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# Problem of refugees from the Soviet Zone of Germany

**Report**[1]
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population
Rapporteur: Mr Torstein SELVIK, Norway, Socialist Group

1. 1958 - 10th Session - Third part

**A. 1. Draft Resolution**

The Assembly,

Having regard to the uninterrupted flow of refugees from the Soviet Zone of Germany since the end of the war, the total of which now exceeds three millions;

Considering that this influx is due to the policy of oppression pursued in that part of Germany;

Having taken note of the situation created by this continual exodus in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin, on the one hand, and in the Soviet Zone of Germany, on the other hand;

Considering the political tension resulting from this situation in the heart of Europe;

Recalling its Resolution 153, which was adopted unanimously on 17th October 1958,

1. Calls the attention of the free world, and particularly that of the European nations and their Governments, to the tragic circumstances in which the people of the Soviet Zone of Germany are obliged to live;

2. Assures the refugees from that Zone, victims of the system of totalitarian oppression which has been forced upon them, and the authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany and of West Berlin, of its sympathy and solidarity;

3. Expresses its conviction that the problem of German refugees from the Soviet Zone is closely bound up with the settlement of the German problem and should thus be of concern to the whole of Europe.

**B. 2. Motion for an Order**

The Assembly,

Having taken note of the report of the Committee on Population and Refugees on the problem of refugees from the Soviet Zone of Germany (Doc. 932),

Instructs the Committee on Population and Refugees to continue its study of this question and to consider the contribution which the Council of Europe could make to a solution of the problem raised by the exodus from the Soviet Zone.

## C. 3. Explanatory Memorandum

**1.**

By Order No. 126, adopted unanimously on 15th October 1958, the Consultative Assembly instructed its Committee on Population and Refugees to investigate on the spot the problems raised by the constant and increasing influx of persons escaping from the Soviet Zone of Germany into West Berlin, and to report back to the Assembly.

Pursuant to that Order, the Committee on Population and Refugees visited Berlin oh 26th and 27th November 1958.

The various aspects of the problem of the refugees from the Soviet Zone were explained to the Committee by:

*M. Lemmer, Federal Minister for All- German Affairs;*

*M. Nahm, Secretary of State, Federal Ministry for Refugees, Expellees and War Victims;*

*M. Willy Brandt, Mayor of Berlin;*

*M. E. Bernoth, Senator in charge of Labour and Social Affairs of Land Berlin,*

Under the direction of M. Nahm, the Committee visited the refugee camp at Berlin- Marienfelde and, on 28th November 1958, went on to visit that at Giessen, in t he Federal Republic.

This report, based on statements made and written material supplied to the Committee and on numerous conversations on the spot, is drawn up in pursuance of Order 126.

### *1.1. I. A STEADY FLOW OF FUGITIVES*

#### *1.1.1. A. Some figures: an average of 20,000 refugees a month for 14 gears*

Since t he end of the war, and particularly since the Soviet imposed the division of Germany in 1949, after the Berlin blockage, a steady stream of thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, of fugitives from the Soviet Zone have entered the Federal Republic or West Berlin every month.

Only since 1st September 1949 have such refugees been systematically counted and registered in transit camps, chief among which are those of Berlin, Giessen and Uelzen.

The number of fugitives registered between 1st September 1949 and 31st December 1958 was 2,120,000.

The number of refugees from the Soviet Zone between 1945 and 31st August 1949 is estimated t o have been 850,000.

But it is known that since 1st September 1949, mainly during the great exodus of 1952 and 1953, a large number of escapees settled in West Berlin or the Federal Republic on their own initiative without passing through reception centres. The Federal authorities' estimate is approximately 430,000.

Thus, 3,400,000 persons in all?a number equal to the population of Norway (3,500,000)? have left the Soviet Zone of Germany since 1945 (see Appendix, Tables 1 and 2).

