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THE TREATMENT OF BELGIAN REFUGEES IN ENGLAND
DURING THE GREAT WAR

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IN ENGLAND
DURING THE GREAT WAR

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ABSTRACT

Almost one quarter of a million Belgians fled to England after the German invasion of Belgium in 1914. The largest contingent of refugees ever to come to England, their absorption into the host society was bound to be a complex process.

The growth of anti-alien sentiment in Britain in the twentieth century has often been remarked, yet the Belgians were assimilated smoothly into the English community. They benefited at first from overwhelming public sympathy, and trade-unionist fears that they would provide a pool of cheap labour dissipated as the war economy created conditions of full employment. There was some anti-Belgian sentiment, but it never became organised or vociferous. The growth of anti-alienism during the Great War must be traced to hysteria about enemy aliens, spies and Bolsheviks. However, the needs of the Belgian government, British relief agencies and various branches of the British government led to a sophisticated system of regulations governing the refugees' movements. The Belgians were important in the development of the primitive system of aliens control established in 1905.

Refugee relief was primarily the work of private charity. The government faced too many other tasks, the Poor Law was unpopular, and relief work provided an outlet for patriotic enthusiasm. Directed by one central body, the War

Refugees Committee, several thousand local committees carried out the vast work of finding shelter, food, clothing and employment for the refugees and providing for many other needs. However, enthusiasm waned and the WRC's funds were never large. Accordingly, the government and the Committee were pushed into reluctant partnership, the WRC surrendering some of its independence in return for financial assistance. The government was slow to extend its control openly, fearing that voluntary effort would collapse. Until August 1916 the fiction was maintained that the WRC was autonomous, and even then the government made only a half-hearted attempt at direct control.

The vigour of the relief movement demonstrates the strength of the philanthropic community in the early twentieth century. Philanthropy was the preserve of the upper and middle classes, a badge of rank, an assertion of social superiority, a form of self-imposed taxation. The WRC drew on the Charity Organisation Society's case work practices, maintained a healthy contempt for government officials, and prided itself on saving the nation vast amounts of money.

However, the growing political importance of the working classes before and during the war, rising taxation and the war's economic effects on the upper classes affected the philanthropic public's morale. Wartime charity also suffered from chronic problems of overlapping effort,

extravagance, inefficiency and fraud, and Belgian relief organisations led the way in demanding stricter control of war charities. Their efforts resulted in the War Charities Act of 1916. Gradually, many relief workers came to accept the need for direct government control as the only way of fairly distributing the burdens of relief. As a result of many pressures, the WRC, which had begun as a purely voluntary agency, ended as something like a government department: the philanthropists had become social workers. The story of the refugee relief movement suggests how the philanthropic community became part of the new system of social welfare in the twentieth century.

This study is based on the Ministry of Health files in the Public Record Office, the Women's Work and War Refugees Collection in the Imperial War Museum, and the Herbert Gladstone Papers in the British Museum.

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I dedicate this thesis with much love to my parents.
I offer it above all

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.

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CHAPTER I

BRITAIN, BELGIUM AND REFUGEES

'Is This a People Worth Fighting For?'

With the exception of the post-Famine Irish, never before or since have as many people as the Belgians entered England as refugees or immigrants in the short space of little more than a year. The Jewish immigration of the nineteenth century involved about 120,000 people; refugees from Nazi Germany in the 1930s numbered at most eighty thousand; and the refugees from all German-occupied territory during the Second World War amounted to only seventy thousand civilians.¹ Yet these groups, with the exception of the last, have attracted academic or popular interest, while the

¹Estimates of Irish Famine immigration vary sharply. Cecil Woodham Smith, The Great Hunger (London, 1962), 276, and John A. Jackson, The Irish in Britain (London, 1963), 9, agree on a figure in excess of 300,000 landing in Liverpool alone in 1847, while Jackson says 280,000 arrived in 1846. But E. H. Hunt, in Regional Wage Variations in Britain 1850-1914 (Oxford, 1973), 287, gives the considerably lower total of one third of a million over the five years after 1845. Transmigration seems to account for the discrepancy: about half the Irish were arriving to take ship overseas. See R. Lawton, "Irish Immigration to England and Wales in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", Irish Geography 4(1959): 35-54, especially 48.

For the Jews, see John A. Garrard, The English and Immigration 1880-1910 (London, 1971), 213-16. For the refugees from Nazi Germany see A. J. Sherman, Island Refuge (London, 1973), 269-72. Sherman thinks 55,000 refugees a more likely figure, 264. For the refugees of the Second World War, see Richard M. Titmuss, Problems of Social Policy

Belgians have been ignored. General histories fail to mention them at all or relegate them to a few brief lines. Even specialist works ignore them.²

Why have the Belgian refugees been neglected? Firstly, unlike other alien groups, they represented neither great threat nor great promise to the host community. They remained evacuees and with few exceptions did not become immigrants, unlike the German Jews of the 1930s and the Poles of the 1940s. There was never any question of their staying permanently--both the British and Belgian governments saw to that. The Irish and Jews of the nineteenth century had posed economic, social and even racial threats, and were often the objects of intense hostility. The Jews of the 1930s likewise caused some alarm and hostility, but have been retrospectively honoured for their contribution to English arts and sciences.

(London, 1950), 246-47. Thirty thousand of the refugees were Channel Islanders and ten thousand Gibraltarians, neither strictly speaking refugee aliens.

²Arthur Marwick, in the most prominent social history of the war, The Deluge (Harmondsworth, 1967), 43-44, dismisses them in a paragraph based on two government command papers which appeared very early in the war. A. J. P. Taylor, in English History 1914-1915 (Oxford, 1965), 19-20, is more informative but just as cursory, discussing them in the context of the British spy and anti-alien hysterias of the early months of the war. Sherman opens his case by asserting that refugees from Nazism confronted the British government with "a domestic and international situation for which it was uniquely unprepared" and for which "there were few useful recent precedents," Island Refuge, 13. There were differences between the Belgians and the later refugees, it is true, but there were also similarities. The British government was not completely unused to dealing with refugees by the 1930s.

They numbered among themselves many eminent men, good grist for scholarly mills. The Belgians were an ephemeral part of the English scene: they disappeared as quickly as they had come. Second, they encompassed none of the extremes of other alien communities. Few were as poor or as desperate as the earlier Jews or Irish, but few were as distinguished as Sigmund Freud or Stefan Zweig. Third, they were absorbed easily into the English economy. Indeed, if the Belgian refugees had not existed, they would have had to be invented by agents recruiting labour for voracious munitions factories. Fourth, the Belgians did not fit neatly into the usual categories of victims of political, religious or racial persecution. They were not ideologues like their Huguenot forebears of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the émigrés from the French Revolution, or the many political exiles of the nineteenth century. They were united only by the bond of panic, which swept many of them out of Belgium before, one suspects, they had had time to ponder their actions. They were invincibly ordinary people. Fifth, they were lost to the view of contemporaries and historians among a multitude of other new and dramatic phenomena: huge casualties, vast battles, spy scares, campaigns against enemy aliens, conscription and conscientious objection, food shortages, industrial strife, the entry of women into the war effort, political changes at home and a revolution in Russia. In peacetime they would have drawn much more attention. Sixth, perhaps the Belgians have simply shared

their country's fate. Probably no other modern European nation--except the Baltic States--has received so little attention from English historians as Belgium, which has been almost totally neglected.³ The refugees were little people from a little country.⁴

But the fact remains that in 1914 they were the objects of vast interest in England. If the war had ended by Christmas 1914, as many Englishmen confidently expected, the Belgians' place in histories of the war would have been assured. "It is wonderful," remarked one relief worker, "how 'the refugee question' pervades the whole country. It is as good an opening subject for conversation as the weather once was, and like that is common to all classes."⁵ They became part of the typically ironic humour of the war. The Times spoke of "a peaceful invasion" and "welcome invaders," while among society women "the correct expression was 'Oh! We are overrun by Belgians.'" The stock phrases wily echoed

³There have been few scholarly studies of modern Belgian history in the past and, to judge by a glance through lists of theses produced or in progress in the English-speaking world in the years after 1970, Belgium has fallen behind Bulgaria and other small European nations.

⁴For a general survey of refugees in Britain over the centuries, see Francesca M. Wilson, They Came As Strangers (London, 1959).

For the Huguenots, see Frederick A. Norwood, Strangers and Exiles (New York, 1969), 1:265-308; 2:52, 68-75. Norwood estimates French Huguenot immigration at between forty and fifty thousand. 2:52.

⁵Imperial War Museum, Women's Work and War Refugees Collection, BEL [hereafter cited as BEL], 6/100, diary of Miss Mary Boyle, 60.

a real underlying fear, which had taken root in the Edwardian era, that a major war would involve invasion by a ruthless enemy.⁶

The Belgians indeed crystallised many English responses to the war. They were an outward and visible sign of the complex chain of cause and effect which had led Britain into the struggle. The German invasion of a large area of Belgium gave the British government an unimpeachable motive for declaring war. It was almost, though not quite, universally acknowledged at the time that Britain was bound by treaty to defend the neutrality of Belgium, whereas a strong body of opinion in parliament and the country opposed the French alliance and British involvement in continental power politics. The German invasion of Belgium decisively stifled the opposition and allowed waverers to calm their consciences and support the war effort.⁷ For those like Bertrand Russell who could not condone the war, the relief

⁶The Times, 14 October 1914; Caroline E. Playne, Society at War 1914-16 (London, 1931), 131; see also Thekla Bowser, The Story of British V.A.D. Work in the Great War (London, 1917), 58: "Birmingham, if not invaded by the enemy, was certainly invaded by Belgian refugees. . . ."

For a brilliant analysis of wartime humour and its use of irony, see Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (London, 1975), especially 34-35. Fussell, however, emphasises a little too much the dark ironies: wartime humour was not always black.

For pre-war fears of invasion, see I. F. Clarke, Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984 (London, 1966), 107-61, and Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton, 1971) 33-53.

⁷For Britain's growing entanglement in a de facto alliance with France and Russia, see Samuel R. Williamson,

of the refugees provided a form of alternative service, a way of bringing good out of the overwhelming evil of the war.⁸ For most people, the refugees were concrete reminders of the righteousness of the Allied cause, and the earliest embryonic declarations of British war aims were almost always made in speeches about Belgium, sometimes to refugee audiences. Britain's one immutable and avowed war aim was the complete restoration of Belgium to its prewar boundaries.⁹

Much guilt pervaded British attitudes towards the invasion of Belgium. For opponents of the war, Britain shared the blame for Belgium's subjugation by encouraging Belgian resistance. For the enthusiastic majority, there was a strong sense of shame at the inability of British arms to halt the invasion.¹⁰ So refugee relief became a service of

The Politics of Grand Strategy (Cambridge, 1969). For British domestic opposition, see A. J. Anthony Morris, Radicalism Against War 1906-1914 (London, 1972), especially chs. 5, 6 and 10. The reasons for the collapse of opposition to war within the British Cabinet have been exhaustively debated, most recently by Donald Lammers, "Arno Mayer and the British Decision for War: 1914", Journal of British Studies, 12 (1973): 137-65, and K. M. Wilson, "The British Cabinet's decision for war, 2 August 1914", British Journal of International Studies, 1 (1975): 148-59.

⁸Bertrand Russell, "Belgian Professors in Cambridge", The Cambridge Magazine, 24 October 1914.

⁹Paul Guinn, British Strategy and Politics 1914 to 1918 (Oxford, 1965), 122-24, 275, 278.

¹⁰H. G. Wells, Mr. Britling Sees It Through (London, 1916), 261-62; John Buchan, Nelson's History of the War (London, 1914), 2:200; advertisement in The Tablet, 23 January 1915: 'We claimed to be the Defenders of Belgium'; T. M. Kettle, The Ways of War (London, 1917), 137-39.

atonement. A sense of numbing sadness at an almost cosmic disaster was as typical of the first British responses to the war as the jaunty patriotism displayed at recruiting centres. Relief work provided a way of fitting intimate griefs into a universal framework of suffering and creative compassion.¹¹ At a less exalted level, refugee relief provided respectable recreation: "For a time 'Belgians' were the excuse for such social functions as might still be held. There were bazaars to get money for Belgians, parties and concerts to amuse them."¹² The refugees were all things to all men, not so much flesh-and-blood individuals as multifaceted symbols of Britain's cause. They quite literally brought the war home to many Englishmen for the first time, as H. G. Wells made clear in the most significant novel about the war written during the conflict, Mr. Britling Sees It Through. A Belgian refugee has just arrived at the home of the central figure:

The dinner that night. . . marked a distinct fresh step in the approach of the Great War to the old habits and securities of Matching's Easy. The war had indeed filled everyone's mind to the exclusion of all other topics since its very beginning. . . . but so far it had not established a direct contact between the life of Matching's Easy and the grim business of shot, shell, and bayonet at the front. But now. . . .¹³

¹¹Playne, Society at War, 131; Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth (first published 1933; Arrow ed.; London, 1960), 77; Seymour Leslie, The Jerome Connexion (London, 1964), 88-89.

¹²Playne, Society at War, 131.

¹³H. G. Wells, Mr. Britling Sees It Through, 256.

The Belgians also drew men's minds back deep into English history. England had established herself in the nineteenth century as a haven for political exiles from all Europe, usually liberals, radicals and socialists such as Herzen, Mazzini, Kossuth, Louis Blanc and Marx, but sometimes royal refugees such as Louis XVIII and Napoleon III.¹⁴ Their diversity emphasised the point that England was a land of tolerance, a truly liberal state. The reputation was bought cheaply enough--the political refugees numbered only a few thousand--but it was a reputation Englishmen fondled proudly in 1914. They delved into the past to place the Belgian refugees in context, and their search for a usable past took some back as far as the French Huguenots and other Protestant exiles. Others went only as far as the emigres from the French Revolution.¹⁵ The war was a shocking event, and in their shock men turned naturally to history for explanations and precedents. On the other hand, the unprecedented scale and intensity of this conflict rapidly impressed itself on observers. Repeatedly they pointed to ways in which the Belgian influx was bigger than all previous immigrations or different in kind. The Pall Mall Gazette noted that in the past England had gladly received co-religionists from Belgium as refugees, whereas "today there is none of that. Religious

¹⁴F. M. Wilson, They Came As Strangers, 108-34.

¹⁵BEL 6/19, Bexhill Committee: "Bexhill and the Belgians", Bexhill Quarterly, Christmas edition (1914), 10.

differences do not exist. A Protestant people are extending their arms of affection to a Catholic one, and the common enemy is Pagan."¹⁶ The liberal tradition had reached, it seemed, a splendid consummation. This theme was played fortissimo in Ireland, where English propaganda harped on the British defence of a Belgium which, like Ireland, was Catholic, little and--let it be noted well--brave.¹⁷

English publicists also stressed the historic relationship between England and Belgium. Some went back to the reign of Edward III, who had imported Flemish weavers, but most concentrated on the nineteenth century and the great power agreement of 1839 guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality and British vigilance regarding that neutrality during the Franco-Prussian War.¹⁸ They subscribed complacently to the view of one Belgian parliamentarian that "England is. . . historically the protectress of the Belgians and of Belgium. Never

¹⁶Pall Mall Gazette, 24 September 1914; Cf. The Tablet, 14 November 1914.

¹⁷T. St. John Gaffney, Breaking The Silence (New York, 1930), 56, and Bernard Shaw, introduction to "O'Flaherty V.C.", in Heartbreak House, Great Catherine, and Playlets of the War (London, 1919), 163. British propagandists impudently used Celtic nationalism, till August 1914 a reviled threat to national unity, to foster enthusiasm for the war in Scotland, Ireland and Wales: Kenneth O. Morgan, Wales in British Politics 1868-1922 (Cardiff, 1963), 275.

¹⁸For example, Why We Are At War, by members of the Oxford Faculty of Modern History (Oxford, 1914), 13-20. Shaw, in Common Sense About The War (London, 1914), 9, characteristically lampooned the sudden development of "an extraordinary sense of the sacredness of the Treaty of London, dated 1839", provoking Arnold Bennett to accuse him of using "an obvious barrister's device, sarcastically to discredit the treaty

have relations been more lasting than those existing between England and Belgium."¹⁹

Finally, writers groping to place the refugees and the war in a larger frame of reference turned naturally to the Bible and literature. Men ransacked old mythologies to patch together a new and serviceable myth. The Belgian retreat and the setting up of a government-in-(more or less)exile at Le Havre was compared to the Athenian evacuation of Athens when the Persians invaded. The refugees in England were likened to Israel in Egypt. The Book of Exodus naturally provided newspaper correspondents with imagery appropriate to the mass abandonment of Antwerp in October 1914, though one observer thought of De Quincy's The Flight of a Tartar Tribe; and Asquith, when he made his famous declaration in the Commons that Britain would never sheathe the sword till Belgium was avenged, rummaged through the ages to compare Belgium with Sparta, the Swiss cantons, the Netherlands against the Spanish, and the brave little nations of all time.²⁰

because of its age." "Shaw's Nonsense About Belgium", in The New York Times Current History of the War (New York, 1915), 60-63. There were other sceptics: see, for example, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, My Diaries (New York, 1921), 2:432-33.

¹⁹G. A. Powell, ed., Four Years In A Refugee Camp (London, 1920), 9.

²⁰J. M. N. Jeffries, Front Everywhere (London, n.d.), 183; G. H. Hallam, Notes On The War (Sidcup, 1914-19), 63; Manchester Guardian, 28 August 1914; Henry Van Dyke, Fighting For Peace (New York, 1917), 86; The Tablet, 29 August 1914. See also, H. Hensley Henson, "Judaea and Belgium: A Parallel", War-Time Sermons (London, 1915), 1-11.

That many potent elements of myth were to be found in the Belgian situation was exemplified in a speech late in 1915 by a Scottish theologian, who blended Calvinist theology with Scottish nationalist hagiography:

Is this a people worth fighting for? Is this a people worth saving? When we remember all that has happened since their first disasters -- the sturdy refusal of the Belgians to accept defeat, their preference of exile to slavery, like our own Puritan forefathers, the resurrection of their own shattered army, the evocation of so many unsuspected virtues in the civil population, the unstinted determination of all classes. . . . to fight to the bitter end; . . . this is a people worth saving. . . . A nation which has been baptised in such suffering and consecrated by such sacrifice, is surely marked by heaven's most certain signs for a noble and beneficent future of service to mankind.²¹

The Belgians had attained a kind of immortality.

Yet there were traces of ambivalence in the rhetoric. Why was it necessary to ask so emphatically whether the Belgians were worth saving? And why were their virtues "unsuspected"? Mythology had to face certain grainy realities: that relations between Belgium and England had not been happy before the war, and that the heroic exiles of the speechmakers' fancy often shrank alarmingly in stature when encountered in real life. By a profound irony, the two little countries which England went to war to defend, Belgium and Serbia, had not been highly regarded before the war, when indeed they were regarded

²¹BEL 6/99, Scotland's National Appeal: speech by Rev. Principal George Adam Smith, Aberdeen University, 2 September 1915. For a Catholic version of the 'redemptive suffering' thesis, see Fr. Vincent McNabb, O.P., in The Tablet, 14 November 1914; and for a non-denominational exposition, The Times History of the War (London, 1914), 2:332.

at all. The private life of Leopold II had scandalised the English, even the sybaritic Edward VII. More damagingly, a growing body of influential English liberal and humanitarian opinion had turned against Leopold's personal rule in the Congo. A powerful agitation built up, led by the Congo Reform Association under the journalist E. D. Morel and Roger Casement, a former British consul in the Congo whose reports and writings exposed a horrifying picture of mass brutality and exploitation of the native people by Belgian officials. The English agitation eventually led the Belgian government to wrest control of the Congo from Leopold and to initiate a programme of reform.²² But the Congo question had caused much rancour between the two countries, and when they joined in common cause against Germany, the ironies abounded. Casement, now a client of the Germans, watched in helpless chagrin as his own reports about Belgian atrocities in the Congo--especially the practice of mutilation--were turned neatly around by Allied propaganda and used as a fable of

²²For attitudes to Serbia, see The Tablet, 17 October 1914, letter of Fr. Oswald Donnelly to the editor; Harry Hanak, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary During the First World War (London, 1962), 91-92.

