

THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES



Refugees in South Asia during Second World War (1939-1945)

How did Allied governments provide for them?

Key Stage 4 and 5 | Postwar 1945-present, Second World War 1939-1945
Lesson

Introduction

In contrast to dominant narratives about refugees from Asia and Africa arriving at the borders of Europe, between 1939 and 1945 thousands of European refugees took shelter in South Asia. They were joined by other war evacuees from Southeast Asia and refugees from China. This lesson looks at Polish and Jewish refugees who came to India from Europe and were joined by refugees from Malta and the Balkans. Alongside these refugees nearly half a million people fled from Burma and Southeast Asia as the Japanese advanced and sought shelter in colonial India. Thus, during the Second World War, India became home to thousands of refugees from Europe and Asia.

This lesson uses original documents to explore how these refugees were provided with relief, how they were treated, and what happened to them when the war ended.

Suitable for:

Key stage 4 and 5

Time period:

Postwar 1945-present,
Second World War
1939-1945

Connections to the Curriculum:

Diverse histories,
The Second World War

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Teacher's Notes

This lesson using original documents can be used to support GCSE units on modern British immigration for AQA History: Britain: Migration, empires, and the people: c790 to the present day; Edexcel, Migrants in Britain c800-present; OCR, Migrants to Britain c1250 to present (Schools History Project) and for 'depth studies' on 'Modern Britain' at A Level for AQA and Edexcel.

Some of sources could be selected by teachers to support history lessons for the Key stage 3 unit: 'Challenges for Britain, Europe, and the wider world 1901 to the present day: social, cultural, and technological change in post-war British society; Britain's place in the world since 1945'.

It is important to note that the documents cover sensitive subjects. Some include language and concepts that are entirely unacceptable and inappropriate today. We suggest that teachers look at the material carefully before introducing to students. It would be helpful to discuss the language and ideas contained in a source beforehand. Teachers may wish to break the documents into smaller extracts if they appear too long or create additional simplified transcripts.

Students should be encouraged to read the relevant titled 'Background' section to help with the source context where indicated. As students get to grips with the type of source, they can work out what is being said and how is it being said. Encourage them to 'look behind the source'. Where has the record come from and why has it been created? Does it offer a national or local perspective? What is the difference between a government report and a local newspaper? What is the value of oral testimony? What type of sources help with specific investigations?

Encourage students to consider both the 'witting' and 'unwitting' testimony a source may reveal. Part of this evaluation is to consider if there are any gaps in the evidence or issues of accuracy in authorship. Why would we trust/not trust this source? What other sources might be needed to provide additional information/context? Does the document support other knowledge that you already have for a certain line of enquiry? Use the document prompt questions to promote discussion of the content.

Background

To understand the modern refugee regime, we should study refugee movements beyond Europe, particularly during and after the Second World War. When the Second World War ended and the 1951 Geneva Convention defined who was a refugee, neither India nor Pakistan were signatories to it. This might seem surprising considering they had just had one of the largest mass migrations in human history during the process of Partition. Between 10-12 million people crossed the new border between India and Pakistan, and it is believed that over a million died. But the leaders of the new nations felt that European leaders had ignored their plight and that the new international refugee regime was overly focussed on the plight of European refugees, ignoring those displaced in Asia and Africa. If we are to understand the refugee regime of the present day differently, we need to think about not just refugees outside Europe, but also European refugees who found refuge in Asia and Africa during the Second World War. Large numbers of Polish refugees were sent to East Africa, and several thousand Jewish refugees ended up in Shanghai. South Asia which would see the massive refugee exodus of Partition, was also home to a large number of such war refugees and evacuees- in particular it housed several thousand Polish women and children, Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany, war evacuees from the Balkans and Malta, alongside those rescued from the Japanese advance through South East Asia, found themselves in South Asia.

Polish Refugees

During the war when both Nazi and Soviet armies invaded Poland, thousands of Polish men, women, and children were deported and resettled in labour camps in Siberia and central Asia under Russian control. The Germans and the Soviets had signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of non-aggression. In 1941 Germany violated this pact and launched Operation Barbarossa and attacked the Soviet Union, changing the balance of power. The Soviet Union joined the Allies, and the exiled Polish cabinet in London asked the Soviet Union to release Polish deportees. According to a Soviet and British plan the healthy men and women would form a Polish force under General Wladyslaw Anders. The rest, particularly women and children would be resettled as refugees.

Background

The newly released Polish refugees were first moved to Iran, then under the control of Reza Shah. They were placed in makeshift camps in Iran run by the Middle East Refugee and Relief Administration. By mid-1942, nearly 100,000 Polish refugees were living in the Iranian cities of Tehran and Isfahan. Eventually, some of the refugees were moved out of Iran, and 4000 went to India, 7000 remained in the Middle East, and the largest number, nearly 19,000 went to East and Central Africa, with the bulk being given refuge in Tanganyika and Uganda.

In India there was initially reluctance to accept the refugees on the grounds that the weather was not suitable to those from Europe and that there could be espionage agents hiding amongst the refugees. The bulk of the refugees who came to India were Catholic, but there were a few Jewish refugees. Their care was coordinated by the Polish Consulate in Bombay through the Polish Relief Committee and the Jewish Relief Committee. The first batch of refugees landed in India in 1942, mainly orphans and young children. Maharaja Digvijaysinhji the ruler of Nawanagar, (called the Jamsaheb) agreed to host nearly 1000 orphans at a coastal camp in Balachadi. In 1943 a second group of 5000 refugees arrived and was housed in a camp in Valivade in Kolhapur state. These camps at Valivade and Balachadi had their own schools, hospitals, post office and even a fire brigade. The work of Mrs Kira Bansinska, who was the wife of the Polish consul general in India, was key to resettling the refugees. In India, the camp at Balachadi was maintained largely by charitable funds raised from the Indian public while the Valivade camp was financed by the Polish government in exile in London.

After the war, it was clear that Poland would fall under Soviet control and many of the refugees refused to return from India and Africa. From 1946 onwards the Polish refugees were the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration UNRRA. After 1947 the IRO or the International Refugee Organisation took over with the aim of getting the Polish refugees out of the camps and resettled. The IRO Sir Maurice Lush toured India and Africa relentlessly trying to persuade local governments to allow some Polish refugees to stay but with limited success. In his memoir, Lush says that Indian officials told him that the IRO had two choices, either to help India deal with millions of Partition refugees or to remove the several thousand European refugees in India. The IRO opted to do the latter and this became part of India's reluctance to join the international refugee regime later.

Background

The refugees themselves were reluctant to leave. In India, the Chief Refugee Office AWT Webb also reported that the refugees were refusing to leave afraid that there were plans to transfer them to the 'clutches of the Russian government.' Valivade camp in India was closed in March 1948 and the refugees were widely dispersed. Some went to the United Kingdom under a Polish Resettlement Scheme, some to Australia and Canada, while others were transferred from India to camps in east Africa to await their fate.

Maltese and Balkan refugees in Coimbatore

A second group of European war refugees came to India from the Balkans and Malta. In July 1941, the Government of India was told to take 58 Balkan refugees of various nationalities who could not be 'disposed of' in the Middle East or Africa, and who had to be interned whilst in the country. At the same time the Government of India was asked to take on 3000 Maltese evacuees from Turkey and another 2000 Europeans from Persia. This was a moment when there was also a growing demand to accept Polish women and children, especially orphans by November 1942. The Governor General indicated that he was concerned about the number of people being sent to the subcontinent and warned that officials should 'resist attempts to convert India into a rubbish heap.'

Maltese refugees who had been evacuated from Turkey and Greece were sent hundreds of miles away to the Indian subcontinent. Most of them had forefathers who had in fact left Malta and settled in Turkey. Many had never been to Malta and nor did they speak the language, being conversant in Turkish and Greek. The Maltese in Turkey were affected by a change in Turkey's nationality law in 1934 which prevented them from seeking employment as non-Turkish nationals. As a result of this they were dependent on Consular relief- handouts from the British Consul in Turkey. British officials were often sceptical about the Maltese refugees arguing that they were not fully British but had managed to 'cling obstinately to their British nationality.' The Balkan and Maltese refugees were sent to the British Evacuee Camp in Coimbatore where they joined several thousand people who had been rescued from South East Asia and Burma in the wake of the Japanese invasion and occupation of these areas.

