for fear of exposing them to interrogation and possibly imprisonment or deportation. The frequent screenings caused acute anxiety about the risk of betraying relatives inadvertently. These fears became more acute when it was learned that the Soviets had resumed mass deportations from the Baltic states and Eastern Poland. There was a more widespread guilt associated with abandoning one's native land. Juozas Girnius, a Lithuanian philosopher, wrote that this abandonment 'always remains a major guilt … and this guilt oppresses us! … and it will continue to oppress us until we return to her'. Refugees were also downcast by the loss of all that was dear: family, friends, country, self-esteem, the esteem of their communities, social position, careers – all the things which shaped their identities, in fact. Without these distinguishing markers they descended into painful anonymity.[39]

If loss was one dominant characteristic in refugee psychology, another was fear. This had several aspects. The experience of the war had terrified

many. They had feared for their lives in situations of extreme danger and felt they had been lucky to survive. The impact of these events was long-lasting, bringing on a neurosis similar to that developed by soldiers in battle. Another aspect of fear was the acute apprehension which almost all felt about the future – what was to become of them? There was apprehension about the possibly dangerous consequences of the repeated screenings and, as we have seen, fear of compulsory repatriation. And the refugees became increasingly afraid as the Cold War intensified of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe which would once again consign them to Soviet control and to almost certain punishment as 'treasonable' Soviet citizens under the Soviet penal code.[40]

The combination of loss and fear sometimes led to what Murphy and Stein have called 'regression to an infantile state', the symptoms of which were the loss of will power, a sense of helplessness, bitter resentment of their fate, procrastination, and above all apathy, what Bakis termed 'DP apathy', a term also used by the DPs themselves. This often took the form, at least for a time, of a lack of interest in the external world, and a fatalism about their own futures. In the course of their time in the camps most refugees seem to have suffered from one or more of these characteristics. The younger refugees were more likely to be unaffected, or affected less seriously. The middle aged and the highly educated suffered more because they had lost more and because many of them had responsibilities for children, and grieved about the conditions in which they were being brought up.[41]

Eduard Bakis, who worked at the Baltic University in Exile and observed the psychological state of the DPs while sharing their experiences of camp life, believed that the symptoms described above became more conspicuous after two years in the camps. 'Almost everyone was showing at one time or another a behaviour that had to be classified as neurotic', he observed. Crimes became more serious (though this contradicts the usual understanding), absenteeism from work more frequent, interest in camp affairs, for example, elections, was vanishing, and even participation in cultural events fell off. It should also be noted, in this connection, that two years of undernourishment inevitably had an effect on energy levels, compounding the impact of depression and neurosis.[42]

To put it mildly, this kind of existence was bearable only in the short term. Not surprisingly, refugees were alert to any opportunity for starting a new life elsewhere, outside the confining and dismal environment of the camps. Remaining in Germany was not an attractive option to many DPs since they believed they were subject to unofficial

discrimination and would fare less well in employment and housing than the hundreds of thousands of ethnic German refugees from Poland, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.[43]

> In that time Germany was almost in ruins; cities, towns and transport and everything was destroyed. The main problem for most of us was just to get out of Germany. Living in a barracks with 50 men with nothing much to do, and with different understandings, and you get fed up. England was the first to take people and everybody was happy to go.[44]

As the Cold War deepened many were desperate to move as far away as possible from the Soviet occupation zone in Germany – this was part of the attraction of Canada, Australia and the United States. Moreover, politicians in the United States seemed less influenced by Communists and fellow-travellers than politicians in a number of Western European countries. However, the United States and the British Dominions were slow to offer a welcome to East European refugees, though ultimately they opened their gates quite wide. Consequently, the earliest opportunities to set up a new life elsewhere were offered by some West European countries, particularly by Great Britain.

> I was in the DP camp for two years until 1947 when I came to England. I had learned about England in history and geography lessons and I wanted to see what it was like instead of staying in the DP camp and practically doing nothing. I didn't think about going anywhere else at that time. It was important for me to stay in Europe. I had managed to make contact with my brother and then I found my mother and sister. I don't think that would have happened if I had been in America or Canada, or perhaps it would but a lot later.[45]

Some British people and perhaps also some members of the British Labour government were motivated by altruism and compassion in their decision to accept tens of thousands of refugees. But the public justification for the change in immigration policy emphasised the need to overcome the acute post-war labour shortage. Aware of potential opposition to their policy, ministers presented it as an indispensable part of their economic recovery strategy. The DPs, or European Volunteer Workers (EVWs) as they became known, entered a country where the population was mainly opposed, indifferent or grudging in its response. Most British people were ignorant of the background and experiences of

the refugees or were genuinely perplexed by their unwillingness to return to help reconstruct their own countries. While grateful for the opportunity to leave the camps, the refugees were to find that living and working in Britain offered one more difficult challenge, admittedly less traumatic than the earlier ones, to add to the many which had faced them since the outbreak of war.

10
Resettlement

About 18 months after the end of the war in Europe members of the Polish armed forces under British command began to arrive in Britain from mainland Europe and the Middle East, to join the approximately 30 000 troops already there. The decision to concentrate all Polish troops in Britain was the outcome of extended discussions at the highest levels of the British government, and reflected the sense of responsibility which the British felt for their close wartime ally. Still, the decision was not an easy one, given the numbers and political sensitivities involved. In July 1945, two months after the end of the conflict in Europe, the Polish forces for which the British government felt responsibility numbered some 210 000, made up of 60 000 servicemen in the UK, 110 000 in Italy, 11 000 in the Middle East and 30 000 in the British zone of Germany. In addition, there were some 35 000 Polish civilian refugees in Africa, India and the Middle East, most of whom were the wives, parents and children of members of the Polish armed forces.[1] At the end of 1946 the first Baltic refugees travelled to Britain from DP camps in Germany and Austria. In their case, it was opportunism on the part of the British government rather than a sense of responsibility which brought them to Britain since it was believed that foreign workers could help to overcome the labour shortage in the British economy.

The exiles' knowledge of Britain and the English language was minimal, and Britain was not the first choice of many of the émigrés. Soldiers from the Polish Second Corps in Italy would have preferred to stay in a Polish formation, possibly undertaking guard duties in the British zone of occupation in Germany, and waiting for an opportunity to take part in the liberation of Poland. Ultimately they were not given the choice and were sent to Britain to await integration into civilian life. The DPs who came to Britain in the period 1946–49 were looking for work and

the possibility of a new start. 'Before we came to England the boredom of life in Germany was making us feel useless', commented one new arrival, 'so we just came to England for the work, whatever it might be'.[2] Many would have preferred to have gone to the United States, Canada or Australia, but the opportunities were not available for the first two or three years after the war. There was no thought among the Balts of returning home while the Communists were in control, whereas some 100 000 Poles under British command decided to return, for reasons given in the last chapter.

Some of the Polish soldiers had been in contact with British servicemen during the war, had learned a little English, and knew something of what life would be like. But most of the exiles arriving in Britain had only the vaguest ideas of what awaited them. It is true that many members of the Polish First Army Corps had been based in Britain for much of the war and were reasonably familiar with the country and its people, but they were a smallish minority of the total number of Polish and Baltic exiles in Britain in 1946–47. Such information as the exiles had tended to be based on out-dated stereotypes, and the reality contrasted rather markedly with this fanciful picture. Comments such as the following are not untypical:

> When I arrived at Hull I was not so happy at first. The British Empire was very mighty and I thought there shouldn't be poor people in England. But when I passed the Hull slums on a double decker bus, I thought how can this be in this empire? I was shocked by the conditions of the terrace housing. It was the contrast between an empire that ruled half the world and the living conditions of the poor. I thought everybody would be a gentleman.
>
> Or
>
> As far as I knew from my days back in Poland, I thought that England was a world of country gentlemen, so I was disillusioned when I first came here. I became more disillusioned when I heard from English people what had been going on before the war, the way people had been looking for work, the conditions they worked in.
>
> Lastly
>
> It is difficult to say what images we had of Britain before we arrived. The promise was that it was the land of fog and rain and very little sunshine. When we arrived the things that stick in my mind were double-decker buses and the six or eight chimney pots to a chimney stack, and I found it funny, it looked very different.[3]

Others commented on the peacefulness and calm of British life in contrast to the disorder and destruction they had witnessed in mainland Europe. Life in Britain turned out to be very different from what they had experienced before, very insular and, on Sundays, very boring. Some of the refugees, it is true, were not enchained by stereotypes. One man admitted he didn't know what England was like before he came, though he knew it was the most democratic state in Europe. On the other hand he and his family had heard nothing bad about English people, and friends who were sent information from Britain received only 'good' reports. Good, in the context of DP camps and refugee settlements in Africa, probably meant 'better'; as a Polish woman remarked, she 'just accepted England as it was and was quite content with it because it was better than my past. I was quite happy because I had everything.'[4]

If some of the newcomers had illusions about Britain, the British hosts, with a few exceptions, displayed great ignorance about the newcomers. The British knew little about the home countries of the exiles, and cared even less, often making no distinction between Poles and Balts, a tendency which the latter found quite irritating. There were many half truths in circulation, notably about the role the Balts had played in the German armed forces, and the conspiracies of Polish Catholics to widen the influence of the Papacy in Britain.[5] To be sure, the exploits of the Polish Second Army Corps in the Italian campaign and the role of Polish aircrew in the Battle of Britain and in the later air war were well-publicised, but knowledge of the occupation regimes and the deportations was fragmentary at best. Willingness to learn and understand was often obstructed by popular sympathy for the part played by the Soviet Union in the defeat of Hitler. Indeed, after the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile in 1943 following the publicity about Katyn, British public opinion became increasingly out of sympathy with the Poles. In the left-wing British press the Poles were characteristically stereotyped as reactionary landlords and fascists. A local branch of the Printers' Union in Croydon refused to accept a Polish member of the union in the memorable words 'We don't want any bloody Polish counts in here'.[6]

The Labour government, in power after the General Election of July 1945, was as sensitive as its predecessor to the need to work with Stalin to create a secure post-war world. The transfer of diplomatic recognition from the Polish Government-in-Exile in London to the Provisional Government of Poland in Warsaw in early July 1945 made

the British government acutely aware of Warsaw's sensitivities to British treatment of Polish nationals under British military command or of Polish DPs in Germany. British authority over Poles provided great scope for misunderstanding, resentment and conflict. London was anxious to ensure that the Yalta commitment to free elections in Poland was met, and this meant establishing good working relations with the Polish Provisional Government. But it was a step too far, in the British view, to bow to the demands of Warsaw to send Polish troops back to Poland. In the face of determined opposition from General Anders and the other Polish military leaders, which reflected the position of most of their troops in Italy, the British government rejected Warsaw's requests. It argued that, on grounds of honour and practicality, it had a duty to offer the exiles a sanctuary in Britain. However, while the British could offer a home, diplomatic considerations prohibited a high-profile welcome to the Poles, and ensured that Polish troops would be demobilised as soon as possible and integrated into civilian life.

The exiles who settled in Britain did so for a great variety of reasons. In the broadest sense they wanted to put an end to the terrible upheavals which had destroyed their lives and hopes, and killed and injured so many of their family and friends. Their existence in the refugee camps seemed to offer no possibilities of independence, privacy and the re-creation of family lives. They were impatient for the chance to work, to receive education and training, to bring up their children in peace, and to feel secure. Polish soldiers wanted to be re-united with their families who were scattered in different parts of the world. It is true that many of the exiles hoped to return to their home countries in due course, but gradually this dream faded and they accepted that their futures lay in Britain or other Western countries. For many years after their arrival the exiles were preoccupied with the basic necessities of living in a strange country: finding work, acquiring homes, bringing up children, learning the language, establishing community institutions, and creating schools and churches. Their knowledge of Britain was widening all the time, but it was confined by and large to the problems of day-to-day existence. Many aspects of British life must have been confusing and even impenetrable. They would not, for the most part, have had the time, energy or language proficiency to become well-informed about the debates taking place in Britain about 'foreign labour'. Even so, much of the content of these debates might have seemed obscure or even mysterious. Why, they might have asked themselves, were the refugees not permitted to take up any jobs they could find until the government gave permission? Why were many British trade unionists

acting in a hostile and unfraternal manner to Polish and Baltic workers who had suffered so much hardship in the recent past? We do not intend to duplicate the excellent work of Keith Sword, Sheila Patterson and Diana Kay and Robert Miles in analysing the evolution of British policy, but an understanding of the experiences of these newcomers in Britain requires at least a brief outline of the political and economic environment into which they entered.[7]

Members of the Polish armed forces who had fought with Britain throughout the war would have been fascinated to have followed the debate in the British ministries and in the Cabinet about the future of the Polish army, navy and air force. This was not an insignificant question; it absorbed a lot of government time, involved several departments including the Foreign Office, Treasury, War Office, Home Office and Ministry of Labour, and was described by the senior official in the Foreign Office, Alexander Cadogan, as being 'full of dynamite'.[8] A number of factors were taken into account in reaching a policy decision. The first was a question of definition. Which elements of the Polish armed forces could the British government be held responsible for? It was finally decided that those men who had come under British command during the war, namely the First and Second Army Corps and other smaller units, had a claim on the British government's support since they came within the scope of the Allied Forces Act of 1940. On the other hand, Home Army personnel in camps in Germany, ex-PoWs who had been captured by the Germans in the Polish war of September 1939, and ex-members of the Wehrmacht who had not transferred early enough to Polish units, had no right to membership of the Polish armed forces in Italy and the United Kingdom, nor to any consequent legislation affecting these forces. This was one of the reasons for limiting the ambition of General Anders, commander of the Polish Second Army Corps, to expand Polish forces without restriction at the end of the war.[9]

Having satisfied themselves that the British government would take responsibility for the formations of which they were members, Polish soldiers might have asked why the formations could not be kept in being, as Anders and others preferred. There were a number of reasons for Britain's refusal to agree to this. The first was cost: at a time of financial stringency, when British forces were being demobilised at a rapid rate, it was politically impossible to continue to spend large sums of money on Polish formations which no longer had a purpose. This was one of the reasons for limiting Anders' ambition to keep the forces in being ready for the day when Soviet power weakened and Poland could be liberated by the Polish army in exile.[10] Anders'

militantly anti-Communist statements from his headquarters in Italy aroused great displeasure in London. They showed that his ambitions were, as Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary in the new Labour government, put it, 'fundamentally opposed to the objects of British policy', at a time when successive British governments were trying to establish an understanding with Stalin and to ensure that the Yalta commitments to a broadening of the Polish Provisional Government and the holding of free elections were implemented. The soldiers in Anders' Second Army Corps would certainly have found themselves out of sympathy with the British on this question.[11]

Another reason for not keeping the Polish forces in existence was the absence of a legal authority under which the British government could exercise control over them after the expiry of the Allied Forces Act at the end of the war. It was not envisaged that Parliament would pass legislation permitting Polish military law to be enforced in Britain. Moreover, since the British refused to transfer control of the Polish army to officers appointed from Warsaw, there was no foreign authority recognised by the British government to which Polish forces could offer allegiance. There was, therefore, a real fear that order and discipline could not be maintained, particularly so since the Polish formations in Italy and in Britain would soon be more numerous than British forces. British civilian officials drew attention to the situation in Scotland where large numbers of Polish soldiers were stationed both during and immediately after the war. Here public opinion had become increasingly intolerant of the existence of military units which were no longer under British discipline and control.[12]

It seemed, then, that London was prepared to accept responsibility for the Poles, but not to keep in being a Polish army. This implied that those Poles who did not return to Poland would settle as civilians in Britain, or in some other country such as the United States or one of the British Dominions. The British hoped that the number who settled in Britain would be as small as possible. The Poles might have asked whether this was the right way to treat an ally which had stood side by side with Britain since the outbreak of war and made a significant contribution to the war effort. Their expectations might have been raised by Churchill's typically grandiloquent statement to the House of Commons on 27 February 1945 when he pledged that the British government would never forget the debt due to Polish troops who had served them 'so valiantly', and hoped they could be offered the citizenship and freedom of the British Empire. He went on: 'We should think it an honour to have such faithful and valiant warriors dwelling among us as if they

were men of our own blood.' It was, as he wrote in July 1945, 'essential and necessary to our honour' to maintain British responsibility in a form yet to be determined for Poles exiled abroad.