The most thorough treatment of British attitudes to the Belgian Congo is S. J. S. Cookey, Britain and the Congo Question 1885-1913 (London, 1968). Belgian reactions to the English campaign are described in Ruth Slade, King Leopold's Congo (London, 1962), 193-98; and in Luigi Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914 (London, 1957), 3:143-46. The Belgians had a chance to hit back at the Congo Reform Association during the war, by attacking Morel as a pro-German. Henri Davignon, Un Peuple en Exil (Paris, 1916), 37.

German atrocities in Belgium. The criminal now assumed the role of victim.²³ Sir Gilbert Parker, who as a leader of the reform agitation had used his literary talents against Belgium, as director of British propaganda to the United States now bruited the theme of innocent Belgium. Herbert Samuel, another leading critic of the Belgian regime in the Congo, became the minister in charge of Belgian refugees, and other reformers actively helped the citizens of a nation they had vilified not long before. The war saw many such reversals.

But the ironies were blunted somewhat by a period of less unfriendly relations immediately before the war. Leopold died and his successor, Albert I, was respectable and likeable; the Congo ceased to be an issue; and Belgium came before British eyes mainly through a series of international trade exhibitions. Therefore, when the Belgian refugees arrived in 1914, the English public had only the vaguest knowledge of their country and the character of its people. The age was prone to generalising about national character, and Britons were interested in finding out quickly about the Belgians.

²³T. Gaffney, Breaking the Silence, 76, 122. The antiwar activist C. H. Norman sardonically spoke of "the gallant Belgians of Red Rubber fame." Norman to the editor, New Age, 3 September 1914. Cf. Audrey May Cameron to the editor, New Age, 8 October 1914:

It is a very short time since we were all raving about the Belgian atrocities in the Congo Free State; now the Belgians have become a brave, chivalrous, and oppressed race; but they cannot be two things, and they cannot have changed so rapidly in such a short time.

The materials to hand were scanty, but perhaps the most important source for impressions of Belgian society was Seebohm Rowntree's Land and Labour: Lessons from Belgium, published in 1910 as part of a strong campaign for land reform in England.²⁴ Rowntree favourably contrasted the efficiency and intensiveness of Belgian agriculture with that of England, and in 1914 scores of reports, articles and letters hailed the refugees as a modern equivalent of the Flemish weavers who had injected new techniques into a moribund English woollen industry. This time, English farming was to benefit: by teaching intensive cultivation, the refugees "would increase the food production of the country and teach a valuable lesson in the art of small-holding which we are trying to develop with indifferent success."²⁵ The peasant theme dominated English stereotypes of the Belgians, whose perceived qualities were 'peasant' qualities--doggedness, patience, tenacity, frugality, hard work and dourness. But in fact there were many inconsistencies in the stereotypes. The Belgians were equated with the Flemish, yet were expected to speak French. Apparently, few Englishmen had

²⁴B. Seebohm Rowntree, Land and Labour: Lessons from Belgium (London, 1910).

For the land campaign, see Roy Douglas, "'God gave the land to the people'", in A. J. A. Morris, ed., Edwardian Radicalism 1900-1914 (London, 1974), 148-64. For Rowntree's part in the land movement, see Asa Briggs, Social Thought and Social Action (London, 1961), 64-78.

²⁵The Times, editorial, 22 October 1914.

noticed the bitter feuding between Flemings and Walloons in the decade before the war. Likewise, English writers blithely described strong collectivist and socialist themes in Belgian society without reconciling these with the peasant motif.²⁶ But, whatever the internal contradictions, all English images of the Belgians omitted concepts like imagination, daring and dash. Propagandists had to reach back to the middle ages, to the Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302, for a conspicuous precedent for Belgian military prowess. Indeed, a certain amount of hasty rewriting of popular history had to go on in 1914: "We know better nowadays than to say that 'the Belgians ran away at Waterloo.' We know that they stood manfully by our side."²⁷ From such evidence as Englishmen had from prewar literature, they would not have expected heroism from the Belgians. Thus, the effusive rhetoric about "brave little Belgium" in some measure belied the reality of English attitudes to Belgium.

So, too, the self-congratulatory propaganda about England's tradition of generosity to refugees glossed over important recent developments. The Jewish immigration of the late nineteenth century seriously challenged the easy

²⁶An exception was W.S.M. Knight, The History of the Great European War (London, 1915), 2: 158-59, who perceived "two Belgioms", one agricultural, the other industrial, fused together by a common industriousness.

²⁷Pall Mall Gazette, 24 August 1915.

liberality which had till then prevailed. The Jews came in large numbers and with an intent of settling, all of which alarmed the working classes in the main areas of Jewish settlement. To working-class fears and prejudice were added Social Darwinist arguments about the racial and moral degeneracy of the Jews, and a series of agitations against alien immigration led to the passing of the Aliens Act of 1905. This measure established for the first time in a century some controls on the entry of aliens into Britain and marked the beginning of British immigration control.²⁸ The Act of 1905 was superseded by a more comprehensive enactment in 1919, a measure which governed the reception of all the refugees of the 1920s and 1930s.²⁹ The postwar decades saw massive movements of refugees throughout Europe coupled with reluctance to receive them. English policy towards these refugees has been generally characterised as unsympathetic and harsh, though that verdict has been softened somewhat by Dr. A.J. Sherman.³⁰ Nonetheless, England's reputation for hospitality lay in tatters by 1939. Something had happened:

²⁸J. Garrard, The English and Immigration, thoroughly examines the agitations.

²⁹Little work has been done on the 1919 Act, but for a popular account, see T.W.E. Roche, The Key in the Lock (London, 1969), 89-99.

³⁰A. Sherman, Island Refuge, 264. For a sterner verdict see Andrew Sharf, The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule (London, 1964), 155-209.

Between 1900 and 1920 . . . the attitude towards the foreigner seeking asylum in England underwent a radical change. A longstanding tradition of hospitality was destroyed: that destruction had begun with an attack by a small but determined group and had then been sealed by the war.³¹

The change in attitudes and policy wrought during the 1900s has been well documented. But the impact of the First World War on the treatment of aliens has been merely assumed. The 1919 Act came after the war: but what in fact did it owe to the war?

As foreigners and as people in distress the Belgians were of great interest to many Englishmen in the years between 1914 and 1919. The interest was on the whole benevolent. But almost a quarter of a million people are not easily settled in a country which finds itself at war. The Belgians were in the strictest sense a foreign body which had to be assimilated into the host culture. The process of aid and assimilation was both complex and revealing, an example of the many strains which the war imposed on British society and of the ways in which that society responded.

This is not a history of the refugees, but a study of the society which received them.

³¹Austin Evans, The Dispossessed (London, 1975), 56.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY DAYS

'Sentimental Benevolence'

On the second day of August, 1914, the German ambassador in Brussels delivered an ultimatum to the Belgian government demanding the right of passage for German armies marching to attack France. The Belgian government indignantly rejected this on the 3rd, after a long overnight meeting of the Ministers of State. On the same day, the British government guaranteed armed support to Belgium if the Germans violated its neutrality, and ordered a general mobilisation. On 4 August, German troops crossed the Belgian border and rolled forward to attack the fortified town of Liège. The British at once demanded the withdrawal of these troops and when this ultimatum expired without reply from Berlin, Britain found herself at war.¹

Both Britain and Belgium entered the war profoundly unprepared. Both had been preoccupied with internal tensions: Fleming-Walloon antagonism and working class unrest in one; Ireland, women's suffrage and a similar wave of labour disputes in the other. The Belgian government and

¹For useful accounts of this period which detail Belgian reactions, see Emile Cammaerts, Albert of Belgium (London, 1935), 11-43, and Barbara Tuchman, August 1914 (London, 1962), 103-16.

people had placed the utmost confidence in their neutral status, which was guaranteed by all the Great Powers. And so, assured by international law and buttressed by ideological predisposition, the Liberal and Socialist opposition had kept the army estimates small for years. King Albert showed a clear understanding of the glaring weaknesses in Belgian defence, but his efforts to establish a coherent plan of national defence were frustrated by the General Staff's inability to agree on the most likely enemy. But the Belgian public cared little about these problems. Despite conflicts within the country and a darkening international situation, Brussels in the last few days of peace seems to have been a placid city intent on enjoying the balmy summer weather.²

In England, as in Belgium, the realisation that an international crisis of overwhelming proportions was about to break dawned slowly. But the politically aware became increasingly anxious late in July about the prospect of a general war. From the thought of war it was a quick jump to thoughts of the social misery which it was universally believed war must bring in its train because of the dislocation of world trade. On 31 July, a group of men who had been associated in a campaign to raise money for strikers' families during the London dockers' strike of 1912 began to

²E. Cammaerts, Albert of Belgium, 11, 152-55; L. Albertini, Origins of the War, 3:452; B. Tuchman, August 1914, 163.

organise a national campaign to raise funds for the relief of war-induced distress. On 6 August, the day after Britain entered the war, the Prince of Wales' Fund, better known as the National Relief Fund, launched itself on the public. The outbreak of war found private charity not totally unprepared and the Fund raised huge sums during its first weeks. Its importance was attested by the number of politicians, especially of the opposition, who joined its executive committee.³

Meanwhile, the government was making preparations for relieving distress. On 5 August, the Government Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress, created by the Prime Minister on the previous day, met for the first time. The speed of its creation revealed the government's lively fear of massive unemployment. Its stated brief was to advise on measures necessary to deal with distress arising in consequence of the war, and to initiate, advise, and coordinate action taken with a view to the prevention and relief of distress. The Committee issued a circular on 6 August 'inviting' local authorities to establish committees for the prevention and relief of distress. The committees were to be set up on "thoroughly representative lines", and should therefore comprise members of local authorities,

³W. Wedgwood Benn, In the Side Shows (London, 1919), 1-4; George Riddell, Lord Riddell's War Diary 1914-1918 (London, 1933), 2-3; J. Fairlie, British War Administration, 148; PP, Report on the Administration of the National Relief Fund up to the 31st March, 1915, 1915, Cd. 7756; Violet Markham, Return Passage (London, 1953), 145-49.

distress committees if any existed, and philanthropic bodies. Trade unions should also be invited to send representatives: a mark of the healthy respect which the unions had won for themselves during the year of bitter industrial conflict before 1914.

The committees' sphere of action, it was emphasised, was

. . . quite distinct from that of any existing local authority. They have been constituted to cope with abnormal conditions. . . . and it is not intended that the funds which they administer should be applied for the relief of chronic poverty or of normal seasonal unemployment.

In practice, however, the distinction between abnormal and chronic distress proved as difficult to maintain in 1914 as it had been in earlier times of economic crisis.⁴ The war made nonsense of many such attempts to maintain old ways and attitudes. The definition of "distress" was a bone of contention between the labour movement and other elements on the distress committees. The NRF became virtually an arm of the government, which plundered it to relieve distress while the government's own committees merely compiled information and decided how the money should be spent. As a result the Fund came in for solid criticism from working-class leaders.⁵

⁴PP, Memorandum on the Steps taken for the Prevention and Relief of Distress due to the War, Cd. 7603, 1914, 1-11; Report on the Special Work of the Local Government Board arising out of the War (up to the 31st December, 1914), Cd. 7763, 1915, 5; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London. A study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (first published, 1971; Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1976), 297-98.

⁵Report of the War Emergency Workers' National Committee (August 1914-March 1916) (London, 1916), 4-6.

Within the government itself responsibility for the relief of distress was not clearly defined. Herbert Samuel, the President of the Local Government Board, chaired the Government Committee because the Board administered the Poor Law and so authority in matters of relief naturally devolved upon it. But the Board of Trade dealt with the unemployed through its labour exchanges and the Board of Education arranged for the extension of school meals to the children of families who were hit hard by the war. Such interdepartmental overlapping, not to mention general unpreparedness and the unclear division of responsibility between the Government Committee and the NRF, proved too burdensome. Relief efforts functioned haphazardly and in places simply broke down. The fund's terms of reference were vague and this led to further trouble. Who had the greater, or even the only, claim on a fund for the relief of 'distress due to the war': soldiers' dependants or unemployed civilians? Those controlling the funds found themselves drawn willy-nilly into providing relief for soldiers' families, especially with the collapse of the Soldiers and Sailors Family Association which was, incredibly, the only welfare organisation for soldiers' families.⁶ Trade

⁶The government itself had made hardly any provision for soldiers' dependants and in 1914 did not have the machinery or the foresight to deal with the problem. Responsibility for the dependants lay with the War Office but it was overwhelmed with tasks and Samuel had to intervene. House of Lords Library Herbert Samuel Papers [hereafter referred to as HS], A/157/712 and 716, Samuel to Beatrice Samuel, 12 and 15 August 1914.

unionists argued that the use of the NRF for military purposes was a misuse of money which should go to help old age pensioners and other members of the poorer classes suffering from wartime inflation. At the other end of the political spectrum, powerful pressure was exerted against the use of the funds for purely civilian relief.⁷

It seems clear, then, that while private philanthropy and the existing welfare agencies responded quickly, if not in some panic, to the outbreak of war, their response was less than effective. Wedgwood Benn captures the mood of the period in both its dynamism and its confusion:

The characteristic of these days was an outburst of national energy the like of which had never been seen. Everybody was determined to do something, and was uncontrollably impatient at being kept waiting. Inevitably the organising skill to find real work for this enormous new force was lacking. But its momentum prevailed. People who had never made a decision in their lives felt the urge, and things were settled in two minutes which would normally have been the subject of many months of correspondence. It was the great opportunity for ideas. The one thing needed was the man who could devise any scheme to crystallise the molten flood of energy.⁸

At first the explosion of public energy found no outlet in the plight of Belgium. The problem of dealing with

⁷Report of the WEWNC, 7-8; BM, Earl of Balfour Papers, Add. MSS. 49777/116-17, Walter Long to Balfour, 20 August 1914. The pressures on the Fund were relieved later by better organisation, the growth of official allowances for soldiers' families, and government grants to local authorities for public works to create employment.

⁸W. Benn, In the Side Shows, 2.

distress in Belgium seems not to have interested many people in the first two weeks of the war. Domestic distress was their immediate concern, and most people confidently expected the French to march rapidly forward to stem the German advance. But the French held back, and the Germans continued their inexorable push through Belgium. The small and ill-prepared Belgian army was driven back despite its strong resistance in places, and on 17 August the government moved from Brussels to Antwerp, where it planned to set up a 'national redoubt'. With the government went many refugees. The gravity of the situation became suddenly and graphically clear to the public in both Britain and Belgium. Yet there was still much complacency, even in Belgium, and the government, burdened with more pressing worries and suffering from the shock of flight, gave little thought at first to the evacuation of citizens in the event of Germany's occupation of the entire country. The first exchange on the subject between the British and Belgians was a request on 10 August from King Albert to send his three young children to England under guarantee of escort in the event of the government's leaving Brussels for Antwerp. But, after a further false alarm late in August, the King let the matter drop till 5 October, when Queen Elisabeth brought the children across

and left them in the care of an old friend, Lord Curzon.⁹ Albert's early concern had dissipated as the German advance swept south, bypassing and relieving the Belgians behind their redoubt. The first arrivals in England were chiefly wealthy individuals who had paid their own way. Many had personal contacts in England and slipped in unheralded. The first tentative suggestion that hospitality be offered to Belgian citizens was made in The Times on 15 August, in a report that the old Radical industrialist Sir John Brunner had arranged to offer accommodation to the families of his friends in Brussels. It was suggested that others might do the same. Three days later, Brunner urged the formation of a hospitality committee which might invite ladies and children to come over to England for safety.¹⁰ At this point the mood was still sanguine, based on archaic notions of a short, limited and gentlemanly war. Like Vera Brittain's ladies of Buxton, the richer classes of England instinctively responded by seeking to "domesticate" the war.¹¹

⁹Public Record Office, Foreign Office files [hereafter referred to as FO], 123/538/194 and 298, Sir Francis Villiers, British Ambassador to Belgium, to Sir Edward Grey, 10 and 28 August 1914; FO 123/540/307 and 308, Villiers to Grey (twice), 30 August 1914. Curzon had met the Belgian royal family some years before the war. On the invasion, he cabled them to place his residence, Hackwood, at their disposal. Marchioness Curzon of Kedleston, Reminiscences (London, 1955), 90.

¹⁰The Times, 15 and 18 August 1914.

¹¹V. Brittain, Testament of Youth, 77.

The Germans closed on Brussels in the second week of the invasion. The supposedly impregnable Liège fortresses were quickly battered to submission by the huge Krupp and Skoda guns which move through all accounts of the Belgian campaign as dark omens of the new warfare and English concern grew for the critical plight of Belgium. Two groups, drawn together in one case by business and in the other by politics, began separately to concern themselves with the relief of England's Belgian allies. Business contacts between the countries had been fostered by a series of industrial exhibitions held in Belgium in the years before 1914, the most famous of which was the Brussels Exhibition of 1910. The Board of Trade recognised the growing possibilities offered by the exhibitions by setting up an Exhibitions Branch, under whose aegis commissioners were appointed to various trade fairs. The man in charge for the Brussels Exhibition had been Lord Victor Lytton, bearer of a distinguished name and a man of wide sympathies. With the outbreak of war, Lytton cut short a holiday and returned to London to begin raising money for Belgian relief from firms which had been represented at the Exhibition. He was joined by four of his former colleagues--Sir Thomas Elliott, the Master of the Mint; Sir Charles Allom, a leading architect; Ulick Wintour, an official of the Board of Trade; and Sir William Chance--who were to become active in refugee relief. It is not clear exactly when he began his work, but it is possible that his example inspired the next gesture of help.

Nicholas Reyntiens, an official of the Board of Trade who was of Belgian extraction, gained permission to go to Belgium and bring back a boatload of women and children.¹² The background to this episode is obscure, but the belief that a boatload of refugees was shortly to arrive galvanised one woman into beginning what became the main refugee relief body, the War Refugees Committee.

On 17 August, the day that the government deserted Brussels, Dame Flora Lugard, wife of the great colonial administrator and famous in her own right as the former Flora Shaw, colonial correspondent for The Times and one of the first prominent English women journalists, cabled Captain James Craig, the Ulster Unionist leader. She asked for the hospitality lists and other schemes of the committee set up by the Ulster Unionist Council to plan the evacuation of women and children to England in the event of the civil war in Ireland that had seemed imminent until 5 August. Craig sent her all their registration forms, which were used thereafter, and, according to Lugard, "put me in touch with people who had the necessary information."¹³ According to A. T. Q. Stewart, the Ulster scheme was very comprehensive: the names of people willing to provide hospitality had been entered in a huge register, refugee officers had been appointed and

¹²The Earl of Lytton, Antony. A Record of Youth (London, 1935).