Background

Burmese Refugees

The Second World War in Southeast Asia caught the British off guard. On the morning of 8 December 1941, Japanese forces landed at Kota Bahru on Malaya's east coast. It was just hours before the assault on Pearl Harbour. Within weeks European power in Southeast Asia had collapsed as Japanese forces moved into the Malayan peninsula and bombs rained down on Singapore. On December 10, 1941, Japanese bombers sank two British ships in Singapore harbour. The Dutch in Java and Sumatra surrendered quickly to the Japanese. From Thailand the Japanese now moved into southern Burma.

Rangoon was first bombed on 23 December 1941 with the British having mistakenly assumed that Burma's eastern frontier would be impenetrable. Compounded by a chronic lack of air cover for the British, the Japanese bombed lower Burma with impunity and by February 1942 British air defences had almost totally collapsed. With the bombing of Rangoon and the advancing of the Japanese army, thousands of Indian refugees now began to flee the city. Their first destination was Prome and then to Taungup. But many never made it to Prome. In responses to appeals from Governor Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, several prominent Indians patrolled the Prome road cajoling Indians to return to their jobs and promising them security in government camps. Dornan-Smith himself, slipped out of Burma to set up a provisional government in the hillside town of Simla in north India. Meanwhile, in these camps the Indians who came back waited patiently for work, but the Burma government issued orders that no adult Indian should be allowed to leave as a deck passenger which meant that only the wealthiest Indians could leave by ship. When the conditions in Rangoon deteriorated further and these men were forced to leave, there was little help available.

After the fall of the second port of Moulmein there was another exodus towards Prome to find safety via the Taungup pass. Nearly 200,000 Indians took this route that would eventually lead to Chittagong and thousands would die on the way. The rest of the refugees moved into middle and northern Burma and tried to escape to Manipur. They struggled on the road between Kalewa and Tamu. After Tamu, the hills and jungles loomed, and exhausted waited

Background

for transport that never materialised. The British had organised only a skeleton refugee organisation to help them and when the monsoons hit, the spread of malaria, dysentery and cholera meant an increasing death toll.

The chaotic nature of the evacuation and the squabbling amongst senior military figures foreshadowed accusations that the evacuation was racially discriminatory. In both Hong Kong and Malaya there had been accusations that those deemed to be of 'pure British descent' had been given priority. In March 1942 motor convoys carrying mainly European and Eurasian employees of the Burma Oil Company were allowed while the road was closed to Indian evacuees. In April 1942 both the Daily Mail and the Daily Herald carried stories about the Burma evacuation and the difference in treatment meted out to Indian and non-Indian evacuees. The Times carried a photograph of a group of refugees, all European, preparing to leave Burma by air. The press strongly suggested that the evacuation effort had been racially discriminatory, and the death toll seemed to bear out this accusation.

The Anglo-Burmans, the Eurasian minority that fled from were a significant portion of the European evacuee population from Burma. Many of these Anglo-Burmans ended up at the camp in Coimbatore joining other Eurasians from Singapore and Malaya. In Burma, the group included people of mixed race who might have had a European paternal male relative. They mainly worked in industry, and public administration. Of the 9000 or so Anglo-Burmans who were evacuated to India, many found themselves at the camp in Coimbatore. Many felt that alongside the Indian evacuees, they had been abandoned by the British. At a conference in Simla in 1944 they use recurrent themes of their heroism, loyalty and sacrifice to the British to argue for concessions and long term guarantees of employment. The Anglo-Burmans found themselves stuck between the British who viewed them with suspicion and Indian evacuees who felt that their 'blood' had given them an advantage in the evacuation process.

Background

Conclusion

At the end of the war, all these groups had to be repatriated from India, a task made more difficult by the lack of easily available shipping options, and the reluctance of many groups including Jewish and Polish refugees to go back to where they came from. The British meanwhile knew that with the transfer of power in South Asia looming, they had to persuade and cajole people to leave these refugee camps as quickly as possible so they could be disbanded. Meanwhile at a global level, negotiations began about what to do about the millions of people displaced around the globe who did not fit within the new national borders that were emerging. As these discussions continued into the 1950s delegates from South Asia felt that their experience of housing war time refugees and dealing with the displaced of Partition, had been ignored. The 1951 Refugee Convention was adopted by the United Nations in 1951 and entered into force in 1954. It was originally intended to protect European refugees from World War II, but states could declare that it would apply to refugees from other places. However, countries like India felt that the Convention ignored the displacement they had dealt with, and to this day have refused to sign the Convention and its amended Protocol in 1967.

Antara Datta

Associate Professor in International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London.

1 Telegram from the Middle East Department 25 July 1941, File no 10/1/115/41/Pol E- The question of accommodating certain Balkan refugees of various nationalities from Mideast, NAI

2 Note from M.K. Johnston, 12 November 1941, File no 10/1/115/41/Pol E- The question of accommodating certain Balkan refugees of various nationalities from Mideast, NAI

Source 1: Extracts from a Home office minute sheet, 17-25 June 1946

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

The Government of India is pressing for the removal, as a matter of urgency, of the Polish refugees in India, whose numbers are estimated at 5,000 very few of whom have expressed a willingness to return to Poland. Some of them, it is thought, will be related to those members of the Polish Armed Forces who are to be admitted to this country. As we have agreed in principle the latter may be joined by their families from Italy, we might feel hard to extend similar facilities in those cases where the dependents are at present in Italy. Those, however, who are not related to members of the Polish Forces scheduled for admission to the U.K. have no claim to entry to this country, and their ultimate disposal will have to be settled as part of the general refugee problem. As the arrangements for the admission of the families of the Polish Armed Forces and their families from Italy have not yet been worked out, the whole question is at the present time somewhat premature.

? Say to India Office that the details for the admission into the U.K. of the families of the Polish Forces from Italy

MINUTE SHEET.

Reference: Lya 556/1/264.

are still being worked out, and that when the categories of relationships have been decided it may be possible to link up with this scheme those dependents of the Polish Armed Forces (who are now in India). It is however considered that the disposal of the remainder of the Polish refugees in India must form part of the general problem of refugees and displaced persons, and our Ambassador S. G. S. reports that he is not prepared to agree to their admission to U.K. of D. A. 17. 6. 46.

2 JUN 1946 Copy of telegram Gov. of India to Secy. of India re arrival of Webb (17/6/46)

Capt Webb will no doubt want to discuss his problem with H.O. at once, and some indication is necessary of S.G.S.'s policy.

If India is allowed to dump unwanted refugees on U.K., the latter part of the Commonwealth will not be slow to adopt a similar course. It may be that this is a "penalty of Empire", but after the Poles will come the refugees of other nationalities and there will be a substantial immigration of foreigners who for the most part will not be useful workmen but a strain on the national economy.

It must be remembered that U.K. has at present no power to exclude British subjects from the Colonies, some of whom, e.g. Maltese and Cypriots, are a source of trouble to the police and give rise to anti-alien sentiments because they are mistaken for Ukrainians or Greeks!

But it is a question whether the special conditions in India at the moment justify ~~the~~ giving them some relief in advance of the settlement of the whole question of refugees and displaced persons by U.N.R.

H. H. L. 17. 6. 46

W.C. 5059/1245
7.500.000 4.45
D.P.W. 51-4582
(REGIMENT)
CODE 5-34-2

[OVER]

Source 1 Transcript

...

The Government of India is pressing for the removal; as a matter of urgency, of the Polish refugees in India, whose numbers are estimated at 5,000, very few of whom have expressed willingness to return to Poland. Some of them, it is thought, will be admitted to this country. As we have agreed in principle that the latter may be joined by their families from Italy, we might feel bound to extend similar facilities in those cases where the dependents are at present in Italy India. Those, however, who are not related to members of the Polish Forces scheduled for admission to the U.K. have no claim to entry to this country, and their ultimate disposal will have to be settled as part of the general refugee problem. As the arrangements for the admission of the families of the Polish armed forces and their families from Italy have not yet been worked out, the whole question is at the present time somewhat premature.

? say to India Office that the details for the admission into the U.K. of the families of the Polish forces from Italy,

...

(ii)

are still being worked out, and that when the categories of relationship have been decided it may be possible to link up with this scheme those dependents (who are now in India) of members of the Polish Armed Forces. It is however considered that the disposal of the remainder of the Polish refugees in India must form part of the general problem of refugees and displaced persons and as at present advised S. of S [Secretary of State] regrets that he is not prepared to agree to their admission to U.K.