One year later, however, in January 1946, Bevin denied that Churchill's statement implied a guarantee of settlement in British territory, or of British citizenship. In what seemed a grudging and mean-spirited interpretation of Churchill's speech, he emphasised that the British government would be ready to collaborate with other governments 'to give what assistance they can when the time comes to enable those who have fought with us throughout the war and have finally decided not to return to Poland to begin with their dependants a new life outside their own country'.[13]

Yet British policy turned out, in the end, to be more generous than this statement suggested, and Churchill and Bevin had more in common than appears at first sight. For example, Churchill hoped that as many as possible of the Polish troops would return to Poland of their own free will to play their part in the future life of their country, a view shared by Bevin. Neither wished to place undue pressure on the Poles to return, believing that as much information as possible about the situation in Poland should be made available by the Warsaw government. This would enable the exiles to come to their own 'unbiased and unhurried' decision, 'free from fear and compulsion'.[14]

On the other hand, it was British policy during the first months of the Labour government to discourage those who refused to return from thinking that there was a certain future for them in Britain. There was a real worry in British government circles that more than a hundred thousand Poles being demobilised in Britain would exacerbate the housing shortage, arouse anti-alien feelings, stir up trade union opposition, and undermine law and order. Indeed, to avoid these possibilities, strenuous efforts were made to persuade the governments of the British Dominions to offer homes to the Polish troops and their families. The British Chiefs of Staff, by contrast, shared Churchill's generous appreciation of the important military role played by the Poles in the war, and proposed that any Pole who refused to return to Poland should be offered the best possible terms. The Chiefs in fact anticipated an apparent change of heart by the government. In May 1946, in a statement to the House of Commons, Bevin conceded that the problem of Polish resettlement would be studied with sympathy, and a demobilisation plan worked out.[15]

What brought about the change in emphasis, if not in policy? First, it was clear that the British bluff had been called. When the vast majority

of the Polish Second Army Corps refused to return to Poland, and it became obvious there were few opportunities to settle elsewhere, the British acknowledged there was a real risk of mutiny if any attempt was made to return them to Poland by force. Second, the British government had obtained information that some soldiers who had returned had been arrested and imprisoned. Furthermore, the Polish government had been reluctant to provide the full information about conditions in Poland which the British believed should be made available to Polish troops. Finally, it occurred to Whitehall that the judicious use of demobilised Polish troops would help to overcome the labour shortage in Britain. Wasn't it a contradiction, they asked themselves, to restrict the number of Polish settlers in Britain at a time of labour shortage? Why recruit Baltic DPs to meet this shortage and not Polish soldiers? And wasn't it preferable to employ Poles rather than German prisoners-of-war being brought over from the United States and Canada for this purpose? Admittedly, the Poles, unlike the PoWs or the EVWs, could not be directed into restricted areas of the economy, nor could they be prevented from mixing with the local population, thus increasing the risk of friction and disturbances. It would also have been impossible to send them home, as you could PoWs, when the current manpower needs had been met. On the other hand, to admit them for the declared purpose of helping economic recovery might disarm some of the prejudice and hostility felt in some quarters for the Polish army.[16]

The key factor in changing government opinion, however, was the proposal from the Home Office, accepted by all the relevant departments, to create a new military structure, a non-combatant corps of the British army, in which the Polish military would be embodied. This would act as a kind of decompression chamber, a midway point between military and civilian life, which it was believed would solve most of the problems connected with the Polish forces. A military formation under British command would guarantee order and discipline and ensure that 'a mass of some 160 000 foreigners [was] not let loose among the civil population without proper provision for housing or for regulating their employment'. This Home Office brainchild was called the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC).[17]

Of course, the Polish forces were largely ignorant of the debate in the British government about Polish resettlement. But the outcome of that debate was soon appearing in their mail in the form of a brochure describing the PRC in detail, and inviting the Polish troops to join. Under pressure from the British, Anders had already agreed not to oppose the proposal. What were the Poles being offered and was it in

their interest to join? Let us place this in context. Most of the members of the Polish Second Army Corps had been transported or deported to the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1941. They had then spent two years in Soviet labour camps followed by around five years in the Polish army, culminating in the campaign in Italy. For a year since the end of the war they had been living in army camps in Italy waiting for their future to be decided. It is in this context that they read the proposals put to them. No doubt most saw the advantages in resuming a civilian life, albeit in a foreign country. Emigration to the United States, Latin America, Australia or Canada still remained a possibility, even if they first enlisted in the PRC. Even a return to Poland remained on the cards should conditions improve. Nothing, in short, was ruled out. Could a more favourable proposal for resettlement have been put to them in the circumstances? A small minority of recalcitrants obviously thought so, but the vast majority of the members of the Polish forces agreed to join. What was it in the proposal that attracted them?[18]

First, there was a structured introduction to British life. PRC members would be enlisted for a maximum of two years after which they could expect to be discharged. Accommodation would be guaranteed in an army camp and army rates of pay would be maintained. Although they would be required to work on War Office projects in the absence of other work, PRC members would be free to find appropriate civilian jobs themselves under the guidance, and with the permission, of the Ministry of Labour. In this case they would be relegated to the reserve, but still subject to military discipline and recall. When they found civilian work they could continue to live in camp or take accommodation in private houses or hostels near their place of employment. They would qualify for 21 days military pay and allowances and a war gratuity, but only on discharge from the Corps. In due course their dependants would be brought to Britain and accommodated in camps or hostels until the family could find private accommodation. English lessons would be provided as well as a general introduction to British life. As part of the British attempt to induce as many as possible to return to Poland, Corps members would be given free transport, 56 days pay and allowances, and a war gratuity. It was emphasised in the publicity that the main purpose of the PRC was to place its members in permanent work, but within a structured setting. On discharge from the Corps, which would be done in stages to facilitate absorption in the host society, Poles would be registered as long-term resident aliens and would be free to take employment without the need for Ministry of Labour approval. They would qualify for naturalisation under the normal rules.

Though attractive, membership of the PRC brought with it one big disadvantage. The Warsaw government reminded Polish nationals that under Polish law enlistment in a foreign army, however temporary, would lead to the loss of Polish citizenship. Some Polish soldiers could not accept that, on principle, and became recalcitrants.[19] But most had no serious complaints:

> I first heard of the Polish Resettlement Corps in Italy when I was ready to go to England. Mr. Bevin announced it and we heard the news on the radio. I had not given much thought to what things would be like in Britain; I just assumed I would be demobbed and go to work, but I found that things were not so simple. There were 100 000 men to settle. There had to be a gradual process. So I thought the PRC was a good idea. I was sent to a camp in Norfolk which had been an American Air Force camp in the war. I'd been learning English in the camp in Italy and I continued in the PRC. The local parson used to give us lessons. Representatives of the Ministry of Labour used to visit the camp to interview us and give us information about jobs. I went to the textile industry straight from Norfolk.[20]

The 'Polish question' which confronted the British government was in essence about the so-called Anders army, the ex-'Siberians', the members of the Polish armed forces most resistant to returning to Poland. This is highlighted when we look at the figures for repatriation. Out of a total of 240 154 Polish troops who had been under British command (a higher estimate gives a figure of 249 000) 105 000 had decided to return to Poland by 1949. Some 86 000 of these were repatriated from the United Kingdom, almost all of these by February 1947 (the PRC was not in operation until the autumn of 1946), some 12 000 returned from Italy (mostly recent recruits to the Second Army Corps from Germany), 5000 from Germany and 2000 from the Middle East. But, of the 114 037 who enrolled in the PRC, only around 9000 decided to return to Poland, largely because they were unable to find suitable work in Britain, or because the adjustment to British life was too challenging. Another 12 000 emigrated, but around 30 000 dependants were re-united with their husbands and fathers in the United Kingdom. In all around 124 000 members of the Polish forces and their dependants settled in Britain by the time the last PRC members had been absorbed into the working population in July 1950. They were the ones who felt they could not go back to a Poland under Russian control, partly because they had lost everything, partly because it was reported to be too dangerous.

There were frequent news stories of waves of arrests, trials and sentences. People escaping from Poland confirmed these impressions. Yet many tens of thousands did return, compelled to do so by the need to see their families, to overcome their homesickness, and to escape from the constraints imposed on them in Britain. The ones who returned to Poland usually had wives, children or other members of their family there.[21]

In the discussions about the future of the Polish Armed Forces, the filling of job vacancies in the British economy was something of an afterthought. By contrast, when it came to a consideration of the future of the DPs in the British zones of Germany and Austria, the search for workers was the dominant factor. Throughout 1945 and 1946 the shortage of labour in certain industries was a major constraint on British economic recovery. The government's *Economic Survey* for 1947 published in February reported that a larger labour force was required if national economic objectives were to be achieved. Labour shortages were particularly acute in three industries which were central to economic recovery – coal mining, textiles and agriculture. Increases in output in these industries, it was argued, would reduce imports of agricultural commodities, expand exports of textiles, and ensure that there was enough fuel available for the needs of British industry. In 1946 and the beginning of 1947 there were serious and frequent electricity power cuts, which adversely affected key British industries. Other industries, too, such as building, iron founding, and transport needed more labour, as did nursing and hospital domestic work. It is not necessary to examine in detail the reasons for this shortage. It is enough to say that it resulted from a complex combination of factors which led the authors of the *Economic Survey* to conclude that the old arguments against the employment of foreign labour were no longer valid. Even the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) conceded that 'the vital needs of this country demand more workers than are available'. With unemployment in 1948 falling to below 2 per cent, this was an obvious conclusion to draw. By December 1946 it was estimated that there was a manpower gap of at least 630 000, and possibly many more.[22]

For the government a key advantage of foreign labour was that it could be directed into certain industries where labour was particularly scarce, notably mining, textiles, brick-making, building (over 3 million properties had suffered war damage), agriculture and domestic labour. This possibility was especially valuable at a time when the wartime controls on British labour were being removed. However, it was not envisaged that the kind of labour controls that were to apply to the DPs, or EVWs as the British now referred to them, would be imposed on PRC

members. For various reasons this would have been inappropriate, though the Ministry of Labour did try to steer Polish soldiers in the direction of industries where labour was in short supply. Nevertheless, they were free to enter 'non-essential' occupations since this would accelerate the dissolution of the PRC and save taxpayers' money.[23]

In October 1946 the first EVWs from German camps arrived in Britain, shortly after the first contingent of Polish soldiers from Italy. They came under four schemes whose risible titles, Balt Cygnet, Westward Ho!, North Sea and Blue Danube, were dreamed up by some Whitehall committee, and could have meant little to many of the refugees themselves. The first group to arrive, around one thousand women, came under the Balt Cygnet label. They were employed as domestics in sanatoria. In early 1947 the recruitment target was raised to 5000, but then this scheme was merged with Westward Ho!, a broader programme for recruitment into all the 'essential industries'. In the first instance all the recruits were Balts since these were generally agreed to be the best of the DPs, and because it was thought that the British were already doing a lot for the Poles under the PRC arrangements. But later, in July 1947, Polish DPs were also recruited under Westward Ho!, followed by Germans and Austrians under the North Sea and Blue Danube schemes.[24]

> In 1948 a British delegation came across from the Ministry of Labour. They tried to talk us into going to England under the Westward Ho! Scheme. They said, come to England to work in the mines, and they told us about the training, the pay, the food etc. I chose to go to England. My original intention was to go to Canada or the States, but I was shocked, and so were a lot of Poles, by the lack of discipline in the American army. I would stand to attention for a corporal but the Americans wouldn't even salute the officers. They were lying down with their hands in their pockets. We just couldn't understand this.[25]

Officially, these schemes were about labour recruitment, not about resettlement of refugees. The terms of the EVWs' admission were that entry was for an initial period of one year, subject to good behaviour and the acceptance of employment offered by the Ministry of Labour. The question of residence rights or the acquisition of citizenship were left very vague.[26] The government could therefore claim, in the face of critics, that this was directed labour which would help to overcome the labour shortage in particular industries. At the end of the first year, some of the EVWs were surprised to find that they were not permitted to move freely in the labour market but were still subject to Ministry of Labour direction. Only

after three years of employment did they normally earn the right to take what jobs they chose. It was clear that most of the EVWs had come to stay, or at least not to return to the camps in Germany. And after three years in Britain, during which they had been broadly accepted as good workers who caused little trouble, it was impossible to send them away without individual deportation orders. In any case many of them were in industries where there were still labour shortages. A further important constraint was the reluctance of the authorities in Germany to have them back, and the strong humanitarian and political objections to sending people, particularly women, back to the camps.[27] To sum up, the British government chose to portray the reception of refugees as a labour recruitment scheme, partly because they needed labour, and partly because they could set conditions for employment which would appease potential opponents of the schemes in the trade union movement. Among the EVWs themselves there was a widespread feeling that the labour contract they had signed was a species of slavery, since in practice EVW status lasted for a minimum of three years. There was some sympathy for this viewpoint in the Ministry of Labour itself. Critics wanted the long-term status of EVWs clarified since the form of labour apartheid which had been established undermined assimilation and denied the newcomers a stake in British society. However, their view was only accepted when the economic emergency was overcome and the remaining employment restrictions on British labour were lifted in 1949.[28]

Under the various schemes the EVWs had to sign an agreement to accept the employment provided and to change this employment only with the Ministry's approval. Most EVWs were sent into agriculture, coal mining, brick-making and textiles.

> I was in this camp near York. We were asked questions and we were told 'You go there and there' and we went to Cleckheaton, a small town south of Bradford. I was sent there with a few more Estonians to work in a textile factory, and I did spinning. We couldn't choose what we wanted to do. We sere sent where we were needed. Of course I had attended grammar school in Estonia and I might have hoped to have a higher education and a good career. But it was nearly impossible for me to take this path in England.[29]

The British authorities wanted workers, and the EVWs were desperate to work:

> We were only in the camp (near York) about a fortnight. I took my first chance, I would have taken anything. I wanted work and money.

> We were still in rags, no clothes or anything. I was just recently married in Germany. We took the first available job, working in textiles near Halifax. My wife started to learn twisting in a spinning mill and I was a hoistman, working from a steam engine, carrying things about. Later I got on a drawing machine.[30]

A Ministry of Labour delegation, on a mission to the German camps, reported that Baltic DP women were 'an exceedingly good type' and very suitable for hospital domestic work in the United Kingdom.[31] One such woman recalled:

> I came to Britain from a DP camp as a domestic, even though I was a doctor. I felt I had to start somewhere and then see what happened. First of all I went to Scotland, to a sanatorium as a housemaid. The people there had no idea where we had come from. They expected us to be in rags, and really starved, but we weren't. We had our pictures in the papers. I didn't find the job or the situation difficult, the hospital was quite good and it was in a beautiful place. You had to adapt yourself, you had to take things as they came, so I didn't find it difficult to be a housemaid. I didn't think I had any prospects of ever being a doctor again.[32]

The government had agreed with the TUC that no foreign worker could be given a job for which a suitable British worker was already available. Employment had to be at the same wages and under the same conditions as existed for British workers. In case of redundancy the EVWs would be the first to be dismissed. This was the cause of much of the insecurity felt by the new workers but, in practice, during the economic downturn in 1951–52, most, though not all, firms in textiles put both British and foreign-born workers on short time rather than dismiss the newcomers.[33] This was welcomed by the EVWs, and the number of applications to emigrate diminished.

The EVWs' accommodation was in camps or hostels, and meals were provided free of charge until work was obtained.[34] The official assumption in government was that the newcomers would ultimately move into private accommodation, but this proceeded more slowly than officials would have liked. In June 1951 10 000 EVWs were still living in hostels benefiting, said their critics, from subsidised hostel rents. The great fear in government circles was that this continued segregation would impede assimilation into British life. But the relative slowness to move out of the hostels and camps was a direct consequence, first, of

the restrictions on employment, and second, of the British government's decision to recruit single workers and leave dependants behind in Germany. Only when this condition was relaxed could families be re-united and begin to set up separate homes away from the hostels.[35]

At the end of the first year of work some EVWs applied for a change of employment. If this was not granted, some took other jobs anyway, ignoring the Ministry of Labour. To overcome this tendency, Ministry officials became more flexible, permitting a change of employment within the same industry, or movement between authorised industries. Most of the movement was out of agriculture and coal mining into textiles. One man who took this route had been placed on a farm near Doncaster.

> Though I was treated comfortably on the farm I didn't really want farm work. But this was the first job I was offered and I took it. I lived at the camp and they took us by lorry every morning and spread us out on various farms. I stayed there about nine months. At first we weren't permitted to leave but then the regulations changed permitting everyone to leave if they wished. First of all I worked for a building firm in the Huddersfield area.[36]

Another man spent two years in farming before entering textiles. He decided to leave, even though he had a farming background in Estonia, because of the differences in the weather, type of farming and the techniques. By the end of 1948 the number of EVWs and PRC members who had been placed in agriculture fell by 19 per cent; the number in coal mining by 30 per cent by July 1949. Dislike of these two industries partly accounted for transfers, but another factor was that women EVWs tended to concentrate in textiles, and husbands and boyfriends looked for jobs in the same industry, or at least in the same geographical area. The restrictions on transfers came to an end when all official restrictions were lifted on the employment of EVWs who had been in the United Kingdom for three years on 1 January 1951.[37]

Personal contacts were often very important in decisions about jobs.