¹³E. Moberly Bell, Flora Shaw (London, 1947), 275.

transport arranged, while at the English end rest stations were made ready to receive the refugees. Dame Edith Lyttelton, wife of the recently deceased Tory Cabinet Minister, Alfred Lyttelton, and, like Lugard, a member of the English committee, paints a less rosy picture: apart from the hospital equipment, which was offered to the Red Cross and the Order of Saint John, "beyond registration forms there was not much to count upon."¹⁴ The fact remains, nonetheless, that the inspiration for, and early framework of the WRC came from the Ulster refugee committee. Lugard herself was not unaware of the irony that the Committee, the hub of the English effort to care for several hundred thousand Roman Catholic refugees who streamed across the English Channel, should be the "lineal descendant" of a committee of Protestant Englishmen looking anxiously to the

¹⁴A. T. Q. Stewart, The Ulster Crisis (London, 1967), 231-32; Lyttelton, 4-5. Some idea of the extent of preparations for a civil war made by Ulster's supporters in England may be drawn from the following letter from the Duchess of Somerset to Sir Edward Carson in January 1914:

"The DAY that the first shot is fired in Ireland--I shall have my complete ambulance started and ready--2 medical men, 2 surgeons, 6 trained nurses and 32 orderlies--I have also undertaken to house 100 women and children from Ulster--The Duke and I will both come over to give all the HELP we can." Quoted in Patrick Buckland, Irish Unionism (London, 1973), 2:52.

The Duchess later put her abundant energies into helping Belgian refugees through her Homes for Better Class Belgian Refugees.

welfare of their brethren across the Irish Sea.¹⁵

But the irony was more apparent than real. For the turmoil of the prewar years, though in one sense turning England's attention inwards and away from the wider European scene, had actually proved a useful preparation for the great conflict. In finding solutions to that peacetime strife and devising ways of coping with the problems which it raised, men and women had established models and frameworks on which to build after the war had begun. Just as the first great war charity, the National Relief Fund, could trace its origins back to the labour unrest of 1912, so the WRC, the second great new charity of that wartime autumn, traced its origins to the struggle over Ulster. The third great phenomenon of the turbulent prewar years, the women's suffrage issue, also contributed greatly to the preparedness to meet the demands of war on charitable organisations. The many suffragist and antisuffragist societies were able immediately to mobilise their resources and use them for new purposes as the war, overnight, cast into the shadows yet another issue which had for years before been engaging the energies of many able and self assured people. The enthusiasm for dynamic action in August 1914 was not entirely inchoate.

¹⁵ Lady Flora Lugard, The Work of the War Refugees Committee: An Address Given by Lady Lugard to the Royal Society of the Arts, March 24th, 1915 (London, 1915) [hereafter referred to as Lugard], 4. Cf. J. Buchan, Nelson's History of the War, 2:200-201.

Nevertheless, Lady Lugard had ready little in the way of an organisation when she began her work. Her first moves showed the instincts common to all organisers of new charities at that time. She sought patrons, notably the Comte de Lalaing, Belgian Minister in London, and Sir Edward Grey, who both approved her scheme.¹⁶ This action was taken probably on 20 August. It was a sensible move and an illuminating one: an energetic philanthropic entrepreneur seeking the blessing of official circles before going about her task. In the close-knit world of Edwardian 'society', one could not move far without the blessing of some eminent figures, and it helped if these were in positions of authority. The first organisation she contacted was one with broad imperial horizons, the Victoria League, founded in 1901 by Dame Meriol Talbot. The League, though imprecise in its aims and limited in its methods of carrying on propaganda for imperial solidarity,¹⁷ was a meeting ground for many society women, and Lugard attended one of its meetings in the middle of August. The meeting was held at the home of Lady Gertrude Emmott, later to head the WRC's clothing department, and Lyttelton was the speaker. Lyttelton had also been casting around "feverishly" for some useful outlet

¹⁶Lugard, 5-6.

¹⁷James Greenlee, "Education and Imperial Unity, 1901-1926", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1975, 90-93.

for her energies, and responded enthusiastically when Lugard told her that a boatload of refugees was expected at any moment, that no arrangements had been made to greet them, and that she had the approval of Grey and Lalaing to organise relief work. Taking the bait, Lyttelton became Lugard's first recruit and her corecruiter over several hectic days.

The story of their campaign is best told by
Lyttelton:

The first thing to do was to get some sort of public appeal for help into the papers under the aegis of a Committee, and to ensure money and hospitality. I knew two men accustomed to organizing, Mr. H. Brittain, now Sir Harry and Mr. A. [sic] Morgan, now Sir Herbert. I rang up Mr Brittain but he was just going away. Then I rang up Mr Morgan, and told him what had happened. He said he would come down immediately and bring a typist. As soon as he arrived he sketched the diagram of an organization, and dictated a letter to the Press with our assistance, and hurried off to secure an office for us after we had drawn up a list of names. It was important from the beginning to get the Roman Catholic element well represented. I secured the Duke of Norfolk--who afterwards withdrew--bearded Monsignor Bedwell in his sacristy, got the Comte de Lalaing, already interviewed by Lady Lugard, but who was plainly frightened by our vehemence, impounded Lady Gladstone, who at once offered her husband too, drove down to Hatfield on Sunday, and pressed Lord Hugh Cecil into the service, and on the Monday our letter appeared.¹⁸

Several things are worth noting about her account. It exemplifies the excitement and urgency of those early days and confirms Wedgwood Benn's point about the speeding up of all normal activities. It illuminates the enormous energies

¹⁸BEL 3, Dame Edith Lyttelton, untitled typescript memoir of experiences with Belgian refugees [hereafter referred to as Lyttelton], n.d. (ca. 1920).

unleashed by the war among upper class English women, denied direct access to political and administrative power. Men in the early days, if we can believe Lyttelton, responded more sluggishly and less imaginatively. Women took the lead, though men were to assert their authority within the refugee relief movement fairly quickly. Certainly it is interesting that these women of proven ability and organising experience should have felt it necessary to call upon a man to take the main burden of finding an office and drafting the letter to the press. The mystique of the 'man of business', which Lloyd George was to foster under his administration, made itself felt early in the history of the Committee. Lord Hugh Cecil showed his awareness of it when he formally offered his services to Gladstone: "If I can be of any service in smoothing people down, I shall be delighted to do anything you wish. Though incompetent for business, I am very good at being civil to people."¹⁹

The chief 'man of business' in the Committee as it developed had gained his experience not in Smith's Crisps, as had Morgan, but as one of the great political managers of his day. Herbert Gladstone, it is generally agreed, had been one of the chief architects of the massive Liberal victory of 1906. As Chief Whip, he reorganised the party's electoral machine ruthlessly and unsentimentally. He fared less well as Home Secretary in the first Liberal Cabinet and was shunted

¹⁹ Charles Mallet, Herbert Gladstone. A Memoir (London, 1932), 270.

off to fill the sensitive post of first Governor General of the new Union of South Africa. He returned to England scant weeks before the war began and found himself with nothing to do:

It was not easy for a man in Lord Gladstone's position, detached from politics in England and returning from high office abroad, to find the opportunities of work which he desired. The question of appointing a Home Rule Viceroy in Ireland was necessarily postponed. Gladstone's old colleagues were deeply engrossed in business.²⁰

Thus, like many other men of the calibre of Balfour, Long and Cecil, whose political careers were in the doldrums at this time, Gladstone found the war gave him a golden opportunity to throw himself into some work, any work. Unlike Balfour, Long, Cecil and Lytton, Gladstone was unusual in that he never found more exciting fields of war work, and in fact did not seem to seek them. Instead he remained one of the chief pillars of the refugee relief movement for the first two years of the war and continued to be influential in its councils thereafter. Most politicians and men of business

²⁰C. Mallet, Herbert Gladstone, 267. For judgements of Gladstone as Chief Whip, see A. K. Russell, "Laying the Charges for the Landslide: the Renewal of Liberal Party Organisation, 1902-1905", in A. Morris, ed., Edwardian Radicalism, 62-74, and H. V. Emy, Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892-1914 (Cambridge, 1973), 86-92. For critical accounts of his Governor-Generalship, see Ronald Hyam, The Failure of South African Expansion 1900-1948 (London, 1972), 21, 82, and G. B. Pyrah, Imperial Policy and South Africa 1902-1910 (Oxford, 1955), 25.

proved less faithful.²¹

What is most striking about the early nucleus of the Committee, however, is less that it was born of woman than that it drew its strength from no clear political group. Lugard herself tells us: "The only condition which I made was that the Committee should have no politics and no religious distinctions."²² While it did begin from a Tory core--Lugard, Lyttelton, Cecil and Lytton--that core also came to include the Liberal Gladstones, Morgan and Emmott. The pattern blurs further as the organisation grew and more prominent individuals took a hand in its works. The Ulster nexus was broken with the recruitment of the Gladstones, while ardent supporters of women's suffrage such as Lytton and Willoughby Dickinson worked closely with Gladstone, who, as Home Secretary, had been a *bête noire* of the militant suffragists.

²¹For the point of view of the men of affairs, see Cameron Hazlehurst, Politicians at War 1914-1916 (New York, 1971), 156:

"If all probing and criticism could not be quashed, those who might have been expected to give a lead in opposition could sometimes be diverted into other occupations. Participation without power was freely dispensed to those susceptible to official invitation. Ramsay MacDonald, John Burns, and Walter Long, for example, found themselves employed as members of the Government Committee on the Prevention and Relief of Distress. After seven weeks and 'a frightful amount of drudgery work' all three were eager to be free. As MacDonald told Charles Trevelyan: 'Long feels that we are being made fools of by the Cabinet and I believe will go at the first opportunity'."

²²Lugard, 7.

The Committee, in fact, grew out of no one ideological grouping of the prewar era. But its social cohesiveness was obvious: it sprang from the upper reaches of London society, particularly those reaches bordering on the political life of the capital. Just as the war produced a truce in the Houses of Parliament, so that truce was sealed at lower levels of the political order through shared labour in organisations such as the WRC.

The recruitment of workers for the Committee ran rather on 'feudal' lines. The leading figures brought in their own friends and sometimes retainers, as in the case of Arthur Tilney Bassett, private secretary to the Gladstone family and a prominent official of the Committee in its later days. The central nexus of the group was that of the Lytteltons and Gladstones. Though their politics were contrary, the two families were related and on friendly terms. Lady Lugard had shown great shrewdness in picking Lyttelton as her first aide. Through her she gained at a stroke wide connections with both Liberals and Tories.²³

²³Edith Lyttelton was a Balfour and, with her cousin Arthur, one of the famous 'Souls', the brilliant and self-admiring late Victorian circle, whose membership spanned both political parties. Alfred Lyttelton's first wife was Laura Tennant, one of an influential Liberal family. Her sister, Margot, married Herbert Asquith. Thus Alfred Lyttelton had powerful connections with Liberal circles by marriage as well as through his family's intimate connection with the Gladstones. And Edith Lyttelton knew many of these people in her own right, as well as through her husband. The importance of a bridging figure such as she should not be underestimated. The Ulster crisis had envenomed personal relationships in the upper levels of British society throughout 1914. Gladstone's

The move proved rather too successful: Lugard rapidly found herself pushed to the background and power devolved to Gladstone and Lyttelton. Lord Lytton also recruited some friends for the staff, but his group never seriously challenged the solid Gladstone-Lyttelton bloc. The pre-eminence of this group caused some resentment at times, and there is evidence that some of the feuds within the Committee ran roughly along tribal lines.²⁴ Lugard was to resolve the frustrations of her eclipse by ultimately leaving the Committee to begin yet another refugee relief organisation which remained always under her firm control. From her new base she carried on a running guerrilla war with the larger Committee for the duration of the war. The ties of friendship and family were more important than political affiliation in determining the composition of the Committee.

absence from England until just before the outbreak of war likewise had insulated him from some of these tensions, so he and Lyttelton were ideal choices to lead the politically disparate forces of the WRC.

²⁴ It is impossible to demonstrate conclusively that power within the Committee ran along lines of personal friendship, but it is significant that most of the major figures ousted from or demoted in the Committee were unconnected, as far as can be ascertained, with the central group. Lugard is the most prominent example. When she left, she probably took her own followers with her. Certainly Sir James Dunlop-Smith joined her new committee's executive. When Lord Lytton left the Committee, his satellite, Mrs Henn Collins, ran into constant trouble with the Managing Committee. Basil Williams, another putative outsider, was sharply attacked by Gladstone for his handling of the WRC's Folkestone organisation. He was forced to step down shortly after the LGB agreed to assume much of the responsibility for reception procedures there. In his place was sent Leonard Franklin, Herbert Samuel's brother-in-law.

As to religious affiliations, interestingly the early impetus did not come from Roman Catholics, as one might have expected. One could argue that there were too few Catholics in the upper levels of British society, but even Catholic aristocrats such as the Duke of Norfolk at first showed little interest in their co-religionists' welfare. It was only because of Lugard's determination to have Catholics represented on the Executive Committee that any attended the first meeting: the Duke of Norfolk, who played little part thereafter; Monsignor Bedwell; Fr. Cator, a Jesuit; and Mrs James Hope, president of the Catholic Womens' League, which was to spearhead such Catholic relief work as there was. It is as interesting to consider the extreme concern for Catholic sensibilities shown by Lugard and Lyttelton as it is to reflect on Catholic sluggishness. Lugard approached the Catholic authorities even before she tackled Grey and Lalaing. She termed this "chang[ing] what I may call the 'sentiment base'."²⁵ It was a logical step to take, but did she, one wonders, take it also because Catholics had proven themselves another of the militant and prickly minorities which harassed the peace of prewar England?²⁶

²⁵ Lugard, 5.

²⁶ Gladstone himself had cause to know this, having been Home Secretary at the time of the 1908 Eucharistic Congress in London, when a Papal Legate came to England for the first time in more than three hundred years and was scheduled to proceed through the streets of Westminster with

The Catholics are often seen as the sinned-against in English religious warfare. But they were giving as good as they got by the early twentieth century, and popular polemics were buttressed by the vigorous apologetics of a new school of Catholic publicists, of whom Belloc and Chesterton--who was Catholic in all but name well before his tardy conversion in 1922--were the most prominent. They led many Catholics in an offensive aimed at reversing the Reformation, undoing the work of 'Bloody Henry', and bringing back the happy days of Catholic Merrie England. Their offensive within England and the Irish crisis combined, perhaps, to cause Lugard's sensitivity. She took pains later to stress that the Catholic hierarchy had been extremely cordial towards the movement. They merely specified that relief work "be properly organized and. . . be viewed with favour by the Government," underlining the significance of her care in seeking official approval. It was assumed in private circles as well as in the government and civil service that the task of seeing to the many social problems caused by the war was not one for the government alone, but

scores of other ecclesiastics in full canonical regalia behind the exposed Blessed Sacrament. A militant Protestant backlash caused the government to press successfully for the abandonment of the ceremony. The government received a very bad press and Gladstone was generally held to have bungled the affair. For an account of the controversy, see C. Mallet, Gladstone, 217-19.

that private efforts should be officially coordinated and sanctioned.²⁷

But at the beginning, questions of policy and ultimate responsibility had to be subordinated to the urgent task of setting up an organisation. Morgan obtained offices for the embryonic Committee in General Buildings, Aldwych. This was a very new structure erected in 1910 for the General Accident Fire Life Assurance Company, a relatively young but thriving firm, ruled autocratically by its founder, a buccaneering Scot named Francis Norie-Miller, who was a close friend or associate of Morgan. The office was given free, and as the Committee's work and staff continued to expand and more space was needed, the Company was extremely generous in asking a very low rental. Relations between landlord and tenant were in fact remarkably harmonious.

The first move of the small group which met together on Sunday, 23 August, was to draw up a letter to send at once to the press. Morgan drafted the letter, which was sent off that evening and appeared the next day. It marked the arrival on the public stage of the War Refugees Committee, but also contained within it the seeds of much of the confusion that afflicted the infant movement. For one thing, it asked for hospitality for women and children only. This largely stemmed from the expectations rooted in the Ulster crisis. But Reyntiens also told Lugard to expect women and children

²⁷Lugard, 5.

when his boat arrived from Ostend.²⁸ No mention was made of men or extended family groups, and the early allocation efforts suffered from this fundamental misjudgment. Gladstone criticised it on other grounds, holding the appeal responsible not only for "the flood of useless hospitality received" but also for the flood of useless volunteers who swamped the small staff. He grumbled to Lyttelton some months later of "the terrible mischief which resulted at the start of the Committee by opening the sluices before we had prepared the channels."²⁹ Lyttelton likewise admitted they had blundered: "Naturally we all wanted the personal contact with the refugees, but we should have been wiser if we had first made sure of a proper organisation behind us."³⁰ The Committee was of its time in making these mistakes. On a much vaster scale, the same errors of official underpreparedness and embarrassingly large public response were wreaking havoc with Lord Kitchener's recruiting drive for his New Armies.

²⁸Lyttelton, 4.

²⁹BEL 3/2/1, interview with Gladstone by Miss Ethel Conway, Director of Women's Work and War Refugees Collection, Imperial War Museum, 14 January 1918: BM, Herbert Gladstone Papers, Add. MSS. [hereafter referred to as GP], 46086/191-92, Gladstone to Lyttelton, 25 January 1915. Gladstone's imagery was apt: in October-November 1914, the Belgian army had saved itself from certain destruction by opening sluices along the Yser river system and flooding a large area between them and the Germans.

³⁰Lyttelton, 6.

The first week was chaos. The appeal which appeared in the morning press was answered the same day in the "embarrassing if. . . encouraging form of no less than 1,000 letters, all containing offers of hospitality and help." Even more letters were received on subsequent days, and on the day the Committee received five thousand letters it also had twelve hundred people call at its office.³¹ It is only fair to say that if the Committee had misjudged the extent of the response to the appeal, it was not alone in its error. It took more than a few weeks for even the most practical men and women to adapt to the novel conditions. There were no clear precedents. Appeals for help for distressed groups in the prewar years had always been sectional. People disagreed vehemently on the rights and wrongs of aid for the families of London's striking dockers, for the unemployed, for Catholic slum children being given holidays in England during the protracted Dublin strike led by James Larkin in 1913,³² or for Ulster's women and children. The Belgians touched an entirely

³¹Lugard, 8.

³²Lugard's sensitivity to Catholic feelings may well have stemmed from this strike, during which a group of English suffragettes offered to bring strikers' children to England and care for them till the strike ended. The first children left on 17 October, and some actually reached English homes. But on 21 October, the Archbishop of Dublin denounced the scheme as a danger to the children's faith. This led to attacks by mobs on the people escorting the children from the country and the scheme was hastily abandoned. Several people were charged with kidnapping in the aftermath of the affair. The incident received wide publicity in England. When the WRC advertised that it expected women and children from Belgium, the response of various correspondents to The Times

new chord. Their plight had no domestic complications for Englishmen. All who supported the war saw in the uprooted citizenry of Flanders and Wallonia a living symbol of why their nation had gone to war, while the few opponents of the war could scarcely object to the help extended. Thus, the Birmingham Trades Council, bitterly divided over the war, was able to make common cause only in aiding Birmingham's refugees.³³ Belgian relief in those early months was a universally popular cause, and the novelty of that is worth stressing.