OP Davies 17.6.46

Copy of Telegram Governor of India to Secretary of State to India re. [regarding] arrival of Webb. (15/6/46).

Captain Webb will no doubt want to discuss this problem with H.O. [Home Office] at once, and some indication is necessary of S. of S.'s [Secretary of State] policy.

If India is allowed to dump unwanted refugees on the U.K., the other parts of the Commonwealth will not be slow to adopt a similar course. It may be that this is a "penalty of Empire", but after the Poles will come the refugees of other nationalities and there will be a

Source 1 Transcript

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It must be remembered that U.K has at present no power to exclude British subjects from the colonies some of whom, e.g. Maltese and Cypriots are a source of trouble to the police and give rise to anti-alien sentiments because they are mistaken for Italians or Greeks!

But it is a question whether the special conditions in India at the moment justify giving them some relief in advance of the settlement of the whole question of refugees and displaced persons by UNO [United Nations Organisation].

H.H. W. 25.6.46

Source 1 Task

Read the Background Section on Polish Refugees for more historical context.

What type of document is this?

Why has this been produced?

Why is it held by the Home Office collections at the National Archives?

How is the Home Office preparing to deal with the issue of Polish refugees in India?

What appears to be the attitude towards refugees who are not members of the Polish Army?

How does the language of the document help us understand some of the attitudes in the British Empire regarding refugees after the Second World War?

What appears to be the government attitude towards Maltese and Cypriot refugees?

What do you think 'special conditions in India at the moment' means? [Clue: research political situation in 1946.]

Source 2: Report to the Cabinet from the Polish Forces Committee concerning the removal of Polish refugees from India, 18th July 1946

Page 1

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

(THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

GEN.125/16

COPY NO. 45

18TH JULY, 1946

CABINET

POLISH FORCES COMMITTEE

THE REMOVAL OF POLISH REFUGEES FROM INDIA

Memorandum by the Secretary of State
for the Colonies

1. In his memorandum (GEN.125/15) on the removal of Polish refugees from India, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India refers to a suggestion which was accepted by the Polish Forces (Official) Committee at a meeting held on the 1st July that a number of Polish refugees at present in India should be accommodated in the refugee camps in East Africa, either in addition to the existing numbers there or in place of the dependants of members of the Polish Second Corps removed from these camps to the U.K.

2. There are already some 17,000 Polish refugees in the East African Territories. The large majority of them are women and children accompanied by a small proportion of elderly or disabled men. The settlements are not, nor are they ever likely to be, self-supporting and they have consumed supplies and engaged the attention of administrative staff which the Governments have ill been able to spare. The Polish refugees are not easy guests, and their presence, together with their inclination to form undesirable associations with Asians and Africans in the neighbourhood of the camps, has led to difficulties of personal relationships with all sections of the community, which the East African Governments are anxious to terminate as soon as possible.

3. The conditions under which these refugees were accepted for war-time domicile in East Africa involved the construction of settlements consisting of temporary-type buildings situated in areas which are not suitable for permanent European settlement. For reasons of public health therefore, it would be unwise to allow these refugees to remain indefinitely where they now are, but the provision of alternative accommodation in the areas allocated for settlement by Europeans is not practicable. It is true that the East African territories have such areas, but they also have schemes and commitments for the settlement of Europeans, most of whom are ex-service men. Any proposal that land so allocated should now be re-allocated to the Polish refugees would inevitably cause most serious political repercussions.

Source 2: Report to the Cabinet from the Polish Forces Committee concerning the removal of Polish refugees from India, 18th July 1946

Page 2

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

4. The Polish refugees now in East Africa have been there since 1942. They were accepted by the East African Governments on the clear understanding that their accommodation in East Africa would be temporary and only for the duration of hostilities. Since the war came to an end the East African Governments have repeatedly sought assurances that they should be removed at the earliest possible moment. The intention is that those who are relatives of members of the Polish armed forces should in due course join their men folk when the latter are permanently settled in the U.K. or elsewhere. It is not yet clear what arrangements are to be made for those refugees who are not relatives of members of the armed forces (and it is in this class that the refugees whom it is proposed to remove from India fall), and the prospects of removing from East Africa those who are relatives remain still quite indefinite. Enquiries indeed indicate that in any case the shipping situation would not allow of any movement this year, and the immediate acceptance of refugees from India would therefore involve an increase in the Polish refugee population.

5. The East African Governments are faced with grave problems of accommodation and resettlement in relation to the large numbers of Africans who are being demobilised from the armed forces raised during the war. A suggestion that at this time, when the continued presence of the Polish refugees already in East Africa is a source of growing social, political and administrative difficulty, the East African Governments should accept a further contingent of refugees, drawn from the class whose resettlement offers the greatest problem, would have the most embarrassing political effects in these territories and would introduce yet another racial question in an area where racial complications are already a serious political issue.

6. The recommendation of the Official Committee was made without consultation with the Colonial Office, who were not invited to the discussion. It does not appear from the memorandum circulated by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India whether the possibilities of extending the arrangements for the temporary reception in the U.K. of members of the Polish armed forces and their relatives now in Italy to include this proportionately small number of refugees from India was considered. It may be that their accommodation in the U.K. would not raise practical or political difficulties on the scale which their accommodation in East Africa would arouse in the East African territories. However that may be, if it is essential that the refugees should be removed from India, I must, for the reasons indicated, strongly resist the suggestion that they should be sent to East Africa, and urge that a solution should be sought which will not augment the already serious difficulties with which the East African Governments are faced in relation to the Polish refugee problem.

(Intld.) G.H.H.

Colonial Office, S.W.1.

18TH JULY, 1946.

Source 2 Transcript

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POLISH FORCES COMMITTEE

THE REMOVAL OF POLISH REFUGEES FROM INDIA

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies

1. In his memorandum (GEN.125/15) on the removal of Polish refugees from India, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India refers to the suggestion which was accepted by the Polish Forces (Official) Committee at a meeting held on the 1st July that a number of Polish refugees at present in India should be accommodated in the refugee camps in East Africa, either in addition to the existing numbers there or in place of the dependents of members of the Polish Second Corps removed from these camps to the U.K.
2. There are already some 17,000 Polish refugees in the East African Territories. The large majority of them are women and children accompanied by a small proportion of elderly or disabled men. The settlements are not, nor are they ever likely to be, self-supporting and they have consumed supplies and engaged the attention of administrative staff which the Government have ill been able to spare. The Polish refugees are not easy guests, and their presence, together with their inclination to force undesirable associations with Asians and Africans in the neighbourhood of the camps, has led to difficulties of personal relationships with all sections of the community, which the East African Governments are anxious to terminate as soon as possible.
3. The conditions under which these refugees were accepted for war-time domicile [home] in East Africa involved the construction of settlements consisting of temporary-type buildings situated in areas which are not suitable for permanent European settlement. For reasons of public health therefore, it would be unwise to allow these refugees to remain indefinitely where they now are, but the provision of alternative accommodation in the areas allocated for settlement by Europeans is not practicable. It is true that the East African territories have such areas, but they also have schemes and commitments

Source 2 Transcript

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Source 2 Transcript

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Colonial Office, S.W. 1

18th July 1946

Source 2 Task

Read the Background Section on Polish Refugees for more historical context.

Where were Polish refugees from India to be resettled according to this report Cabinet?

What difficulties have arisen for the Polish refugees and the authorities in the East African Territories according to this report? [Clue: paragraphs 2, 3 & 5]

On what basis did East African Governments agree to look after Polish refugees?

Why does the author of the report say: "if it is essential that the refugees should be removed from India ...[I] strongly resist the suggestion that they should be sent to East Africa"?

Source 3: Notes for the Secretary of State relating to a Ministerial Committee on Polish Forces for the India Office, 16 July 1946

Page 1

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

If once we admit the principle that Polish refugees who are not dependents of the Polish Armed Forces can come to this country, we open the door to requests that this country will admit Polish refugees from all over the world, including large groups in Shanghai, in Africa, in Palestine and in the Middle East.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the United Kingdom Government has some special responsibility for the people who are now in India. Their history is that they reached Persia via Russia, that when in Persia they became a military embarrassment for reasons of supply and defence, and for this reason it was arranged that they should be sent to India.