> I had a friend who had a letter from Bingley from Mr. X who was a Polish Jew and owned a mill there. He got the addresses of Poles who before the war had worked in textiles in Łódź. I suppose he got this information from the government. My friend got this letter and was offered a job. So my friend took me there and Mr. X employed me even though I had no experience in textiles before. There were

> already about 15 workers from Poland, all had been weavers or textile workers before the war. I did not receive a very friendly reception from these Poles. I think it was because I was an outsider and had not worked in textiles before.[38]

Good luck and personal attributes also played a part in securing work. One man was part of a group taken to a new agricultural hostel being established near Wetherby:

> I went to the warden's office for transport. Then I noticed a magazine on his table from the British Philosophical Society and I started reading it. When the warden came in I apologized for reading it without his permission. He said it was alright, but did I understand much of it. I said, yes I did. He said wait here while I come back and he came back with two officials who were opening the camp, and then they talked for a while and then went away, and finally asked me if I would like to work there, and I said I don't mind, and they made me assistant warden there. I enjoyed the work very much. When the camp ran down I went to Harrogate General Hospital as an orderly, and then I went to the University of Leeds.[39]

As we have hinted already, romantic involvement could also determine the place of work. One PRC member was asked by a friend to help him get a job in Bradford since his girlfriend, an EVW, had gone there to work in textiles. He accompanied his friend to help him with his English. While his friend landed a job in spinning in Salts mill, he himself met a girl. 'I decided if I went back to college in Glasgow I'd lose my girl probably. So I went to Salts and asked for a job.' He got the job and married the girl.[40]

The first group to be employed in wool textiles were 18 Lithuanians in Halifax. In neighbouring Bradford 1000 foreign workers were employed in the woollen and worsted industries between June and December 1947; of these, 600 were women EVWs (there were particular labour shortages in spinning, which is where most women were employed), 115 male EVWs and 250 ex-PRC. By July 1951 around 7000 foreign workers of all nationalities were employed in Bradford, not all of them in the textile industry. Across the Pennines, more than twice as many ex-EVWs and ex-PRC members found jobs in the cotton textile industry of Lancashire as in the woollen and worsted industries of Yorkshire.[41] At the end of the recruitment period in 1950 some 35 700 Polish and Baltic EVWs had entered Britain, composed of 14 000 Poles,

12 000 Latvians, 5700 Lithuanians and 4000 Estonians. These constituted slightly under half the total of EVWs entering Britain since there were also substantial numbers of Ukrainians, Yugoslavs, Hungarians and Czechs. Added to the overall total were some 14 000 dependants.[42] Around 3800 EVWs returned to Germany (some to take advantage of the emigration schemes run by the IRO) and another 600 or so were deported for serious offences. The ratio of men to women among the Balts was around 4 : 1, though the arrival of dependants increased the number of women in the Baltic communities. Initially the proportion of women in textiles was much higher, but the movement of men from other industries into textiles reduced the ratio. There was a higher proportion of women to men when Westward Ho! was opened to the Poles. The large number of unattached PRC males living in Britain by that time was probably a factor in inducing more Polish women to go to Britain.

Labour shortages in Britain were largely in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, and the EVWs were explicitly recruited for this type of work. The PRC members, though not directed, were often forced into unskilled work because they were unable to enter the occupations for which they were qualified because of trade union opposition, or because their qualifications were not recognised, or because linguistic difficulties prevented them re-qualifying. A survey of the main occupations of 66 000 ex-PRC members between 1947 and 1950 showed the following distribution: agriculture – 8200, building – 9000, brick-making – 3100, coal mining – 7300, general engineering – 3500, civil engineering – 3000, domestic service – 1300, food manufacture – 1500, hotels and catering – 6200, iron and steel – 2500, textiles – 6400, miscellaneous – 14 000. Of the latter, the largest component was self-employed people in a variety of occupations.[43]

Ambition, energy, the wish to become well-off, proficiency in English, and sometimes marriage to a British spouse were qualities required for success in self-employment. The following example is a good illustration of this. The narrator was a Polish weaver, his Scottish wife the manageress of a café:

> We knew two Polish people who owned a café and they decided to sell it. My wife was tired of working for somebody else but the price of this café was too high. But these Polish people wanted us to buy it and they offered to lend us some money interest free. We were not poor. In our house we had quite a lot of Polish lodgers, Ukrainian as well. So, with the money from selling the house and the loan we were able to buy this café. Eventually we employed two sets of waitresses

> in two shifts, a washing up lady and someone to clear up in the café. My wife did the cooking and I helped her. The first weekend we were there, there was some kind of fair or circus on a piece of ground nearby. So many people came to buy food and drink that we took £400. At the time I was only earning just over £10 a week. So we had the café decorated all through. When we sold the café I became manager of a big fish and chip restaurant in Leeds. Since I've been in Britain I've had eight cars, all new, three houses, a café and some good jobs. I couldn't have done this in Poland. I've been back to Poland eight times for holidays. My brothers are very poor. I used to send them money and parcels.[44]

Polish cafes such as this, as well as Polish shops, bars, pharmacies and travel agencies offered not only services, but the opportunity for members of the community to meet and socialise away from the clubs, and a chance to talk in their native language in familiar settings.

Only 29 per cent of Poles in employment had jobs corresponding to their qualifications. Yet there was a good deal of mobility between occupations in different industries as the newcomers sought out more congenial and better paid work, and looked for opportunities to employ their skills. As trade union opposition weakened in the late 1940s these opportunities increased. Some people took advantage of them, others were unable to for various reasons.

> In Germany after the war I attended a college of engineering which taught me everything about the mechanics of cars etc, but I wasn't satisfied with that and when I finished I went on a radio course which was very interesting. Everybody thought that when we came to England we would stand a much better chance if we were more skilled. I found a few jobs for myself. First I went round to a garage and asked for a job and the owner said, 'Yes, with pleasure'. But they put a stop to that at the Labour Exchange. Then I tried radio places but I couldn't get a job there because of the unions. I felt very bitter because I'd spent a lot of time preparing for civilian life and then couldn't get the start I wanted. So I had to take a job in textiles. I eventually worked as a grinder since it was a well-paid job. I felt I could do other jobs much better, but that didn't happen because I was a foreigner. Without the war my career would have been different.[45]

Others largely fulfilled their expectations:

> I went to Brighouse for an engineering job since I'd almost completed my engineering apprenticeship in 1944 [in Warsaw] – three months from my final examinations. But the unions wouldn't allow foreigners into engineering at that time. After a job in textiles, I learned that the unions might allow foreigners in engineering because there was a shortage of skilled workers. I came to Bradford one day and went to Crofts to have a look. I could use all the machines. They didn't supervise me. They simply said you're on a week's trial and we'll know by then, or you will know, whether you can do the job. The foreman came with a pile of drawings and said, there you are, and that was it. I was impressed and a bit frightened by that. But I rather liked the idea that it was entirely my own ability, my own skill, that counted. I looked at the drawings, thought I know that, I can do that, and everything was more or less the same. No problem. I stayed with them for 27 years until they closed. Back in Poland I'd attended a good school and I think my parents wanted me to have a career as a professional – my aunt for example was a surgeon in a Warsaw hospital. But I never had resentment about the possible lost opportunities. Basically it was just a relief to do what I wanted to do, to go out when I wanted, and so on.[46]

The proportion of employees in professional occupations and managerial and supervisory positions rose slowly in the next decade, but the major occupational gains were achieved by the younger generation who continued their education in Britain and qualified or re-qualified as engineers, architects, economists and doctors. An Estonian doctor described how she managed to qualify in England:

> There was an Act of Parliament. It was for doctors who worked during the war here. They were mostly refugees, Jews or Poles, who worked without being on the register. The Act was passed to permit them to register. They would now be permitted to register if their qualifications were approved by the General Medical Council (GMC). So I applied to the GMC for registration. The medical institute where I had trained was approved by the GMC so I didn't have to sit any exams for qualifications etc. I had to work hard on my English. When writing a case history I couldn't just write it there and then but had to make notes and write it up at night.[47]

This was a good example of someone who was able to make use of her pre-war qualifications. Best placed in this respect were doctors, dentists, engineers and scientists. It was harder to re-qualify in law, but even in this field there were six Polish barristers, 10 solicitors and 20 legal consultants practising in 1958. By 1960 there were approximately 50 Poles on the academic staffs of British universities or other higher education institutions. Architects, too, could re-qualify, and training opportunities in architecture were available in the Polish Architectural School in Liverpool from 1942. At the same time the School of Medicine at Edinburgh University offered medical training to Poles, and in Glasgow there was a Polish agricultural college.[48]

The Committee for Education of Poles in Great Britain under the Ministry of Education, set up in 1947 did admirable work in opening educational opportunities for the Polish community during its seven years' existence. One of its central aims was to incorporate Polish youth into British schools and to adapt traditional Polish curricula in special camp schools to British requirements, ensuring that pupils gained British qualifications at the end of their study. The Committee also offered grants to Polish students entering higher, further and technical education. Around 10 000 Polish students received grants between 1947 and 1960. About one-third of Polish students in higher education were in British institutions and the remainder attended the Polish University College in London. The College, founded in 1947, had three faculties, engineering, architecture and economics, its academic staff were mainly Polish, and its students, numbering 980 in the 1948–49 academic year, studied for external degrees of the University of London. Between 1947 and 1954 the Committee disbursed around £9 million in grants for Polish education, covering the maintenance of special schools, the costs of the Polish University College, and the payment of grants for students in higher and further education. These grants facilitated the entry of Polish graduates into various professions. At the same time some 30 EVWs were offered university scholarships by mid-1949. In December 1949 the government also decided that EVWs who had worked well for 18 months would be permitted to leave the essential industries to take up courses of full-time study, provided they could support themselves.[49]

The people who benefited from these grants were generally young people without family responsibilities. Perhaps a more common route to achieving educational qualifications was attending evening classes or taking correspondence courses. There are some heroic examples of exiles who studied for years while working full-time at their jobs to provide for

their families. One man started working in textiles but then attended night school classes in mechanical engineering. This became more difficult when he had a family, so he changed to correspondence courses. He transferred to the engineering industry when trade union opposition ended. Since he was too old to gain an apprenticeship, he decided to try to become a draftsman, but to do that he needed to move from firm to firm in order to broaden his knowledge of engineering. Eventually he demonstrated he had enough skill to become a turner. Completing his correspondence course in mechanical engineering, design and draughtsmanship he worked in a number of factories as a draughtsman with a view to becoming an engineering designer.

> One of my best jobs was with Associated Weavers where I worked for seven years. This covered everything – general mechanical engineering, design, fluids, hydraulics, pneumatics, gear design – everything was there. When they closed down the factories I moved on from there to another firm as a design engineer.[50]

His success was paralleled by another exile who, after working in the building industry for several years, decided that life was passing him by and he was making no progress educationally or socially. Taking classes at night school he qualified as an Intermediate Chartered Secretary:

> I started work for a company as assistant company secretary. I decided then that I'd better qualify as a chartered secretary and I did this in Leeds Polytechnic. After six years in the job they asked me to set up a buying department and I spent 14 years organising and purchasing. I'm proud that I haven't been to a British school for a single day and I got where I got.[51]

Others dispensed with formal qualifications and learned on the job. A Latvian did various jobs on building sites, from drainage to electrical work, before forming his own firm in 1961 which eventually employed 26 men. He had not only craft skills but entrepreneurial flair – 'I was never shy of going in to get business. If I saw someone building I would stop and ask them if I could give them a price.'[52]

If upward mobility became increasingly common among the first generation of exiles, the dominant experience was one of occupational decline and declassing. Over half of Poles with skills and qualifications were employed as unskilled labour between 1947 and 1950 and only

around one-third had jobs corresponding to their qualifications.[53] Language problems and a lack of transferable qualifications and skills were the root cause of this. However, the belief that exile was temporary and that a return to their home countries was imminent also deterred some of the Polish and Baltic newcomers from making the great efforts required to adapt to the employment opportunities in Britain.[54] Sheila Patterson noted that the majority of older Poles in Croydon were 'economically downgraded or declassed'. But in Croydon, as opposed to some other areas of the country, there was sufficient prosperity to ensure that most Poles who lived and worked there were 'moderately well-to-do', even though they worked in jobs which were below their formal qualifications. And even more prosperous were engineers, scientists and skilled workers with pre-war or British qualifications who were able to work in their own trades and professions.[55] But the humanist and artistic intelligentsia, for whom 'there was no fit work' to use General Marian Kukiel's words, were acutely conscious of what they had lost. An article in a British newspaper in 1948 put the size of this group at 20 000 which may be rather on the high side since other estimates suggest a figure of around 10 000. It was composed of civil servants, actors and opera singers, instrumentalists, lawyers, school teachers, academics, journalists, painters and writers. Some of them were able to obtain work in their own special fields, but they were in a minority. The majority were over 40, they often had language problems, and their unfamiliar qualifications were suspect in the eyes of most British employers.[56]

Among those who had difficulty in obtaining work at an appropriate level were professional army officers with few transferable skills. They were often unwilling to leave the PRC and look for work since their army pay and allowances were quite generous. In order to induce them to enter the job market the army offered them vocational training in a number of fields such as watch making and repairing, shoe repairing, farming and forestry, tailoring, photography and electrical trades. Some set up small hotels and boarding houses and other small businesses. Still others were liftmen in department stores, or gardeners or hospital porters. One Bradford textile mill employed three former Army colonels who 'coped very well, and weren't depressed or ashamed'. Some of the older ones became dependent on state support through the National Assistance Board.[57]

Others who were technically qualified could not get the job of their choice owing to trade union opposition. This was particularly frustrating when the newcomers suspected that the opposition to their employment was political rather than economic. This was explained well by

a Pole who tried to get a job in Sheffield:

> I went to see one or two friends there and there was the prospect of a good job with a good salary. But I was told, yes, they'd give me a job if I was accepted into the trade union. So I made enquiries about that, and I was told, yes, we accept you into the trade union if you get a job. But the management couldn't offer me a job without me being in the trade union because the whole firm would stop, and at that time I didn't understand very well that the barrier was put up towards the Poles by a communist-dominated trade union. The motivation was political; it was much less about preserving jobs for the British. After all, the Asians got jobs, the Jews got jobs, the Poles didn't.[58]

While this man was barred from employment another who came up against the same problem when trying to get a job as an electrician was able to break the deadlock by persuading the contractor to give him a trial. But this was the building industry where there was much less chance of industrial action by the unions than in, for example, engineering or printing.[59]

This is not the place to discuss at length the complex question of trade union opposition to the employment of foreign labour after the war. Among union members there was a not unreasonable fear of unemployment, lowered wages, shorter overtime and a deterioration of working conditions. The TUC attempted to safeguard standards by extracting promises from the government about the conditions under which foreign labour would be employed. Opposition to foreign labour was strongest in those industries which had experienced acute economic insecurity between the wars, where memories of the 1930s were still strong, and where workers hesitated to believe Labour's assurances that, in future, full employment would be the norm. In general the greatest opposition came from the agricultural workers' and miners' unions, unsurprisingly in view of the direction of foreign labour into their two industries. Opposition was also strong among highly skilled workers in engineering and other skilled trades, particularly those with a left-wing or communist leadership.

At its annual congress in 1946 the TUC agreed, though with considerable opposition, to the employment of foreign labour, but under strict conditions. There were some virulent speeches against the proposal; one from a delegate of the Wood Workers' union who referred to the Poles, unforgivably, as 'so-called refugees who had never lifted a rifle or given

battle against Hitler's fascism', and were characterised by Jew baiting, hatred of the communist government in Warsaw, and the belief in an imminent war against Bolshevism. He concluded that they should all be returned to Poland. At the other extreme unions such as the Transport Workers and the General and Municipal Workers actively recruited foreign workers. It seems that Polish workers were just as likely to join trade unions as the indigenous population, if given the chance.[60] By the end of the 1940s, though, most trade unions had ceased to oppose employment of qualified foreign workers in their industries and this opened up the job market for Poles and Balts. Nonetheless, there was a legacy of bitterness and anger among some of the newcomers who were denied the opportunity to practise their hard-earned skills. Others, however, were more philosophical, not to say Panglossian:

> We weren't angry about British trade unions because everybody was fighting among themselves. They were afraid because they'd never seen a stranger or a foreigner but they steadily got used to us and we have been the best of friends since then. We mixed in and they forgot. It was no trouble.[61]

Whatever the truth of this, there was some dissatisfaction with the conditions of life and work in Britain during the years of economic recovery between 1948 and 1951. The pace of re-migration began to pick up as a result of a mixture of pull and push factors. The United States passed a Displaced Persons Act in 1948 which removed DPs from the quota legislation and authorised an entry of 200 000 persons, rising to 400 000 under a second DP Act in 1950. At the same time the Ministry of Labour in Britain established a Central Polish Resettlement Office in 1947 to assist Poles who wished to emigrate.[62] After the short downturn in the economy beginning in late 1951 resulted in increased unemployment, the temptations of life elsewhere, in North America and Australia, began to exert greater influence on the Poles and Balts in Britain. 'They just wanted a better standard of life', as one Estonian recalled. There was also a growing recognition, in the light of the Korean War and the hardening of divisions in Europe, that the prospect of the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union and its East European satellites was becoming more remote. Hence, remaining in Europe in order to effect a swift return home was an unrealistic option. Quite the reverse, in fact, since some of the newcomers feared a Soviet advance into Western Europe, which would once again imperil them. Consequently the distance from Europe of the Americas and Australia as well as the presence of large communities

of their fellow Poles and Balts in the United States offered attractions which Britain could not match. Moreover, there was some disenchantment with the notorious British reserve, and resentment at discrimination and ill treatment because of accent or name. 'Ah, they treated us as second class people', said a Pole who had re-migrated to Canada, 'You know, like you get the British noses up in the sky'.[63]

Yet, in 1954, allowing for emigration and death, at least 119 000 Poles remained in Britain along with three quarters of the EVWs.[64] It was these people who put down deeper and deeper roots and began to establish communities in different parts of Britain, all endowed with a range of social, political, educational, religious and cultural organisations. There was by now a growing acceptance among the newcomers that they and their families would make their lives in Britain, for better or for worse.