The Committee rapidly forfeited the advantages of massive public sympathy by its initial mistakes, and joined the ranks of many other societies which contributed to the growth of a certain cynicism among women in particular by asking their help and then having to rebuff volunteers. "Everyone was making 'calls to women'," and the women responded by calling at bureaux, and were frequently snubbed, which

focussed on the issue of the children. Thus, on 5 September, one wrote that: "If. . . the organization for the Ulster children be made wise use of. . . the children might perhaps be stranded in country villages unable to get to their own church or see their own clergymen." And on 14 September, the Committee's care in seeking Catholic cooperation was explained thus: "It was thought that, in view of the religion of the great majority of the refugees, there would lie upon the Committee something approaching to a sacred obligation that orphaned children should be placed where they could be brought up in the faith of their fathers." For the kidnapping' affair see C. D. Greaves, James Connolly (London, 1971), 318; L. Ó'Broin, Chief Secretary (London, 1969), 77; and F. S. L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine (London, 1971), 279-82.

³³ John Corbett, The Birmingham Trades Council 1886-1966 (London, 1966), 105-106, 110-11.

left them wondering why they had been called.³⁴ The Committee's files abound in such complaints at this time. In some terse notes scribbled shortly after January 1915, Gladstone described the first week thus:

Period of hopeless confusion. Small offices thronged by confused crowd of refugees and persons anxious to help. Several volY workers established themselves in connection with hospitality transport etc without authority. Secretariat non-existent. Thousands of letters poured in. Finances safeguarded.³⁵

The crowds of the first two days were overwhelmingly English. Some Belgians arrived on the first day, but Reyntiens' proposal for a shipload had disappeared into limbo. Little groups of refugees came trickling through, those needing immediate accommodation being housed at 49 St. George's Road, first of the Committee's hostels. It had been obtained through the graces of Sir James Dunlop-Smith, political aide-de-camp to the Under Secretary of State for India. He knew Lugard and Lyttelton through the Victoria League, and it seems that Lyttelton went to the League for help on the first difficult day of active work. The house was used to accommodate the King's Indian orderlies but was at that moment standing empty, though furnished.³⁶

This hostel was staffed by the first of the voluntary bodies to come to the aid of the new refugee organisation: the Voluntary Aid Detachments. The VAD's, as they came to

³⁴ Sarah Macnaughtan, A Woman's Diary of the War (London, 1915), 19.

³⁵ GP 46102/34, note by Gladstone, n.d.

³⁶ Lugard, 10-11; Lyttelton, 6.

be known, had been founded as an adjunct of the Territorial Army in 1909, and were set up under the auspices of the British Red Cross.³⁷ Despite its prestigious backing, the VAD movement fared no better than the famous Dr. Elsie Inglis, who offered a ready-equipped hospital and its staff for work at the front, only to be rebuffed ungraciously by the War Office. The War Office likewise refused Dame Katherine Furse, founder of the Detachments, when she first offered help, and so she was delighted when Lyttelton asked her for assistance.³⁸ The reception of Belgian refugees gave the as yet untried movement a chance to prove its mettle, and it rose to the task. The Detachments provided many workers for the Committee's hostels, staff for the skating rink at Aldwych when it became the central clearing house for refugees, and helpers at the railway stations. They were withdrawn from most refugee work as the number of British and Allied wounded grew enormously and their services were urgently needed by the same authorities who had at first spurned their help.

The first public body to offer help was a local authority: the Borough Council of Camberwell offered the use

³⁷S. Unwin, The Work of VAD London I (London, 1920), 13; T. Bowser, British VAD Work, 17; Arthur Marwick, Women at War 1914-1918 (London, 1977), 21.

³⁸Lyttelton, 9.

of the Dulwich Baths. The Baths had been prepared for another use, as a military hospital holding eighty to a hundred beds. Once again, the Belgians were beneficiaries of energies directed originally to quite other purposes. They were fortunate that the speed of the German advance and the slowness and smallness of Britain's initial commitment of troops had not thrown back large numbers of wounded soldiers to British shores. In the words of one member of the South London Red Cross, Camberwell Division, who helped prepare the Baths in early August:

Some of us felt rather disgusted when we heard the first inmates were to be civilian refugees; it did seem a decided come down after all our grand plans, but the joy at something to do did away with our first reluctance and great was the excitement over the first arrivals.³⁹

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, 26 August, a Mrs. Walter Cave took charge of a disused warehouse belonging to the Army and Navy Stores and strategically sited just opposite Victoria Station. She had managed to get this on loan from the owners: another of the ways in which the high social status of the Committee's members stood it in good stead. Within a day the former shirt factory was converted into a hostel for 250 people.⁴⁰

Crockery and linen were lent by Rowton Houses, the chain of poor men's lodging houses which later took in many refugees

³⁹McMaster University, Mills Memorial Library, War Collection, #2, Griffiths files: Evangeline Griffiths, "Notes on Experiences Amongst the War Refugees", n.d.

⁴⁰Lugard, 11-12; WRC I, 2; T. Bowser, British VAD Work, 100.

waiting for more permanent quarters.⁴¹ Initiatives such as Mrs. Cave's meant that, despite the administrative shambles at Aldwych, things did get done and the refugees were all found accommodation of some kind.

At Aldwych, the first steps were taken to bring some order out of the general chaos. The first general meeting of the Executive took place on the 25th and the agenda included the issues of the registration of refugees and the degree of the Committee's responsibility for them. It was decided that registration should take place at the port of arrival and that case histories regarding allocation and related themes should be sent to London. All offers of assistance were to be placed at the disposal of the Belgian Society in London, but the Committee would not accept further responsibility for cases dealt with directly by that Society.⁴² A further proviso laid down that only refugees already in this country were to be dealt with. The first principle was eroded as time went on and smaller societies were forced to

⁴¹Rowton Houses were set up by Baron Rowton, at one time Disraeli's private secretary, who decided to found hotels for poor men which would be 'clublike' and cheap. The first house was opened in 1892, and Rowton Houses Limited was set up in 1894. Six houses were eventually opened with over five thousand beds in all. Dictionary of National Biography Supplement 1901-11 (London, 1912), 422-23.

⁴²This may have been the Société Belge de Bienfaisance, a "small and poor" body dealing mainly with the elderly. Public Record Office, Home Office files, HO 45/10737/261921/2, W. T. B. of the Destitute Aliens Committee to John Pedder, 2 September 1914 [hereafter referred to as HO etc.]; GP 46101/2, agenda for meeting of Executive Committee of WRC, 25 August 1914.

rely upon the Committee for assistance and expertise; and the second collapsed when officials of the Committee and the LGB went to Belgium in September and October to organise evacuation and a little later when the Board of Trade began recruiting refugees from Holland for work in war industries.

No proper minutes were kept of the early meetings of the Committee and it is impossible to tell who attended, beyond the nuclear group. A letter to the press drafted by Gladstone on the 26th carried the names of a large 'General Committee' which included Lord Milner, Mrs. Asquith, Mrs. Harcourt, Lord and Lady Beauchamp and Lord and Lady Esher. As none of these ever played an active part in the activities of the Committee, it is to be assumed that they were more 'patrons' than Committee members. The first Report of the Committee described its early organisation as being "on the usual constitutional lines." This seems to have meant at that time that one sought first to construct a noble facade, while the real centre of gravity lay elsewhere. The same report went on to point out the significance of the general committee for an organisation of that era: "a large General Committee of influential and representative persons was constituted."⁴³ Permeating the thinking of the Committee's founders was the belief that there were powerful sources of influence in society and that these must be tapped before

⁴³ War Refugees Committee, First Report (London, 1916),
4 [hereafter referred to as WRC I].

substantial support could be assured. Significantly, the general committee included no representatives of the labour movement, though there were two Catholics, a prelate and Mrs Hope of the CWL. It was not thought necessary at first to have to influence or to represent the working class. The WRC's upper-class leaders assumed either that refugee relief would be an effort conducted purely by the patriotic moneyed classes or that the lower classes would be content to accept the leadership of their betters. The early constitution of the Committee reflected crucial assumptions of Edwardian philanthropy: notably, that philanthropy was the preserve mainly of the wealthy (though the poor were always held up to their betters as an example of unselfish and heroic self-giving in fund-raising campaigns), and that 'influence' counted more than 'representation'. Significantly, in the first reference to the Committee in official correspondence, Sir Francis Villiers had noted in a despatch to Grey that "an influential Committee under the chairmanship of Lord Hugh Cecil" had been set up.⁴⁴ The comfortable belief in a stable world of leaders and led was soon to be sharply challenged, as organised labour demanded access to power at all levels of public activity as its price for participation in the war effort.

Overlapping the general committee but more directly involved in the affairs of the refugee movement was the

⁴⁴FO 123/538/296, Villiers to Grey, 27 August 1914.

executive committee. This included many members of the other committee: Gladstone, Lugard, Lytton, Cecil, Morgan, Lyttelton, Lady Emmott, Mrs. Hope, Humphrey Leggett, Sir Albert Stanley and Sir Charles Allom. Others were included because of their very practical involvement in facets of refugee relief work. Thus, the transport industry was represented by Stanley, of the London General Omnibus Company, and by Francis Dent, general manager of the South East and Chatham Railway Company, which ran the line between Folkestone and London. The powerful Jewish community was represented by a young activist lawyer, F. M. Guedalla, and by the more established figure of Mrs. Louise Gilbert Samuel, Herbert Samuel's sister-in-law and thus another very useful link with the government. Another Jewish member, a Belgian named Charles Baschwitz, was included probably because he had been a resident in London for some years.

One pressing problem for relief workers was that so few people knew anything about Belgium. If the refugees had been French, thousands of volunteers could have come forward with intimate knowledge of all districts of France. The Belgians were an enigma, and Flemish was spoken by only a handful of Englishmen--and even these often had trouble understanding the broad dialects spoken by many of the refugees. Belgian interests were directly represented on the committee by the Belgian Consul-General, M. Pollet, and by Messrs. de Cartier de Marchienne and de Coppet. Two

Liberal backbenchers, Arthur Allen and Willoughby Dickinson completed the list. Dickinson was one of five members named in a rather erratic list in Gladstone's papers as officials of the Committee.⁴⁵ Gladstone was Honorary Treasurer, Morgan Honorary Secretary, and the Secretary was a Mr. Hennessy Cook, a shadowy figure soon to vanish from the scene after bitter infighting. His successor, Algernon Maudslay, was at this time merely Superintendent of the Office. It is not clear when exactly this latter position was created, and quite possibly it did not exist in the first breathless days. In the earliest period of activity, decisions were taken ad hoc by individuals or groups of individuals on the spot, or by the cumbersome executive committee.

The first step taken to disperse power and responsibility was the setting up of a number of sub-committees to run various departments. The work of the Committee was divided into various spheres, and it will be convenient henceforth to consider the work under these categories.⁴⁶

⁴⁵GP 46101/34, "WRC Executive Committee", n.d. (late 1914).

⁴⁶The WRC went through many organisational changes in the first two months and thereafter. My account to some extent has telescoped those changes. This has been necessary for the sake of economy, clarity, and the harmonising of discrepant accounts of the Committee's structure. The memoirs of various Committee members conflict wildly on the time at which certain changes were made, and there is much ambiguity in the use of the word 'department' to describe sections of the organisation. Some 'departments' were in fact sections of sub-departments!

One of the Committee's first considerations was money. Lugard could later write of the period of early confusion: "We contented ourselves with safeguarding our cheques, and gave our thoughts to the refugees."⁴⁷ And Gladstone stressed that the finances were "safeguarded" during the first week. This was done by creating a Finance Department, under an efficient professional, Harold Bourne. Valuable help was given by the firm of Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths and Company, who became honorary accountants to many war charities. They lent one of their officers and made arrangements for a monthly audit. The Committee was saved vast expense by the generosity of such firms.⁴⁸

One immediate financial problem was dealt with in Gladstone's letter to the press on 26 August. It began:

Sir,

The recent and unexpected arrival in England of hundreds of refugees from Belgium called for immediate action, and the necessarily rapid organisation of the Refugees Committee has not unnaturally been confused to some extent with the Belgian Relief Fund started and operated by the Belgian Minister, the Comte de Lalaing. But the Belgian Relief Fund is being applied solely for the benefit of persons in Belgium, who have been made destitute by the war, while the work of the War Refugees Committee is primarily directed to help refugees . . . The War Refugees Committee, though

⁴⁷Lugard, 20.

⁴⁸WRC I, 15. Little work seems to have been done on the support which business firms gave to charity. Yet their substantial aid in kind was a powerful argument for preserving the role of philanthropy in social welfare: as soon as the government took over charity's tasks, all such hidden savings would become chargeable to the public purse. (See chapter XI.)

the complement to the Belgian Relief Fund, and cordially supported by the Belgian Minister who has joined the General Committee, has a distinct object and purpose.⁴⁹

It was, in mild terms, a declaration of war. Lalaing had started his fund on the outbreak of war and it reaped the benefit of the popular sympathy for Belgium, especially as news of brutal German measures against civilians began to filter through. Large sums poured in. Gladstone and others were convinced that much of this money was intended for the Committee. They were furious when Lalaing failed to make clear that his funds were to be applied only to relief in Belgium and that his organisation was entirely distinct from the Committee. Lugard and Gladstone both pointed out the effect of this confusion in a restrained manner in their public pronouncements,⁵⁰ but were privately more pungent. The difficulty was, as Gladstone made clear to a friend who wrote asking what had happened to the money subscribed to the Fund, that, while agreeing with the suggestion that the Fund be made to publish its accounts, the Committee had no control over the other body. They could do nothing in the face of Lalaing's refusal to part with any of his money. "As you will realise," he concluded, "it is quite impossible for us to move publicly in the matter."⁵¹ The experience

⁴⁹GP 46101/15-16, copy of letter to press by Gladstone, 26 August 1914.

⁵⁰WRC I, 8; Lugard, 4-5.

⁵¹GP 46080/103, Gladstone to Mrs S. A. P. Kitkat, 12 January 1915.

with the Fund was to spur the Committee towards energetic support for the tighter control of war charities, a campaign which culminated in the War Charities Act of 1916.⁵² It was also to have profound effects on the Committee's conception of its role. Lacking large funds, it had to be extremely careful with its resources and could not enter into providing direct relief for the refugees. Distinguishing later between the Committee and the Relief Fund, Lugard said, "Our wealth has consisted mainly in offers of hospitality and gifts in kind," but that was rather making a virtue of necessity.⁵³ The WRC had to restrict its handouts to the period immediately after refugees arrived (though demands for financial relief were to grow later), and to husband its resources for administrative needs. Its poverty also naturally increased its dependence on the government.

The Finance Department was the first Department as such to develop, but Bourne did not arrive on the scene until early September. A fully bureaucratic structure took some time to emerge at Aldwych, and in the early weeks most aspects of the Committee's work were carried on in a haphazard way. Two phenomena underlay the development of a more complex and coherent organisational pattern: the shock of floods of refugees, and the growing involvement of the

⁵²See chapter XII.

⁵³Lugard, 35.

government. It is time now to consider the story of the refugee exodus and the British government's response to a novel and unwelcome problem.

CHAPTER III

THE GOVERNMENT BECOMES INVOLVED

'This Is No Time for Charity'

Although the first decisive action was taken by private individuals, pockets of concern for the plight of Belgium's civil population did exist in the British government. The LGB's Reyntiens, with Ulick Wintour of the Exhibitions Branch of the Board of Trade, had made a trip to Belgium at an early date and their efforts were the catalyst for the Committee. The Exhibitions Branch was an obvious first starter because of its close connection with Belgium over the preceding four years. Wintour had been British Chief Commissioner at the Brussels and Ghent Exhibitions and Reyntiens' Belgian ancestry gave him a very real interest in the fate of the people of Belgium.

Predictably, the Foreign Office, as the branch of government most concerned with the Belgian situation, was second to assume some responsibility. It was prodded by R. C. Hawkins, secretary of the Wounded Allies Relief Commission, a private body which came into being on the very outbreak of war and which had outlined a scheme for treating wounded Belgian soldiers in English hospitals. This initiative came in the first week of hostilities, and in

response the Foreign Office conferred with the mayor of Deal. The link with Deal ran via Lord George Hamilton, the veteran Tory statesman now pottering around at the Foreign Office. Hamilton was at Deal on the outbreak of war and some refugees may have already landed there. Hamilton wrote to Hawkins on 24 August that "under present circumstances it seems to me unlikely that any considerable number of wounded Belgians or French would be transported across the Channel for convalescent treatment." This was a rather optimistic statement in view of the bleak situation in Belgium, where the British Expeditionary Force was beginning a desperate struggle in the area of Mons, and the Belgian army had been bottled up in Antwerp with only a relatively narrow coastal strip still in the hands of the Allies. Such expectations left English officialdom ill-prepared for the many wounded Belgian soldiers who had to be hurriedly shipped to England later. Nonetheless, Hamilton was not entirely sanguine, and went on to suggest that Hawkins might reshape his scheme in readiness for other purposes:

It occurred to us all here that there is a very pressing emergency in consequence of the Germans over-running the non-belligerent part of Belgium. There must be a very large number of refugees who will come to this country almost penniless.

He therefore suggested that the Commission could most usefully direct its resources towards providing some board and lodging for such refugees. He had spoken to the Belgian consul at Dover that day who thought there would be many of

these. Hamilton felt that "we ought, if possible, to be prepared to do our best to temporarily support them."¹ Thus, it seems from the tenor of Hamilton's letter--especially that suggestive "it occurred to us all here"--that various members of the Foreign Office staff were personally aware of the human misery caused by the war. And the record of the Foreign Office throughout the war tended on the whole to demonstrate a deep sympathy for the refugees. It was professionally convenient to show such sympathy: the Foreign Office had to convince the battered and demoralised Belgian government of His Majesty's Government's complete solidarity and support. The refugees were also a useful, if potentially double-edged, propaganda weapon in impressing the righteousness of the Allied cause upon neutral powers.

But the members of the Foreign Office prided themselves on being more than mere professionals. They were members of the most exclusive branch of the civil service, and heirs to a self-confident, humane and aristocratic tradition. Men like Lord George Hamilton were born into the ruling elite. Where members of lesser departments of government were disposed to cloak their personal convictions in bureaucratism, he and his colleagues expressed their own views unashamedly and were less inclined to draw a line between their public and private roles. Perhaps for this reason,

¹HO 45/10737/261921/2, Lord George Hamilton to R. C. Hawkins, 24 August 1914.

there is a refreshing immediacy and humanity about minutes on the refugee problem by Foreign Office officials.²

The Foreign Office not only approved Lugard's hospitality scheme; it had already used her as an intermediary to sound out the willingness of the Belgian government to sanction and to publicise such a scheme. A week later, on the 27th, Villiers, now removed with the government to Antwerp, reported to Grey that thousands of refugees were pouring into the city and creating a difficult situation. The Belgian government was anxious to know if Britain would approve arrangements for receiving those who could not be accommodated in Antwerp. The estimated number at that time was two thousand, but more would perhaps follow. Villiers fostered the unpreparedness of British officialdom by assuming Grey--presumably on hearsay from Belgian sources--that these refugees were "of the agricultural class and people of quite respectable position." To Villiers' communication an unknown hand appended the query, pregnant with irony in view of later events: "Could 2000 be received in England?"³

The Foreign Office thereupon contacted the Home Office and the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, decreed that Belgian

²For a beautifully written, acute analysis of the Foreign Office in this period, see Zara Steiner, The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898-1914 (Cambridge, 1969).

