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Veterans of '56: II
The Agencies - Tangible Conscience of the West

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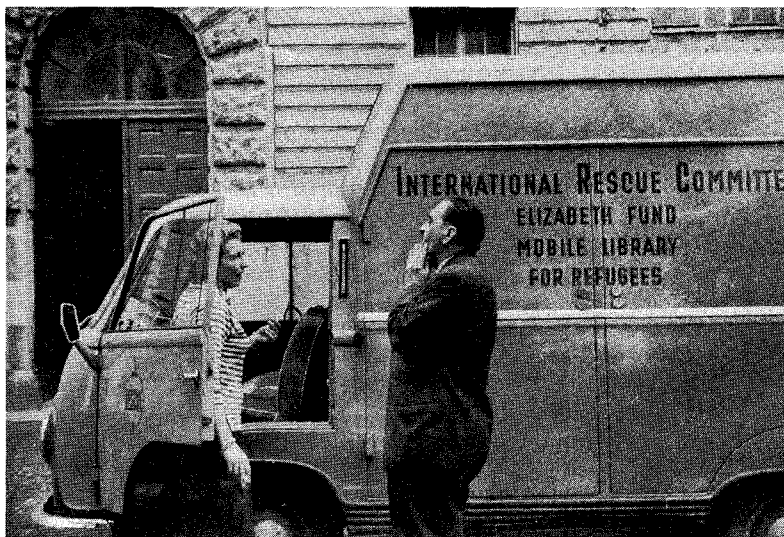
Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The bookmobile is a medium gray, and on the panels large black letters announce, in English, "Elizabeth Fund - Mobile Library for Refugees." Elizabeth is Elizabeth Riedl, an Austrian woman who had the idea for a mobile library and a small amount of the money. The vehicle and the original endowment of books came from the International Rescue Committee, a non-sectarian American organization doing refugee relief work. The salary of the operator and some 12,000 Austrian Schillings (\$450) a month for the purchase of new books (the turnover - i.e., theft rate - being very high) come from the United States Escapee Program, an official U.S. government agency. Books are donated by many agencies and individuals, including the U.S. Information Service, which supplies little books written in Washington to explain American democracy - in English - to the world's doubters. These no one ever reads, or even steals. The operator of the bookmobile is a retired Hungarian countess, Austrian by birth, Hungarian by marriage, Bulgarian by name, and Argentinian by present citizenship. The bookmobile, she says firmly, is the worst possible vehicle for the library as it finally evolved, since her job is to deposit and pick up boxes of books at and from each camp library, and for this the bookmobile, designed as an integral portable library, is unnecessarily large, topheavy, and awkward for a lady to handle over Austrian provincial roads.

The Elizabeth Fund Mobile Library is, in short, a perfect specimen of the relief work being carried on for Hungarian refugees in Austria today - the tangible evidence of continuing Western concern and conscience. The idea was good. The Library answers a genuine and obvious need - a more serious need in refugee camps, where the real enemy is boredom, than in most places. That it was created in response to an on-the-spot need seen by a voluntary organization is typical. That the tab for running expenses is now being picked up by a government agency is also typical. That the project suffers from the burden of this typical history is sadly commonplace. In an unusual situation in which governments and private agencies alike had to make decisions and projects ad hoc and without prior experience, bookmobiles were too often bought where panel trucks would have been cheaper and more efficient. And when governments and private agencies, all eager to be helpful, rushed in (and when no one of them was equipped to do the whole job by itself), an administrative muddle resulted that is undeniably a muddle, no matter how often the workers declare loyalty to an outsider that all is really for the best in the best of all possible agency worlds.

The outsider is equally bound to admit, if he looks far enough, that it is after all the best of all existing refugee worlds (no refugee world is good), and that the



governments (Austrian, UNO, and US) and agencies (religious and non-sectarian) are doing a conscientious job of wading through their own muddle to frequent effectiveness. Undoubtedly all those involved have learned much, and when the Hungarian refugee situation is repeated somewhere else they should be able to handle it more efficiently and (what is important) more painlessly.