11
Communities

When the Polish and Baltic exiles arrived in Britain they had, as their personal accounts show, several priorities. After years in labour, military or civilian camps where it was impossible to create a satisfactory family life or to resume their interrupted careers, and where everything seemed temporary, uncertain or problematic, they yearned for stability, privacy, the opportunity to earn a satisfactory living, property ownership and the uniting of their families. Moreover, they felt they had a mission to maintain their national cultures. This was not only a question of recreating a familiar and beloved spiritual and emotional environment. Sustaining and then transmitting their 'pure' cultures to a new generation was critical because Communist rule in their home countries would, they were convinced, corrupt their nations' cultural heritage. It was therefore their duty to preserve this heritage intact in anticipation of the day when they would return.

This meant passing on to the next generation knowledge of the language, history, literature and traditions of their homelands, instilling in them in the words of Pope John Paul II, 'their great and dear spiritual heritage'. Familiarity with this heritage had the additional advantage of fitting the younger generation for life in the home country after the fall of Communism. At the same time parents were realistic enough to see that their children had to adapt to life in Britain as well, which would be their home for the foreseeable future. The majority of parents took the view that their children should be part of both cultures, but others believed that to succeed in Britain their children should concentrate on acquiring the best British education without diversions into the language and traditions of the homelands.

On their arrival in Britain the exiles were accommodated in former military camps and workers' hostels. While it was comparatively easy to

maintain their cultures in this environment, it was impossible to achieve many of their other ambitions. They could, to be sure, take jobs near to their accommodation or, in the case of members of the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC), find work further afield and live in rented rooms. After three years the European Volunteer Workers (EVWs) too were permitted to choose jobs more freely and to move out of the hostels and camps. But an absolute priority for almost all the newcomers was to own a house where they could create a stable family life and surround themselves with the privacy which they had been denied for so long. Initially, few of them spoke good English, or even any English at all, and were quite unfamiliar with British customs, bureaucracy and way of life. To adapt to Britain without help was a difficult if not impossible task. Moreover, though the exiles wanted private family lives, they also needed to be part of their ethnic communities. Fortunately for them, the British government's direction of labour helped them to combine these two objectives.

The concentration of the newcomers in certain geographical areas enabled them to create ethnic communities where they could interact with the host society in work, trade unions and professional associations, and where their children could attend local schools and mix with children from different backgrounds. At the same time, living in communities of fellow ethnics permitted them to establish institutions in which their cultures could be nourished and transmitted to the next generation. Here they could speak their mother tongues and socialise freely, away from the pressures and tensions of the unfamiliar British world. These communities were the saving grace for many of them. However, a small minority were marginalised, isolated both from British society and from their own cultural roots. These were the people most susceptible to mental illness. The victimisation of the exiles by Stalin and Hitler continued to torture them long after the arrests and deportations which had severed their connections with home.

The direction of labour instituted by the British government in its treatment of the EVWs and its encouragement of PRC members to take up employment in labour-scarce industries ensured that the exiles were concentrated in certain areas of Britain. Figures for 1950 show that there were 14 500 Poles in Lancashire, of whom 3300 were in Manchester, 13 500 in the West Riding of Yorkshire including around 3000 in Bradford, 5500 in Staffordshire, 4500 in Gloucestershire and the same number in Warwickshire, which included 2500 in Birmingham, and around 4000 in various locations in Scotland. Similar, but smaller, concentrations existed among the Baltic exiles, particularly in the

northern textile areas but also with a greater emphasis on the East Midlands at the expense of the West Midlands and the south-west. These concentrations resulted from four complementary elements: the pull of employment in these areas, the attraction of being part of a large community of fellow ethnics, the possibilities of setting up small enterprises, such as cafés, bars, travel agencies, pharmacies, shops (delicatessens in particular) and shoe repairers to service the needs of the exile communities, and, finally, the greater possibilities of obtaining private accommodation in some of the larger cities.[1]

But the greatest concentration in the case of the Poles was in London. Here some 33 000 former Polish citizens resided in the Metropolitan district. Among them was a large proportion of the middle class and the intelligentsia who were attracted to London by a wider variety of job opportunities and the possibilities of a rich cultural life for minorities. Here too was the seat of the Polish Government-in-Exile and the headquarters of the numerous Polish educational, charitable, welfare and cultural organisations. Balts too were susceptible to the attractions of London but the size of their community there was smaller owing to the lower numbers of settlers in Britain. Forty years later, the Census of 1991 showed that the relative concentration of native-born Poles remained, though their numbers had fallen substantially from the earlier figures. The smallest decline took place in London. This was the result of the pull of London for the approximately 23 000 Polish nationals who emigrated to Britain between 1950 and 1990. All these figures obscure the fact that people of Polish and Baltic origin born in Britain represent substantial numbers of people who are scattered over the country in a less concentrated fashion than their elders, but nonetheless add to the numbers in the Polish and Baltic communities. One calculation put the number of second-generation Poles, for example, at over 40 000 for the early 1980s.[2]

The clustering of Poles and Balts depended on the availability of jobs and accommodation. Since the ambition of almost all the newcomers was to acquire their own houses, concentrated settlement as described above required a supply of private housing at affordable prices permitting the newcomers to live relatively near to each other. These conditions were not present immediately after the war. There was a housing shortage in Britain in 1945. Some 150 000 homes had been destroyed by war-time bombing and more than 1 million seriously damaged. No new houses had been built since the beginning of the war. However, in the textile areas which suffered relatively little war-time damage, there was actually a surplus of housing owing to population decline. For

example, the population of Bradford fell by 5700 between 1931 and 1951. Houses in the Bradford area were sometimes too large and inconvenient for British families who had no domestic help, whereas the Poles and Balts were prepared to buy them and to lease out rooms to fellow ethnics. One of the government's priorities was make up the backlog of housing as quickly as possible. Moreover, priority in the allocation of new homes such as council houses went to people already on waiting lists. These were usually British citizens, including people recently demobilised from the British forces. This was accepted as the correct policy by some of the Poles and Balts who were interviewed. In any case the newcomers were not interested in being housed on large new housing estates on the edge of cities, preferring to live closer to their work and to fellow-ethnics. So far as buying houses went, most of the newcomers had not built up enough savings to enter the housing market before 1950. In fact it was the decade of the 1950s when house purchase by the exiles began to accelerate.[3]

The newcomers' ambition to purchase their own houses was a product both of their background and their early experiences in Britain. Their inherited attitude to property purchase was an important element in this ambition, and a number of them commented on it.

> I think it's a lot to do with coming from an agricultural background, with owning land. Before the war 95 per cent of the Polish population worked on the land or owned a part of the land even though they worked in a factory or an office. But somewhere they had a little patch or shared the patch with a brother or with their parents. And maybe you would go and help with the harvest. Every peasant wants to own something. So you see, there was a great desire to own a house.[4]
>
> It was important for me to own my own house, because this is what I intended doing when I lived in Poland. My father had his own property and was a farmer in his later years, buying a farm when I was very small.[5]

This ambition intensified as a result of their first years in Britain living in camps, hostels and rented accommodation. Initially, the camps to which the exiles were sent were in remote areas of Britain, far from centres of employment. The Ministry of Labour was deputed to secure accommodation, either in camps or hostels, nearer to these centres. Despite their disadvantages, the camps have been praised for sheltering their residents from 'a premature launching into the strangeness and

uncertainty of life in mainstream British society' and giving them time to adjust mentally. They produced 'a measure of stability', an improvement in health, and a chance to organise their family lives.[6] On the other hand, the experience of yet more camp life soon began to pall. Camps, usually built of nissen huts, suffered from the common problems of overcrowding, the need to share facilities, poor insulation, inadequate furnishings, institutional food, lack of privacy and often the separation of families, with dependants in one camp and the males of the family in another, sometimes many miles apart.[7]

Hostels provided by the Ministry of Labour in areas of employment suffered from some of the same disadvantages, including segregation from the host society. According to Bülbring, mill owners in the West Riding, though they needed the refugees' labour, opposed the establishment of hostels because they disliked the segregation involved, believing that if the foreigners were to work effectively with British workers there should be as little difference as possible in their ways of life. On the other hand, we know that a number of firms converted factory buildings into hostels to help overcome the labour shortage. The exiles themselves were unhappy with the isolation involved in hostel accommodation since many hostels were situated on the edge of cities, requiring a long coach ride into work. Hostels also often involved separation of husbands and wives. The disadvantages of hostels led to their rapid abandonment. Though there were 118 hostels open in 1951, accommodating some 16 000 persons, by 1959 only 3 were still functioning, showing the level of dissatisfaction with this form of accommodation and the pace of re-location into private accommodation.[8]

Some of the newcomers remained in hostels until they could afford to buy their own houses, but the majority went into lodgings near their place of work and often in the houses of other Poles or Balts. Fellow ethnics were usually more ready to accept the newcomers as lodgers than the British, who sometimes posted notices saying 'No Poles or East Europeans!' The usual route to house ownership was by rigorous self-denial and disciplined saving. Once a deposit had been acquired, the mortgage repayments were usually financed in the early days by taking in lodgers. The owners lived in one room and leased out the rest, usually one family to a room, leading to considerable overcrowding. Some lodgings lacked bathrooms and indoor toilets. This overcrowding attracted criticism from the local Bradford newspaper which otherwise was very supportive of the newcomers in the city. In the circumstances it is not surprising that the exiles, who were well-disposed to buying

property in any case, should make every sacrifice to acquire the freedom and independence resulting from home ownership.[9]

> It was very important for us to own our own house. Council houses and other rented property are never yours. It was something that belonged to you. Nobody tells you what to do, when you can use the bathroom etc – the independence is what is important. And the children like to have freedom as well. In your own house you can do whatever you like. You can spread your wings.[10]

The unsatisfactory nature of many lodgings produced a deep desire to achieve the independence which came from owning your own house. One man moved into six lodgings before he entered the housing market himself.

> The last of these lodgings was with a Polish family who had just bought a house and wanted a lodger. After buying the house he hadn't any money left and so when I went to talk about it on a Sunday afternoon, his wife gave me tea in a jam jar. He then asked me to pay him three months in advance because he had to buy a bed and blankets. So I paid him.[11]

Another man used every penny he had to buy a house.

> I had £450, and I put £370 for a deposit, paid £50 for a solicitor and with what I had left bought a gas ring and a table and two chairs and I started life like that. One friend gave me a little single bed. I was left without a penny and had to wait until Friday for my wage. I had one or two coppers to last me until then.[12]

The interviewees made clear that the Savings and Loan Associations set up by ethnic communities in the United States to help members borrow money for house purchase did not exist in Britain, and so Poles and Balts had recourse to building societies for mortgage finance like everyone else. Probably the majority of the exiles in the cities bought houses in localities where there was, or was likely to be, a concentration of their fellow-ethnics. This did not mean that there were ethnic ghettos since the concentration of settlement was not so intense. For example, in areas of Polish settlement there were also Ukrainians, Balts and Italians. Most Poles and Balts in Bradford, for example, could be found in three or four districts, notably Manningham, Frizinghall, Great and Little Horton and Shipley. Later, when the Polish church was established, it

was located within easy reach of these centres of settlement. The Balts, who generally worked in the same textile and other enterprises as the Poles, also congregated in the same areas. Of course, there were always individuals who chose not to live in too close proximity to their fellow ethnics, but often this was the result of exogamy which pulled them in another direction. Later, with the second generation, there was a movement to better quality housing in the suburbs. This led to a dispersal of the community and a weakening of its core institutions.

Although the search for jobs was a powerful factor in determining location, the need to be part of a community of fellow ethnics was very strong. Many people moved from work in relatively isolated areas to jobs which permitted them to live in close contact with their compatriots. This was not invariably because the latter jobs paid better. By forming part of a community of their fellows they could accommodate themselves to the demands of British life with the support of others, exchanging information and advice, and socialising in a familiar environment. A community offers a number of vital functions, according to Roland Warren. It can provide economic opportunity. It offers the possibility for socialisation so that individuals can acquire or sustain the knowledge, values, and behaviour patterns of their ethnic group. It creates the opportunity for social interaction and participation. It is indispensable in establishing mechanisms of social support, providing help in times of trouble or hardship.[13] The communities of Balts and Poles provided their members with all of these functions. In the larger communities of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians houses or clubs were bought by means of voluntary donations from the members. But first the communities had to find whatever premises they could, mainly church or school halls where lectures or musical performances were organised. However, the ownership of clubs greatly expanded the communities' activities. These were places where the members could meet, celebrate their national days, socialise and chat in their own languages, and provide rooms for cultural activities such as choral singing, folk dancing, the Saturday or supplementary schools, the performance of plays, and the showing of films about the home countries. Native language books were available for borrowing from libraries established in the clubs. The clubs also provided offices for Baltic welfare associations which offered help to the aged, to invalids, to people in hospitals or mental institutions, and provided funds to support Saturday schools.[14]

> The Estonian club house was bought in 1955. We had been looking for a house for the group for a long time. It had to be a certain size

> and we wanted a bit of ground around, and somebody noticed there was one for sale. It was in a really shabby condition, the walls were nearly falling in and so on but the price was not bad, so they bought it. And the people did voluntary work to get it in good shape again, because we didn't have much money. I mean, we had to raise the money ourselves, so we didn't have enough for labour. It took about a year before it was converted into a good condition.[15]

The Poles too formed clubs, very often under the auspices of the Polish Ex-Combatants' Association (SPK) which for many years provided one of the two main Polish social, cultural and welfare organizations, the other being the Polish parish. The SPK was formed in 1945 and took over the welfare role undertaken by the Polish armed services during the war. Its headquarters in London was the centre of a world-wide federation. It aimed to help Poles in Britain accommodate themselves to British life while at the same time preserving Polish culture and identity intact, forming so far as possible self-contained Polish communities, and implicitly resisting the process of assimilation. It was also a political and propaganda organisation, lobbying for a free and independent Poland, reminding the British public of the crime of Katyn, and pressuring the Soviets to return Poles from their Siberian exile to their home countries.[16]

The SPK, through its numerous clubs in the Polish communities, offered a wide variety of services and opportunities for its members. Among these were financial assistance to people in need, aid to individuals who wished to set up their own businesses, legal advice, and help in finding jobs by liaising with Ministry of Labour offices. Its role as a welfare organisation for the elderly, war invalids, widows and orphans was particularly valuable. For the second generation the SPK ran Saturday or supplementary schools, and organised sports and cultural associations.[17] In 1953 it had 14 600 members in 197 branches but numbers declined quite rapidly after that, stabilising at around 7000 in the mid-1970s. It is clear that the second generation was much less interested in participating in the clubs, finding the social atmosphere relatively unattractive and dated. They preferred to go elsewhere for their entertainment. The future is one of steady decline unless new roles and new enthusiasms can be found.[18]

But for their parents' generation the premises of the SPK, like the Baltic clubs, offered an opportunity to meet friends, share experiences, give and receive advice, celebrate anniversaries and relax in their mother tongue, surrounding themselves with the familiar symbols of

their native cultures. Here was the opportunity to sing in choirs, take up folk dancing, provide musical accompaniments, play different sports and games, and take part in scouting. For those who wanted it, and not everybody did, the SPK, along with the parish, offered an ethnic cultural microcosm, a haven from the difficulties of everyday life, and some slight consolation for the loss of country. And for those who had been declassed, administrative and committee work in the clubs offered the opportunity to demonstrate the talents and abilities which found little outlet in their sometimes menial everyday work.