³FO 123/538/296, Villiers to Grey, 27 August 1914.

refugees were to be treated as friends. No difficulty would be put in the way of their landing, provided they landed at approved ports under the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 and could satisfy an Aliens Officer that they were "in fact Belgians and not Germans or Austrians." Not surprisingly, prohibited ports--those containing important naval or military installations--were closed to them. The Home Office disclaimed any responsibility for the policy of accepting large numbers of aliens into England, arguing that such responsibility lay with the Foreign Office or the Cabinet as a whole. McKenna indeed acquiesced only grudgingly:

Mr. McKenna can only say that, with every wish to show the utmost friendliness to Belgium, he feels some doubt whether it will in many cases be to the advantage even of the refugees themselves to come to this country; while, if their numbers should be large, they might after a time become a serious source of embarrassment.

The Foreign Office politely rejected this attempt to foist responsibility onto its shoulders. McKenna's doctrine made sense only if British policy remained in the realm of cheap and lofty gestures and if such refugees as arrived were self-supporting. As soon as practical relief measures were required, the matter had passed out of the hands of the Foreign Office. Since the latter already saw that receiving refugees inevitably implied relieving refugees, its view of its role was that of sympathetic go-between and forwarder of proposals for active help. But, in rejecting its own involvement, it was vague as to where ultimate responsibility lay: its reply to the Home Office merely mentioned "the Departments

most concerned."⁴ Faced with a problem which was both complex and devoid of useful precedents, no department was eager to assume responsibility.

Before effective governmental action was forthcoming, the thorny question of responsibility had to be attacked. The WRC had swiftly come to realise that the task of coping with refugees was hopeless without government cooperation. There were numerous problems relating to sea and land transport, arrangements at ports in Belgium and England, the intricacies of the new Aliens Act, and "above all, the necessity for securing great buildings for reception," and all needed official approval and assistance. But the Committee's frantic attempts to induce various departments to take over the refugees at first got nowhere. It approached the Board of Trade, the Home Office and Foreign Office without success. The appeals to the Board of Trade and Foreign Office were acts of desperation. The two obvious candidates were the Home Office and the Local Government Board, the former because of its jurisdiction over aliens and the latter because of its involvement in social welfare. Samuel considered that responsibility lay with the Home Office. His biographer leaves the impression that Samuel was shocked at a rather bizarre and impractical proposal by McKenna that refugees could be herded into vast camps in southern Ireland, and that

⁴HO 45/10737/261921/1 and 2, R. Paget to under secretary of state for the Home Office, and reply, 29 August 1914.

he thereupon "readily agreed" to McKenna's suggestion that, because the Home Office was already staggering under the burden of new tasks brought by the war, the LGB should deal with the problem. This flattering account is belied by other sources and by the sequence of events. Given the close acquaintance of Gladstone and Samuel, and the Board's obvious candidacy for the job of supervising refugee work, the Committee almost certainly appealed to Samuel at the very outset, especially in regard to the urgent problem of securing depots for the reception of refugees. But the Committee's first Report states that "finally, a strong appeal was made to the Prime Minister, with the result that the necessary responsibility was assigned to the Local Government Board." The clear implication is that the Board did not undertake refugee work as the result of a gentlemen's agreement--or horse-trading--but in obedience to a prime ministerial fiat.⁵

But Asquith disliked issuing edicts, and preferred to let the Cabinet meander its way to collective decisions.

⁵WRC I, 5; John Bowle, Viscount Samuel (London, 1957), 121. Samuel, in his own Memoirs (London, 1945), 107, explicitly states that the Home Office would normally have dealt with all matters pertaining to aliens. He says that, when he had disagreed with McKenna's proposal for the Irish camps and the latter asked him to take responsibility for the refugees, he agreed, primarily because the LGB had relatively little to do. Samuel's successor was still puzzled after the war as to why the refugees had become a charge on the Board. Walter Long, Memories (London, 1923), 231-32.

While this process was working its way out, he and his colleagues contented themselves with rhetoric. Thus, when the two Houses unanimously passed an Address of Sympathy to the King of the Belgians on 27 August, speeches on both sides were marked by many florid platitudes and few practical proposals. It was left to the Marquess of Lansdowne, in seconding the motion for the opposition in the Lords, to make even a vague reference to the possibility of concrete action. He solemnly declared in his peroration:

I believe there is not a man or woman within this country who does not pray that in the fullness of time we may be able to give practical proof by our deeds of the gratitude, the sympathy, and the admiration which in feeble words we are seeking to express this evening.⁶

These were fine words, but they alluded to a hazy future. Pressure began to mount within Parliament over the next few days for more definite statements of government intentions towards refugees. On 28 August, the veteran Labour MP, George Barnes, asked if the government had any information on the number of impoverished and destitute Belgians who had arrived in England and if it was prepared to lay aside a sum of money for their relief. Asquith returned a vague answer, telling him to write to the "relevant Minister."⁷ Who that might be he did not say, and Barnes did not press him further. Barnes does not seem to have

⁶PD, (Lords), 27 August 1914, 5th ser., 17, col. 515.

⁷PD, (Commons), 28 August 1914, 5th ser., 66, col. 276.

played any further part in the history of refugee relief, except to repeat his question twelve days later. On the other hand, members such as Dickinson and the Liberal MP from North London, Percy Alden, who were to be important protagonists, were at this point silent. The next pressure came from a very different quarter, when the crusty Unionist MP, Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, asked the Prime Minister on the 31st if state funds would be used to relieve destitute refugees. Asquith again temporised: "There is a certain number of funds which are being raised by private action for the purpose, and I would rather see how that works out before answering the. . . question." This was despite the fact that the chief private agency had been frantically pleading for help throughout the week.⁸

The mounting pressures behind the scenes and in Parliament, however, did have their effect, though it was not till 3 or 4 September that Asquith forced the issue between McKenna and Samuel and the LGB was pushed into the arena. Now Samuel, once Gladstone's subordinate at the Home Office, came to be his old master's nominal superior. In general, relations between the two were amicable, but there were to be many times when the Board under Samuel was to lock horns with the Committee under Gladstone. Initially, Samuel entered upon his new responsibilities at an easy pace. Probably his permanent officials fed him a highly unrealistic assessment

⁸Ibid., col. 368.

of the demands likely to be made on the Board. J. Lithiby of the Board wrote to the Foreign Office on 2 September to say that the Belgian legislature had placed foreigners on the same footing as Belgians in the matter of public relief. It had been ruled, therefore, that under existing English law, Belgian nationals would have a claim equal to that of British subjects to relief from the poor law. He concluded by claiming optimistically that:

The Secretary of State is no doubt aware that an influential Committee has been formed under the chairmanship of Lord Hugh Cecil to make arrangements for the care of refugees from Belgium and it may be supposed that the activities of this Committee will do much to obviate the necessity of application to the Poor Law authorities.⁹

In such a view--and it was widely held at all levels of the government in 1914--private charity was to be the beast of burden, and the traditional channels of public relief would take the overload. It was expressed in its most cynical form by a Home Office official on 2 September:

If for reasons of policy it should come about that Belgians were allowed to come into this country for refuge, they could, I think, be dealt with even in considerable numbers by Charitable Funds, which would probably in the long run have to be supplemented by State assistance. It might be thought a graceful, and not very expensive way of assisting our brave allies.¹⁰

⁹FO 123/543/138, J. Lithiby to FO, 2 September 1914. The Treasury also shared the view that 'Private Agencies will be able to render the necessary assistance' to the distressed families of friendly alien soldiers. Public Record Office, Treasury files, T 12/33, T. L. Heath to FO, 1 September 1914 [hereafter referred to as T etc].

¹⁰HO 45/10737/261921/2, W. T. B. to J. Pedder, 2 September 1914.

Such blithe opportunism was soon destroyed by events.

On 27 August, Foreign Office despatches had mentioned the possible arrival of two thousand refugees. On 2 September, the same day that the Board was writing its complacent note to the Foreign Office on the role of private charity, Grey informed Villiers that Lalaing had enquired if the British could provide transport for fifty thousand non-combatants! Some German prize ships lying in the Scheldt had been discussed in Cabinet the week before and it had been proposed that they be brought to England. They were still at their moorings, and were the only transport available for the large numbers of refugees contemplated. Crews were being sent to man them and Grey had contacted the Netherlands government to assure it of British willingness to receive the refugees and ships, "as the matter does not admit of delay." The Dutch had to be consulted because they controlled the mouth of the Scheldt.¹¹

Grey's energetic action was rather wasted on the Board, which hid behind due process, and so he was forced to

¹¹FO 123/538/251, Grey to Villiers, 2 September 1914; also FO 371/1910/43846, unsigned memorandum, 27 August 1914. Churchill, with typical stylishness, wished to settle the problem of the Scheldt by demanding of the Dutch that they keep the river open to navigation for the duration of the war and warning them that a refusal would be met by the use of British force. "The obstruction of the Scheldt by Holland to any supplies. . . needed for the defence of Antwerp," he declared, "is a base and hostile act which should be strenuously and fiercely challenged." Churchill to Asquith, Grey and Kitchener, 7 September 1914, in Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill. Companion Volume III, Part I, July 1914 - April 1915 (Boston, 1973), 97. The ships could not be

wire Villiers for further information. The Board had told him it was impossible to make adequate arrangements until it knew approximately how many were to come; and it required a day's notice, at least, of the arrival of refugees. It also wanted prior information as to the proportion having means of their own.¹² Nonetheless, the Board could now no longer conveniently ignore the worsening situation in Belgium and domestic pressures compelled some constructive reaction. On the night of 5 September, the burgomaster of Malines, who was then in London, notified the Board that one thousand refugees from his city would be coming from Antwerp on the following day. The military governor of Antwerp also asked if arrangements could be made to ship a large number of civilians to England. The Belgian government was pushing ahead with its policy of clearing the city of its swollen civilian population before the expected imminent German attack.¹³ This new information added urgency to the first administrative decisions of any consequence which the government undertook on 5 September.

brought out and Churchill ordered their destruction. They were blown up by a demolition team between 30 September and 4 October. Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill (London, 1971), 3:101.

¹²FO 123/538/251, Grey to Villiers, 3 September 1914.

¹³Ministry of Health, Report on the Work Undertaken by the Local Government Board in the Reception and Care of the Belgian Refugees (London, 1920), 4 [hereafter referred to as 1920 Report] .

On that day, the dedicated and indefatigable Reyntiens went to Ostend and there began to set up a committee for the registration of refugees before their departure. He had been preceded there by an emissary of the Committee, which as usual had outpaced the government. Basil Williams, the historian and member of the imperialist 'Round Table' group, crossed from Folkestone on the 2nd and returned the following day with a boatload of refugees. While on the voyage, he had tried in makeshift fashion to sort the destitute from those with means, but thereafter he left the field to Reyntiens and later paid tribute to the latter's efficient work in Ostend.¹⁴ Grey had told Villiers on the 5th that the British government would accept two thousand refugees from Antwerp and more later if necessary, but he stipulated that these be persons driven from their homes by the war and of "good character."¹⁵ So Reyntiens insisted that refugees seeking free passage prove that they were from the devastated districts or had offers of hospitality from private sources in England. At this stage the government had no intention of subsidising any and every panic-stricken Belgian citizen likely to end up as a charge on the Exchequer. All refugees getting the special card entitling them to free passage were medically inspected and

¹⁴Cd. 7763, Special Report, 23.

¹⁵FO 123/543/135, Grey to Villiers, 5 September 1914.

some were rejected on unspecified medical grounds.¹⁶ Only women and children or heads of families accompanying their families were able to leave. Britain at this time had no need of able-bodied men who, it was felt in both governmental and private circles, should be fighting the invader. By instructive contrast, Williams had merely tried to sift the destitute from the nondestitute. The Committee paid little attention to the refinements so important to its official counterparts. The WRC knew it did not have the time.

The Foreign Office faithfully transmitted the wishes of the Board to the Belgian government throughout the hectic and strained weeks that ensued. Villiers on 6 September extracted a promise from the Belgian Minister of the Interior, the minister responsible for refugees, that due notice would in future be given as to the despatch of refugees and all other necessary particulars. One wonders how seriously the Belgians intended to keep their promise, a doubt strengthened by an interview on the 7th between Villiers, the minister, the president of the Chamber of Deputies and the burgomaster of Malines. It was then divulged that the number of refugees greatly exceeded previous estimates. About twenty thousand at most would come from Antwerp, but if German occupation extended to Bruges, Ghent and other cities, there would be perhaps another thirty thousand. At the moment, the minister was asking only for ten thousand to be transported from

¹⁶Cd. 7763, Special Report, 17.

Antwerp. The Belgians dutifully repeated all the assurances demanded of them as to the bona fides of their citizens, and promised to send responsible officials with each batch of refugees.¹⁷

But despite the increasing pressure on the British government to take refugees, and the growing involvement of British administrators in planning and supervising evacuation, the issue was by no means finally settled. One powerful figure in the Cabinet definitely opposed any scheme to bring large numbers of civilians out of Belgium. Winston Churchill wrote to Grey on the 7th:

There is a military reason for relieving the fortress of Antwerp of refugees (bouches inutiles) and we ought to help them in every way as part of our policy for the sustained defence of Antwerp. But we ought not to concern ourselves with merely helping Belgians from the unpleasant consequences of residing in Ghent & Bruges under German occupation. They ought to stay there & eat up continental food, & occupy German policy attention. There is no reason why the civil population of Belgium, not concerned in the defence of Antwerp, should come & live in England. The point is important. Everything must be done to help Belgium's military resistance--but this is no time for charity.¹⁸

¹⁷FO 123/544/172 and 174, Villiers to Grey, 6 and 7 September 1914.

¹⁸ Cited in M. Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill. Companion Volume III, Part I, 99-100. The question uppermost in Churchill's mind was not what the Admiralty could do for Belgian refugees but what Belgian refugees could do for the Admiralty. On 9 September, he wrote a minute stating the need to get war material, promised to the Belgian government, to Antwerp. He directed the supplies to be sent on one of the Great Eastern Railway boats then beginning a special shuttle service for the refugees leaving Antwerp. "If possible," he suggested, "all should go in one boat so as to give no time for questions to be raised by the Dutch about subsequent voyages." Ibid., 104.

Churchill was not to win his point, but he thus fired the first shot in what was later to become an important struggle in official circles over the relief of the civil population of Belgium. In microcosm it reflected the perennial debate about the nature of strategy: is it to be based on narrowly military criteria, or is it to be conducted with an awareness of other political and moral factors? Here, as with the later controversy over the feeding of occupied Belgium, the more humane policy was prompted by the need to keep up Belgian morale and perhaps by sensitivity to public opinion in neutral countries.¹⁹

Perhaps simple sentiment played its part. Not only were the Belgians acquiring heroic status in the British press, but Asquith was to note of a Cabinet meeting late in October, when the issue of sending food to occupied Belgium was discussed for the first time, that he and Grey were "rather pro." Significantly, however, he noted that it was an "urgent matter (upon wh. there threatens to be acute difference of opinion among us)" and that "Lt. George, McKenna, Kitchener & others are strenuously contra."²⁰

¹⁹The case for a humane policy on the feeding of Belgium, couched in terms of the debate over strategy, was most pithily expressed by Lord Robert Cecil when Parliamentary Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. FO 800/195, private papers of Lord Robert Cecil, Belgium file, Cecil to Hankey, 17 May 1916.

²⁰Ibid., 210-11. See also Peter Rowland, Lloyd George (London, 1975), 219.

Asquith himself realised the importance of following the implications of Britain's policy of coming to Belgium's aid through to their logical conclusions. Certainly the British public believed firmly that the war was a just struggle to defend a small and innocent nation, and a callous policy towards refugees might erode public confidence in that wider policy. Men like Lloyd George, McKenna and Churchill, though ardent supporters of the war now that it had begun, were oblivious of these considerations. Asquith and Grey carried their view in the event; or perhaps in the end the opponents of generous treatment were presented with a fait accompli. The Belgians were arriving and were being welcomed enthusiastically by the British people.

The episode illustrates the confusion and conflicts within the British government during the early period of the war. Churchill's memorandum against receiving refugees came at least three days after the LGB instructed a subordinate organisation, the Metropolitan Asylums Board, to begin preparing accommodation and health facilities for the expected refugees. With this, the LGB finally entered upon its full scale work for refugees. The MAB was founded in 1867 to control "Asylums for the Sick, Insane, and other classes of the Poor, and. . . Dispensaries."²¹ The MAB's first war work was the provision of accommodation for

²¹ Greater London Record Office, Metropolitan Asylums Board files, prefatory note, citing Act of 30 and 31 Victoria c. VI for 15 May 1867 [hereafter referred to as MAB etc.].

destitute enemy aliens. The workhouse of Holborn Gardens in Endell Street was taken for this purpose and opened on 27 August; but not till after three weeks of increasing misery for many Austrians and Germans thrown out of work by patriotic employers. In all, 363 enemy aliens were admitted and remained there till 9 September, when control of them passed to the military.²² This concentration of a special class of inmates in one workhouse was a small and inadequate dress rehearsal for the main drama.

The MAB held one of its regular meetings on 5 September. The press was present as usual, but was asked to withdraw while the clerk, Duncombe Mann, told the representatives that on the preceding day he had been informed by the LGB that provision was required for housing a large number of refugees about to arrive in England and that the LGB wished the Board to undertake the task. He had agreed on behalf of the Board and had already begun energetically to set about finding a suitable reception centre.²³

The Crystal Palace was the first venue chosen. It had already been promised to the LGB for the purpose, so Mann had gone down with LGB officials to set in hand the necessary arrangements. Beds and equipment were ordered and the place

²²Sir Allan Powell, The Metropolitan Asylums Board, 1867-1930. (London, 1930), 85.

²³MAB 62/311, minutes of meeting of the Board, 5 September 1914.

was made ready to receive several hundred refugees. At this juncture the administration of refugee relief ran for the first time into one of its most persistent obstacles, the military and its needs. That evening the Admiralty informed the LGB that all existing arrangements were nullified and the Palace was required for the Royal Naval Reserve, perhaps for the accommodation and training of the same men whom Churchill was to send too late and in too few numbers to aid the final defence of Antwerp.²⁴ The incident nicely illustrates the problems of the civil service in those early days of the war. Almost overnight the leisurely pace of peacetime administration had been accelerated enormously and for a time a free-for-all developed between departments competing for desirable accommodation and resources, with the military at all times holding the whiphand over their civilian counterparts. It was typically the Admiralty, under the dynamic and ruthless Churchill, which seized the Crystal Palace. The War Office was more phlegmatic in its approach.

Rebuffed, the LGB regrouped and arranged with the Westminster Board of Guardians that a refuge at Poland Street, in Soho, should be used for refugee reception. This had lain disused for eighteen months and much work had to be done to prepare it. Refugees were expected that same night, the 5th, and so workers were hastily despatched to carry out at least superficial cleaning.²⁵ The MAB approved Mann's

²⁴Cd. 7763, Special Work, 20.