At first the unwary student, bumping into bureaucracy where he was looking for humanitarianism, is convinced that there is no order in the work, and probably not much humanity. The alphabet soup the relevant organizations have made of themselves is surely equalled only by Washington during the Great Depression: UNHCR, UNREF, USEP, ICEM (formerly PICMME), CERF, IRC, WCC, NCWC, etc. Of course they all call one another by these alphabet abbreviations (except for the American Joint Distribution Committee, which calls itself "American Joint"), and the buzzing in one's head that comes with the first hour's conversation with them may account for the small number of Hungarian refugees who decided to return to Hungary.

It is only from the top of the mountain - represented here by the local office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - that a pattern becomes apparent. Here one sees the governmental agencies, which have the money, spending it through the voluntary agencies, which have the counsellors, the experience, and generally less restrictive charters, to reach the refugees. For a number of reasons this is probably not the best possible arrangement.

There are three possible solutions to a refugee problem: repatriation, emigration, or integration. A very few of the Hungarians elected the first solution, after interviews with Hungarian repatriation commissions carefully supervised by UN or Austrian officials. For almost all of them, however, emigration or integration remained the only solutions, and either requires a lot of money. The two (alone with relief in the camps, not a solution and therefore always considered temporary) are the tasks of both the governmental and private organizations.

The UN High Commissioner's mandate is limited by a restrictive definition of "refugee" that definitely excludes East Germans who have fled to West Germany and probably excludes Yugoslavs who have fled to Austria. But it does include the Hungarians. The High Commissioner's first problem is the legal status of the refugees included in his mandate, since it was in recognition of this problem that he was established. Since the refugee, by definition, either has no nationality or is unwilling or unable "to avail himself of the protection of the government of the country of his nationality" (UNO wording), the High Commissioner takes over the functions of a "government" for the refugee, supplying him with necessary legal documents and passports and concerned that his legal rights are recognized by the country of his residence. But in any case, UNO's interest in the refugee ends when the refugee accepts citizenship in some country of refuge and, by UNO definition, ceases to be a refugee. The High Commissioner cannot therefore be interested in any subsequent problems of integration.

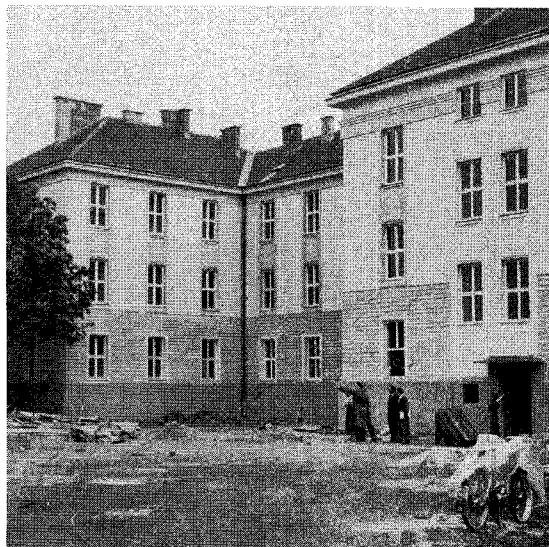
The United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF) handles the non-legal work done by the High Commissioner, but is generally limited by the same definitions, and by the meager response of most UNO members to the High Commissioner's appeals for funds. For the Hungarians UNREF's most spectacular project is the building of 1000 flats that will house about 3000 refugees when completed. The work has now begun at the old Kaiser Ebersdorf caserne, where one former barracks is being converted into some 48 flats and two others are scheduled for similar alteration. The extraordinary rent laws of Austria (left over from Imperial days) make such a housing project especially important. The ordinary citizen or visitor here must pay an outrageous rent for a sub-lease or else make a sizeable capital investment to "buy" a primary lease which carries with it controlled rents at (sometimes) pre-1914 levels. The UN project will give the Hungarians modern flats with all conveniences including central heating (still a rare luxury here) for 150 Schillings (\$6) a month. (The refugees have learned never to be satisfied; in this instance, they are complaining bitterly because Kaiser Ebersdorf is a long hour's tram ride from downtown Vienna!)