This means that a monthly average of 20,000 refugees have sought asylum in the Federal Republic or West Berlin since 1945. In point of fact, the figures fluctuate widely, in close correlation with month-to-month variations in the repressive treatment of the population of the Soviet Zone. The extreme limits so far have been 7,227 in January 1952 and 58,605 in March 1953.

#### *1.1.2. B. Some sociological data*

1. A classification by age groups of all refugees registered between 1949 and 1958 shows the predominance of youth. While young persons between 14 and 25 represent 17.9% of the population of the Federal Republic, the proportion is 35.7%, or double, among refugees (see Appendix, Table 3). It even rose to 4 5% in June 1955 and 60% in February and March 1958.

It should be mentionned that 20% of these young fugitives come to the West on their own, without their families. The adjustment of these " unattached " persons raises delicate problems. Brought up under a totalitarian system, and suddenly finding themselves thrown upon their own resources, they often become a

prey to moral confusion and disappointment. Hence quite a number of them (about 10%) return home after a few weeks or months. But the census figures show that at least a quarter of those who regret their move subsequently take the road to freedom again, this time for good.

2. Statistics show that males are still in the majority, though the proportion has fallen from 58% in 1955 to 52% in 1958. However, the ratio of males to females varies appreciably according to age-group. While it is equal among children and old people, the preponderance of males is perceptibly higher among refugees between 14 and 45, and still more so (about 65%) among those between 18 and 25.

3. The social structure of these refugees has also varied considerably through the years, and sometimes from one month to the next.

Workers, whether in industry, agriculture, commerce or transport, have always constituted the largest group. They form a steadily increasing percentage of the wage-earners, having risen from 53% in 1952 to 64% in 1955; it is appreciably higher than the percentage of workers among wage-earners in the Soviet Zone (51%).

It is interesting to see that the proportion of workers advanced from only 46% in May 1953 to 54% in June, 66% in July, 69% in August and 71 % in September of the same year. This sudden steep increase is evidence that the workers played a leading part in the East Berlin rising of June 1953.

In the early days, between 1949 and 1952, following the agrarian reform decreed by the Soviet Zone authorities, it was the peasants who fled in greatest numbers. Next it was the turn of tradesmen and craftsmen, who themselves became victims of nationalisation, expropriation and heavy taxation of the recalcitrant. More recently the persecution of the Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, caused a mass exodus.

During the past two years more families? women and children joining the head of the family?have also arrived than before.

The year 1958 was notable for the flight of the highly educated, whose numbers have risen from 2,890 in 1957 to almost 5,000 in the past year (see Appendix, Table 4). The quarterly statistics for 1958 are still more revealing (see Appendix, Table 5), for they show the magnitude of the movement which took place during July, August and September.

Another indication is that, whereas the highly educated accounted for 4 . 3% of wage and salary-earning refugees in the first quarter of 1957, the proportion rose to 10.3% in the third quarter of 1958.

The flight of teachers assumed particularly large proportions and their number doubled between the first ?and third quarters of 1958. The relative strength of university professors, during the same period, was 5 times greater than their proportion of the population of the Soviet Zone. That of doctors was as much as 6 times greater, and more than 6% of all doctors in the Soviet Zone fled in 1958 alone.

#### *1.1.3. C. More than half of the refugees pass through Berlin*

More than half the refugees from the Soviet Zone registered from 1949 to 1958 passed through Berlin (see Appendix, Table 1).

Until the end of 1951, only 30% chose the Berlin route, but, as a result of the draconian measures of the Soviet Zone authorities (temporary stoppage of interzonal movement and intensified control of the line of demarcation), the percentage rose to 70% in 1952 and 90% in 1953, actually reaching 97% in the first half of the latter year.

The proportion of fugitives entering via Berlin then gradually declined, settling at around 40% in 1957 and early 1958. But there was another rise to 6 5% in the third quarter of the current year, and the Berlin transit camps, despite continual improvements, became overcrowded once more.

During the third quarter of 1958 average daily arrivals in West Berlin, which have been about 350 for the whole period since 1949, rose sharply to 490, whereas they were still as low as 240 during the first six months.