At the meeting of the Official Committee a suggestion was made that these refugees who are not dependents of the Polish 2nd Corps might be sent to East Africa either in addition to the Polish refugees who are already there or in substitution for a corresponding number of refugees already in East Africa who are dependents

Source 3: Notes for the Secretary of State relating to a Ministerial Committee on Polish Forces for the India Office, 16 July 1946

Page 2

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

-2-

of the Polish Armed Forces. The objection, however, to bringing from East Africa a corresponding number of the dependents of the Polish Forces is that there are about 6,000 such dependents in South and East Africa, that the War Office are not at present able to make arrangements for their transfer to the United Kingdom, and that if once a group of them is moved the remainder will become restless and expect to be transferred immediately.

It would seem, therefore, that if we are to move from India to East Africa those Polish refugees who are not dependents of the 2nd Corps, they must become additional to the refugees already in East Africa. To this I understand the Colonial Office object. It is being arranged that the Colonial Office shall be represented at the meeting of the Ministerial Committee, and if Ministers are satisfied that these people must be removed from India, it will next be for the Colonial Secretary to satisfy the Committee that they cannot be admitted to East Africa.

If Ministers are satisfied (a) that they must be removed from India, and (b) that they cannot be admitted to East Africa, then I can see no alternative to bringing them to this country; but we must try to devise some reason for differentiating them from other Polish refugees in various parts of the world. The only reason I can suggest for differentiation is that they are at present associated with the 3,600 persons who are dependents of the Polish 2nd Corps, that they have in connection with the composite camp their own hospitals, schools, etc., and that from the point of morale and organisation there is something to be said for keeping all the inmates of the camp together (other than the separate orphans group) and bringing them to this country together.

(11a) RM

16.7.46.

Source 3 Transcript

S. of S. [Secretary of State]

...

If once we admit the principle that Polish refugees who are not dependents of the Polish Armed Forces can come to this country, we open the door to requests that this country will admit Polish refugees from all over the world, including large groups in Shanghai, in Africa, in Palestine and in the Middle East.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the United Kingdom Government has some special responsibility for the people who are in India. Their history is that they reached Persia [Iran] via Russia, that when in Persia they became a military embarrassment for the reasons of supply and defence, and for this reason it was arranged that they should be sent to India. At the meeting of the Official Committee a suggestion was made that these refugees who are not dependents of the Polish 2nd Corps might be sent to East Africa either in addition to the Polish refugees who are already there or in substitution for a corresponding number of refugees already in East Africa who are dependents

-2-

of the Polish Armed Forces. The objection, however, to bringing from East Africa a corresponding number of dependents of the Polish Forces is that there are about 6,000 such dependents in South and East Africa, that the War Office are not at present able to make arrangements for their transfer to the United Kingdom, and that if once a group of them is moved the remainder will become restless and expect to be transferred immediately. It would seem, therefore, that if we are to move from India to East Africa those Polish refugees who are not dependents of the 2nd Corps, they must become additional to the refugees already in East Africa. To this I understand the Colonial Office object. It is being arranged that the Colonial Office shall be represented at the meeting of the Ministerial committee, and if Ministers are satisfied that these people must be removed free from India, it will next be for the Colonial Secretary to satisfy the Committee that they cannot be admitted to East Africa.

Source 3 Transcript

If Ministers are satisfied (a) that they must be removed from India, and (b) that they cannot be admitted to East Africa, then I can see no alternative to bringing them to this country; but we must try to devise some reason for differentiating them from other Polish refugees to various parts of the world. Only reason I can suggest for differentiation is that they are at present associated with the 3,600 persons who are dependents of the Polish 2nd Corps, that they have in connection with the composite camp their own hospitals, schools, etc. and that from the point of morale and organisation there is something to be said for keeping all the inmates of the camp together (other than the separate orphans) group and bringing them to this country together.

16.7.46

Source 3 Task

Why does the Colonial Office object to bringing, from India to East Africa, Polish refugees, who are not dependents of the Polish 2nd Corps?

What arguments would have to be used to explain why these refugees were moved to the U.K and not East Africa?

How does this source add to your understanding of Source 2?

Source 4: Report from A.W.T. Webb, Principal Refugee Officer, Government of India in New Delhi (who holds the role due to his status/another position) sent to the Secretary of the Government of India, Department of the Commonwealth, 31 August 1946

Page 1

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

From
Captain A.W.T. Webb, OBE.,
Principal Refugee Officer,
Government of India,
Commonwealth Relations Department,
NEW DELHI, 3.

To
The Secretary to the
Government of India,
Department of Commonwealth
Relations,
NEW DELHI, 3.

No. 50/46-Poll(Evn) Dated New Delhi, the 31st August 1946.

Subject:- Maintenance of Evacuees accommodated in India

Sir,

In accordance with instructions, I have the honour to submit a tenth periodical report on the reception and accommodation of and other matters concerning evacuees, for whom His Majesty's Government have accepted financial liability, or who are evacuees sponsored by Allied Governments. This report covers the period January, 1946, to date.

2. The lapse of time, since the submission of my ninth periodical report, may be excused the imputation of delay, since its preparation was put off from time to time in the pious hope that some finality was just over the hill. To this hope strength was added by the discussions in London during my recent deputation to the United Kingdom and Egypt. Since now our legitimate expectations have been dashed to the ground, there remains no excuse for further delaying a record of the events of the past eight months.

3. Polish Evacuees.

The trickle of Poles willing to return to Poland shows signs of developing into something which, if not a spate is, at any rate, a flow of unexpected volume. In the last two weeks, the numbers have increased from 70 to 170 and there are distinct signs that more persons may yet give in their names. This, undoubtedly, is satisfactory and all arrangements for their repatriation by UNRRA, Mideast, have been made, on paper. Unfortunately, paper makes but cockle shell vessels and the apparently insuperable difficulty which faces us at present is that, whereas it is only fair to these people that they should reach their homes before the worst of winter sets in, no suitable shipping can be provided till November or December, 1946, at the earliest. It is difficult to forecast the results of this delay, but it would be idle to suppose that it can encourage others to come forward. The most likely effect will be to wring from these people an exasperated:- "Let down again!" Unfair, of course, but typically Polish.

Whereas it is the ardent desire of the Government of India to be relieved of all European refugees by the end of 1946 at latest, it is apparently only in respect of 400 Polish Orphans that realisation of this wish is likely. Here, at least, we have definite information that the Government of Australia is sympathetic to the proposal that these children should find a new and permanent home in that country. Curiously enough the only reaction to the proposal which might cause a hitch comes from the Chairman of the Polish Refugee Welfare Committee in India, Bombay. That dignitary sought to impose the conditions that the orphans should be kept together in Australia under Polish guardians and teachers and brought up in Polish traditions. He, apparently, has taken umbrage at the obvious retort that Australia wants new settlers who will become absorbed into the life of the country, that Australia, as the piper, is entitled to call the tune, that it is obviously improper to attempt to prejudice the future of these inarticulate minors for political ends which may never mature, and that, in any case, these children,

/now

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Page 2

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

now mostly over fourteen years of age, can, on reaching majority and if they so wish, return to Poland or join any wild-cat scheme their brother ex-patriates may launch.

Of the remaining approximately 4,600 Poles in India, some 2750 can claim to be dependants (under the definition of that word just made known) of Members of the Second Polish Corps; some 1,000 as dependants of other Members of other Polish Forces who served under British command; some 170 are willing to return to Poland; and the balance, approximately 680, fall into the general pool of displaced persons. And all, including the orphans, are in a state of mind bordering on hysteria, compounded partly of ignorance on which the forces of propaganda have worked distressingly, partly of nervousness about the political situation in India, and partly of the deepest distrust of the intentions of UNRRA. As illustrating the pass to which this hysteria has reached, I may instance the absolute refusal of a number of Poles to be measured for warm clothing. Because those Poles, who have asked to be repatriated, were measured at the same time, they argue that everyone to be given warm clothing was destined to be sent to Poland. And nothing that anyone, including their own Welfare Committee, might say could persuade them otherwise. Others, it is rumoured, are turning an ear to the hazy blandishments of a certain crack-brained Pole of feminine gender, who has turned theosophist, apes Indian modes of life and dress, and would have as many Poles as possible remain in India "to help in India's fight for freedom." By this, presumably, she means remain behind and fight the British!