The United States Escapee Program (USEP), like UNREF, is interested in financing emigration or integration, and spends most of its money through the private

agencies. Both UNREF and USEP even pay the salaries of agency councillors. USEP's only advantage over the United Nations agency is that it escapes the UNO's restrictive definition of refugee. In fact no one (including USEP employees I have talked to) seems to know why the American government elected to establish a separate organization instead of supplying more money to the UN agency it was in principle committed to support. (Says Elfan Rees, longtime UNRWA and World Council of Churches refugee worker, in a booklet for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: "The declared motives for (USEP's) establishment are unexceptionable, its record of service is outstanding, but why it is unilateral in a day of international organization remains a mystery.") UNO employees are openly critical of what appears to them unnecessary duplication.

But of duplication this is only the beginning.

When the new refugee sits down to fill out what will be only the first of hundreds of forms and questionnaires, he is often startled to find that one of the first things he is asked is his religion. I thought, he protests, the asking of that question was one of the things I had escaped. The Austrian official explains patiently that help - and money - are administered largely through voluntary religious bodies, that in principle most of these sectarian agencies accept people of any faith, but in practice it would be convenient to know the refugee's confession so that one would know to which agency it would be most appropriate to send him. In Vienna I have been referred to the offices of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the World Council of Churches (Protestant), the Lutheran World Federation, and the American Joint Distribution Committee (Jewish). I was told there is also a Moslem refugee agency here, but no one seems to know the address.



UNO HOUSING AT KAISER EBERSDORF

All of these do much the same work: counselling, arranging emigration, administering integration funds for those who stay. The money comes from UNREF and USEP. USEP, for example, will pay the complete cost of emigration. (Transportation is not the only expensive item in such a move; providing the required copies of all the required documents - birth certificates, marriage license, divorce decrees, military records, etc. - can amount to over \$100 per family. One of the curiosities of the 1956 story is that, in the midst of revolution, almost all those who fled remembered to collect all these legal documents to bring with them.)

For those who cannot emigrate anywhere - the aged and the sick or their families - USEP will make a grant of what is considered an equivalent sum of \$500 per person for integration. No one who is eligible to emigrate is eligible for this grant. Since several European countries, notably Sweden and Switzerland, have done a creditable job of accepting the old and sick, while the United States has generally been careful to admit only the healthy and the potential economic assets, this grant by an American government agency smells a little like guilt money.

For some classes of those who still hope to emigrate (and therefore cannot get USEP money), UNREF has a loan fund, advancing from \$800 (for a single person) to \$1600 (for a family) for living expenses, or up to \$1200 for housing. These must be repaid in five to ten years and interest of one to two per cent is charged.

The volume of work is typified by the World Council of Churches office here. The director told me that his organization works with people of all religious faiths, but his counsellors said that, in fact, only protestants had ever been processed. They now have one hundred families registered. They are able to process these at a rate of 8-10 a month for UNREF loans, or a total of 50 families in the past half year.

Some refugees have naturally decided that it would be a clever game to play the agencies off against one another. Only one agency head was objective enough to tell me she thought this game, if restricted to looking for "the best deal", was fair enough. But for most agencies the game has merely stirred a sense of rivalry and resentment. This inter-agency attitude is typified by one counsellor for a denominational agency who described one of the non-sectarian agencies to me as "uncooperative" because "they have no clientele of their own and so go around fishing in other agencies' ponds." This attitude seems incredible, when the purpose of all the agencies is supposed to be providing the refugee with the best help possible, until one recalls the exact analogy of agency rivalry within Community Chests in America.

Another form of "jurisdictional dispute" is provided by the refugee who is for some reason disqualified by the agency to which he would naturally apply. The most obvious example is the divorced Catholic or Jew who is statutorily ineligible for help from the Catholic or Jewish agencies.