West Berlin has now itself absorbed 180,000 refugees from the Soviet Zone. In addition, it has received 133,000 expellees, evacuees or refugees from the" territories beyond the Oder- Neisse Line, so that 15% of the total population (about 2.3 million) consists of refugees.

### *1.2. II. CAUSES OF FLIGHT*

1. If disillusionment with the material conditions of life in the East, and hence the hope of finding a better situation in the West, were an adequate explanation of the flight from the Soviet Zone, the flow of fugitives, which has now continued without interruption for 14 years, ought to have dwindled with the passage of time.

It is true that numbers were greatly swollen over the years by those affected by the successive expropriations, who had nothing more t o lose and everything to gain. Together with their families such persons accounted for up to 40% of the monthly total.

Interrogation on arrival in Berlin or the Federal Republic shows that there are always some fugitives who are maladjusted or in fact incurable misfits, or whose flight was due to more or less questionable motives or simply to adventurousness. There, however, are but a small minority.

Interrogation also reveals that in such t:ases, where the purpose of escape is not to unite families, it may be attributed in increasing measure to the moral pressure which stems from the political pressure brought to bear upon, the inhabitants of the Soviet Zone. This moral pressure, unbearable in the long run, is felt as much by the young as by workers and the highly educated ; the intensity with which it is brought to bear on a given social class varies from time to time.

Only the aged are spared, since they are regarded by the authorities as " irredeemable " and are therefore left out of the " re-education " programmes. Hence their relatively small part in the exodus.

2. The young people who flee from the Soviet Zone are no more genuine " resisters than are the workers. The percentage who have been regular members of an anti-communist political organisation has never exceeded 3 or 4%, even after the East Berlin rising in 1953.

The purpose of these young people in escaping is above all to rid themselves of the regimentation, strict discipline and the crushing obligations imposed on them. So, despite everything that is done for them, the " system " does not succeed in keeping them. In fact, it is the most pampered of the young people, those whose material future is best provided for?namely the students?who flee in the greatest numbers.

There are other explanations of the increasing tendency of young people to escape to the West. Some want to avoid conscription into the army or police, some can no longer tolerate the political bias given to education, some refuse to submit to the officially propagated atheism. For instance, first communion and confirmation of the Churches have been replaced by the purely Marxist ceremony of " youth dedication"; everything to do with religion is systematically attacked. When an infant is baptised, parents and godparents must undertake to " educate the child in the great and noble cause of peace and socialism ". On marriage, bride and bridegroom must undertake to " make a joint and active contribution to the furtherance of socialist achievements... ".

3. This increasingly thorough " socialisation " has in the last few years been extended to education and the field of art and thought in general. The Fifth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party (S.E.D.), held in July 1958, decided to " overcome popular resistance by means of a genuine socialist education ". The Central Committee of the Party accordingly required educational establishments to become " socialist institutions, directed by socialist masters ". The teaching staff must be made to " believe in the truth of the Marx-Leninist philosophy " and to " free themselves from narrow bourgeois conceptions, with their religiosity which cannot stand up to scientific examination ".

In pursuance of these directives, politics have invaded the University. À professor of the University of Halle, who fled on 22nd November 1958 and with whom the Committee was able to talk freely five days later at the camp of Berlin-Marienfelde, confirmed that higher education, previously more or less untouched, had been subjected for the past year to an intense campaign of unification. Objective instruction, he assured us, was no longer possible, even in the scientific faculties. University teachers are subject to such close surveillance and highhanded treatment that they must either yield or leave their post. Hence the particularly large number who have fled during the current year.

To illustrate his case, this history professor from Halle told us that the University authorities had, for instance, contrived to arrange the time-table in such a way that his lectures, which were marked as optional, coincided with the compulsory lectures of his more " reliable " colleagues. He described the humiliating and discouraging effect of this simple administrative measure which, by precluding all but an insignificant number of students from attending his lectures, reduced his position within the University to that of a bystander.