²⁵MAB 62/311, minutes of meeting of the Board, 5 September 1914.

unilateral actions, and all further responsibility for refugee work was delegated to a subcommittee of the Clerk, the Chairman, R. Woolley Walden, and the Vice-Chairman, Canon Sprankling. This time, refugees did arrive as expected, and the staffs of the Westminster Board of Guardians and the Water Board Authorities--the latter doubtless conscripted hastily as an ad hoc measure--worked throughout the night with a batch of two hundred refugees. Not only the middle-class, leisured volunteers of the WRC gave their time and energies unstintingly to the refugees: many humbler men and women whose work brought them into contact with the refugees at this time worked heavy shifts to keep reception procedures moving. But in fact the Board's involvement with Poland Street was brief, and control of the depot passed to a powerful voluntary organisation. For, as it happened, the first two hundred refugees were all Polish and Russian Jews from the large émigré colony in Antwerp. Thus the felicitously named Poland Street Refuge was set aside for the exclusive reception of Jewish refugees under the control of Jewish relief organisations. The MAB remained in charge till 16 September, when the Jewish War Refugees Committee took over.²⁶

In the next weeks, the first reception depots were opened, to deal with the first wave of refugees, those coming in during August and September before the main rush

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For the Jewish War Refugees Committee see 142-50 above.

caused by the final siege of Antwerp and the German occupation of the Belgian coastline in early October. The distress caused by the war does not seem to have filled the workhouses--or refuges, as they were now termed--because a number of poor law institutions were able to offer wards for the use of refugees. Between 1912 and 1914 the number of poor in London's casual wards--that is, hostels for vagrants--had declined from 1,200 to about three hundred, and so several such wards were easily made available.²⁷ Several boards of guardians threw open their infirmaries to sick refugees. The Endell Street refuge was cleared of its enemy aliens on 9 September, and was immediately made ready to receive nine hundred people. One large institution at Edmonton was at that moment being converted from a workhouse to a lunatic asylum. The MAB now decided to turn it into a haven for refugees instead, and it was converted to a

²⁷ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, in their English Poor Law History. Part II. The Last One Hundred Years (London, 1929), 2:772-73, say that because of better employment between 1909 and 1914, the number of vagrants accommodated in poor law institutions on one night of the year dropped by half, from 14,757 in June 1909 to 7,719 in January 1914. More significantly, both the Webbs and I. G. Gibbon and R. W. Bell, in the latter's History of the London County Council 1889-1939 (London, 1939), 424, point to the takeover of casual wards in 1911 by the LGB from the guardians. The change did not mean expanded accommodation because the MAB closed sixteen of twenty-eight wards. It did mean more uniform treatment in the wards. Previously, some guardians had enforced harsh conditions for vagrants in the wards, so that their wards lay empty while more humane guardians had to turn vagrants away. The overflow preferred to sleep on the Embankment and elsewhere than face the other wards. Some of the wards used for refugees may have been some of the sixteen vacant wards. Clearly, plenty of Poor Law accommodation was available for the Belgians.

reception centre for five hundred people on 7 and 8 September.²⁸ Its dark tradition endured as it became the much hated dumping ground for refugee 'undesirables.' Edmonton and Endell Street were the two largest depots converted from poor law buildings. But the largest depot was a converted pleasure palace. Foiled in its plan to use the Crystal Palace, the LGB instead took over the latter's great Victorian rival in North London, the Alexandra Palace. This huge structure stood in spacious grounds not far from rail connections at Wood Green. Apart from a brief spell as quarters for a squadron of colonial light horse in early August, its facilities were lying underused. Samuel wrote to his wife on 8 September that he had taken the Palace, though it was not occupied for some days. He also mentioned other measures he had taken, notably the institution of a daily boat service for refugees coming from Antwerp (by this time at the rate of up to a thousand a day) and a circular to mayors' committees for the prevention and relief of distress asking them to arrange hospitality. Thus improvisation was added upon improvisation, and the whole ramshackle structure hastily thrown together in early August to look after British distress was now called upon to bear a new and unexpected responsibility. Once again, the government looked for the cheapest expedient, though Samuel concluded his letter with a slight touch of foreboding:

²⁸Cd. 7763, Special Work, 20.

"We may have to pay in many cases. The L. G. B. is taking over most of the work of the War Refugees Committee."²⁹

This was certainly not the way the Committee was to see it, but the comment formed a prelude to the final declaration of government intent towards the refugees which the Committee had been long and anxiously awaiting. On 9 September, George Barnes repeated his questions of 28 August and gave Samuel the opportunity to make a formal statement. He declared:

As many of those who have come to this country from the seat of war have means of their own and travel as ordinary passengers, it is not possible to state the number of refugees. The War Refugees Committee and the Local Government Board have been in touch with some 3,600 persons coming from Belgium, for all of whom temporary accommodation, and for some more permanent hospitality, has been found. In addition, a very large number have been met at the railway stations. There are, however, some thousands of persons in Belgium, from the towns of Louvain, Malines, Liège, and elsewhere, whose homes have been destroyed and for whom the Belgian Government, on account of military exigencies, are unable to provide.

In answer to inquiries from the Belgian Government, His Majesty's Government have offered to these victims of the war the hospitality of the British nation. Arrangements have been made for their transport and for their temporary accommodation at hostels in London. The War Refugees Committee, who have rendered very valuable service hitherto, have consented to co-operate with my Department in their reception and distribution.

He sat down amid ringing applause.³⁰

²⁹ HS A/157/743, Samuel to Beatrice Samuel, 8 September 1914.

³⁰ PD, (Commons), 9 September 1914, 5th ser., 66, col. 558; The Times, 10 September 1914.

Samuel's statement contained some interesting nuances. It seemed to imply that the Board had been co-principal with the Committee in the work undertaken thus far: a very different picture from that painted by Committee members. It also suggested the universal confusion as to the exact number of Belgians arriving to that date, and made clear that the bulk of these people had fled entirely on their own initiative using their own resources, and perhaps without the blessing of their government. Further, the refugees whom the government was specifically welcoming were Churchill's bouches inutiles, the civilians hampering the defence of Antwerp. This was a limited offer of help, a favour from one belligerent to an ally. It did not envisage aid to over 100,000 panic stricken people caught in a blind, incontinent scramble for safety as their country's last defences fell in October, nor the later shipment at government expense of almost as many who had fled into Holland and were severely straining that country's resources.

Though the government's offer was limited, the public's response was not. Most interest focussed on the phrase, "hospitality of the British nation," which gradually became transmogrified into one of the most potent talismans of the refugee movement, "guests of the nation." Around this phrase swirled some of the fiercest debates over the treatment of refugees particularly regarding its implications for the employment or otherwise of refugee labour. For the moment, it merely sparked a bonfire of emotional rhetoric

about Britain's obligations to the "brave Belgians." The vagueness was not in the minds of press and publicists alone. The country simply had heard nothing concrete from Samuel, and so the most grandiose conceptions of what refugee relief meant flourished unchecked.

Behind the scenes, however, Samuel swiftly settled down to the details of his new task. On the day of his speech, he met a deputation from the Committee, consisting of Cecil, Gladstone, Morgan and Henry Leggett. He began by outlining a broad division of labour between the two bodies, and the delegation agreed to it. The Board were to transport, meet, and support all destitute refugees on their arrival, and to feed and house them in government depôts which would now take over from the small, overburdened hostels of the Committee. The Board would take over the registration of all refugees on arrival and would be responsible for giving the Committee notice of the arrival of special trains carrying refugees. Furthermore, the organisation at Folkestone would now fall under the Board and be financed by it. The Committee were to provide a "chief lady visitor" for each depot, who would have under her a body of "approved helpers." It was not specified who would do the approving. The Committee would establish bureaux at the major receiving stations of Charing Cross, Victoria and Liverpool Street, with interpreters and staff to help refugees find accommodation in hotels and lodging houses or to send them to the government depôts. Finally,

the Committee would be responsible for allocating and billeting refugees all over the country and would work through local committees. In essence, the agreement meant that the Board would provide financial backing and the plant, while the Committee would provide the bulk of the workers and handle personal contact with the refugees.

The meeting was amicable, Samuel still rather revelling in the unexpected twist of events which saw him "graciously" receiving his former chief as a suppliant. But there were some points of disagreement. Samuel had asked the Committee to instruct its workers to distinguish between destitute and nondestitute refugees. Gladstone replied to this that "the difficulty we find is to distinguish between the two; some who are well dressed are more destitute than those who appear poor." Samuel thereupon suggested that doubtful cases be sent to a depot, adding, however, "one does not want to take a good class to the Alexandra Palace." The issue of different treatment for different categories of refugee proved a thorny one and the source of much friction within the refugee relief movement as the war dragged on.³¹ Here, several things seem clear. Voluntary workers were ahead of their official colleagues in grasping the dimensions of the problem. They were less hampered by bureaucratic preconceptions and categories, and in a real sense had been more exposed to the shock of war than politicians and

³¹See chapter VIII.

administrators. Before politicians began to visit the front and see for themselves the conditions of war, they, unlike the member of the WRC, had no first-hand experience of the war's toll on humanity. But it is also clear that attempts to distinguish between destitute and other refugees smacked of more than administrative necessity. Underlying Samuel's statement was the assumption that only the poor were ever destitute. Middle-class Englishmen were for the first time confronted with a strange phenomenon: a large number of members of their own class, albeit from another society, dispossessed of their property and resources and seemingly candidates for accommodation customarily reserved for the lower ranks of British society.

Samuel overruled the Committee on several suggestions put forward at the meeting. The Committee had proposed to organise local committees throughout the country, but he felt that they would take too long to organise, some would be inefficient, and there might be overlapping. He suggested instead that the month-old machinery of the mayors' committees for the relief of distress be used, being "representative of charitable organisations and influential people." He went on: "Most of these Committees have not yet much to do, and, of course, where there is much distress in any district we should not trouble that Committee." He was prepared to circularise the committees at once, if the Committee agreed--which was a little disingenuous, since he had already taken this step. The Committee in any case

agreed and the circular was sent. Thus the machinery for relieving English victims of the war's economic disruptions was finally put to use relieving foreign victims of its military campaigns. Without the Belgians, much of that machinery might have been dismantled or atrophied through disuse. The Belgians arrived at the right moment for many a local activist chafing to do something for his country.

Herbert Morgan suggested that some "permanent" machinery be set up between the Board and the Committee, but Samuel was cool:

I am rather averse to anything in the nature of a committee of Departments, where the views of say the Home Office, the Board of Trade and the Treasury must be all consulted. Such a committee would make for waste of time. The thing must be dealt with to some extent autocratically and swiftly.

He suggested that matters could best be decided by consultation between the Committee's leaders and F. S. Oxley and Henry Leggett, acting for the Board. The war had rapidly cut across the normal functioning of the government, and Samuel, to his credit, was swift to realise that a certain ruthless improvisation, of the sort pursued by Churchill at the Admiralty, was needed to get things done. More normal routines were to reestablish themselves after the first rush of events had slowed down and new wartime patterns emerged. For the present, however, Samuel was acting in the spirit of Asquithian improvisation, going his own way under a minimum of direction.

A number of minor points were discussed. Morgan

wanted to know who should have ultimate responsibility for the depots. It was agreed that the government would be "absolutely responsible" for them, but that the Committee's representative would have power to point out defects. Gladstone took up this latter point, noting curtly that the Committee would in fact have no such power. The depots were to be the cause of much friction between the Board and its voluntary helpers, and the issue of divided responsibility had to be thrashed out piecemeal. Other matters were discussed without disagreement. Cecil raised the issue of French refugees and Gladstone expected that there would be probably many of these, reflecting the mood of pessimism among many as the German advance pressed inexorably south and west into France and towards Paris. The Committee did not want the responsibility of rejecting these people. Despite its ambitious title, the War Refugees Committee had been born of the popular indignation at the invasion of a small neutral country, and if it did have pretensions to looking after all Allied civilians uprooted and brought to England by the war, its lack of funds and the difficulties of the early weeks had clearly destroyed them. Samuel merely commented that he did not want to encourage French refugees to come to England. He made three points against having them, each the counterpoint to arguments for taking the Belgians: the French had a big population, they had not been subjected to atrocities, and the French government had not asked the British to offer refuge to French citizens. In other words, Samuel's offer of

hospitality was predicated on the belief that there would be few Belgian refugees.³² Asquith had remarked to the King two weeks before that

. . . the occupation of Ostend by a brigade of marines supported by 4 battleships of the Majestic class was approved as an operation involving little loss and calculated to give both material and moral support to Belgium,³³

and a similar calculus was employed in the matter of the refugees. The reception of a few refugees seemed a cheap price for bolstering Belgian morale, which at that point was a crucial factor in Allied strategy.³⁴ So British policy-makers, in a rather patronising response to their small beleaguered ally, entered casually on a commitment which was to engage them far more mightily than they supposed.

Samuel was one of the Cabinet Ministers who had supported entry into the war on the issue of defending Belgian neutrality,³⁵ and so had an emotional interest in the events taking place there. Perhaps his point about atrocities was mere window-dressing. But, like other ministers of the time, he was, in this and other matters, as much in the dark

³²BEL 3/1/2, "Note of an Interview on Wednesday, 9th September, between the Rt. Hon. Herbert Samuel. . . . and a Deputation from the War Refugees Committee consisting of Lord Hugh Cecil, M.P., Lord Gladstone, Major Leggett, and Mr. Morgan."

³³M. Gilbert, Winston Churchill. Companion Volume III, Part I, 55.

³⁴See, e.g., Churchill to Asquith, Grey and Kitchener, 7 September 1914. Gilbert, Winston Churchill, Companion Volume III, Part II, 96.

³⁵Marvin Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War (Oxford, 1971), 68.

and the victim of rumours as the general public. And the rumours told of terrible atrocities committed by German soldiers against innocent civilians in reprisal for alleged attacks on German troops, while the sack of Louvain had horrified England. Thus, for all that his initial response to the refugee question had been cautious, Samuel was moved by the common emotions of the time and, once committed, worked energetically for his charges. The meeting with the Committee's representatives on 9 September ushered in a new period, in which the government and the Committee worked in tandem. Reluctantly, the government had entered the field and the WRC found itself backed by the resources of a large government department but also faced by a battery of new problems over the division of responsibility and the constriction of its area of unfettered free action.

CHAPTER IV

THE REFUGEES ARRIVE

'Guests of the Nation'

By 9 September the WRC had run into major problems which forced the government to step into refugee relief work. In real terms this was a small step. The great test came over the next few months and reached a point of crisis in January 1915. This second crisis forced another declaration of policy from a reluctant Samuel. The months between saw the WRC coping on the one hand with a vast increase in the number of refugees and on the other with the drying up of the early sources of private hospitality. Aldwych also had to work out effective patterns of cooperation with the government, other private relief bodies, recently established Belgian organisations in England, and its many affiliated local committees which had sprung into being especially as a result of Samuel's appeal.

Early Arrivals

Eager hosts, not desperate refugees, had first overwhelmed the Committee. However, the chaos of the first two weeks discouraged and disgusted some, while others continued to insist on taking only special categories of refugees. Yet others found themselves unable for a variety of reasons to

resume their original offers when the Committee finally needed them. Nor was it easy at first to classify refugees and so ascertain how many would require hospitality and other support. Many of the early arrivals were in fact people of means. Reports in early September from The Times' correspondent at Folkestone described the bulk of the refugees there as "well-to-do business people," most of whom "stood in no need of assistance." The town's hotel trade was actually thriving on its unusually high foreign population. A batch of Russian Jews and small shopkeepers arriving on 5 September was an exception worth noting:

To-day for the first time the refugees really looked what they actually are, people fleeing from their own country to a place of safety. The well-to-do classes have hitherto formed so large a proportion of the passengers from Belgium and France that the poor have almost been lost sight of.¹

Obviously by this stage there had been a shift from the rather genteel conception of the refugees propounded by Brunner and others in earlier letters to the press. The reports of German outrages at Visé and other towns and the apparent destruction of Louvain and its historic university had brought home to the British public that this was a war in which civilians suffered as much as soldiers.² But, just as the public was beginning to think of refugees as pathetic, destitute

¹The Times, 5, 6, 8 and 9 September 1914; Observer, 6 September 1914.

²Observer, 30 August 1914; Manchester Guardian, 29 and 31 August 1914.

creatures, The Times noted on 10 September that many French and Belgian families were taking furnished houses in the plush suburbs of Hampstead and Wimbledon and were meeting in hotels and restaurants in the West End.³ Such wealthy emigrés must have disappointed the benevolent. Many never considered themselves refugees, and steadfastly refused to inform the authorities of their presence in England long after the registration of refugees had been made compulsory.⁴

It is difficult to ascertain precisely how many Belgians arrived in England in 1914. Refugee statistics were never perfect because the official register of Belgian refugees was not compiled from the outset and because the minority never registered. On 1 October Villiers sent the Foreign Office a list drawn up some days before by Baron Berryer, the Belgian Minister of the Interior who had been made responsible for refugees. Berryer concluded that by 28 September 7,500 to eight thousand refugees had arrived, adding parenthetically, "sans garantie." But as 6,882 were accounted for in specific ways, at most only 1,200 were subsumed under the heading "refugiés partis d'autres voies (peu probable)."⁵ This approximation obviously conflicted with English estimates and either was a wild underestimate

³The Times, 10 September 1914.

⁴HO 45/10737/261921/422a, memorandum by J. F. Moylan, 9 April 1915; also, interview with M. Joseph Vanderwegen, Hamilton, Ontario, 24 January 1976.

⁵FO 123/544/199, note by Baron. P. Berryer, 29 September 1914. Cf. Lady Lugard's estimate of five hundred arrivals daily. Lugard, 12-13.

or reflected a narrow definition of the refugee as a destitute person. The low estimate may have been deliberate: the Belgian government cannot have wanted to alarm the British who had been proving so prickly on the subject of the numbers of refugees. Berryer had to confess that he had no accurate figures on the refugees from the provinces who were then in Antwerp, and were likely therefore to seek refuge in England, for the same reason that it was difficult to assess the numbers already in England: "Recensement assez difficile parce qu'a cote de ceux qui se trouvent dans les refuges, il y a des réfugiés momentanément logés chez des parents ou des amis."

It was as difficult to predict the numbers likely to arrive in England. No sooner had Samuel grandly offered the hospitality of the nation than Villiers was contacting Grey on 11 September to tell him there was a shortage of willing refugees: this after increasing estimates from the Belgian government. The reason for the unexpected dearth was simple. The main thrust of the German attack had missed Antwerp and the coastal region and was sweeping south to Paris. Antwerp was spared till the deadlock on the Marne and the Aisne in the first half of September led to the so-called 'race to the sea'. Control of the Belgian coastline hinged on control of Antwerp and the Kaiser in fact gave orders for its capture on 9 September. It took several weeks, however, for his armies to bring up the huge siege guns needed to reduce the outer defences of the city, and during the lull the fugitives from

the zone of combat began to recover confidence. "They expect," said Villiers, "to be able to return to their districts and apparently the majority refuse to leave Belgium."⁶ As the lull continued, the authorities began to relax and on 17 September the LGB asked the Foreign Office to ascertain "whether there is still necessity for sending refugees to this country." The British, like the Belgians, were in their own way treading warily with their ally, for Grey warned Villiers: "Impression should not be created however that we are unwilling to receive them if necessary." A later telegram on the 21st from Grey to Villiers anticipated a reduced number from Antwerp.⁷

But the flow of emigrés through Folkestone, having slackened for a fortnight, began again around 27 September. The Belgian government still expected numbers to be no more than eight thousand and this was, as Villiers pointed out, lower than the lowest figure quoted in the negotiations at the beginning of September.⁸ A few days later the optimism of the assessment was belied as Antwerp once again became a haven, this time for civilians fleeing from the renewed German bombardment of nearby Malines. The Belgian authorities

⁶FO 123/544/177, Villiers to Grey, 11 September 1914; Cd. 7763, Special Work, 12.

⁷FO 123/543/147/14, Grey to Villiers, 17 September 1914; 123/547/148/14, Grey to Villiers, 21 September 1914.