It is the needs of these and other odd cases - notably intellectuals and free-thinkers - that justify the existence of yet another class of agency, the non-sectarian, and their work, because most independent, is in many ways the most interesting.

One of these is the International Rescue Committee. It is also one of the oldest organizations dedicated exclusively to the refugee problem: it was founded in 1933 "as a voluntary non-sectarian private organization to aid escapees from political oppression," at that time in Germany and Italy. The IRC has always concentrated its work on intellectuals and still does so, although here it operates the Bookmobile and a home for refugee children as related projects. Although the private money backing the organization in America is considerable (Angier Biddle Duke is the president), it is here another large spender of USEP funds.

Herr Röhrholt, the High Commissioner's representative, had mentioned intellectuals as the most serious integration problem. Doris Duffy, the IRC's explosive Irish-American chief in Vienna, concurred. "What," she demanded of me, "will you do with a Hungarian journalist or writer - a damned good one - who can only write in Magyar and, say, Polish?" Doctors, too, are a problem, and the IRC is proud of having settled fifteen of them in the US in the past year. A typical IRC case was a woman who is a restorer of old paintings - a highly skilled craft, but one for which demand is limited and specialized. A place was eventually found for this woman, on excellent terms, with the Fort Worth Museum in Texas, USA.

The IRC also runs a special program for psychiatric cases among refugee youths (are psychiatric adolescents considered a form of intellectuals?) between the ages of 15-19, in cooperation with the Vienna Child Guidance Committee. Some 55 Hungarian youths in the 16-19 age group have been sent through the IRC to Hochleiten, a privately owned model "workers' village" for apprenticed youths north of Vienna, where they are mixed with some 200 Austrian young men of the same age. The importance of projects like these is proved by the special problems encountered in refugees in this age group.

The bureaucratic disadvantages of the general system, in which government funds are administered on a contract basis through sectarian agencies, responsible also to their own national or international headquarters far away, is even better demonstrated by the success record of another fundamentally non-sectarian agency, which happens to operate without USEP or UNREF contracts. This is Quäker Hilfe, run jointly until this year by the American Friends Service Committee and the Friends Service Council of London, when for technical reasons the AFSC took over sole responsibility. (Although the Quakers are a religious organization, the facts that they are not classifiable as Catholic or Protestant and that there are no Quakers among the refugees have meant that they are in effect non-sectarian.)

Miss Julia Branson is the thin, grayhaired American spinster who runs Quäker Hilfe in Vienna. The grace of her hands, the confident evenness of her voice and

the penetration of her judgments, with the level coolness of her eyes in appraisal and their warmth in subsequent welcome, mark her as one of the best and most admirable of her species. She supervises a staff of about 35, including warehousemen, (Quakerhilfe has had bedding and secondhand furniture available for refugees trying to set up housekeeping), and six integration counsellors.

"Our advantage," she says, "is that we spend our own money and don't have to refer to our own or anybody else's headquarters for permission. We make our own decisions." Consequently Quakerhilfe has been able to pinch-hit in all those cases - and they are numerous - which other organizations because of bureaucratic technicalities cannot touch. Their success in this sometimes sensitive work is witnessed by the rare and universal praise given them by all the sectarian agencies and by the fact that these agencies make a practice of sending the refugees they cannot help to the Quakers.

The story of Quakerhilfe in Austria is the history of the refugee cause here. The American and British Friends came back to Vienna in 1946 to re-establish Quakerhaus, their international center for "the promotion of international friendship and understanding," originally established here in 1919 but closed in 1942 when international friendship and understanding were not conspicuous Central European virtues. Quakerhaus was reopened in 1948 and by 1950 the Friends were deeply involved in integration work with what was then Austria's largest refugee group, the Volksdeutsche. Quakerhilfe was set up as a separate unit.