The flight of such professors?some of whom held the highest honours bestowed by the regime, with all the benefits that these confer? proves conclusively that the exodus is no longer due to material considerations, or is so to a diminishing extent. And the same applies to engineers, doctors, specialised workers and police

officers. Their decision to leave?though aware that their possessions will immediately be auctioned?marks the culmination of a moral struggle in which they realised the impossibility of bowing to the dictates of the regime and at the same time their need of freedom. Thus the Secretary of State, M. Nahm, was able to use the words " Every day we are witnessing a plebiscite against oppression ".

### *1.3. III. REPERCUSSIONS OF THE SHIFT OF POPULATION*

This constant exodus of refugees has given rise to serious repercussions and profound structural changes, both in the Soviet Zone and in the Federal Republic. It has also been instrumental in making Berlin a counter in the Cold War.

1. The population of the Soviet Zone, which amounted to almost 20 millions (including East Berlin) in 1949, was down to 17 millions in 1956 ?a loss, therefore, of nearly 3 millions. During the same period the population of the Federal Republic rose from 47 to almost 51 millions? an increase of nearly 4 millions.

If it is borne in mind that young people, men and wage-earners predominate among the fugitives, we shall see that the quantitative impoverishment is matched by a qualitative one, the repercussions of which will only be fully felt after a certain lapse of time.

" The Soviet Zone is literally suffering from haemorrhage, and we are afraid lest one day we may be faced with a territory drained of its substance ", we were told by M. Lemmer. In his address to the Committee, he described this shift of population as a " national danger ". And, indeed, in his speech to the Bundestag at the extraordinary sitting in Berlin on 1st October 1958, M. Lemmer officially exhorted his fellow-countrymen in the Soviet Zone to do their utmost to hold on, in other words to make as many concessions as they could, assuring them that it would not be held against them later. It is common knowledge, moreover, that the Federal Government have publicly appealed to doctors not to flee unless compelled to.

In view of the disquieting repercussions caused by these perpetual departures, the question was raised whether the communist regime really did its utmost to minimise them or whether i t had a certain interest in tolerating or even encouraging them. But, without turning a blind eye to the fact that the Soviet Zone authorities should have been able to prevent flight in certain cases, the people to whom we spoke drew our attention to a number of?certainly very severe? measures designed to arrest the " flight from the Republic ".

For example:

*the border between the Soviet Zone and the Federal Republic has been hermetically sealed; behind the barbed wire entanglements are police posts with machine-guns and police dogs;*

*under the "Passport Law" of 11th December 1957, travel to the Federal Republic or West Berlin is assimilated to foreign travel, so that permission is required;*

*railway tickets are endorsed on issue with the user's name and identity card number;*

*the penalties of imprisonment or penal servitude for attempting or merely aiding and abetting escape have been drastically increased;*

*interzonal traffic has been so drastically reduced that in 1958 it was only 15% of the 1957 level.*

Nevertheless, the control posts installed along the line of demarcation and around Berlin, although numerous, still seem too few for the detection of fugitives, whose escape is usually carefully prepared. Their problem is to find a plausible reason for being on the move and to pass unnoticed.

2. The Federal Republic has accepted heavy sacrifices in admitting the refugees, but has also reaped great benefits.

We have seen that about 20,000 Soviet Zone inhabitants cross the border every month and that the total reached 3,400,000 at the end of 1958. Since it is known that the complete assimilation of each refugee necessitates an outlay of 10,000 DM (including public and private contributions for housing, public works and the enlargement of schools and hospitals), it is fitting that some impression shall be given of the resulting burden on the State, the Lander and the local authorities.

But the full weight of burden is only apparent if one remembers that, in addition to the 20,000 Soviet Zone refugees, the Federal Republic admits monthly about 13,000 expellees, evacuees and refugees from the German territories beyond the Oder-Neisse Line.