⁸FO 123/544/181, Villiers to Grey, 27 September 1914.

remained piously adamant that the refugee exodus to England, though indubitably larger than eight thousand, would not exceed the previous largest estimate of fifty thousand. At the same time, they put out a shy feeler which Villiers passed on: "Would it be possible to give me any idea of the total further number which can be received? This wd much help the Belgian Gov^t in making arrangements. Distress is painfully acute here & elsewhere in Belgium." The British government replied positively, though its acceptance was based on the rather leisurely rate of 1,500 refugees weekly, "especially if they are of a class suitable to be sent to private hospitality."⁹

Antwerp and After

By 1 October, the real rush had begun with the final German assault on Antwerp, and Villiers reported that "considerable panic has arisen amongst the Belgians here."¹⁰ The government itself was preparing to depart and it seems that only the bluster and dash of Winston Churchill, there at the head of his naval brigade, kept it there for a few days longer and prolonged the city's death agony by a week.¹¹ The

⁹FO 123/544/183 and 191, Villiers to Grey, 25 and 27 September 1914; FO 369/671/54529, H. C. Monro to A. Nicolson, 28 September 1914.

¹⁰FO 123/540/431, Villiers to Grey, 1 October 1914.

¹¹M. Gilbert, Winston Churchill, 3:118, 120; P. Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, 40. Belgian sources tend to dispute the British view of Churchill's crucial role, royalist mythology giving King Albert the credit for steadying the nerve of the government and military leadership. Emile Galet,

dilapidated forts ringing the city fell silent one by one and on 7 October the Belgian government and the Allied diplomatic corps left Antwerp. Their departure tolled the city's doom and now thousands of citizens and the refugees who had crowded in began making their panic-stricken way out of the city along the roads leading to the Dutch border and Ostend. It was a huge throng. Most of the city's population seem to have fled, and contemporary estimates veered between a quarter and half a million people, though favouring the latter. It was an evacuation without precedent in the recent history of western Europe and was etched on the imagination of the world by dozens of newspaper correspondents, through whose reports "Antwerp became a spectacle of pity and terror."¹² Seeking language appropriate to the event, they found it in the Bible:

In Antwerp, more than in Brussels, the race had taken refuge. Now it was driven forth again and with its primitive belongings was plodding into exile. No wonder then that the unbroken press before me, wherein old-style chariots and improvised litters and herds were all mingled, made me think of the Israelites and Exodus.¹³

Albert, King of the Belgians, trans. Sir Ernest Swinton (Boston, 1931), 216-17; E. Cammaerts, Albert of Belgium, 195-96.

¹²C. R. M. F. Cruttwell, A History of the Great War 1914-1918 (Oxford, 1934), 96. As a symbol of the panic and misery of a civilian population caught in the tide of war, the evacuation of Antwerp in its day had the same effect, and possibly a greater effect, on English observers as the great flight of French civilians in 1940 had on a later generation.

¹³J. Jeffries, Front Everywhere, 183.

Thus was the Belgian nation apotheosised and its suffering sanctified.

Antwerp fell on 8 October and attention now shifted to Ostend. It was the last large port left in Allied hands, and refugees had flowed through it since the outbreak of war. A semblance of organisation existed at Ostend. Since his arrival on 5 September, the highly competent Reyntiens had managed to establish a local committee, which had set up a relief programme, including the provision of clothing and medical attention.¹⁴ Its main task throughout September, however, had been supervising the embarkation of destitute refugees bound for England. Fare-paying passengers were beyond its purview. Such system as had been established broke down utterly in the days after 7 October, when the arrival of the Belgian government for a brief sojourn prior to its removal to France caused a panic which intensified as refugees poured in from Antwerp. Till the 7th, regular mail steamers had been used to ferry destitute refugees to England, but now paying passengers pre-empted the regular boats and Reyntiens was forced to find other transport. For a short time the problem of transport overshadowed all other issues.

The LGB had shown little foresight in preparing

¹⁴It was called the Double White Cross League, and suffered the perennial problem of relief societies: misplaced generosity. The Times noted that "even Belgian refugees draw the line at ball-room dresses, particularly when the biting blasts sweep in from the North Sea." The Times, 10 October 1914. Cf. Granville Fortescue, At the Front with Three Armies (London, 1915), 215.

against the final fall of Belgium. The fluctuating predictions of refugee numbers in September had led it to believe that numbers would not be huge. Antwerp's six week respite had contributed to this myopia. In general the Board was the victim of bungling at the highest levels of British authority. Although the strategic significance of Antwerp was firmly grasped by the leading members of the Cabinet and their advisers, especially after the battle of the Marne, no attempts were made to strengthen its defences by substantially reinforcing and supplying the garrison. Preoccupation with the main theatre of operations further south and an ill-founded belief in the invulnerability of the Antwerp fortifications, designed like those of Liège by Brialmont, probably accounted for their inaction. When the German assault began "nothing but improvisation was possible" and the British reacted "with the disconcerted energy of despair."¹⁵ The LGB's failure to prepare for the mass evacuation of Belgian civilians in the event of a sudden military collapse must be viewed in this general context.

If British policymakers had quickly perceived the seriousness of the final threat to Antwerp, their knowledge was not passed on to the Board, for only one man was sent to

¹⁵M. Hankey, Supreme Command, 1:201; C. Cruttwell, The Great War, 95. Other sources which discuss the failure of British strategy in not reinforcing Antwerp earlier include P. Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, 38-40; M. Gilbert, Winston Churchill, 3:96-134; and, from a slightly different perspective, Field-Marshal Viscount French of Ypres, 1914, (Boston, 1919).

aid Reyntiens. This was Dr. Reginald Farrar, one of the Board's medical inspectors, whose task was to conduct the medical examination of all destitute refugees presenting themselves for passage to England. He made two trips to Ostend, the first on 10 to 11 October, when he managed to inspect 1,500 people. He returned on 13 October and worked heroically with Reyntiens, trying to cope with the vast hysterical crowds of up to twenty thousand people who thronged the boat station without adequate supplies of food and water. It is incredible that the two men received no other help from British sources in those days. The British vice-consul left with the British ambassador and the Belgian government on the morning of the 13th, as did the British Headquarters Staff. The two were therefore, as far as they knew, the only British officials in the town, even though Ostend was now the only important Belgian channel port in Allied hands.¹⁶ Villiers had subtly underlined the lack of British help when he advised the Foreign Office on 9 October: "Local Government Board official is here doing excellent work

¹⁶In fact, there was one other, a man named Menzies, who cabled the Board of Trade asking for a ship to be sent to Ostend late on the afternoon of 13 October. FO 369/671/58081, Menzies to Board of Trade, 13 October 1914; also, /57800, Villiers to Foreign Office, 9 October 1914: Villiers mentioned he had spoken to a "representative of the war refugees committee" in Ostend. Fortescue claims that two Englishwomen from the Red Cross also stayed. He does not mention seeing the three English officials. At the Front, 214-15.

with only such help as he can obtain locally." Such help was indeed strictly local, as the Belgian central administration was utterly demoralised and near collapse.¹⁷ Ten gendarmes helped to keep order at first, but fled to France on the 14th, after which ten stray British soldiers, six of them wounded, who struggled into Ostend on that day, provided a skeletal escort for Reyntiens and Farrar. The two received some help also from a few selfless Belgian individuals who had remained calm amid the general hysteria.

Only the courage and drive of the two Englishmen acting on their own initiative enabled the last thousands of refugees to flee Ostend. Reyntiens asked for a large quantity of food to be sent to relieve the city. It arrived only in the final hours, when Reyntiens and Farrar judged it too late to unload the food, as no organisation existed ashore for its distribution. Last minute arrangements had to be made for more ships to carry off the desperate thousands. Here, the two largely ignored the LGB, dealing directly with F. H. Dent of the South East and Chatham Railway Company. Farrar, in fact, had returned to Ostend not at the Board's command but at Dent's request. The decision to stay till 14 October was Farrar's and was taken after Villiers had advised Reyntiens to leave with all other British officials. In these last two days the two men had to organise the collection and distribution of bread and water for the

¹⁷FO 369/671/57800, Villiers to Foreign Office, 9 October 1914; /59081, Johnson (American vice-consul at Ostend, acting for the British vice-consul) to Grey, 13 October 1914.

thousands and try to keep some order in getting people from the quay to the boats. The last hours were a total melee, and after an ugly scramble for one boat which berthed where the crowd was densest, Reyntiens and Farrar boarded the next boat and instructed a third boat then entering the harbour to turn back. Their fear of the consequences on the quay if that boat docked were perhaps exaggerated, as another boat later went in and took off more than two thousand people. This was a completely private action by the captain of the ss Kenilworth, who courageously took in his old tramp steamer despite the warning. It was a fitting end to an episode marked throughout by gallant improvisation rather than the smooth functioning of a great bureaucratic machine.¹⁸

A motley collection of craft had been used as transport. One striking feature was the absence of direct aid by the British Navy. Churchill's imagination had been gripped by the danger to the Belgian army. He remained indifferent to the plight of bouches inutiles. His admirals were desperately concerned with getting men and material across the Channel to the British Expeditionary Force and civilian refugees were very low on their list of priorities.

¹⁸This account is based on the reports of Reyntiens and Farrar in Cd. 7762, Special Work, 17-20. See also Leon van der Essen, The Invasion and the War in Belgium (London, 1917), 291-92. Sadly, the Kenilworth ran aground on its trip to England and had to be towed free. This led to a wrangle over compensation between the underwriters, the owners, and the British and Belgian governments. FO 371/1913/79602.

Many refugees got themselves to England on a heterogeneous fleet of hoys, smacks, trawlers, fishing boats, yachts and pleasure craft.¹⁹ But the vast majority was taken off by the ships of the South East and Chatham Railway Company on their regular service or running additional trips. Throughout, the LGB showed a decided preference for the usual channels: even with refugees, it was a case of 'business as usual' in the early months of the war. The evacuation of the refugees had the romance of neither a gunboat rescue nor a Dunkirk, 1940. The British public still viewed the war with a detachment and sense of distance far different from the mood of national crisis and imminent invasion of 1940.²⁰ Given the willingness of so many individuals to make dramatic and colourful gestures of selfless philanthropy in this period of the war, it is remarkable that there are only a few recorded instances of British boat owners ferrying refugees to safety. In the absence of government announcements and press comment, the public doubtless assumed all was under control.²¹

¹⁹W. Knight, The Great European War, 3:88; The Times, 16 October 1914.

²⁰The two situations were of course quite different: France in 1914 was not nearing collapse; nor--at least in 1914--did the spectre of aerial bombing bring the war near to the home front in England as did the Zeppelin and Gotha raids after 1915 and in the Second World War.

²¹Armand Varlez, Les Belges en Exil (London, 1917), 43. Largely because of the censorship of much news from the front, press reports at this time were highly optimistic about the progress of Allied arms. Thus, The Times, in an editorial on 1 October, dismissed the suggestion that the renewed German bombardment of Antwerp amounted to a siege, and spoke of second-line German troops facing a Belgian army

Within the government, military pressures actually hindered evacuation. On 12 October, the Home Office informed the Foreign Office that

. . . while not wishing to put difficulties in the way of Belgian refugees seeking shelter in the United Kingdom, Mr. McKenna feels bound to point out that the danger that undesirables (German spies and others) may be included among those refugees is causing uneasiness to the Police and the Military Authorities. . . . and that the uneasiness would be greatly increased if there were any wholesale transportation of persons who have fled from Antwerp.

This was merely a formal protest against a fait accompli, as the Foreign Office realised.²² But the fear that enemy spies might use the refugees as a cover to enter England and to infiltrate the defences of some important ports obsessed military authorities. The officer commanding Eastern Command, which included Dover, was furious when six shiploads of refugees--the last boats from Ostend--arrived unannounced off the harbour in one day. The Dover authorities flatly refused to accept them immediately, and the boat carrying Reyntiens and Farrar had to stand offshore for the entire night of 15-16 October. Smaller boats were not allowed to dock but were sent to Folkestone. Many refugees had not eaten for two

in "vigorous condition"--the Belgians were exhausted and low in morale--and airily concluded, "we do not think there is any need to worry about Antwerp." Newspaper reports of the evacuation of Antwerp tended to suggest that refugees were almost all heading into Holland and not down the coast.

²²FO 369/671/58717, E. Troup to Grey, 12 October 1914; HO 45/10737/261921, minutes by J. Pedder, 10 and 14 October 1914, and undated minute (signature illegible).

or three days, were cold and often ill and hysterical.²³

The Dover commander protested to the War Office, which protested to the Admiralty, which protested, albeit in mild terms, to the LGB. The military's anger had been roused by the danger of spies and saboteurs. The Home Office and the Admiralty squabbled over the administrative inconvenience involved in dealing with so many unannounced arrivals at once. The Home Office--afraid that, "having got the alien (spy or innocent) well under control," it now faced a fresh danger from thousands of new aliens--blamed the Admiralty for having brought the refugees to Dover in the first place without informing it. This was hardly fair, for the Admiralty had had nothing or little to do with the rescue operation. The American vice-consul at Ostend had wired Grey asking urgently for more ships on 13 October and had asked that the Admiralty be informed. Whether the Foreign Office did this is unclear. The whole episode is, indeed, shrouded in the fog of war. Liaison between the Foreign Office, Admiralty, Home Office, War Office, Board of Trade and LGB was minimal. The Admiralty was irritated in this case because the Teviot, carrying food to Ostend, had been turned back and the provisions not used, and concluded that no further need existed.²⁴

²³The Times, 17 October 1914: Public Record Office, Ministry of Transport files [hereafter referred to as MT] 349/T 5348/1915/79/6210, F. H. Crampton (OC, Dover), "Diary of Progress," 16 October 1914.

²⁴MT 23/349/T 5348/1915/6210, Major-General John Adye (for GOC, Eastern Command) to secretary, War Office, 16 October 1914; N. Cubitt (War Office) to secretary,

However, refugees who were denied escape through Ostend, which was occupied by the Germans on 16 October, rushed south along the coast into France. Dunkirk took the first shock and the British consul, Philip Sarell, wired frantically on the 16th that refugees were besieging his consulate. With some feeling he argued that "concerted action between the British, Belgian, and French Governments is indispensable if we are to prevent the most appalling confusion and consequent suffering." Challenged directly, the Foreign Office lamely replied that it "might" be able to reach an agreement with the French government regarding asylum for the refugees. In effect, no one had given serious thought to the refugees as an inter-Allied problem. No coordinated effort was made, no supranational body was even created to deal with the Belgians in the manner of the post-war international refugee organisations. The British, French, Belgians and Dutch conducted negotiations on refugee policy on a purely makeshift basis throughout the war, in contrast to the growth of formal international cooperation on problems like munitions and shipping.

Admiralty, 18 October; W. Graham Greene (Admiralty) to Secretary, LGB, 19 October. Adye claimed that "the arrival of large numbers of foreign spies - amongst whom there are certain to be a number of the Enemy's spies - within the precincts of a first class Fortress is a grave danger." Cf. HO 45/10737/261921/19a and 29, minute by J. Pedder, 15 October, and E. Troup to Pedder, 16 October; FO 369/671/59747, W. F. Nicholson to Foreign Office, 16 October 1914.

With the arrival of the refugees in France, official British attitudes hardened. Sarell had not sought to have refugees shipped to England primarily as an answer to congestion in Dunkirk. French officials had told him that the refugees could be dealt with in France, but that money was needed from England. If funds were provided they would save the English refugee organisations from massive difficulty during the coming winter. Sarell believed it would be easier to provide for the refugees in Normandy and Brittany, especially as they would be in close proximity to their government, now established for the duration of the war at Le Havre. Neither Sarell nor his superiors at any time indicated that they believed the refugees to be the direct responsibility of the British government. Tyrrell wired back that the Foreign Office was asking the Comte de Lalaing to send some of his funds to Dunkirk for immediate relief purposes.²⁵ This was an early fusillade in what was to grow into a veritable barrage against Lalaing's jealously guarded Belgian Relief Fund. More immediately, it signified that the government still considered the refugees the responsibility of private charity.

Transport was in fact available at Dunkirk to bring the refugees to England. But the LGB and Home Office, already burdened by the ten thousand or so recent arrivals from Ostend,

²⁵FO 369/671/60675, Sarell to Tyrrell, 16 October 1914; Tyrrell to Sarell, 18 October 1914.

did not want more problems. The Admiralty likewise refused to permit the waiting ships to take on refugees without proper authority from the Foreign Office or the Belgian government. This was a mere formality, but in the extreme confusion of the time, formalities were formidable obstacles to speedy action, and Sarell, perhaps feeling a little betrayed, informed Tyrrell on the 17th that the British and French governments had agreed to ship the refugees to other ports in France.²⁶

Spies and Undesirables

Having thus won the skirmish by stonewalling, the Admiralty turned its attention to the problem of the many refugees who had been landed in ports under its jurisdiction. Graham Greene, permanent secretary to the Admiralty, wrote to the Home Office on 18 October to urge the speedy dispersal of all refugees from Dover, Folkestone and Southampton because of the danger of spies and saboteurs. The Home Office replied that it had given instructions prohibiting certain areas, particularly of the south and south-east coast, to aliens. Finally, a system of registration was started, under the control of the Registrar-General, which it was hoped would go far "to facilitate the work of surveillance by the

²⁶FO 369/671/60675, Sarell to Tyrrell, 17 October 1914; Tyrrell to Sarell, 18 October 1914. FO 369/671/60356, minute by T. B. F., 16 October; HO 45/10737/261921/29, W. Graham Greene to under secretary of state for the Home Office, 18 October, and H. C. Monro to Graham Greene, 20 October 1914.

police." This assurance temporarily allayed the Admiralty's fears, but a week later it joined the War Office in forcing the Home Office to revoke its decision to declare Southampton an open port.²⁷

The spy hysteria then sweeping England thus encompassed even the Belgians, Britain's most lauded allies. Whether the military authorities were reacting to intelligence or overreacting because of hysteria is difficult to say. Newspaper columns were filled with wild tales of German espionage rings, persistent spy-hunters asked questions in parliament, and the trial of Karl Lody, later executed for spying, fed fears that the Germans had managed to smuggle scores of spies into England before the war, particularly among the thousands of foreign waiters and domestics.²⁸ The government acted on the first day of the war, pushing an Aliens Restriction Act through all its stages in parliament and publishing it in an Order-in-Council, all on 5 August. Such speed was possible because the measure had already been drafted before the war broke out. Although the Act in one sense was a tough successor to the Aliens Restriction Act of 1905, the one owed little to the other. The Act of 1905 had

²⁷MT 325/712808/1914, Graeme Thomson to secretary, Admiralty, 27 October; unsigned minute, 28 October; and minute by G. Thomson (?), 5 November 1914.

²⁸For the fears of a highly-placed, well-informed man, see M. Hankey, Supreme Command, 1:166-67. The balance of evidence suggests that men at the top were as prone to irrational hysteria as the general public.

been a reluctant response by the Conservative government of Arthur Balfour to popular but localised agitation against the Jewish immigrants who had come to England in their thousands after 1880. Anti-alien sentiment focussed on the threat to English working-class standards of living posed by cheap immigrant labour, and was buttressed by a mixture of Social Darwinist racial and cultural fears.²⁹ The Act passed only after fierce Liberal opposition had mutilated it, and was administered with leniency by the Liberal Home Secretaries--notably Herbert Gladstone, no less--who, ironically, inherited it as one of the prizes of their victory in 1906. Nonetheless, the Act of 1905 marked the beginning of modern immigration control in England and established an embryonic bureaucracy of "immigration officers" hastily recruited from the Customs service and the Board of Trade. Medical inspectors were also appointed.³⁰

The Act of 1914, though it summed up and surpassed the earlier law and though some of its measures had been foreshadowed in the debates leading to the Act of 1905, had a

²⁹For discussion of anti-alien sentiment and the Act of 1905, see J. Garrard, The English and Immigration, and B. Gainer, The Alien Invasion.