The political nature of the SPK alienated some of the Polish exiles who preferred to meet in the parish club, which was usually attached to a Polish church or chapel. The parish was not necessarily an alternative to the SPK since many people belonged to both clubs, and those members of the SPK who did not, often attended church services. The first generation of priests had often been padres in the Polish armed forces, and many of them had shared with their flocks the hardships of deportation, imprisonment, war service and exile. They were the objects of admiration and respect. Some of the more recent appointees, trained in Lublin, Paris or Rome, had not shared these war-time experiences and occasionally found it difficult to relate to the war veterans who refused to accept the clerical assumption that the priest should automatically be the leader of the community. 'The priest is of a different origin and background. He comes from Poland and I think he doesn't understand our ex-serviceman's attitude', reported one SPK member. Nevertheless, the parish became of even greater significance in the life of Polish communities as the SPK's membership fell. It is difficult to estimate what proportion of the Polish communities attended their churches and parish clubs. Some people were assiduous attenders, others occasional, but most at some point in their lives went to the church because it served not only a religious function but a cultural and social one too. According to Sword, there was a growing recognition that the cohesion of the community in the future would depend on the parish structure.[19]

In terms of ecclesiastical organisation, the Polish parishes were in a very unusual position. Initially Roman Catholic priests in Britain assumed that the Polish exiles, almost all of whom were from the Catholic religious tradition, would attend the local Catholic church and integrate into the wider community. This would have meant that services and sermons would have been in English, which for most of the newcomers was incomprehensible. To avoid this, it was arranged through the offices of the Papal Curia that the jurisdiction of the bishop to the Polish armed forces would remain over all Poles living in camps

and hostels. However, as the exiles moved into private accommodation and the PRC came to an end, this arrangement was no longer considered appropriate. Polish priests were then placed under the authority of the Polish Catholic Mission and, through the Mission, to the British and Polish hierarchies. In practice the administration of Polish parishes has been largely independent of the British hierarchy. Accompanying this decision was the Papacy's consent to the creation of 'personal' parishes wherever a Polish community was large enough to justify a separate parish. Polish parishes were, in effect, superimposed on the normal territorial parish structure. The effects of this independence were profound for the life of the Polish communities in Britain.[20]

For one thing it enabled Polish congregations to attend services conducted in the Polish language, to sing familiar hymns, to experience the well-loved rituals and to make confession in Polish. It also enabled the priest to give sermons in Polish, which helped to maintain morale in difficult times, and to reinforce the community's awareness of its national identity, a role the Church had performed through the centuries 'I think that the faith is an essential part of the Polish inheritance' said one man, 'and if the faith goes then the inheritance is weakened substantially'. 'The church' said another 'kept the community together and does even now, and that's the main point'.[21] The Latvians had similar ideas. 'The church is important to the Latvians because it deals with christenings, births and deaths. To many coming together for a wedding or funeral it was important to hear the Latvian language because the whole age range of Latvian people were present and they generally could fully understand only Latvian and this state of affairs lasted for several years.'[22]

In addition to its spiritual functions, the Polish church afforded its parishioners the opportunity to engage in many other collective activities. On the most informal level the church was a gathering place where members of the congregation could chat and socialise after the services. Since a very high proportion of the community attended the Polish church in the early days of settlement, going to church put people in touch who did not meet at work or in their neighbourhoods, giving them the opportunity to exchange news about family and friends. The parish also had more organised social functions. The parish club was the venue for all kinds of activities, some of which replicated those of the SPK. Here were bars, meeting rooms, libraries and reading and games rooms. Here one could participate in folk dancing, choral singing, chess competitions and many similar recreational and educational activities, including Saturday schools. In the early years of settlement priests had important additional functions, such as acting as advisers,

interpreters or intermediaries between their parishioners and the wider British community. In these ways the parish helped the Poles to adjust to the host society but at the same time strengthened their sense of common identity. [23]

There appears not to be the same degree of allegiance to the parish among the second and third generations as among the first. 'As parents we are upset that this is so, but we can't influence our children now that they are grown up.' A number of second-generation Poles stressed that they attended local Catholic churches and only went to the Polish church occasionally. Others became disaffected:

> We attend the Polish church but we're beginning to rebel. As second generation we can't agree with the doctrine of Polish Catholicism. A lot more of us are turning to the English church. We find it more comfortable but it doesn't give us the thrill and enjoyment that the church should give us. The priest is head of the parish and whatever he tells you to do, whether it's in Warsaw or Britain, that is law. The older generation will tolerate this, but I can't accept it. We are slightly more democratic in the West and have the power to question the priest. They don't like it. The church has got to move with the times. We go to the local Catholic church and take our children there. But we still go to the Polish church once a month. I think in the olden days going to church was a way of joining a communal meeting place; after Mass you could meet your friends. On Sundays about a thousand Poles would meet between 10 am and 12.30 pm. Now, when we walk out of church, we are lucky to find 30 or 40 people outside.[24]

Other opportunities for socialising besides the SPK and the parish were provided by ethnic shops, bars and cafes:

> In our city there was only one Polish bar and no Polish restaurant. People did meet at Polish shops, such as delicatessens; we used to do much of our shopping there because we wanted to buy Polish food but also it was a good opportunity to meet other Poles. There was a Polish travel agency just down the road from the Ex-Combatants' Club, and a jeweller's shop and a pharmacy on one of the main streets in town. When my mother was still alive and I wanted to send some money to her and my sister in Poland we used to go to the Polish chemist to send money through him to Poland. Some banks wouldn't do it but he could.[25]

Though the local communities were vital for the maintenance of Polish traditions and culture, they were not sufficient. The exiles wanted to maintain the sense of *esprit de corps* which so many had experienced in the Polish army. The SPK was an example of a centrally organised body with branches in almost every Polish community. The Polish Government-in-Exile also claimed to represent the mass of Poles in Britain, but its internal politicking in the 1950s lost it credibility among the exiles. Although it continued in existence until after the fall of Communism in Poland in 1989 it was a shadow of its former self. After it ceased to exist in 1991, an organisation called the Federation of Poles in Great Britain assumed greater significance, acting as a co-ordinating agency for the 75 or so social, community and welfare organisations existing in the British – Polish community. These did not include parish organisations since the Church kept itself apart from this secular body. But, all in all, secular and religious organisations represented, as Zubrzycki said, 'a genuine effort at the reconstruction of the social, cultural and spiritual life of the community planted in foreign surroundings'.[26]

Recreating this cultural and social life involved not only establishing local community organisations but also creating associations of people in the same professions or occupations who faced similar challenges in establishing themselves in the host society. There were associations of engineers, doctors, journalists, writers, artists and teachers among others. There existed, to take three examples, a Union of Polish Craftsmen and Workers in GB which was affiliated to the General and Municipal Workers' Union, a Union of Sports Clubs and an Association of Polish Students and Graduates.

To provide a framework and headquarters for all these organisations and to offer a clear physical focus for the Polish community in Britain, it was decided to establish a building in London housing the Polish Social and Cultural Centre (POSK). This was completed in 1974 after a major fund-raising effort from the whole of the Polish community. Two decades later it had 10 000 members and its meeting rooms, art gallery, cafés and restaurants, bookshop, the Polish University Abroad and Polish Library housing more than 100 000 books were heavily patronised. As Sword pointed out, the building symbolised the permanence and continuity of the Polish community in Britain, demonstrated by the fact that 40 per cent of the governing Council were from the second generation. [27]

This association and the numerous other Polish organisations could not have existed without the means of easy communication among the Polish communities. Here the Polish language press was of

prime importance. The journal of widest circulation was *Dziennik Polski*, (Polish Daily), founded in 1940, but there were some 200 other titles being published in the 1940s. By the 1960s the number had fallen to 33. The circulation of the *Polish Daily* was 31 560 in 1951, but by the early 1990s it had fallen to around 7000. The readership of the other remaining journals had also fallen, as the numbers of the older generation who constituted most of the readers declined. It was reported that in two Polish communities, while 62 per cent of the first generation read Polish newspapers often or very often, only 13 per cent of the second generation did so. Similarly, a survey of Polish readers of books showed that a diminishing number of people borrowed Polish language books. Additionally, while 78 per cent of the first generation read books often, only 6 per cent of the second generation did so.[28]

The *Polish Daily* served a number of very important functions in the Polish community in Britain. It publicised and promoted the social and cultural activities of the community. It offered advice on employment opportunities and legal problems, and informed people about the work of the various Polish organisations. It was, for some decades after the war, a propaganda tool of the Polish exiles, taking a strongly anti-communist line and arguing for the restoration of Polish independence. As time passed it contained less and less news from Poland and more reports on Polish activities in Britain. Being written in Polish it had the effect of keeping the Polish community separate from the life around it and hampering improvement in English and assimilation. On the other hand, as it broadened its coverage of events in Britain, the knowledge gained assisted accommodation to British life and prepared the exiles for broader participation in the life of the host society.[29]

Although the Baltic communities were not as large as the Polish and therefore did not find it viable to establish their own churches as the Poles did, their pastors and priests (the Estonians and Latvians were mainly Lutheran, the Lithuanians Roman Catholic) who usually had care of a number of scattered communities, held services in local Protestant or Catholic churches. Consequently, most cultural and social activities took place, not around the parish or some equivalent to the Ex-Combatants' Association, but in the Baltic meeting houses. The interviews suggest that the great majority of Balts in each city or town were members of their clubs and houses. Like the Poles, the Balts had an intense interest in international affairs and in news from their homelands, and assembled substantial libraries in their clubs for the information of their members. They retained their passionate involvement in singing and folk dancing, in ethnic costumes and ancient customs.

Indeed, in due course, they revived in Britain their famous song festivals. These activities, which were enjoyable for participants and observers alike, had the additional advantage of encouraging the participation of the second generation and reinforcing their ethnic identity. The press of the Baltic émigrés had similar functions and influence on the respective communities as the Polish press had in regard to the Polish exiles.[30]

Both the Polish and the Baltic communities also came together to celebrate national anniversaries as well as religious festivals. The Poles, for example, celebrated 3 May, the anniversary of the 1791 Constitution, and all the communities remembered their respective independence days. These ceremonies were all the more poignant in the light of their lost independence following the Soviet takeover, which was so recent in their memories. On these commemoration days entertainments might be organised involving plays, music and dance. As ardent Catholics the Poles and Lithuanians celebrated Easter, Corpus Christi and All Souls' days with characteristic solemnity and age-old rituals. The particular character of the Christmas celebration by the Poles of *Wigilia*, the traditional 12 course Christmas Eve meal, followed by attendance at Christmas Mass, was particularly memorable as it brought the generations together, reinforcing family and community solidarity, and a sense of ethnic distinctiveness. The magic of this ceremonial meal was something the second generation of Poles remembered with particular pleasure when they reached adulthood. They and the Balts had particular affection of their ethnic food in general since it gave them an immediate and easily accessible contact with their former lives. The litany of Polish food names conjured up the sights and tastes of the homeland – *gołabki, kiełbasy, pierogi, sernik, makowiec* and *charlotka* – and formed an essential part of their sense of identity.[31]

Many of the folkways could be transmitted to the younger generation in the home. But most parents did not have the skills or the knowledge to teach the history, geography, culture and religion as well as the language of the mother country. Even if they had, they were often working very long hours and could not find the time and energy to do this. Accordingly, the Polish and Baltic communities established Saturday schools which the younger generation, aged 5 to 17, could attend on Saturday mornings. It was possible for a minority of pupils to take Polish language up to Advanced level at some of these schools. Generally, though, teachers followed the curriculum of Polish schools during the inter-war period. Textbooks were continually revised and updated. In addition to formal lessons, there were also opportunities for dancing

and singing. Provision was also made for older children to graduate into the Scout movement or into youth clubs in which their language proficiency could be maintained. Initially, the schools were established to prepare the children for life in the motherlands.[32] Later, when this prospect became increasingly remote, their purpose was the preservation of the language, culture and history of the respective countries. The director of the Polish Educational Society Abroad commented that the aim of the Society was to retard assimilation for as long as possible. The World Lithuanian Charter of 1949 stated this less defensively: the school, it stressed, 'is the spiritual heart of national culture', and by becoming familiar with this culture the younger generation would be able, in Sword's words, to formulate a viable sense of self-identity.[33]

In the early days of the schools, former professional teachers were often employed, but later many of the teachers had themselves been pupils at the schools. In terms of numbers of pupils the schools could claim to have been a success. The SPK ran 54 Saturday schools with 3300 pupils in 1960, and there were another 60 schools independent of the SPK with 3000 pupils registered. Fifteen years later the number of schools had fallen but the number of students was about the same. It was reported that around 50 per cent of eligible children attended the schools in some communities. The local Bradford paper recorded that 300 Polish children registered at the schools in the 1950s and early 1960s. By 1975 the numbers had fallen to 150, divided between the two schools in Manningham and Shipley.[34]

The Estonians were no less active in organising schools:

> About 30 years ago there was an Estonian school taking place every Saturday morning for three hours. My son attended. He can write and read Estonian as well as me and has quite a good idea about Estonian history. Most of the children born in this city went to the Estonian school. The school closed when there were not enough children. Many marriages were mixed and this reduced the potential number of pupils.[35]

Mixed or exogamous marriages affected not just the attendance at Saturday schools but also other aspects of children's upbringing. Exogamous marriage was quite common in the Polish community. The critical factor in marrying outside one's own ethnic group was the shortage of potential partners. Males greatly outnumbered females. In 1951 the number of Polish females was barely one third the number of males. In the following decades this proportion increased steadily owing partly

to a higher level of mortality among males and partly to a greater number of female Polish immigrants, a flow which began in the mid-1950s resulting in part from the search for marriage partners by unattached Polish males in Britain. For a brief period in the 1960s there was a growth in endogamy reflecting the increased inflow of Polish women, but then the long-term trend towards intermarriage resumed. Many Polish men married British women, or women from other ethnic groups such as Italians. As Herberg showed for the United States, exogamy was normally within the same religious confession. Poles preferred to marry women from a Catholic background, either British or other European. 'There is not the harmony in mixed marriages that there should be' commented one interviewee, 'If you have the same religion or the same language a lot of arguments can be avoided.'[36] Intermarriage with a British partner inevitably assisted integration in the British community and offered membership in a British primary group. But it also weakened the sense of Polishness in the Polish partner, and the effects of this on the children of such a marriage were significant. This is why some of the first generation threatened to disown their children if they did not marry someone from their ethnic group.[37] But according to the interviewees, this threat was made rarely, parents placing their children's happiness first.

> My Dad wanted me to marry someone who was Polish. My Mum said, marry an Italian because you're safer. If you're married to an English girl, she might leave, like. English girls don't like foreign husbands because they like spending your money, taking your money off you and going off enjoying themselves. The Italians don't do that. I married an Italian girl. Italian women look after their money better.[38]

One of the most notable consequences for the upbringing of children was the reduction in language proficiency. Wojciechowska's research into the Polish communities of Coventry and Ealing suggested that while over 90 per cent of the first generation spoke exclusively in Polish to their spouses, of the second generation none spoke Polish exclusively with their peers. In the home children tended to answer their parents in English, 40 per cent spoke Polish only some of the time and 25 per cent not at all. This showed a decline in language proficiency or the willingness to use Polish even among families where Polish was used virtually exclusively by the parents.[39] But in mixed marriages where one parent did not speak Polish, the ability of the children to speak Polish diminished dramatically, particularly if the mother was British. For example,

one Polish man married to an English wife recalled:

> I sent my two sons to the Polish school one summer. I was working long hours and couldn't speak to them at home in Polish so I tried to teach them by sending them to the school. My wife, of course, spoke to them in English. But a few hours once a week is too little. I think I was persuaded by my Polish friends to send them to the school. I thought it would be better for them. Also they'd have got a little more familiar with Polish things and we'd have had a little more in common. I spoke to them sometimes about Poland but I cannot say they were much interested.[40]

Another reflected on the different upbringing of his two daughters:

> I have two daughters, one by my first wife, one by my second. The older one knows more about Poland than me. My wife taught her a lot because she was Polish. She spoke Polish perfectly, she went to the Saturday school, she went to Poland on exchange to teach English and learn Polish. She passed at the highest level. My second daughter doesn't speak Polish. I've never wanted to persuade her into it. Her mother is English. Yet she has my name. She's proud that her father is Polish. And any one who says anything, she says, what about it? She usually shouts them down. I didn't teach her that.[41]

Another man recalled:

> All our children are married. The oldest boy married a girl from Poland, one married an English girl and the other a girl from Wales. My daughter married a Polish boy. Our grandchildren are all brought up in the English way. They are not taught Polish at all, except for our oldest son's wife who is Polish and may teach their child Polish. But the main thing is that they are all happy.[42]

The impact of mixed marriages on language proficiency was paralleled by other consequences for the upbringing of children. In families where both parents were of the same ethnicity the patterns of pre-war child upbringing which they themselves had experienced as children were adopted as far as possible. Inevitably there had to be compromises since the children had to learn to adapt to British society. As William McCready remarked, the cultural values transmitted within the family no longer reflected the outside world. Children had to move away from

their parents to survive. 'It was a sad satisfaction' wrote Oscar Handlin 'to watch the young advance, knowing that every step forward was a step away from home'.[43] This was the price that had to be paid for living in two cultures.

Fiercely maintaining one's culture and ethnic identity did not preclude adaptation to the host society. Indeed, many parents who had been declassed by their exile or worked at menial jobs desperately wanted success for their children, and did all they could to encourage them to perform well at school. Parents were prepared to make many financial sacrifices to enable their children to have the best education they could afford, including sending them away to boarding schools. A relatively high percentage of Polish children in London stayed in education longer than children of English parents. An analysis of the 1961 Census sample covering 28 London boroughs found that 30 per cent of Polish males finished education at 20 or above compared with 4 per cent of the English-born.[44] On the other hand, many bowed to reality when their children did not want to go into higher education, and accepted that their children's happiness and fulfilment were their first priority. They also stressed the importance of good behaviour and discipline both at school and outside. This reflected well on both their family and their ethnic community, for which, as some parents suggested, they were ambassadors. Sometimes these pressures were too much for the children who found the stress on conformity as compared with their British peers very restrictive. On the other hand, the interviews suggest that most children did in fact conform and accepted that the different expectations placed upon them were part of being Polish.[45]

A case in point was the following description of a child's upbringing:

> We were strict with our son. He had to do what we told him. When he was about 16 he liked to do what the other boys did but we didn't let him. He said when he was 18 there was going to be a change, but I told him that so long as he lived in my house and ate my bread he'd have to do what I told him. When I said he must be home at 10 o'clock I told him that if he came in late he must not try to come in.[46]

It would be a mistake to leave the impression that accommodation to British life was smooth and relatively unproblematic, and that there were no casualties in that process. Mental breakdown, even suicide, among the émigrés was not unknown, though it would be wrong to over-emphasise its incidence. It cannot be denied, however, that breakdown there was. From the perspective of community-building which

has been the subject of this chapter, it would appear that one of the most important factors in inhibiting mental stress was integration into the émigré community. Those who remained on the margin of British life or were isolated from their fellow ethnics were the ones most likely to succumb to one or other of the most common mental illnesses among refugees, depression, schizophrenia or hysteria. The statistics show that the Poles and Balts had a higher incidence of hospitalisation for mental illness than the British population in general. For example, in 1950 the crude rate of first admissions to mental hospitals for all categories of Polish refugees was 4.42 per thousand for males and 3.78 for females. The Latvians had a rate of 1.82 per thousand. By contrast, the rate for the British-born of both sexes was 0.86 per thousand. In Australia, Baltic inpatient admission rates were twice as high as the general population rate after standardisation for age and sex.[47]

An explanation for these differential rates would first of all need to focus on the devastating experiences of the exiles since the beginning of the war. Deportations, imprisonment, oppression and economic deprivation were compounded by the sense of loss and grief at the separation from country, culture, identity and family. These feelings were accentuated when it became clear that the Soviets were not going to release their grip on the émigrés' home countries. The problems associated with acculturation to life in Britain discussed in this and Chapter 10 added to the psychological distress shared by very many of the newcomers. The loss of status, and the necessity to undertake menial work which was beyond the physical capacity of some of the exiles, exacerbated their sense of inadequacy. Nevertheless, although sadness and even despair were unavoidable in the circumstances of their exile, the vast majority of the émigrés did *not* suffer from clinical depression and other mental illnesses. Most of them made the best of their situation, trying to establish themselves economically, to marry and have children, to care for parents, to get on to the property ladder. But some did not. What, then, tipped the balance between adjustment to the circumstances of exile on the one hand, and the onset of mental illness on the other?