Thus, taking into account the " displaced persons " (170,000) who sought permission to stay after the war, and the foreign political refugees from countries behind the Iron Curtain (50,000), the Federal Republic had by 1st October 1955 already received 11,250,000 refugees, including 2,540,000 fugitives from the Soviet Zone. The figure now exceeds 12 million and is equal to the combined populations of Sweden and Denmark.

It is hardly surprising in the circumstances that the budgetary expenditure of the Federal Republic on national refugees from the Soviet Zone and territories under Polish administration reached a total last year of 1,500 million DM.

But the assimilation of these refugees, especially those from the Soviet Zone, has also brought benefits to Western Germany. This active population represents a gain, although the effects are only felt after its integration into the economy of the country. The preponderance of the young and of males has helped to correct the post-war age structure and normalise the ratio between males and females in the Federal Republic.

The refugee manpower made available to industry and the stimulus given t o building (the Bonn Government having set their face against camps as a solution as early as 1949) have undoubtedly promoted economic growth in the Federal Republic in the past few years. On the other hand, it was also brought home to us that these extra arms and mouths would considerably increase the difficulties in the event of an economic crisis.

Two other repercussions of the influx of refugees and the consequent mingling of populations were reported to us:

1. first, the settling of Catholic refugees in Protestant areas (and vice versa) has.considerably reduced, and sometimes removed, the religious antagonism which hitherto existed in Germany;
2. secondly, the constant arrival of further refugees has " immunised " the population of Western Germany against communism.

3. The problems of the City of Berlin are more serious.

This is first and foremost because Berlin, being isolated, has not experienced the economic progress of the Federal Republic. Despite the implementation of an emergency programme, unemployment there is still comparatively high: 150,000 since 1956, against 300,000 in 1950, out of a population of 2.3 millions. Moreover the proportion of people over 60 years old is 16% in Berlin whereas it is barely 10% in the Federal Republic. The economic integration of the refugees is therefore proving very difficult: 50,000 are destitute and are entirely dependent on public assistance. Quite a large number of refugees are still living in camps.

As a result, only a small proportion of the fugitives wishing to settle in Berlin can be satisfied. But there are many who, having been directed to the Federal Republic, make their own way back.

The " border crossers" set a special problem for the Berlin administration. Almost 40,000 residents of East Berlin are working in West Berlin; counting their families, there are thus nearly 120,000 additional persons who are dependent on West Berlin for their livelihood and who are liable at any time to seek asylum in the Western sectors. The proportion of " border crossers " among the fugitives has already increased appreciably in the past year.

But for Berlin the refugee problem has become an essentially political one. The more control measures along the demarcation line are tightened up and other possibilities of escape (such as interzonal traffic) dwindle, the refugees, especially in periods of crisis, reach the " haven of freedom " as travellers without luggage.

There were certain days during the large-scale exodus of 1953, and again in July and August 1958, when nine out of ten escapes made their way to the free world via Berlin.

As M. Lemmer told us, " there is a hole in the Iron Curtain: the Brandenburg Gate ". That is what gives Berlin a political character of the utmost importance. When one realises that all these refugees must subsequently be flown to the Federal Republic, one must agree with the Minister that one of the aims of the Soviet Zone authorities, partly responsible for the present tension is to abolish, or at least control, the Berlin air link.

M. Willy Brandt told us that the intention of the Soviet and Pankow Governments was to incorporate the whole of Berlin in the Soviet Zone. That would certainly be one way of settling the refugee problem.

This report, as the curtain-raiser to a general debate in the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, should serve to awaken public opinion in the free countries and interest it in this tragic problem, this cancer which is eating away the heart of Europe.

The Committee on Population and Refugees, in addition to the draft Resolution and the draft Order it now submits to the Assembly, intends later, perhaps as part of the programme i t is preparing for the World Refugee Year, to put forward a plan by which the Council of Europe could back up its declarations of principle by a concrete, if modest, contribution to the solution of the problems raised by the exodus of German refugees from the Soviet Zone.