4. Balkan and Maltese evacuees.

Here, too, the restlessness among them, mentioned in my last two reports is growing apace. It is high time these people left India and I, personally, am more than ever convinced that, if our suggestion to His Majesty's Government were accepted, that they should be given free passages plus a cash grant for resettlement not exceeding £200/- in any family, or a small old-age pension to those over sixty years of age or incapacitated, then a very large number of these persons could, in a very short time, return to the countries whence they came or find new homes in other countries. I am aware that in the views of the British Treasury, cash grants raise difficulties of comparison with what is being done for demobilized soldiers. The facts remain, however, that without such cash grants these people cannot fulfil the immigration rules of the countries in which they wish to settle, that the alternative suggestion, of small monthly allowances until they can get on their feet again, cannot take the place of capital sums for the purpose of immigration, tend to debase morale or, at any rate, do not heighten morale in the way that a capital sum in hand does and will, by every practical calculation, prove more costly and far less effective in the long run. Lastly, comparison of the cases of demobilized soldiers with those of displaced refugees does not seem reasonable. The former return to their own homes and people, young and fit; the latter have lost their all, have suffered in health and morale and have to start life afresh often in new and unfamiliar surroundings. Were they assured of cash grants for resettlement, many of them, on their own initiative or with our assistance, could obtain permission of entry to countries of their choice. And the greater part of the problem would be solved early and satisfactorily. Admittedly, responsibility for the future resettlement of these people rests with His Majesty's Government and not with the Government of India. But since His Majesty's Government have, so far, found no way to help India get rid of them, India may, perhaps, be excused for making suggestions in her own interest and even of offering help in the attainment of her own wish to secure their early removal.

5. Far Eastern refugees.

The repatriation of non-Indian evacuees from the Far East, exclusive of Burma, may be said to be almost complete. The few that
/remain

Source 4: Report from A.W.T. Webb, Principal Refugee Officer, Government of India in New Delhi (who holds the role due to his status/another position) sent to the Secretary of the Government of India, Department of the Commonwealth, 31 August 1946

Page 3

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

556/1/2664
443/3/14

remain are held up for lack of shipping. Those Indians, for whom the Colonial Office are not providing free passages, are being assisted in procuring shipping by the Controller of Civil Passage Priorities for the Far East. At present, shipping is very considerably below the requirements of persons to whom priority certificates have been issued. Repatriation of non-Indian evacuees from Burma is being handled by the Government of Burma. A very large number of persons, especially Anglo-Burmans and Anglo-Indians, still remain in India.

6. Statistics concerning European evacuees have been relegated to an appendix, to facilitate reading.

7. Barely two months ago I was deputed to proceed to the United Kingdom to bring to the notice of His Majesty's Government the imperative necessity for removing from India all European evacuees at the earliest possible date and not later than the end of 1946. The reason for the Government of India's request was, in the main, the political situation in India. The voice of India through her elected representatives in the Assembly was being raised against the continued presence, after hostilities had ceased, of a large number of European refugees, for whom India felt no responsibility and had accepted only under pressure, and especially at a time when the food situation was acute and Indians in certain countries were receiving allegedly unfair treatment at European hands. Added to this was the grave possibility of widespread disturbances and War Department's categorical assertion of inability to provide any protection whatever for these refugees, should the civil government break down.

In light of the above, the Ministerial Committee's refusal to comply with India's request came as a surprise. Even allowing for all the undoubted difficulties with which His Majesty's Government are surrounded - and they are great - refusal to relieve India of the functions of agent in respect of these refugees, when the agent had clearly and with reason expressed unwillingness and inability to continue the agency, seems to ignore the very basis on which the agency came into being. It is sincerely to be hoped that His Majesty's Government's decision may be reconsidered in light of our last telegram No. 7190 of 18th August, 1946.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient servant,

(Sgd.) A.W.T. Webb.

Principal Refugee Officer,
ex-officio: Deputy Secretary,
Commonwealth Relations Department.

Source 4 Transcript

UNRRA means United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration formed to provide economic assistance to European nations after the Second World War and to repatriate and assist the refugees who would come under Allied control.

From
Captain A.W.T. Webb, CBE.,
Principal Refugee Officer,
Government of India,
Commonwealth Relations Department,
NEW DELHI, 3.

To
The Secretary of the
Government of India
Department of Commonwealth Relations
NEW DELHI, 3.

No. 50/46-Poll (Evn)

Dated New Delhi, the 31st August, 1946.

Subject:- Maintenance of Evacuees accommodated in India

Sir,

In accordance with instruction, I have the honour to submit a tenth periodical report on the reception and accommodation of the other matters concerning evacuees, for whom His Majesty's Government have accepted financial liability, or who are evacuees sponsored by Allied Governments. This report covers the period January 1946, to date.

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Source 4 Transcript

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Source 4 Transcript

[Pg. 2]

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Source 4 Transcript

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The repatriation of non-Indian evacuees from the Far East, exclusive of Burma, may be said to be almost complete. The few that remain are held up for lack of shipping. Those Indians, for who the Colonial Office are not providing free passages, are being assisted in procuring shipping by the Controller of Civil Passage Priorities for the Far East. At present, shipping is very considerably below the requirements of persons to who priority certificates have been issued. Repatriation of non-Indian evacuees from Burma is being handled by the Government of Burma. A very large number of persons, especially Anglo-Burmans and Anglo-Indians still remain in India.

6. Statistics concerning European evacuees have been relegated to an appendix, to facilitate reading.

7. Barely two months ago I was deputed to proceed to the United Kingdom to bring to the notice of His Majesty's Government the imperative [vital] necessity for removing from India all European evacuees at the earliest possible date and not later than the end of 1946. The reason for the Government of India's request was, in the main, the political situation in India. The voice of India through her elected representatives in the Assembly was being raised against the continued presence, after hostilities had ceased of a large number of European refugees, for whom India felt no responsibility and had accepted only under pressure, and

Source 4 Transcript

especially at a time when the food situation was acute and Indians in certain countries were receiving allegedly unfair treatment at European hands. Added to this was the grave possibility of widespread disturbances and War Department's categorical assertion of inability to provide any protection whatever for these refugees, should the civil government break down.

In the light of the above, the Ministerial Committee's refusal to comply with India's request came as a surprise. Even allowing for all the undoubted difficulties which His Majesty's Government are surrounded- and they are great- refusal to relieve India of the functions of agent in respect of these refugees, when the agent had clearly and with reason expressed unwillingness and inability to continue the agency, seems to ignore the very basis on which the agency came into being. It is sincerely to be hoped that His Majesty's Government's decision may be reconsidered in light of our last telegram No. 7190 of the 18 August, 1946.

I have the honour to be,

Sir

Your most obedient servant,

(Signed) A.W.T. Webb.

Principal Refugee Officer,

ex-officio; Deputy Secretary,

Commonwealth Relations Department

Source 4 Task

How would you describe the tone and attitude in Section 2 of this report concerning evacuees?

How does Section 3 explain the delay in the repatriation of Polish evacuees?

What has been the impact of this delay for the Poles?

How many Polish evacuees are in India currently?

What arrangements have been made for Polish orphans?

How has this policy been viewed by Polish Refugee Welfare Committee in India?

What do you think about this view?

What attitude does the author of the report source infer about Indian Independence in Section 3?

Why does the author feel that the 'comparison of the cases demobilized soldiers with those of displaced refugees does not seem reasonable'.

How successful has been the repatriation of evacuees from the Far East?

Why is Captain Webb concerned about the situation in India for European refugees remaining there?

How does the final paragraph reflect the concerns hinted at in paragraph 2?

Source 5: Letter from H. Jacques to the Foreign Office, 1946

Page 1

Catalogue Ref: FO 371/57815

[The 'free passage system' meant free passage by boat was provided by the Colonial Office. Balkan peoples today would include Greeks, Albanians, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bosnian Muslims.]

COPY

833070 Sgt/Sur. H. Jacques,
72, Bombay St.,
Blackburn,
Lancs.

Dear Sir,

During my tour of overseas service I met and became engaged to a Balkan Refugee, Miss T. Caruama, B.E.C., Coimbatore, S. India - unfortunately due to my unexpected repatriation there wasn't sufficient time for us to get married, but it was arranged through the Principal Refugee Officer, Delhi, to have her sent to the U.K. under a free passage - during my correspondence with Delhi I wrote a guarantee that:-

(a) I or my people would meet her at the port of arrival.

(b) That I would be responsible for her maintenance until such times we became man and wife.