This question has usually been answered by reference to the isolation or alienation of those admitted. Obviously, the émigrés, initially at any rate, were on the margins of British society, but most of them gradually made the necessary accommodations in what are usually called secondary relationships, namely with fellow workers, trade unionists, members of political parties and fellow professionals. But for their emotional and primary relationships they needed to be part of a familiar community,

sharing its values, traditions and aspirations. This was the great contribution of the Polish and Baltic community structures as we have described them. Here the members could speak their mother tongue, share familiar experiences, obtain help from sympathetic fellows and generally feel at home. But some of the exiles were isolated from their communities, or isolated themselves, either because they never left hostels or camps or because they lived in rural or mining areas where they could not mix easily with fellow exiles. Some, despite their best efforts, did not make much material progress and became embittered and alienated. It was these unfortunates, isolated both from the host society and their own transplanted communities, who were most susceptible to mental illness and to suicide. The higher levels of admission to mental hospitals among Poles than among Balts has been attributed to the fact that the Poles were the most persecuted group after the Jews during the war, and were held in the highest contempt as *untermenschen* by their Nazi occupiers. A distinction should also be made between Poles from the Second Army Corps, who retained to a great extent their war-time *esprit de corps*, and Polish EVWs who were more susceptible to mental illness.[48]

It will have been clear from this chapter that long-term trends in the émigré communities are likely to make the maintenance of communal life more difficult. Various indicators, such as the smaller percentage of the second generation speaking the mother tongue of their parents, the reduced attendance at Polish clubs and churches, the smaller numbers reading the Polish language press, the lack of knowledge of the mother countries among many of the children of émigrés, the geographical dispersal of the second and third generations away from the former centres of residential concentration, and the attenuation of émigré cultures, all of these raise questions about the ability of the Polish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Britons to maintain their identities and traditions. If culture dies, can identity be sustained? Will the outcome of the Polish and Baltic exodus and resettlement end in complete absorption into British society? Or will it sustain a form of pluralist integration in which the Polish and Baltic émigrés continue to be recognisable and visible elements in the ethnic mosaic which constitutes the multicultural Britain of the twenty-first century?

12
Identities

The end of the Cold War, the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe, and the restoration of democracy in the Baltic states and Poland raised important questions about the character of the Polish and Baltic exile communities in Great Britain. For decades after the Second World War the first generation of these refugees saw themselves as a 'fighting emigration' of political exiles with a cause to uphold, namely the maintenance of their languages, cultures and traditions until the fall of Communism permitted them to return home. When Communism finally crumbled the exiles had lived in Britain for 40 years, had put down roots and brought up families. For most of them it was too late to leave the country where they were settled and where their children and grandchildren lived. Moreover, their visits both before and after the Gorbachev years convinced them that their homelands had changed dramatically and they had grown apart from their compatriots.

> I went to Poland for the first time in 1965, but it had changed. It was a different Poland from the one I left. The people had changed and their ways of thinking are different. I think of myself as being Polish, although when I go with my wife to Poland I feel like a foreigner there.[1]

Experience of the Baltics was similar:

> I was shocked when I went back to Latvia in 1989, especially with the countryside. It was dirty and run-down, there were ruined churches, derelict farmsteads. On the farm where I used to work there was only the house left and a ruined coal shed, all the rest of the timber buildings had been used for firewood.[2]

Similarly,

> Well, the first time it was very pleasant, because we met all the relatives after so many years. But the second time, you can see behind all the scenes then. You can see what the country has become and more of their nature and I was very upset because the country was very neglected, and we travelled quite a lot, and then you realise how the people talk then as well, what their opinions are, which are quite different from ours.[3]

A few families did return but the vast majority did not. The end of Communism clarified the exiles' thinking about where they wanted to live and highlighted their mixed identities. As one person commented, we felt English in Poland and Polish in England. Some of them felt they had more in common with other 'European' minorities in Britain than with their fellow ethnics in their home countries.[4]

However, there was another profound consequence of the changed political situation in East Central Europe, namely that the exiles could no longer think of themselves as refugees from political oppression, a status they had nourished since their arrival in Britain. Hitherto they had distanced themselves from most immigrants to Britain after 1950 who were overwhelmingly economic migrants. They denied that sociological generalisations about the evolution of immigrant minorities in a host society applied to them. That position, which had already been difficult to uphold in the case of their children, was now impossible to defend. If, then, they had become like any other immigrant minorities, what did the future hold for these communities?

There is no easy answer to that question since owing to the considerable disagreement among theorists and researchers in this field. The greatest body of research on this subject has, not surprisingly, been undertaken in the United States, that 'nation of immigrants'. There has been a succession of theories purporting to explain the immigrant experience and to predict how ethnic minorities will evolve in the United States over the course of several generations. A brief review of this literature may help us to interpret the experience so far of the Polish and Baltic minorities in Britain, and to predict whether they will be able to sustain their cultures. If the answer to that is in the negative, will they be able to retain their distinctive identities nonetheless? In other words, can a separate identity exist without the support of a separate culture?

The notion of assimilation was an attempt to show that under the impact of the American environment the ethnic consciousness of

immigrants declines with successive generations. The newcomers are encouraged to relinquish ancestral customs, loyalties, languages and cultures and to conform to the 'American way'. Glazer and Moynihan referred to assimilation as a 'powerful solvent' that washed out immigrant languages and customs. Accordingly they become invisible and indistinguishable, except for surnames, from the rest of the population, 'no longer exhibiting the marks which identify [them] as members of an alien group'. Although Marcus Lee Hansen argued that there was a revival of ethnic consciousness in the third generation most commentators have suggested that the decline of ethnicity has proceeded on a more or less straight line, with the biggest decline between the first and second generations. Assimilationists believe that the tendency towards homogenisation in modern society is 'virtually irresistible' under the influence of the mass media, the schools, intermarriage and mass advertising.[5]

When the Poles and Balts first arrived in Britain after the Second World War, the British government also hoped that assimilation would occur. Their understanding of the term was, however, rather different from that outlined here. Essentially ministers and officials hoped that the newcomers would become inconspicuous, integrating effectively into the job market, learning English, becoming naturalised and participating in political and civic life. They feared the creation of exclusively alien communities which would, in the words of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration of 1902, remain 'foreign in speech and habit' and indifferent to British ways and customs. For British officials assimilation would have occurred if there were no ghettos and there was no social protest at the employment of immigrants or at their occupation of scarce housing. It did not necessarily mean, as American assimilationists took it to mean, cultural absorption. That the British were aware of this possible meaning is evidenced by the comment of a Ministry of Labour official in 1949, that eradicating ethnic feelings entirely meant the destruction of personality and culture, and the rooting out of traditions and customs. Officials generally showed no interest in trying to implement such a programme.[6]

Can we assume, as many ideologists of assimilation do, that acculturation of ethnic groups in the United States has taken place? By acculturation is meant that immigrants have absorbed many cultural aspects of the host society including knowledge, beliefs and behaviour patterns. These might include, for example, work habits, consumption preferences, political loyalties, tastes in clothing and interior decoration, leisure activities and sport. If we accept that acculturation has occurred,

can we go on to say that assimilation has also taken place? That is to say, is acculturation synonymous with assimilation? If we take the meaning of assimilation to be the decline and final disappearance of ethnic consciousness, then the answer to that question seems to be no.

The assumptions of assimilationists were challenged by events in the twentieth century. The First World War showed that ethnic allegiances remained very powerful, even among the group thought to be the most assimilated, the German-Americans. The Americanisation movement during and immediately after the war was an attempt to accelerate the disappearance of ethnic cultures and identities. But at the same time writers such as Horace Kallen in his book *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, published in 1924, proposed that a state of cultural pluralism characterised American society and that separate cultures and identities would remain indefinitely. Kallen and other so-called pluralists believed that ethnic groups were bearers of ancient cultures and traditions which resisted conformity. It followed that the United States was not a nation but a 'political state' composed of many different nationalities, an ethnic mosaic held together by the ideology of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. In turn, Kallen's views were challenged by assimilationists who denied that the boundaries between ethnic groups were rigid and impermeable, asserting instead that ethnic cultures dissipated over time under the influence of the American environment.[7]

A second major challenge to the assimilationist ideology arose as a result of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The so-called ethnic revival of the period asserted ethnic pride and the uniqueness of different cultures and identities. The re-assertion of ethnic values stimulated a large-scale re-evaluation of the natural history of ethnic groups and assessed their future evolution. One of the most influential analyses of this period was Milton Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life* published in 1964. In it he proposed that cultural differences between ethnic groups were in fact diminishing. Assimilation was occurring in the sense that members of ethnic groups were absorbing many cultural traits from the host society. This he referred to as cultural or behavioural assimilation. The persistence of ethnicity as demonstrated by the ethnic revival could not be explained mainly by the survival of ethnic cultures. Rather, this persistence was explicable by the propensity to choose primary group relationships from within one's own ethnic group. By this Gordon meant that one's familiar intimate life, one's associational life, took place within the cliques, clubs, institutions and kinship groups of the ethnic enclave, while in one's secondary relations at work, in trade

unions, in politics and so on one followed American norms. It was, as Gleason put it, not a matter of how we acted but whom we interacted with. Ethnic identity for Gordon was primarily structural rather than cultural. So, cultural assimilation could take place but ethnicity remained important for primary relationships. Only if ethnicity ceased to be a major factor in choosing primary relationships could structural assimilation, as Gordon called it, take place. Evidently, acculturation was not synonymous with assimilation.[8]

One worry about this model which John Higham noted was the possibility that structural pluralism might preserve social barriers while ethnic cultures disintegrated. 'For the assimilationist the primary social unit and the locus of value is the individual. What counts is his right to define himself. He must therefore be free to secede from his ancestors… For pluralists, however, the persistence and vitality of the group comes first.' In short the integrationist looks towards the elimination of ethnic boundaries, the pluralist believes in maintaining them. For the pluralist it is the group which should have priority, for the assimilationist it is the individual. Higham comments that assimilationists believe that ethnic ties dissolve fairly easily in an open society, but this fails to understand the durability of ethnic allegiances. Pluralists by contrast assume 'a rigidity of ethnic boundaries and a fixity of group commitment' which American life did not and does not permit. All groups lose people who inter-marry and their children do not identify as closely with their parental groups. Morally both positions are objectionable, Higham argues. Assimilation teaches a rejection of origins, pluralism limits the more autonomous and adventurous, who find the ethnic community limiting and stultifying. Higham then advances the ideal of pluralistic integration 'which will not eliminate ethnic boundaries but will not maintain them intact'. He makes the distinction between boundaries and nucleus. Ethnic nuclei should be respected as 'enduring centres of social action', but no ethnic group should have the support of the general community in strengthening its boundaries. In this sense both assimilation and ethnic cohesion are recognised as worthy goals. However, our task here is not to discuss what should happen but what has happened and what is likely to happen in the future.[9]

In this connection the notion of the triple melting pot taken up by Will Herberg suggested that endogamy in ethnic groups was decreasing while religious endogamy was increasing. This meant that intermarriage between members of different ethnic groups tended to be contracted by people within the same religious affiliation. More explicitly, intermarriage was largely confined within one of the three major religious groups

in the United States, Protestants, Catholics and Jews. When assimilation took place, so it was argued, it occurred within three separate confessional settings. But this is no surprise since, as we have already observed, in Britain Polish Catholics, when marrying out, usually married other Catholics.

Even more suggestive of the future was the work of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan in their *Beyond the Melting Pot*. In their study of five ethnic groups in New York City they asserted that the American descendants of immigrants diverged markedly from the people of the old country. The foreign language press had declined, the old ethnic neighbourhoods were home only to a few elderly persons, the culture, traditions and crafts had almost vanished. The language had disappeared. But this did not mean the disappearance of ethnic groups. Quite the contrary, in fact. As the groups 'were stripped of their original attributes, they were recreated as something new, but still as identifiable groups'. Persons thought of themselves and were thought of by others as members of that group, and most significantly 'they are linked to other members of the group by new attributes that the original immigrants would never have recognised as identifying their group, but which nevertheless serve to mark them off … in the third generation and beyond'. These are the 'unmeltable ethnics', a term which Michael Novak applied to them in the 1970s.[10]

These theoretical insights and empirical observations may help us to project the likely progression of the Polish and Baltic minorities in Britain. As we have seen, the first generation of these groups differentiated themselves from economic immigrants, who as it happened made up the overwhelming majority of migrants to the United States over more than a century, and have dominated the migration to Britain since the 1950s. The initial intentions of these Polish and Baltic refugees were not to settle but to return to their homelands at the first opportunity following the fall of Communism. As we saw in previous chapters, they kept their communities in vibrant health, tenaciously holding on to their languages and cultures, establishing organisations and associations to serve the cultural and social needs of their people, and providing for the transmission of their values, folk arts, history and traditions to the next generation. Culturally and socially their communities were essentially self-contained.[11] To be sure, the demands of employment and schooling for their children forced them into the host society. Some of their members married out and established primary relations outside the communities. As time passed substantial numbers, some 23 000 by 1961 and double that number a decade later, took out British citizenship but

this was not because they now saw themselves as completely acculturated. Foreign travel, particularly visits to their home countries, was facilitated by British passports. Some jobs required that the holder be a British citizen. Of those interviewed in one survey over 90 per cent gave practical or technical reasons for their decision.[12]

> I was naturalised when I joined the insurance company since I couldn't take out bond insurance unless I was naturalised. It was obviously more for convenience than anything else.[13]

and

> So I didn't want to hide anything or change my name because if I changed my name, my manners, my way of speaking, that would make me an Englishman out of a Pole. However, I did take out British nationality in 1954. I did this basically for travel purposes. I got married to an Italian and I went over to Italy in 1953 and the trouble I had with travel documents! Every country I crossed wanted to see certificates that I worked in England and that I wasn't going to stay in their country.[14]

Finally,

> 'When we got our passports we felt free, especially when we went to Poland. Our feelings were more settled, and besides that, we don't feel less Polish because we are not Polish citizens.[15]

Gradually, however, they recognised that they had become in some important respects British – 'when I come back to England I feel as if I am in my own country'[16] – and this realisation was made more acute by the collapse of Communism which undermined the claim to a different status from other ethnic minorities.

While individual members of the first generation may have felt more British while claiming to feel no less Polish or Lithuanian or Estonian or Latvian, the communities as a whole were conscious of the changes which were overtaking them. They found the American experience applied to them too, namely that ethnicity declines generationally. The second and third generations attend ethnic church services less frequently, they marry within their ethnic communities less often (with the heightened possibility that the Polish or Baltic husbands or wives will be socialised into the host society) and speak the tongue of their

parents or grandparents more and more rarely. The proportions reading the Polish language press and Polish books fall dramatically, which is partly the consequence of the much reduced numbers of children from these minorities attending the Saturday schools. As they grew into adulthood these young people did not attend the ethnic clubs and associations as frequently as their parents, or even not at all, and were widely ignorant of the culture and history of their parents' homelands.