What attitude can?it is tempting to say must? the free world, and particularly the Council of Europe, adopt towards this terrible tragedy, the last act of which may not yet have been played out?

We put this question to the spokesman of the Federal Government and City of Berlin. The same question was put a score of times to members of the Committee by journalists and others and also by the refugees with whom we had an opportunity to talk.

M. Willy Brandt said: " You must know and make it known that the refugee problem is closely bound up with the Berlin question, and that the latter cannot be solved in isolation, for it is part of the whole German problem, which itself cannot be dealt with apart from the problem of European security ".

M. Lemmer's answer was: " Your most valuable contribution would be a great publicity campaign. Inform people not only of the figures but also of the causes of this constant exodus of fugitives ". This advice was subsequently borne out by the professor of history at the University of Halle: " Tell people about the moral distress; the anguish, the searchings of conscience of the 17 million inhabitants of the Soviet Zone, all of whom are potential refugees... "

## Appendix APPENDIX

### TABLE 1 - German Refugees from the Soviet Zone - 1949-1958

| | TOTAL | VIA BERLIN |
|---|---|---|
| 1945-31.VIII.1949 (estim.) | 850,000 | 140,000 |
| 1.IX.1949-31.XII.1958 (registered) | 2,120,000 | 1,135,000 |
| 1.IX.1949-31.XII.1958 (estim.) | 430,000 | 80,000 |
| Grand total | 3,400,000 | 1,355,000 |

### TABLE 2 - Flow of German Refugees from the Soviet Zone - 1949-1958

| YEAR | TOTAL REFUGEES REGISTERER | VIA BERLIN | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | NUMBER | PERCENTAGE |
| 1949 (4 months) | 75.756 | 16,511 | 21.8 |
| 1950 | 197,788 | 60,397 | 30.6 |
| 1951 | 161,386 | 55,007 | 34.1 |
| 1952 | 171,168 | 117,681 | 68.8 |
| 1953 | 331,390 | 297,040 | 89.7 |
| 1954 | 184,198 | 94,517 | 51.5 |
| 1955 | 252,870 | 133,291 | 52.7 |
| 1956 | 279,189 | 139,745 | 50.2 |
| 1957 | 261,622 | 110,005 | 42.1 |
| 1958 | 204,092 | 111,485 | 54.6 |
| | 2,119,459 | 1,135,679 | 53.6 |

### TABLE 3 - Classification by Age-groups

| AGE | SOVIET ZONE REFUGEES | FEDERAL REPUBLIC |
|---|---|---|
| 1 to 6 | 7.4% | 8.8% |
| 6 to 14 | 9.1% | 10.7% |
| 14 to 21 | 24 % | 12 % |
| 21 to 25 | 11.7% | 5.9% |
| 25 to 45 | 26.3% | 26.4% |
| 45 to 65 | 19.3% | 26.1% |
| over 65 | 5.9% | 10.1% |

### TABLE 4 - The flight of the highly educated

*A. Comparative list*

| | 1958 | 1957 |
|---|---|---|
| University professors and lecturers | 208 | 58 |
| Teachers | 3,089 | 2,293 |
| Pharmacists | 184 | 99 |
| Doctors | 1,242 | 440 |
| Total | 4,723 | 2,890 |

### TABLE 5 - The flight of the highly educated

*B. During the year 1958*

| | 1st qtr. | 2nd qtr. | 3rd qtr. | 4th qtr. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Doctors | 161 | 209 | 359 | 198 |
| Dentists | 49 | 47 | 91 | 105 |
| Veterinary Surgeons | 7 | 10 | 19 | 17 |
| Pharmacists | 48 | 36 | 47 | 53 |
| Engineers | 510 | 557 | 728 | 550 |
| University professors and lecturers | 31 | 44 | 65 | 68 |
| Teachers | 659 | 675 | 1,217 | 538 |
| Other professions | 392 | 434 | 671 | 546 |
| Students | 535 | 694 | 775 | 648 |
| Total | 2,392 | 2,706 | 3,972 | 2,723 |