(c) That should anything happen which would prevent our marriage, I would pay her fare back to the country from whence she came, should she so desire it.

Miss Caruama has now been informed from Delhi that her passage to the U.K. cannot be granted due to the fact that she has not got any home ties here. Sir, I would like to point out that since my arrival in the U.K. I have spent a considerable amount of money on preparing a home, with the view to getting married to Miss Caruama and also Miss Caruama in recent months has suffered very badly with nerves due to this present worry of having her passage to the U.K. stopped and also due to the local political tension which is prevalent throughout India at the present time.

/All

Source 5: Letter from H. Jacques to the Foreign Office, 1946

Page 2

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All this Sir I put down to be inefficiency of Delhi, for they gave me to understand quite clearly that once they got the above mentioned guarantees there would be no difficulty in sending Miss Caruama to the U.K. under the free passage system.

Sir, may I plead with you to grant a free passage to Miss Caruama, so that she can become my wife in the U.K. Trusting that I shall get an early and favourable reply, I remain,

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) H. Jacques.

Source 5 Transcript

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Yours faithfully,

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Source 5 Task

Read the Background Section on Maltese and Balkan refugees in Coimbatore for more historical context.

Why has Sergeant Jacques written this letter to the authorities?

What is the tone and attitude of his letter?

Can you explain why Miss Caruama is living in Coimbatore, Southern India? [Clue: see Source 6, paragraph 4]

How can personal letters contribute to our understanding of the issues surrounding refugees after the Second World War?

What questions does this letter raise about repatriation?

What issues does this letter raise about the meaning of term 'home'?

Source 6: Report from the Principal Refugee Officer in New Delhi to the Secretary of the Government of India at the Commonwealth Relations Department, 6 January 1947

Page 1

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

The Principal Refugee Officer,
Government of India,
Commonwealth Relations Department,
NEW DELHI 3.

To:- The Secretary to the
Government of India,
Commonwealth Relations Department,
NEW DELHI 3.

No. 50/46-Poll (Evn)

Dated New Delhi, 6th January, 1947.

Subject:- Maintenance of Evacuees accommodated in India.

Sir,

In accordance with instructions, I have the honour to submit an eleventh report on the reception and accommodation of and other matters concerning evacuees, for whom His Majesty's Government have accepted financial liability, or who are evacuees sponsored by Allied Governments. The report covers the period 1.9.46 to date.

2. General Remarks.

The period under review may fairly be described as one of frustration. The absence of any decision by His Majesty's Government concerning our proposals for the resettlement of Maltese and Balkan evacuees (vide paragraph 4 of my last report), or even of His Majesty's Government's agreement to provide passages for such of these persons who have secured visas for countries in Europe and elsewhere and who have guaranteed maintenance there (vide our telegram No. 10642 dated 17.12.46), has caused widespread dissatisfaction as evidenced by the large number of letters received and couched, often, in abusive terms. These people feel they are being kept in India unnecessarily, are suffering in health and losing opportunities for re-establishing themselves. They cannot understand why priority of departure has been accorded to Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees. Nothing that we can say mollifies them. Indeed, if the truth be told, we have done all we can to speed their departure, but so far our efforts have been in vain. Unless something is decided soon as to the future of these people, it is certain that they will get badly out of hand. Already the Commandant of the British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore, is complaining that his position is becoming intolerable and discipline is lax.

In respect of the Poles the situation is no better. The changeover of paymaster from His Majesty's Government to UNRRA has necessitated such drastic cuts in the budgets that the Poles are convinced that there is a plot to force them back to Poland. Where before we had their trust and esteem, we are now coming to be regarded as co-plotters with UNRRA and the Provisional Polish Government. But the worst effect is the apparent probability that the Government of India may now, unless a strong line is taken, become involved in Polish politics. This matter will be dealt with more fully in the paragraph which follows.

3. Polish Refugees.

Since last August, 1946 funds for the maintenance of Polish Refugees in India are being provided by UNRRA. The agreement reached between His Majesty's Government and UNRRA in this respect is essentially a financial one, and UNRRA have not undertaken administrative responsibility for these refugees. UNRRA, however, have reserved the right to request the removal of any Poles who indulge in any undesirable political activities or who prove an obstacle to repatriation. Mr. Eggers, in his d.c. dated 9.11.46, to the undersigned summed up the position as follows:-

"The position under the agreement is really that the Government of India are now administering Polish Refugees on behalf of His Majesty's Government whereas, between July, 1945 and the end of July 1946, they were doing this on behalf of the Interim Treasury Committee. For practical purposes I recognise that there is little fundamental difference between the two positions, but it does mean the Polish administrative staff, who have regarded themselves as employed by the Interim Treasury Committee must no longer maintain contact with the Committee. In so far as the Government of India may decide to retain their services either in administrative, educational, welfare or other capacities such Poles will now be directly employed by the Government of India and answerable to them for their conduct."

Source 6: Report from the Principal Refugee Officer in New Delhi to the Secretary of the Government of India at the Commonwealth Relations Department, 6 January 1947

Page 2

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The reservation as to UNRRA's right to ask for the removal of any Poles for political reasons may, or certainly will, if put into effect, have embarrassing repercussions for the Government of India. As early as July, 1944, when the question of UNRRA assuming financial responsibility was under discussion, it was made clear (vide telegram to the Secretary of State No. 9063 of 10.7.44) that it was considered essential for the Government of India to exercise, as in the past the fullest discretion, both administrative and financial, in dealing with these refugees. The present Polish staff, it must be realised, was selected before the present political differences arose. They were chosen for their suitability and qualifications; their political views were no criterion. If now politics are to become a criterion and those who are hostile to the present regime in Poland are to be considered unfit for office, it is safe to say that every single one of them will have to be removed. It is not believed that the present Polish Government could provide sufficient doctors, school masters/mistresses, priests, administrative officers, etc. required for so large a camp. Even if they could, it is safe to assert that they would be boycotted, the schools emptied and that the whole administration and life of the camp would come to a standstill. Openly at least there is no attempt to dissuade persons from returning to Poland if they wish to do so, but our experiences with Miss Burakiewicz, sent from Cairo to persuade persons to return to Poland, do not encourage the idea that mere talking or even financial curtailments will have any effect. The present population of the Camp is too well indoctrinated with anti-Warsaw views, and the only thing which might change them would be letters from Poland from their friends and relatives, assuring them that conditions there are better than painted. In any case, the Government of India would seem to have no choice but to insist that no changes in staff be made at the dictation of UNRRA which would impede or disrupt the present administration. Should this view not be accepted, then the alternative would appear to be to ask for the Poles to be removed from India.

On the financial side, the Government of India are doing everything possible to keep expenditure within the UNRRA capitation grant of £5/- p.m. Should, despite every effort, it prove impossible to keep within this limit, then the Government of India must call upon His Majesty's Government to make good the difference. This was always a condition of the Government of India's agency in respect of foreign nationals who took war-time refuge in India.

The chief difficulty to be faced is the fact that the estimated life of the camp buildings has been exceeded, and it is certain that extensive renovations will be necessary. We are awaiting a report from the Central Public Works Department of the amount involved. For the rest, the fluctuations in population cause concern. Recently, 154 Poles were repatriated and more recently a dozen or so girls left for Bombay for training as hospital nurses. The loss in capitation grants for these people is serious since administration costs will remain, practically, the same.

Belachadi and Panchgani camps have been closed and all the Polish refugees have been concentrated in the one remaining camp at Kolhapur.

Lt. Col. Neate's services have been terminated from 31.12.46 and Lt. Col. Bhalla, a Sikh officer of the I.A.M.C., has been appointed in his stead. The selection of a medical officer as Commandant has one great advantage. He can check up on the work of the Camp Hospital staff. It is there that the biggest ramps have been perpetrated in the past.

4. The British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore.

As already mentioned many of the inmates of the camp are becoming restless at their prolonged stay in India. This restlessness is most evident among the Balkan and Maltese evacuees. Their morale has declined and there are serious complaints from the civil authorities concerning their lack of discipline and ill-behaviour in the town and elsewhere. Evacuees from Malaya and Hong Kong have now all been repatriated. Concerning evacuees from Burma; a request to the Burma Government for their early repatriation is being pressed.