> I see myself as English and never relate to being Polish. Normally I was with English children all the time. Polish was always spoken at home by my parents, so of course I learned the Polish language, though there was no great importance attached to this. I find it very difficult to speak Polish and I don't read or write it. I don't go to the Polish church and I very rarely go to the Polish Club. Its membership is declining and its days are probably numbered. I don't feel saddened because I've never been involved in the Polish community. My house is decorated in the English style, very non-Polish. I don't read Polish books at all and wouldn't really make a special effort to watch a Polish film on TV. My closest friends are born of English parents.[17]

But even within one family there could be significant variations:

> Our older child has no problems adopting this Polish nationality but our younger child has rebelled against it. As far as he's concerned he's English. Our daughter was the first, she was brought up in a similar environment to ourselves, but he's struggled with the language. We firmly believe that our daughter's generation will be the last generation before we become Anglicised. The younger generation will not be able to speak the language. I used to be responsible for a Polish dancing troupe. Our daughter loved this but not our son. I'm not going to force Polishness on him. How could I, when my own father left Poland only two years older than our son is now? What did he know of Poland? He only knew peasant life on the land.[18]

Isajiw proposed a series of indicators of ethnic identity which he divided into external (observable behaviour patterns) and internal (attitudes and feelings interpreted indirectly). He found in his study of four ethnic groups (Italians, Germans, Ukrainians and Jews) that from generation to generation the percentage of ethnic indicators fell off significantly. Averaging out all the indicators for the four groups he discovered that the first generation scored 60 per cent, the second about 45 per cent,

and the third about 31 per cent. Interestingly the highest indicator across the four groups was ethnic food, with the next highest items being the possession of ethnic articles, the maintenance of ethnic customs, the retention of ethnic close friends and the participation in functions organised by ethnic organisations. Low on the list was knowledge of the ethnic language and use of ethnic recreational facilities.[19]

From this evidence it seems incontrovertible that ethnic identity can change its meaning over time. Herder's and Fichte's claims that language and culture were essential to group identity has dominated thinking about the identity of nationality groups, and by extension of immigrant minorities in host societies. Schermerhorn's definition of ethnicity, for example, focused on a group with a common ancestry, shared historical memories and a 'cultural focus' on one or more symbolic elements which epitomise their identity, such as language or religious affiliation.[20] Presumably without these cultural symbols the group would go into decline and eventually assimilate to the host society, becoming indistinguishable from it. But this, as American and other experience shows, is certainly not the inevitable outcome since in the United States ethnic minorities have continued to exist in some form or other at least until the fourth generation, despite the loss of language and the culture depending on it.

To account for this survival we have to modify our definition of ethnicity and to emphasise that it is social rather than cultural bonds which hold the groups together. The members see themselves and are seen by others as having a distinctive identity which they wish to maintain, either in the form of ethnic communities or, more weakly, in ethnic associations or networks. In other words, group identity seems to survive changes in any 'objective' markers. For Gedmintas, the critical aspect of ethnicity is the maintenance of boundaries to preserve that ethnic identity. Baskauskas reinforced this point, arguing that it is the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the culture that it encloses. But we should not write culture out of the script entirely since, as Glazer and Moynihan pointed out, a new cultural amalgam composed of a mixture of group heritage and host society features can develop to fill the space vacated by the former cultural elements. This seems to be a case of putting new wine in old bottles, without the usual pejorative connotations. But even without any significant cultural forms, if boundary maintenance remains important for members of the group, the group will continue to exist.[21]

So, let us put the question, what is the future for the ethnic minorities of Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians in Britain? Are they

likely to survive as distinct entities in one form or other into the foreseeable future? If we are guided by American experience we may conclude that they will persist for up to four generations, but beyond that the future is uncertain. Gedmintas suggests, drawing on his study of the Lithuanian community in Binghamton, that sooner or later the ethnicity binding the members together will dissipate and their ethnic identity will die. But this is not the inescapable outcome. The prospects for ethnic groups depend to some extent on the relative size of the groups – the larger the group the more likely it is to survive. They also depend on the policies of the host society. If a programme of discrimination or persecution were to be initiated in the future, this would strengthen the identity of the persecuted groups. In the case of some groups, increased visibility through skin colour or physiognomy and a resulting increase in hostility would also strengthen the identity of the visible group. Cultural rejuvenation for the Poles and Balts might also be brought about by higher levels of immigration to Britain from Poland and the Baltic states, resulting from the membership of these states in the European Union in 2004. At the same time this might result in conflict between members of the old and new immigrations. Increased opportunities for travel between the host society and the former mother countries might also foster ethnic identities, but equally it might heighten differences. There is also evidence that social class is inversely related to the salience of ethnicity, so rising levels of affluence could also contribute to the decline of ethnicity.[22]

One could envisage a situation where most tangible signs or markers of ethnic identity had disappeared but there remained informal associations or networks invisible to outsiders but called upon by members for social, convivial or recreational reasons. Two studies of Lithuanians in the United States suggest as much. In her study of Lithuanians in Los Angeles Baskauskas found that, though they had experienced rapid assimilation and there were no visible signs of community life such as clubs or neighbourhoods, the members had constructed and continued to maintain a separate but informal network of associations based on friendship and self-help.[23] Gedmintas offered similar findings for the older community of Binghamton, New York, namely that social ties, once expressed through formal group organisations (and still so expressed but on a very reduced scale), were later perpetuated by informal means, through small friendship groups, occasional chance meetings in public places, and meetings in organisations which were not themselves ethnic, what one scholar referred to as 'the backstage activities of informal groupings'.[24] In addition some elements of the material

culture had been inherited from parents and grandparents, such as books in the Lithuanian language, linens, articles in amber, Lithuanian crosses and so on. Lithuanian dishes were occasionally prepared, and Lithuanian songs remembered. For such groupings the Lithuanian language is not used for communicative purposes, just as Irish-Americans do not speak to each other in Gaelic, but the language may remain important for symbolic and emotional reasons, reaffirming perceptions of ancestry and descent. A similar symbolic meaning may be attached to the ethnic churches, even though attendance at these churches is confined to an older generation, or the church itself has become defunct.[25]

It seems probable, then, that what it means to be a Lithuanian, or a Pole, or an Estonian or a Latvian changes over time and that most of the ethnic markers of the first and even second generations are lost. Nonetheless, the feeling of being a member of one of these groups persists by virtue of descent and ancestry.

> At the end of the day we're rather proud of our Polish culture which had existed for a thousand years. If it's beautiful, you must try to preserve it, just like we should preserve our identity. Whether the children will appreciate it is another matter.[26]

And again,

> I don't want to forget my Polish background. It's always going to be a part of me, but of course if I have children of my own they will know I'm Polish, but they won't know the Polish ways and the Polish language – they'll be English.[27]

Others asked why they should give their identity away or disguise the fact that they were Latvian or Estonian. One man compared himself to a Scot at work in England, how to be equal in a working situation and 'how to come back to who you are at other times.'[28]

Knowing 'who you are', and trying to decide who your descendants might become calls to mind Maurice Barres' definition of 'La Patrie', the fatherland – a combination of 'La Terre et les Morts'. In an increasingly nomadic world, we can and do change our soil but we cannot change our dead. Nor can we 'transform other people's dead into our own ancestors'.[29] We may increasingly try to determine our own identity or identities, picking and choosing from a series of options, but we cannot reject our genes nor shake out from ourselves the cumulative impact of our upbringing.

Furthermore, in a cold world of rationality, impersonality and homogenisation, we may prefer to keep in part of our lives the warmth and affinity which comes from membership of a group with a common ancestry. Similarly we may maintain active ethnic associations, formal or informal, because they fulfil a need, because they offer us intimacy and trust and a sense of belonging. Polish and Italian immigrants in Britain and the United States affirm that their family lives were different from the 'Anglo-Saxon' model in the amount and quality of attention given to children, the closeness between generations, and the extended family relationships.

> In lifestyle, attitudes, on the face of it, I think people would say I'm as English as the next man. Deep down there's a hell of a difference. The way we were brought up, the emphasis on the importance of the family compared with general English people where, when you reach 17, you've got to get a job, to leave, you're independent. I don't think the Polish family will dissipate in the way the English family has done, even in one or two generations. The ties are still too strong, there's more chance of family members meeting regularly.[30]

Perhaps this legacy will persist into succeeding generations. When asked why they considered themselves Lithuanian, the Binghamton respondents' most frequent answer was ancestry.

We return to the question we originally posed, can one have identity without culture? The answer is surely in the affirmative. As the generations pass perhaps what will be left is a mental awareness of an informal, invisible community, ethnicity as mental construct but replete with values and attitudes which are imprinted in childhood and youth. As Gedmintas observed, the only way to determine ethnicity is to ask the person to identify himself and to ask someone else to confirm it. Eastman quotes the example of a native French-speaking upper class restaurant proprietor in Alsace, middle-aged and able to use German with customers who may be as much an Alsatian in terms of ethnic identity (at the primordial level) as is a monolingual Alsatian farmer from outside the city – as long as both share the feeling that they are descendants of the same group.[31]

Since the story of these minorities has been partly recorded in their own words, maybe the last words should be theirs. They reflect the ambiguities and complexities of their identities.

> If you take French nationality you're a Frenchman. If you take German nationality you're Deutsch. But if you get nationality in this

country you're a Briton. And five of us meet round a table. He'll be a Scotsman, he'll be a Welshman, he'll be Irish, he'll be English. Who the hell am I? A bloody foreigner! (laughter) A Polish-British. It sounds stupid. Look, deep down I'm Polish in England, and I'm married to an English lass. (first generation man)[32]

As far as I'm concerned, I'm not ashamed of my name. When someone asks me 'Are you English?' I say 'No, I'm Polish.' I can't be English with my name. We're in a dilemma, we don't know who we are. You can't say that you're English because you are called Mazowiecki, say. On the other hand I've been to Poland and you tell them you were born in Britain and they don't consider you Polish anyway. You don't belong to either.[33] (second generation man)

But if somebody asks me I usually say Polish, living in England. I don't feel in saying that that I'm betraying my Englishness.[34] (second generation woman)

I do feel at home here in England now. I feel comfortable. I think I have a mixed identity because when I'm with English people I feel I am even a better citizen than the majority of the English, but when I go to the Polish club I feel as a Pole. I can easily drop into one identity and then into another.[35] (first generation man)

Sometimes when people mention that I'm a Pole it comes as a surprise since I was born here, was brought up here and have lived on the whole with English children. I didn't have many occasions when I related to being Polish. My Polish background will always be a part of me but if I have children of my own they won't know the Polish ways and the Polish language, they'll be English. Probably I'm more curious now about my family history, but I wasn't when I was young. I heard stories about how my father and mother got to England but I wasn't interested in the background because I looked on myself as being English.[36] (second generation man)

I think of myself as Estonian. I was born in Estonia. I have no other passport. I was born in 1928 when it was an independent state and I try to keep it. Why should I give it away? And that is why I am not British. I have nothing against being British otherwise.[37] (first generation woman)

It was important to keep my Estonian identity, that's why I did not get naturalised. It would not have made me different but I wanted to stay as I was. I haven't mixed much with the English. Here I had a chance to mix with my own. Good or bad as you are, you still stick with your own kind.[38] (first generation man)

> I didn't consciously make myself as English as could be. At the first opportunity I tell people where I am from, but having said that I feel I owe this country and the people living here some allegiance. Unless you are somewhat isolated you have to have dual allegiance.[39] (first generation man)

It is now around sixty years since these Poles and Balts were forced from their homelands and after complex journeys and numerous painful and traumatic experiences ended up in Britain. We have described, often using their own words, their uprooting, their exodus and their resettlement in Britain. Their residence here has been for little more than a generation. They have over the years become accustomed to this country, have taken out citizenship, and have raised families. The overwhelming majority did not return to live in their former countries after the fall of Communism. Not only do they find these countries much changed but they also recognise, sadly, that a gap had opened up between their fellow-countrymen and themselves. Their children and grandchildren have ensured that Britain is the country they can most call home. It is through these descendants that something of Poland and the Baltic states will continue to exist in Britain. The duality or the hyphen (to use the common American term) will not disappear. Their presence here will leave its mark, their legacy will persist in some form, their descendants will not forget their inheritance, and subsequent generations will affirm their identity as 'British citizens of Polish or Lithuanian or Latvian or Estonian ancestry'. Ancestry rather than culture or language will be the key. 'You come back to who you are', you come back to your ethnic roots, as one Latvian man put it. But for how long? That is the unanswered and, at present, the unanswerable question.

Notes

Introduction

1. There are occasional exceptions to this rule, notably the acceptance of responsibility for the mass killing of Polish officers at Katyn in 1940. See review by David Pryce-Jones of Adam Hochschild's *The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 December 1995. See Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* I–II and III–IV, London, Harper and Row, English translation 1973, 1974 and 1975; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, London, Hutchinson, 1990.
2. *The Baltic Times,* 4–10 December 2003.
3. Ann Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps*, London, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2003; Martin Amis, *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million,* London, Jonathan Cape, 2002; Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 254.
4. *The Baltic Times*, 19–25 June 2003, interview with Otto von Habsburg.
5. Helen Macdonald, 'The Power of Polonia: Post-World War II Polish Immigrants to Canada: Survivors of Deportation and Exile in Soviet Labour Camps', unpub. MA diss., Trent University, Ontario, 2001, pp. 292–3.
6. For the source of these figures, which the authors admit cannot be definitive, see Darius Sł ola, 'Forced Migrations in Central European History', *International Migration Review*, vol. XXVI, no. 2, Summer 1992, pp. 321, 331–3; Tomasz Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR, 1939–1989*, London, Gryf Publications Ltd, 1990, pp. 50–4; Z.S. Siemaszko, 'The Mass Deportations of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1940–1941', in Keith Sword ed., *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–1941*, Basingstoke, Macmillan in association with SSEES, University of London, 1991, pp. 217–19.
7. For more discussion about the value of oral interviews see Vieda Skultans, 'Remembering Time and Place: A Case Study in Latvian Narrative', *Oral History*, vol. 26, parts 1–2, 1998, pp. 55–63; Alistair Thomson, 'Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies', *Oral History*, Spring 1999, pp. 24–37; Bogusia Temple, 'Telling Tales: Accounts and Selves in the Journeys of British Poles', *Oral History*, Autumn 1995, pp. 60–3.

1 'A Timeless and Magical World?'

1. Vieda Skultans, 'Remembering Time and Place: A Case Study in Latvian Narrative', *Oral History*, vol. 26, parts 1–2, 1998, p. 58.
2. See, for example, Eugenia Huntingdon, *The Unsettled Account: An Autobiography*, London, Severn House Publishers Ltd, 1986 or Krystina, *Journey without a Ticket*, 5th edn, Nottingham, Fineprint Ltd, 1998.

3. This and later accounts in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author or by interviewers for the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit (BRHU). Author's interviews are identified as follows: PA1, PB1 represent people of Polish nationality, Est1 and Lat1 etc interviewees from Estonia and Latvia. BRHU interviews are numbered BO1, BO078 etc. The BRHU transcripts and tapes and the author's transcripts are held in the Local History Section of the Bradford Central Library.
4. These accounts are to be found in PA1 and PC1. The second story had a slightly happier ending: the instrumentalist arrived in Bradford where he joined the famous Black Dyke Mills Band and continued his musical career, albeit as an amateur.
5. Est 6 and BO079. The latter story also had a relatively happy ending in that the father was able to use his expertise in textiles to teach spinning in a Huddersfield textile mill after the war. This was unusual since most exiles who worked in textiles had no previous experience of the industry, and considered themselves to have been deskilled by working in this job.
6. Interviews PB4 and PB6.
7. Interviews Est1, 5, 6, 9, Lat1,2,3, BO150. Note the matter-of-fact tone of the former medical student who casually remarks, only three medical students were deported. Place this in a contemporary British context: only three students from an English university were deported to Siberia, without trial, without conviction and without defence.
8. Interviews PA1, PB6, Lat3, Lat4, Lat7.
9. Interviews Est5, Lat2, Est9.
10. Interviews Est1, Est2, Lat4, Lat7, BO150.
11. Est1, Est7, Est8, Lat1, Lat4.
12. Est1, Est4, Est5, Est6, Lat1, Lat2, Lat3.
13. Est6, Est9, Lat3.
14. GULAG was the Russian acronym for Main Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Labour Settlements.
15. Interview PA1.

2 Defeat

1. Norman Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw*, Basingstoke and Oxford, Pan Macmillan, 2003, pp. 26–32.
2. Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, London, Macmillan, 1985, pp. 13–21.
3. Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees 1939–1952: A Study in Forced Population Movement*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1956, pp. 35–6; Eugene M. Kulischer, *The Displacement of Population in Europe*, Montreal, International Labour Office, 1943, pp. 48–50. Authorities differ on the number of Poles who fled abroad. The figures quoted here seem to be the most reliable.
4. Interviews PA2, PA3, PB8, PC1.
5. Irene Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross, ed. and comp., *War through Children's Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939–1941*, Stanford, CA, Hoover Institution Press, 1981, pp. 3, 6; Interview with Mr L. Stadtmüller.

6. Michael Krupa, *Shallow Graves in Siberia*, ed. Thomas Lane, London, Minerva Press, 1995, pp. 36–7.
7. W. Anders, *An Army in Exile: the Story of the Second Polish Corps*, London, Macmillan, 1949, pp. 19–20; John Erickson, 'The Red Army's March into Poland, September 1939', in Keith Sword ed., *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces 1939–41*, Basingstoke, Macmillan in assn. with SSEES, 1991, pp. 19–20.
8. See Garliński, p. 25 and Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain*, London, Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998, pp. 14–15.
9. See Hope, p. 16; Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–48*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994, p. 5.
10. Interview PA1.
11. Grudzinska-Gross and Gross, eds, pp. 4–5; Garliński, p. 22.
12. Garliński, pp. 22–3, 25.
13. Kulischer, pp. 50–1.
14. Garliński, p. 25; Erickson, pp. 20–2.
15. Interview PA1.
16. Keith Sword, with Norman Davies and Jan Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939–1950*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989, p. 37; Proudfoot, p. 35; Hope, p. 6; Garliński, p. 55.
17. Interview PB8.
18. Interview PA7.