The Volksdeutsche are and will remain the great unsung refugee problem of Europe. These are the former members of German speaking communities in Eastern Europe, many of them established as much as 600 years ago in the nether reaches of the Habsburg Empire and beyond. With the approval of the Allied Powers, many of them were expelled from their homelands at the end of the war, half-guilty victims of the anti-Germanism everyone was feeling just then. In 1958 the UN High Commissioner listed 26,000 of them in camps in Austria alone, where only 7000 Hungarians remained. The Volksdeutsche, who have been in the camps since 1945-6, will be there long after the rest of the Magyars have gone. In the face of the guilty silence of the great powers, the problem has been left to Austria and Germany.

It was not originally intended that Austria should have to take any of the Volksdeutsche, but legal technicalities caught most of the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche in the British and American zones of occupied Austria, on their way "home" to Germany, and have kept them here ever since. Most of them were farmers, and Austria in 1950 was already suffering from a flight from the farms that has grown in seriousness ever since. To Quakerhilfe came the idea that to settle some of the Volksdeutsche on the abandoned farms would be good for both refugees and Austria, and a farm loan plan was initiated. The UN High Commissioner thought this a bright idea and made available to the Friends a portion of a Ford Foundation grant given him for refugee work. This sum, only slightly shrunken (to \$90,000) as a result of some administrative expenses and the few loans that were never repaid, is still being continuously reinvested, both in Volksdeutsche and Hungarian projects.

By the summer of 1956 the Friends were looking for a way out of "the banking business" and seeking an Austrian agency to whom they could turn over the loan fund. Then came the Hungarian uprising and the flood of new refugees from the east. In February, 1957, while government and other private agencies were still operating on the assumption that all the Hungarians would emigrate further, Quakerhilfe made its first loan to help a Hungarian family establish itself permanently in Austria. Today they are the only agency doing no emigration work. For their integration work, meanwhile, they have added to the Ford Foundation funds some \$500,000 collected by American and British Friends for Hungarian relief. Even with this money the local office makes no distinction between Magyar refugees and those who are Yugoslavs, Poles, or Germans.

A survey like this of the relief and rehabilitation work being done with refugees begins to sound like a survey of the similar work done by similar organizations with all sorts of other social problem groups around the world. The similarity becomes even more marked when one begins to consider the smaller projects sponsored by other humanitarian organizations for the refugees - for example, the language classes run in the camps by the YWCA and YMCA.

The difference lies in the nature of the problem group: the refugees are an international problem, and one with serious political, as well as social, implications and dangers. The refugee is usually a more than normally political animal, and his political views will often concern both the state in which he lives and the state to which he originally belonged.

An appropriate symbol, at a relatively trivial level, of these political potentialities of the refugee situation is provided by the extra police guard placed this week, the anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, at the huge Red Army monument in Vienna's Schwarzenburgplatz. The Austrian government was committed in the State Treaty that re-established her sovereignty three years ago to the perpetual care of this unlovely memorial (known locally as "The Unknown Plunderer"). It would be awkward if local refugees or their native sympathisers (which means almost everyone) decided to mark the anniversary by marking the monument.

In West Germany, where the refugees for many years had a political party of national significance, and where they still are an important pressure group with extreme irridentist views on both the East German and trans-Oder-Neisse questions, the political implications of the refugee situation have been recognized. In the Middle East they are painfully obvious. But elsewhere they are largely ignored.

The lone emigre may be politically an insignificant creature, but refugees concentrated geographically by the tens of thousands, unintegrated and discontented, are a factor to be reckoned with politically as well as philanthropically.

It is with this in mind that the alphabet-soup, multiple-agency system of moving and integrating refugees should be evaluated. On the basis of the Hungarian experience in Austria, it seems very doubtful that a sectarian basis, or even a national one (as with USEP) is the best answer. On the other hand, it is some answer, and, until the United Nations decided to recognize that the refugee is and will remain a fixture of our age and expands the mandate of the High Commissioner so that he can deal adequately with both humanitarian and political aspects, the agency system seems likely to remain the only working answer.



IN NEED OF PROTECTION -
THE RED ARMY MEMORIAL IN WHAT WAS CALLED
STALINPLATZ, 1945-55

Sincerely,

Dennison Rusinow

Dennison Rusinow