Source 6: Report from the Principal Refugee Officer in New Delhi to the Secretary of the Government of India at the Commonwealth Relations Department, 6 January 1947

Page 3

Catalogue Ref: HO 213/1190

A novelty has been complaints by a number of evacuees about their individual accounts. In the past all were only too pleased to get every penny they could out of Government. Now, with repatriation in view, they have begun to question the fairness of debits for rent, light, water and supervision. A suitable reply has been sent to them.

There is no good in shutting our eyes, however, to the fact that the majority of these people will never be able to repay the assistance rendered to them. Every month they remain adds to the weight of debt which will eventually have to be written off. Any reasonable scheme, to resettle them, therefore, would appear to be justified financially.

5. Statistics.

For the sake of convenience, statistics are given in an appendix. The health of the camps, during the period under review, has been good.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient servant,
(Sgd) Arch. W.T. Webb.
Principal Refugee Officer,
ex-officio: Deputy Secretary,
Commonwealth Relations Department.

Source 6 Transcript

UNRRA means United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration formed to provide economic assistance to European nations after the Second World War and to repatriate and assist the refugees who would come under Allied control.

The Principal Refugee Officer Government of India
Commonwealth Relations Department
NEW DELHI 3.

The Secretary of the
Government of India
Commonwealth Relations Department
NEW DELHI 3

No. 50/46-Poll (Evn)

Dated New Delhi, 6th January 1947.

Subject:- Maintenance of Evacuees accommodated in India

Sir

In accordance with instructions, I have the honour to submit an eleventh report on the reception and accommodation of and other matters concerning evacuees, for whom His Majesty's Government have accepted financial liability, or who are evacuees sponsored by Allied Governments. The report covers the period 1.9.46 to date.

2. General Remarks

The period under review may fairly be described as one of frustration. The absence of any decision by His Majesty's Government concerning our proposal for the resettlement of Maltese and Balkan evacuees (vide paragraph 4 of my last report), or even of His Majesty's Government's agreement to provide passages for such of these persons who have secured visas for countries in Europe and elsewhere and who have guaranteed maintenance there (vide [consult] our telegram No. 10642 dated 17.12.46), has caused widespread dissatisfaction as evidenced by the large number of letters received and couched, often, in abusive terms. These people feel they are being kept in India unnecessarily, are suffering in health and

Source 6 Transcript

losing opportunities for re-establishing themselves. They cannot understand why priority of departure has been accorded to Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees. Nothing that we can say mollifies [appeases] them. Indeed, if the truth be told, we have done all we can to speed their departure, but so far, our efforts have been in vain. Unless something is decided soon, as to the future of these people, it is certain that they will get badly out of hand. Already the Commandant of the British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore, is complaining that his position is becoming intolerable, and discipline is lax.

In respect of the Poles the situation is no better. The changeover of paymaster from His Majesty's Government to UNRRA has necessitated such drastic cuts in the budgets that the Poles are convinced that there is a plot to force them back to Poland. Where before we had their trust and esteem, we are now coming to be regarded as co-plotters with UNRRA and the Provisional Polish Government. But the worst effect is the apparent probability that the Government of India may now, unless a strong line is taken, become involved in Polish politics. This matter will be dealt with more fully in the paragraph which follows.

3. Polish Refugees.

Since last August 1946 funds for the maintenance of Polish Refugees in India are being provided by UNRRA. The agreement reached between His Majesty's Government and UNRRA is essentially a financial one, and UNRRA have not undertaken administrative responsibility for these refugees. UNRRA, however, have reserved the right to request the removal of any Poles who indulge in any undesirable political activities or who prove an obstacle to repatriation. Mr. Eggers, in his d.o. dated 9.11.46 to the undersigned summed up the position as follows:-

"The position under the agreement is really that the Government of India are now administering Polish refugees in behalf of His Majesty's Government whereas, between July 1945 and the end of July 1946, they were doing this on behalf of the Interim Treasury Committee. For practical purposes I recognise that there is little fundamental difference between the two positions, but it does mean the Polish administrative staff, who have regarded themselves as employed by the Interim Treasury Committee must no longer maintain contact with the Committee. In so far as the Government of India may decide to retain their services either in administrative, educational, welfare or other capacities such

Source 6 Transcript

Poles will now be directly employed by the Government of India and answerable to them and their contact."

Page 2

This reservation as to UNRRA's right to ask for the removal of any Poles for political reasons may, or certainly will, if put into effect, have embarrassing repercussions for the Government of India. As early as July 1944, when the question of UNRRA assuming financial responsibility was under discussion, it was made clear (vide telegram to the Secretary of State No. 9063 of 10.7.44) that it was considered essential for the Government of India to exercise, as in the past the fullest discretion, both administrative and financial, in dealing with these refugees. The present Polish staff, it must be realised, was selected before the present political differences arose. They were chosen for their suitability and qualifications; their political views were not criterion. If now politics are to become a criterion and those who are hostile to the present regime in Poland are to be considered unfit for office, it is safe to say that every single one of them will have to be removed. It is not believed that the present Polish Government could provide sufficient doctors, school masters/mistresses, priests, administrative officers etc. required for so large a camp. Even if they could, it is safe to assert that they would be boycotted, the schools emptied and that the whole administration and life of the camp would come to a standstill. Openly at least there is no attempt to dissuade persons from returning to Poland if they wish to do so, but our experience with Miss Burakiewicz, sent from Cairo to persuade persons to return to Poland, do not encourage the idea that mere talking or even financial curtailments will have any effect. The present population of the Camp is too well indoctrinated with anti-Warsaw views, and the only thing which might change them would be letters from their friends and relatives, assuring them that conditions there are better than painted. In any case, the Government of India would seem to have no choice but to insist that no changes in staff be made at the dictates of UNRRA which would not impede or disrupt the present administration. Should this view not be accepted, then the alternative would appear to be to ask for the Poles to be removed from India.

On the financial side, the Government of India are doing everything possible to keep expenditure within the UNRRA capitation grant of £5/- p.m. [per month] Should, despite every effort it prove impossible to keep within this limit, then the Government of India must call

Source 6 Transcript

upon His Majesty's Government to make good the difference. This was always a condition of the Government of India's agency in respect of foreign nationals who took war-time refuge in India.

The chief difficulty to be faced is the fact that the estimated life of the camp buildings has been exceeded, and it is certain that extensive renovations will be necessary. We are awaiting a report from the Central Public Works Department of the amount involved. For the rest, the fluctuations in population cause concern. Recently, 154 Poles were repatriated and more recently a dozen or so girls left for Bombay for training as hospital nurses. The loss in capitation grants for these people is serious since administration costs will remain, practically, the same.

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4. The British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore

As already mentioned many of the inmates of the camp are becoming restless at their prolonged stay in India. This restlessness is most evident among the Balkan and Maltese evacuees. Their morale has declined and there are serious complaints from the civil authorities concerning their lack of discipline and ill-behaviour in the town and elsewhere. Evacuees from Malaya and Hong Kong have now all been repatriated. Concerning evacuees from Burma; a request to the Burma Government for their early repatriation is being pressed.

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A novelty has been complaints by a number of evacuees about their individual accounts. In the past all were only too pleased to get every penny they could out of the Government. Now, with repatriation in view, they have begun to question the fairness of debits for rent, light, water and supervision. A suitable reply has been sent to them.

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Source 6 Transcript

will never be able to repay the assistance rendered to them. Every month they remain adds to the weight of debt which will eventually have to be written off. Any reasonable scheme, to resettle them, therefore, would appear to be justified financially.

5. For the sake of convenience statistics are given in an appendix. The health of the camps, during the period under review, has been good.

I have the honour to be,

Sir

Your most obedient servant.

(Signed) Arch. W. T. Webb

The Principal Refugee Officer,

Ex-officio: Deputy Secretary,

Commonwealth Relations Department

Source 6 Task

Read the Background Section on Maltese and Balkan refugees in Coimbatore for more historical context.

What is type of document is this?

Explain the difference between a prisoner of war and an evacuee.

Can you imagine how they might have been treated differently?

Why are evacuees in India dissatisfied with the British Government's management of repatriation?

How have some evacuees responded to this situation? Can you give examples from this lesson to support this?

Which organisation is responsible for the care of Polish evacuees?

According to the report, how has this impacted on the Poles?

What are conditions like for refugees at Kolhapur camp in India according to this report?

What does this report infer about the organisation of post second world war migration?

Source 7: Letter to Queen Elizabeth II from Mrs Soffe in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, 13 August 1949

Catalogue Ref: DO 35/4191

COPY.