3 German Colonies

1. Interview PB3.
2. See Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, 3rd rev. ed., Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1976, pp. 103–16.
3. Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, London, Macmillan, 1985, p. 27.
4. The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, *The Baltic States 1940–1972: Documentary Background and Survey of Developments, presented to the European Security and Cooperation Conference*, Stockholm, the Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, 1972, p. 59.
5. Garliński, p. 28; Eugene M. Kulischer, *The Displacement of Population in Europe*, Montreal, International Labour Office, 1943, p. 52; Interview PB3; Interview PA3.
6. Interview PB3.
7. Frank Gordon, *Latvians and Jews between Germany and Russia*, Stockholm, Memento, 1990.
8. Interviews Lat1, Lat4, Est3.
9. Anon. (Zoe Zaidlerowa), *The Dark Side of the Moon*, Preface by T.S. Eliot, London, Faber and Faber, 1946, p. 7.
10. Kulischer, p. 54; Dariusz Sł ola, 'Forced Migrations in Central European History', *International Migration Review*, vol. XXVI, no. 2, Summer 1992, p. 332.

11. Kulischer, pp. 54–5; Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees 1939–1952: A Study in Forced Population Movement*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1956, p. 37.
12. Interview BO067.
13. Interview PA3.
14. Kulischer, pp. 64, 123; Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain*, London, Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998, p. 21; Interview PA4.
15. Interview PB3; Sł ola, p. 333; Garliński, p. 28.
16. Interview PB3.
17. Garliński, p. 28, Kulischer, p. 123; Interview PA3.
18. Interview PB3.
19. Interview PA4.
20. Interview BO100.
21. Kulischer, pp. 135–8.
22. Interview PA3.
23. Interview PC1; for a detailed description of the Warsaw Uprising see Norman Davies, R*ising '44: The Battle for Warsaw,* Basingstoke and Oxford, Pan Macmillan, 2003.
24. Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940–1990*, London, Hurst and Co., 1993, p. 49; The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, *The Baltic States 1940–1972: Documentary Background and Survey of Developments, presented to the European Security and Cooperation Conference,* Stockholm, The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, 1972, p. 58.
25. Gordon, p. 31; Albertas Gerutis, 'Occupied Lithuania' in Albertas Gerutis ed., *Lithuania: 700 Years*, New York, Manyland Books, 7th edn., 1984, pp. 294–5.
26. Gordon, p. 31; Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 55–6; Interview Lat1.
27. Interview Est5.
28. Interviews Est2, Est9, Lat1, Lat2.
29. Interviews Lat2, Lat3, Lat4.
30. Interview Est3.
31. Interview Est5.
32. Misiunas and Taagepera, p. 57; V. Stanley Vardys and Judith B. Sedaitis, *Lithuania, the Rebel Nation*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1997, p. 57; The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, pp. 59–61; Thomas Lane, *Lithuania: Stepping Westward,* London and New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 56–8; Interview Lat6.
33. Interview Est6.
34. Gerutis, p. 294; Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 57–8; A. Ezergailis ed., *The Latvian Legion: Heroes, Nazis or Victims? A collection of documents from OSS War-Crimes Investigation Files 1945–1950*, (Riga: the Historical Institute of Latvia, 1997), pp. 9–12.
35. Juris Sinka, *Latvia and the Latvians*, London, Central Board 'Daugavas Vanagi', 1988, p. 30; Gordon, pp. 41–2.
36. Interview Lat 2.
37. Interview Lat3.
38. Interview Lat4.

39. Interview Lat5; stories about the Balts fighting either compulsorily or voluntarily in the Legions against the Soviets or in the Red Army against the Nazis tend to dominate the historical accounts. But in an article called 'The True Freedom Fighters' Janis Peters has drawn attention to the Latvian national resistance movement, embodied in the Central Council of Latvia established on 13 August 1943 which opposed both occupying states and, he asserts, clearly characterised Latvians caught between two hostile regimes. See *The Baltic Times*, 5–11 September, 2002.
40. Lane, pp. 55–6, 155–8.
41. Alfonsas Eidintas, 'Remembering the Jewish Catastrophe: 60th Anniversary of the Holocaust', Speech at the Lithuanian Seimas Special Session, 20 September, 2001.
42. Alfonsas Eidintas ed., *Lietuvos Zydu Zudyniu Byla (The Case of the Massacre of the Lithuanian Jews: Selected Documents and Articles*),Vilnius, Leidykla VAGA, 2001, and also Eidintas speech; see also Dina Porat, 'The Holocaust in Lithuania: Some Unique Aspects', in David Cesarani ed., *The Final Solution*, London: Routledge, 1996, 1st pub. 1994, pp. 159–66.
43. Interviews Est5, Lat2, Lat4, Lat5.
44. Interview Lat4.

4 Soviet Fiefs

1. John Coutouvidis, 'Lewis Namier and the Polish Government-in-Exile 1939–1940', *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 62, no. 3, July 1984.
2. Thomas Lane, 'The Soviet Occupation of Poland through British Eyes', in John Hiden and Thomas Lane eds, *The Baltic and the Outbreak of the Second World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 160–3.
3. Public Record Office (hereafter PRO FO 371 24472, C6548/116/55, 29 May, 1940 (minute of Fitzroy Maclean).
4. PRO FO 371 26724, C4932, 3 May 1941.
5. Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: the Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, expanded edn, 2002), pp. 226, 229; Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, Oxford, Oxford Paperback, 1991, p. 155.
6. W. Anders, *An Army in Exile: The Story of the Second Polish Corps*, London, Macmillan, 1949, pp. 20, 67–8; Interview with Mr and Mrs L. Stadtmüller; Michael Krupa, *Shallow Graves in Siberia*, London, Minerva Press, 1995, pp. 42–5.
7. Interview PA1; Anon. (Zoe Zaidlerowa), *The Dark Side of the Moon*, London, Faber and Faber, 1946, p. 50; M. Krupa, 57; for a detailed description of Soviet methods of extracting confessions see Ann Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps*, London, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2003, pp. 141–7. By the time of the arrests of the Poles and Balts in 1939 and 1940 physical torture was formally banned but psychological torture continued.
8. Interview with Mr L. Stadtmüller.
9. Interviews Est 3, Est 5, Lat5; PRO FO 371/26724/C4932, FO371/26724/C4932, 8 May 1941, Report of Zaleski, p. 42; The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, *The Baltic States, 1940–1997: Documentary Background and Survey*

of Developments, Stockholm, 1972, p. 49: Tomasz Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR 1939–1989,* London, Gryf Publications Ltd, 1990, pp. 19–20.

10. Zaleski, p. 42; Jan Malanowski, 'Sociological Aspects of the Annexation of Poland's Eastern Provinces to the USSR in 1939–1941', in Keith Sword ed., *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–41*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, in association with SSEES, 1991, p. 76; Piesakowski, pp. 38, 58; Jan T. Gross, 'Polish POW Camps in the Soviet-Occupied Western Ukraine', in Sword ed., p. 46; The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, p. 49; Latvian National Foundation, *We Accuse*, Stockholm, Latvian National Foundation, 1985, p. 2; Ryszard Szawlowski, 'The Polish–Soviet War of 1939', in Sword ed., p. 31; the information about the shootings of Estonian ministers came from a former KGB officer Vladimir Pool, *Estonian Life*, 15 October 1992.
11. Interview Est 6.
12. Interview Lat1.
13. Interview Lat6.
14. Krupa, pp. 55–6.
15. Krupa, p. 55; Piesakowski, pp. 42–3; *The Dark Side of the Moon*, pp. 80 and 91; Anders, p. 20.
16. Krystina, *Journey without a Ticket,* Nottingham, Fineprint (Nottingham) Ltd, 5th edn, 1998, p. 28. Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross eds. and compiled, *War Through Children's Eyes The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939–41*, Stanford, CA, Hoover Institution Press, 1981, p. 7. Danuta Teczarowska, *Deportation into the Unknown*, Braunton, Devon, Merlin Books Ltd, 1985, pp. 15–16; S. Kozhevnikov, 'A Historic Campaign', Appendix 2, in Sword ed., p. 299–300.
17. Interview with Mr and Mrs L. Stadtmüller.
18. Interview Est3.
19. Interview Lat7.
20. Krystina, pp. 20–8; Anders, p. 19; Review by Anna M. Cienciala of David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government in Exile and the Jews 1939–1942*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
21. Interview Lat4; Gross notes that because anyone could cause anyone else's arrest, Soviet terror acquired the extraordinarily random quality that rendered it so effective.
22. Malanowski, pp. 81–2; Teczarowska, pp. 15–16.
23. Grudzinska-Gross and Gross, p. 16; Villibald Raud, *Estonia: A Reference Book*, New York, The Nordic Press Inc., 1953, p. 117.
24. Interview Lat2.
25. See Lane, p. 153.
26. Huntingdon, p. 32; Anon. (Zoe Zaidlerowa), pp. 47–8; The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, pp. 46–7.
27. Interview Est5.
28. The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, pp. 44–6; Anon. (Zoe Zaidlerowa), pp. 47–8; Thomas Lane, *Lithuania: Stepping Westward,* London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 52.
29. Interview Lat4.
30. Lane, *Lithuania,* p. 53.
31. Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War,* London, Macmillan, 1985, p. 34; Zaleski, pp. 44–5; Piesakowski, p. 39; Lane, 'The Soviet Occupation of

Poland', p. 154; see also for comparison, Estonian Information Centre, *Reports on Communist Activities in Eastern Europe,* vol. xxv, no. 510, October 1981, p. 19.
32. Zaleski, pp. 44–5; Anon. (Zoe Zaidlerowa), p. 48.
33. Garliński, p. 35; Gross and Gross, pp. 4–6; Zaleski, pp. 45–6; Malanowski, p. 77.
34. Interview Est1.
35. Interview Est5.
36. Interview Est6.
37. Malanowski, p. 77; The Baltic Committee in Scandinavia, pp. 12, 22; Piesakowski, p. 49.
38. Interview Est6.
39. Interview Est5.
40. Gustav Herling, *A World Apart: Imprisonment in a Soviet Labour Camp during World War II,* Oxford University Press, 1987, 1st pub. Heinemann 1951, p. 175.
41. Grudzinska-Gross and Gross, pp. 26–7.
42. Such sentiments were expressed in the British Foreign Office in 1940; see e.g. PRO FO 371 24471, C21190/116/55, 5 February 1940 and FO 371 24472, C5622/116/55, 7 April 1940; MacDonald, p. 254.
43. *Nepriklausoma Lietuva* (Independent Lithuania), 15 June 1943, quoted in E.J. Harrison, *Lithuania's Fight for Freedom*, New York: Lithuanian American Information Center, 1952, p. 48; see Applebaum for a more extended comparison between the criminality of the two regimes, pp. 6–9.

5 Deportations

1. Z.S. Siemaszko, 'The Mass Deportations of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1940–1941', in Keith Sword ed., *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–41*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, in association with SSEES, 1991, pp. 217–9; Dariusz Słola, 'Forced Migrations in Central European History', *International Migration Review*, vol. XXVI, no. 2, Summer 1992, p. 334; Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross eds, and compiled, *War Through Children's Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939–1941*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1981, p. xxii; Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain*, London, Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998, pp. 19–22.
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18. Interview Lat1.
19. Interview Lat3.
20. Interview Lat7.
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13. Anon. (Zaidlerowa), p. 103; Interview PB6; Herling, p. 40.
14. Herling, pp. 40, 44.
15. Herling, p. 34.
16. Anon. (Zaidlerowa), p. 108; Herling, pp. 24, 26.
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30. Interview PB4.
31. Interview PB4.
32. Interview PB6.
33. Interview PB4.
34. Interview PB4.
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11. Nadeau, p. 79; Garliński, p. 110.
12. PRO FO 371 C491/19/55, Sikorski to Churchill 14 January 1942. In a marginal comment Frank Roberts agreed that the proposed evacuation was a great success but leaving the bulk of the Polish army in the Soviet Union would make it extremely difficult for the British to equip them.
13. GSHI, pp. 254, 319–20 (Letters from Sikorski to Churchill, 17 December 1941 and 1 April 1942).
14. GSHI, 319–20; Garlinski, p. 153.
15. GSHI, pp. 397–9.
16. GSHI, pp. 168, 180. The Polish Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Stanisław Kot, asserted in a discussion with Deputy Commissar Vyshinski that the number of Polish troops to be recruited would depend on the manpower available, and would not be limited to two divisions, as the Soviets were claiming.

17. GSHI, pp. 253–4.
18. Piesakowski, p. 131.
19. GSHI, p. 233.
20. PRO CAB 21 968, from O'Malley to Eden, 24 May 1943.
21. Interview PA1.
22. GSHI, pp. 355–6; Teczarowska, pp. 51–2; W. Anders, *An Army in Exile*, London, Macmillan, 1949, p. 48.
23. GSHI, p. 158; Anders, p. 119; Piesakowski, p. 80; Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain*, London, Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998, p. 43; J.K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest: the Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre*, London, Macmillan, 1971, first published University of Notre Dame Press, 1962, pp. 15, 18–25; Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. II, 1795 to the Present, Oxford, the Clarendon Press, 1981, p. 452.
24. GSHI, pp. 156, 163–4, 277, Sikorski to General Bohusz-Szyszko, 14 August 1941, Sikorski to Anders, September 1941, Anders to Sikorski, 4 February 1942.
25. Quoted in Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–48*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Publishers, 1994, p. 56.
26. Hope, pp. 34–5; Piesakowski, p. 80.
27. Danuta Teczarowska, *Deportation into the Unknown,* Braunton, Devon, Merlin Books Ltd, 1985, pp. 118–19.
28. Hope, pp. 37–8; Piesakowski, p. 119; Interview B135.
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30. Interview PB1.
31. Interview PB4. In December 1939 the Soviets had declared that all people of Ukrainian or Byelorussian ethnicity from the Polish eastern territories had to take Soviet citizenship. This meant that they were not permitted to join the Polish army after the amnesty. Hence the desire of some potential recruits to conceal their ethnic origins.
32. Interview PB6.
33. Interview PB6.
34. GSHI, p. 240.
35. GSHI, pp. 373–4, 376–7; Piesakowski, p. 125. According to Piesakowski, Stalin decided to get rid of the Polish army because ' Soviet plans to send part of it to the front were frustrated, epidemics did not wipe it out, and sending its soldiers back into labour camps was impossible and would cause an outcry among world opinion.'
36. GSHI, p. 115.
37. GSHI, Preface, VIII, and p. 214; Sword, p. 89.
38. GSHI, pp. 153–4, 157, 176.
39. Interview PA1.
40. Interview PB4.
41. Interview B135.
42. GSHI, p. 196.
43. Piesakowski, pp. 96–7.
44. GSHI, pp. 218–19.
45. GSHI, p. 234; Stanisł aw Kot, *Conversations with the Kremlin and Dispatches from Russia*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 173–5.
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48. GSHI, Raczyński to Eden, 26 July 1942, p. 414.
49. GSHI, Raczyński to Ambassador Bogomolov, 13 April 1942; GHSI, pp. 375–6.
50. Sword, p. 91.
51. GSHI, pp. 378, 402–3.
52. GSHI, p. 403.
53. GSHI, pp. 420–1.
54. Piesakowski, p. 99; GSHI, pp. 442–5.
55. GSHI, pp. 505–6; Anon. (Zoe Zaidlerowa), pp. 205, 208–10.
56. GSHI, pp. 200–1, 228; PRO CAB 21 968, Report of Statement of A.Y. Vyshinski, 6 May 1943; PRO CAB 122 927, Eden to Halifax, 11 May 1943; PRO FO 371 31077 C347/G, 11 January 1942.
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58. Garliński, p. 161.
59. GSHI, pp. 512–13; Nadeau, pp. 82–3.
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3. Interview PA8.
4. Hope, p. 8.
5. Hope, p. 8; Keith Sword, *Identity in Flux: The Polish Community in Britain,* London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1996; Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain: A Study of Adjustment,* The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1956, p. 54.
6. Sword, *Identity in Flux,* p. 22; Hope, p. 9.
7. Interview PB7.
8. Sword, with Davies and Ciechanowski, p. 50; Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees 1939–1952: A Study in Forced Population Movement*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1956, pp. 65–6; Zubrzycki, p. 55.
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10. Interview PB7.
11. Sword with Davies and Ciechanowski, pp. 51, 55; Garliński, p. 88; Hope, pp. 9, 42; Public Record Office (henceforth PRO) CAB 120 671 Notes on Organization of Polish Forces in the Middle East, 29 August 1942.
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24. Interview Lat7.
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29. Interview Est5.
30. Interview Est4.
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19. Interview Lat5.
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29. Van Reenan, pp. 103; Wyman, pp. 99–104.
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41. Stein, p. 324; Murphy, *Flight and Resettlement*, p. 59; Bakis, p. 78.
42. Bakis, pp. 76, 79.
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45. Interview Lat2.

10 Resettlement

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4. Interviews, Est3, PB6.
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Assistance Board

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War Office

WO 32 Polish Armed Forces

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