D/13/8/49.

To: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth,
Queen of Great Britain,
Buckingham Palace,
LONDON.

Dear Madame,

I have taken the opportunity of placing my grievance before Your Majesty and I trust Your Majesty will have some compassion on me and my family. I have seven little ones, during the riots of 1946 and 47 we lost our home and property, and the little money we possessed was looted from us and left us stranded. My husband who has been since doing odd jobs to keep the family going has been given a month's notice. As there are no jobs in this country for us Europeans and Anglo-Indians, since this Indian Government has taken over our kind is treated worse than Indian and we are also told to quit India as there is no place for us Europeans and Anglo-Indians in this country. Our daughters are abused and insulted by these Indians when seen on the streets. We have no other means and I will be going to hospital for my confinement in September. I have 'nt the means to get the few necessary things that are required for and needed in a confinement such as clothes and medicines etc. I trust Your Majesty will have some compassion on me and help me with fifty pounds which will also enable me to make my little ones some clothes and bedding etc. which they have been in great need of. I wish to also bring to Your Majesty's notice that my husband who is an Ex-N.C.O. had the pleasure of being a Mounted Orderly for His Majesty the late King George V when he came to India for the Delhi Durbar in 1911 and 12. I shall be ever so thankful and grateful and so will my little ones pray and may God bless the Royal Family.

I beg to remain Your Majesty's
Most humble Servant,

(Sgd.) MRS. M. SOFFE,
Block No. 249,
SAHARANPUR, U.P.

Source 7 Transcript

The Delhi Durbar of 1911 was a coronation ceremony held in Delhi on 12 December 1911 to mark the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary as Emperor and Empress of India.

N.C.O: An officer who does not hold a commission. He will have entered the ranks and earned his position through promotion, On the other hand, commissioned officers usually enter directly from a military academy or after some kind of training.

Mounted Orderly: A commissioned officer assigned to an officer as a personal man servant. In this case a member of the cavalry.

The period after the Second World War saw the rise of mass movements across India, reflecting the growing demand for independence.

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I beg to remain Your Majesty's

Most Humble Servant

Signed Mrs M. Soffe.

Block No. 249

SAHARANPUR, U.P.

Source 7 Task

Read the Background Section on Maltese and Balkan refugees in Coimbatore for more historical context.

Why has Mrs Softe written to Queen Elizabeth II?

What can we find out about from the letter about:

- (a) Her personal situation
- (b) The political situation in India
- (c) The British Empire

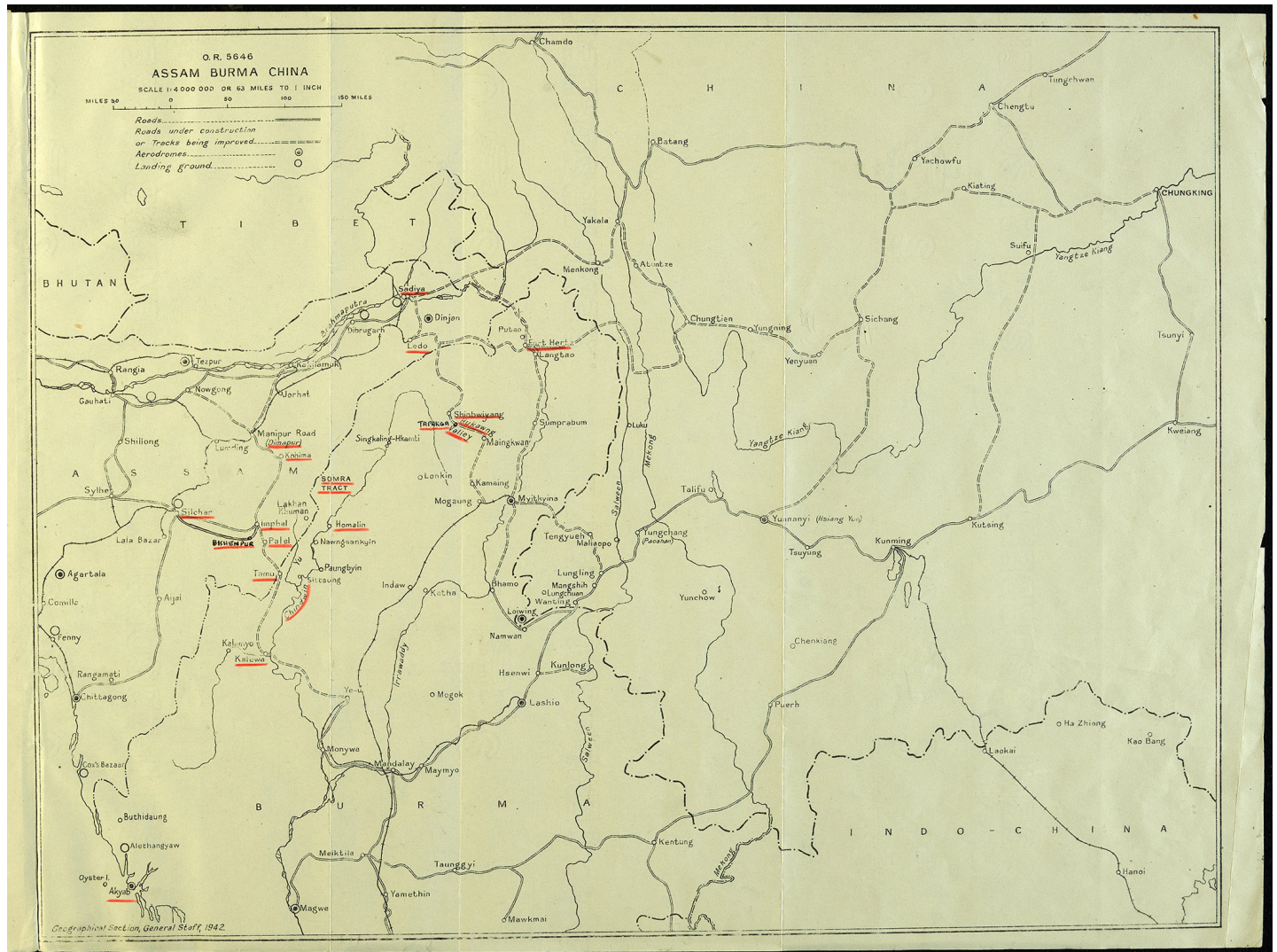
Why is the address for the sender of this letter given as 'Block no. 249'?

Why is this letter part of the Dominions Office collection?

Find out more about the Partition of Indian in 1947 for further context for this source.

Source 8: Map showing the routes taken by refugees travelling from Burma to India after Japanese bombing December 1941-February 1942

Catalogue ref: WO 106/3710



Source 8 Task

Read the Background Section on Burmese refugees for more historical context.

Use the Background section on Burmese refugees to find the routes on the map that refugees might have taken out of Burma?

Why might these journeys have been so difficult?

List of Sources

Cover illustration Image: Burmese civilians pulling a cart during the evacuation of Rangoon, 1942. Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection © Imperial War Museum Catalogue ref: JAR 1230

Source 1: Extracts from a Home office minute sheet, 17-25 June 1946, Catalogue ref: HO 213/1190

Source 2: Report to the Cabinet from the Polish Forces Committee concerning the removal of Polish refugees from India, 18th July 1946, Catalogue ref: HO 213/1190

Source 3: Notes for the Secretary of State relating to a Ministerial Committee on Polish Forces for the India Office, 16 July 1946, Catalogue ref: HO 213/1190

Source 4: Report from A.W.T. Webb, Principal Refugee Officer, Government of India in New Delhi (who holds the role due to his status/another position) sent to the Secretary of the Government of India, Department of the Commonwealth, 31 August 1946, Catalogue ref: HO 213/1190

Source 5: Letter from H. Jacques to the Foreign Office, 1946 Catalogue ref: FO 371/57815

Source 6: Report from the Principal Refugee Officer in New Delhi to the Secretary of the Government of India at the Commonwealth Relations Department, 6 January 1947, Catalogue ref: HO 213/1190

Source 7: Letter to Queen Elizabeth II from Mrs Soffe in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, 13 August 1949, Catalogue ref: DO 35/4191

Source 8: Map showing routes taken by refugees travelling from Burma to India after Japanese bombing December 1941-February 1942, Catalogue ref: WO 106/3710



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

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The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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