³⁰J. Garrard, The English and Immigration, 103-33, and B. Gainer, The Alien Invasion, 199-207. Gainer argues that Liberal opposition to the control of immigration lessened over the years and that, to head off continuing harassment by anti-alien MPs, Churchill as Home Secretary introduced in 1911 a bill containing several more stringent clauses regarding the treatment of criminal aliens. The bill expired in committee. For a history of immigration control in England, see T. Roche, The Key in the Lock. Roche, himself a retired immigration officer, is generally

separate history. In May 1910, the Committee of Imperial Defence set up a subcommittee under Churchill to study the question of controlling aliens and espionage in time of war. It was not till August 1913, when McKenna had become chairman, that its report was presented. Its principal proposals were based on measures taken by British governments during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and recommended that certain strategic areas of the country should be prohibited to enemy aliens and that all enemy aliens should be compelled to register with the police, while only certain "approved" ports were to be used by friendly and neutral allies entering the country. Prohibited areas, registration, and approved ports had all been mooted during the debates of 1905 and were embodied in the Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration of August 1903. But if there was a link between the two Acts it was tenuous. Probably it was to be found in the fear of criminal and anarchist aliens which replaced the earlier emphasis on pauper aliens once the Act of 1905 had passed and which reached its height after the famous "Siege of Sydney Street" in January 1911.³¹ The fear of anarchist

sympathetic to measures for control, and the book is thus a useful foil to the more hostile approach of most writers on the subject.

³¹B. Gainer, The Alien Invasion, 159-60, 205-07; and W. J. Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914 (London, 1975), 287-92. The "siege" was a shooting match between police and two burglars, widely believed to be anarchists. According to Fishman (291), they were actually Lettish Social Democrats. The London anarchist community, essentially pacific, had no connection with the gang or with any other violent anarchists, but was harmed by the incident. Lloyd P. Gartner, The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914

rings and the fear of spies had at least some common features--and especially the fact that foreign immigrants figured in both--but that is the most that one can say.

The Act of 1914 embodied all the proposals of the subcommittee on espionage, which had been made ready for immediate use in the event of war.³² Thus, from the very first day of the war, the treatment of aliens in England was indissolubly linked to the fear of espionage. And so, the Belgian refugees entered England in a strange atmosphere of popular sympathy and official suspicion. At first, however, the authorities were less concerned about spies masquerading as refugees than about riff-raff arriving with the "respectable" refugees. Two C.I.D. detectives were sent to Antwerp late in September to scrutinise refugees before embarkation. They were "to endeavour to. . . prevent criminal and undesirable aliens being sent to England as refugees."³³ This was language straight from the debates of

(London, 1960), 137. The anarchist scare of the late Edwardian years was linked to the earlier anti-alienism because London anarchism was strongest among Jewish immigrants. James Joll, in The Anarchists (Boston, 1964), 177, argues that the siege did not lead to a general anarchist scare, such as swept the USA at that time, but rather "served to emphasise the innocence of the anarchists in London." But fear of anarchism pervaded the period in England, anarchists figuring prominently in Edwardian popular literature--e.g. some Sherlock Holmes stories and G. K. Chesterton's The Man Who Was Thursday (London, 1908).

³²M. Hankey, Supreme Command, 1:115-16; B. Gainer, The Alien Invasion, 207.

³³FO 123/545/125, Basil Thomson to Villiers, 25 September 1914.

1905. The policemen's expedition was abortive: Villiers could not give them an introduction to the Belgian police because Baron Berryer had assured him that no "undesirables" would be sent and he felt bound to accept this assurance. Such problems of protocol were to hamper the English police in their dealings with refugees until the great riot at Birtley in December 1916.³⁴

Supervision of the Belgians tightened when a central register of refugees was established. Two facts probably account for its creation: first, the protests of the Admiralty and War Office about the uncontrolled arrival and dispersal of the refugees from Ostend; and, second, the establishment by Samuel of a departmental committee of enquiry into the employment of refugees and the need to provide it with reliable statistics. The WRC had carried on with its own haphazard and incomplete lists of refugees at first, but its card index proved quite inadequate and it was greatly relieved when the Registrar-General offered to take over registration work. The WRC seems not to have pressed for this and the offer came as a welcome surprise. Samuel had asked Bernard Mallet, the Registrar-General, to compile a central registrar on 19 October. According to the official in charge, T. T. S. de Jastrzebski, its primary function in the beginning was to trace missing relatives--which rather modifies the claims later made by the chairman of the committee of enquiry that the register was the child of his committee. The register

³⁴FO 123/545/125, Basil Thomson to Villiers, 25 September 1914.

was a puny instrument of government at first. It was casually created, having been brought about by an informal agreement rather than a departmental fiat. Registration was not compulsory at first, was not a formal responsibility of the Registrar-General, and did not become so till 7 December 1914. Until then, a hastily recruited staff, including some Belgians, sought to compile a uniform register from the records of various relief organisations. Local relief committees were circularised and repeated notices were inserted in the press. But many refugees ignored requests to register and some had to be prosecuted.³⁵

The register began chaotically. Mallet wrote to J. F. Moylan of the Home Office on 29 October, declaring that "the registration of these refugees has got into an appalling muddle," and opposing Home Office suggestions that the police set up a separate register. The police, he said, should have been called in at the very beginning and could still be of assistance to him. But, he went on:

To start, now, the whole paraphernalia of a separate [sic] Registry would it seems to me to be merely to spoil both, besides wasting a great deal more public money, and it would utterly confuse the unhappy Refugees who have many of them already registered 3 or 4 times over and had just begun to realize that they have to look to this Department as the headquarters of registration.³⁶

³⁵T. T. S. de Jastrzebski, "The Register of Belgian Refugees", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXXIX (March, 1916), 133-58, with discussion; see specially 133-55, and remarks by A. Maudslay, 154.

³⁶HO 45/10737/261921/42, B. Mallet to H. Moylan, October 1914.

The muddle over the register was an illuminating example of the workings of the Asquith administration as it made the reluctant and piecemeal transition from peace to war. While the military departments were inclined to be too stringent where their policies clashed with the needs of civilians, the civil departments often moved into war at a very easy pace. Nonetheless, one Belgian observer acutely realised that the Register had been a significant step:

We may well regard this register. . . . as the parent of that general catalogue of Great Britain's human resources which was drawn up on August 15, 1915, and rendered possible the first application of military conscription.³⁷

The register was in fact used for more than merely tracing missing relatives. It was used to control the movements of Belgians at all times; to aid, by way of a derivative circular issued on 17 November 1914, in determining employment policy for the refugees; and as a basis for Belgian conscription drives. The register was the foundation for a growing tangle of regulations which left both Belgians and the police bewildered and exasperated. Although welcome guests, the refugees were subjected to bureaucratic controls more intense than British citizens ever experienced and surpassed only by the constraints on enemy aliens during the war. Accordingly, the WRC had to add to its lists of burdens the unexpected task of protecting the refugees from the worst toils of British bureaucracy.

³⁷Henri Davignon, "Belgium in England", Yale Review, r., 6 (October 1916): 96.

The refugees were to suffer throughout the war from being linked as aliens with the problem of enemy aliens. At first governmental preoccupation with the enemy alien benefited the Belgians, for the Home Office was too busy to worry greatly about the refugees. The Belgians were thus completely free, as long as they stayed out of the prohibited areas. But concern grew at the possibility of Germans posing as refugees, and The Times reported on 20 October that forty German spies had been arrested at Dover disguised as refugees.³⁸ Lurid tales from such respectable sources influenced even the WRC, whose leaders in their memoirs told tales of the spies they had encountered: for instance, two suspect "females" whose host discovered them shaving late one night.³⁹ Fears of harbouring spies in refugees' clothing strengthened considerably late in November when Farrar, now in Holland superintending the shipment of refugees, reported that the Germans had seized the entire stock of Belgian official documents and were issuing forged passports to Germans.⁴⁰ The LGB at once informed the Foreign Office, which took its time about informing the Home Office. Haldane Porter, chief inspector of aliens, calmly noted that aliens officers and Belgian agents carefully checked all Belgian papers at both Flushing and

³⁸The Times, 20 October 1914. The report was never substantiated.

³⁹BEL 3, manuscript of Miss Mary Bidwell: "Two Belgian Lady Refugees."

⁴⁰FO 369/674/80542, R. Farrar to H. Monro, 1 November 1914.

Folkestone.⁴¹ But there is no recorded instance of any person, posing as a Belgian refugee and arrested as a German spy, being brought to trial and sentenced to death or imprisonment under the terms of the Defence of the Realm Act. It would seem that, with a few exceptions, British officials, both civil and military, were as much the victims of the hysteria and prejudice engendered by the war as the most uninformed citizen. In the confusion of war, all men were almost equally ill-informed.

The refugees themselves contributed willingly to popular conceptions of German wickedness. The brutal German policy of taking reprisals against Belgian civilians for alleged acts of sniping and sabotage had shocked the world. Moreover, the destruction of large areas of Louvain and its ancient university by overwrought German soldiers over six days late in September and early in October enraged Britain.⁴² There was naturally general eagerness to hear confirmation of German barbarity from the lips of the victims. Reporters

⁴¹HO 45/10737/261921/245, A. Law (Foreign Office) to Home Office, 9 December 1914; memorandum, undated, by R. Haldane Porter.

⁴²Later British writers discredited many of the atrocity stories and their attacks on Allied propaganda of the Great War created a climate of scepticism which hampered British propaganda in the next war. It is worth noting that historians have relied for their evidence about Great War "atrocity-mongering" on contradictory but equally biased sources: on the one hand, contemporary British, French and Belgian accounts; on the other, on antimilitarist polemics of the interwar years.

avidly questioned refugees at Folkestone, the railway stations or the transit camps for dramatic stories of murder, rapine and pillage. The official British Committee of Enquiry into Alleged German Atrocities--better known as the Bryce Commission after its chairman, the eminent jurist, Lord Bryce--relied almost exclusively on interviews with refugees and wounded Belgian soldiers convalescing in England for its evidence.⁴³ The papers of WRC workers are full of pathetic tales of suffering and loss and the arrival of so many refugees in poor health seemed convincing evidence of German brutality.

This great weight of evidence has still, however, to be treated with a healthy scepticism. It is impossible to assess the extent to which refugees retailed as firsthand experience what they had merely heard from other refugees or even read in the press. And the belief that a certain cachet attached to being the victim of an "atrocit  " may have prompted many to embroider on experiences or to compose their own yarns. Further, the Bryce Commission's methods of taking and verifying evidence have been criticised. The Commission was, after all, an instrument of British propaganda, and Bryce had been chosen because of his great prestige in the United

⁴³ PP, Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, 1915, Cd. 7894; Appendix to the Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, 1915, Cd. 7895.

States, based on his reputation for probity and fair-mindedness.⁴⁴ It is true that many refugees died soon after reaching England, as the records of local committees indicate, but these were almost invariably old people, young children, babies and nursing mothers.⁴⁵ Some refugees went mad as a result of their ordeal. But the deaths and the insanity were the result of exposure, undernourishment and nervous strain while in flight. Few refugees, if any, could be found who had been mutilated or physically abused.

In fact, evidence to the contrary is provided by the response of the Foreign Office to a suggestion from the Duke of Connaught, Governor-General of Canada. The Duke was worried that the effect of atrocity stories in the United States was being eroded by German counter propaganda. He argued that "if ocular demonstration could be given. . . no further fears need be had of American sympathy," and quoted the suggestion of an American informant that "as many maimed Belgian refugees as possible should be collected privately and quietly put on board American relief ship." [sic]

⁴⁴Charles Roetter, Psychological Warfare (London, 1974), 47-48; also Laurence Housman, The Unexpected Years (London, 1937), 304. Housman ran a refugee hostel in 1914-15 and came across at least one hoax perpetrated by a refugee. George Bernard Shaw shared Housman's scepticism, suggesting that refugees were catering to a voracious public appetite for atrocity stories. F. Stanley Weintraub, Journey to Heartbreak: The Crucible Years of George Bernard Shaw (New York, 1971), 66-67.

⁴⁵Cf. MH 8/7/98/116, Belgian relief committee, Boston, to WRC, 19 April 1915; Glasgow City Archives after referred to as GCA, D-C.A.12, "Belgian Burial in Glasgow", n.d.

The Colonial Office forwarded this macabre suggestion to the Foreign Office, but stated that "so far no cases of intentionally maimed refugees have been discovered in this country, and it is prima facie unlikely that any such evidence, if it exists, would have been allowed by the Germans to leave Belgium." The Foreign Office objected on tactical grounds that it would be

. . . quite impossible to keep anything like this dark in America. The story of how they came over would appear in head lines in every paper in the US - supposing they exist at all.

And even if this were not so, 'ocular proof' could only be given on the music hall stage. Comment seems needless.

The real way to conciliate American opinion - if desired - would be to publish officially that there are no mutilated Belgians in England.

Senior officials of the Foreign Office were even blunter:

"a gruesome suggestion," was Arthur Nicolson's terse comment, to which the notoriously anti-German Eyre Crowe added, "I entirely agree." The suggestion was firmly squashed, and the incident clearly indicates the scepticism with which at least some important officials regarded the atrocity campaign.⁴⁶

But they were the exceptions, and the refugees basked in the bright sun of their hosts' abundant sympathy.

⁴⁶FO 371/1912/70990, Duke of Connaught to Colonial Office, 7 November 1914; H. W. Just (Colonial Office) to Foreign Office, 13 November; minute by R. Paget, n.d., and marginalia by Nicolson and Crowe, n.d. For a study of Crowe's part in the growth of an anti-German policy in the Foreign Office, see Zara Steiner, The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 112-18.

The Foreign Office response to Connaught illustrates general subtlety and sophistication of British propaganda directed towards the United States. British propaganda was generally held to have been much more successful than

The Belgians' stories of atrocities did have one concrete result. Maurice Hankey, secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence, had raised informally in April 1913 the question of arrangements for the English civilian population in the event of a German landing, but his suggestion had been coldly received. He continued to be interested in the problem, however, and at the outbreak of war was studying plans made in 1804 for evacuating civilians from coastal areas, driving or carrying off livestock and supplies, and flooding large areas. The influx of Belgian refugees provided the spur needed to awaken the interest of Hankey's superiors in the problem of evacuation. A subcommittee was set up with the ubiquitous Hankey as its secretary. Significantly, Asquith's choice of chairman was Herbert Samuel, by now the Cabinet's acknowledged expert on civilian distress. Although the Cabinet at first overruled the subcommittee's recommendations that civilians should not move from their localities upon invasion, the subsequent work of Hankey and Arthur Balfour, in consultation with the War Office, Home Office and other departments, led to the preparation of a fairly complete scheme of evacuation by early

the German effort in America, because the British were more sensitive to what American public opinion would and would not tolerate. See, e.g., C. Roetter, Psychological Warfare, 52-68. For the British campaign, also see J. D. Squires, British Propaganda at Home and in the United States. From 1914 to 1917 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1935), and H. C. Peterson, Propaganda for War (Norman, Oklahoma, 1939),

1915.⁴⁷ The scheme was never needed, but its preparation betrayed a growing governmental awareness late in 1914 that the war might demand the ruthless sacrifice of traditional freedoms to the dictates of the military. In both World Wars the British government had to prepare against the unthinkable: the invasion of England. In the first of those wars, Belgian refugees first brought it face to face with what invasion meant to the population of England. The refugees embodied the reality which the prophets of doom had merely imagined.

Holland and England

Public sympathy for the Belgians extended beyond those who had actually arrived in England to the far larger number who had crossed into Holland and to their heavily burdened Dutch hosts. If the Belgians were "brave" in the rhetoric of the times, the Dutch were "kindly." They seem to have first earned the plaudit by their treatment of interned British sailors from torpedoed naval vessels.⁴⁸ The term caught on because it fitted the Dutch neatly into the cosmology that the British had been constructing since the beginning of the war. "Kindly" implied two antithetical but balanced concepts. It suggested that the Dutch were decent and civilised and therefore naturally pro-Allied. On the other,

⁴⁷M. Hankey, Supreme Command, 1:216. For the psychological connection between dealing with arriving refugees and wounded Belgian soldiers and preparing against invasion, see Lord Knutsford, In Black and White (London, 1926), 277-78.

⁴⁸Times History of the War, 2:17; The Times, 16 October 1914: "Hospitable Holland", Pall Mall Gazette, 16 October 1914: "The Kindly Dutch".

it hinted at unheroic and domestic qualities, a certain Hobbit-like refusal to face squarely the moral issues over which other nations had gone to war. More specifically, however, British opinion was deeply impressed by the apparent willingness of the Dutch to look after many more refugees than Britain had received, despite the economic hardship the war had brought to Holland by the curtailment of Dutch overseas trade.⁴⁹ The British blockade was chiefly responsible for this hardship and the Foreign Office was extremely nervous about pushing the Dutch too far. A blockade policy would obviously work more smoothly if neutral powers cooperated meekly or willingly. Some wild dreamers hoped that the Netherlands could be persuaded into the war on the Allied side, while their more pessimistic fellows feared that German blandishments might persuade the Dutch to join the Central Powers. In fact, the Dutch pursued the policy that Belgium would have followed if left alone in August 1914: to keep steadfastly out of the conflict, to preserve a scrupulous neutrality, and to place the army on standing alert against

⁴⁹P. Fussell, in The Great War and Modern Memory, has brilliantly analysed the popular and poetic diction of the war. But no one as yet has studied the official rhetoric--the shifts and turns in language needed to express all the oscillating hopes and fears, alliances and enmities, of the struggle.

The Dutch economy was ultimately stimulated by the war: see, Joh. De Vries, "From Keystone to Cornerstone. Hoogovens IJmuiden 1918-1968. The Birth and Development of a Basic Industry in the Netherlands", in B. H. Slicker Van 1th. ed., Acta Historiae Neerlandicae (The Hague, 1973), 12-145.

an attempted invasion by either side.⁵⁰ Cooler heads at the Foreign Office were less extreme in their expectations of the course of Dutch policy, but Holland was arguably third in importance to America and Italy among the neutral powers to whom they directed their attention.

Private charity was first to extend British aid to the Dutch. The Women's International Relief Committee sent three representatives with supplies late in October. They reported to Grey on their return that the Dutch government had warned them of increasing public resentment that England was allowing the main burden of relief to fall on their small country. The report raised the spectre of a swing in Dutch public opinion, which at first had been alienated by the German invasion of Belgium and the reports of German brutality.⁵¹ The Dutch were supporting German appeals to the refugees to return to Belgium, and this presented the British with a dilemma. They had three options: first, to encourage Belgian citizens to return to occupied Belgium; second, to send relief to the refugees in the large Dutch camps; and third, to take refugees from Holland and bring them to England. The first course had its attractions--after all,

⁵⁰M. Gilbert, Winston Churchill, 3:98-99. The policy was succinctly advocated by the president of the second chamber of the Dutch parliament: "Let us keep our powder dry and our country wet." The Times, 7 October 1914. On Dutch neutrality, see Amry Vandenbosch, The Neutrality of the Netherlands during the World War (Grand Rapids, 1927).

⁵¹FO 369/671/59417, Mary Sheepshanks to Grey, October 1914. The WIRC was a recently formed federation of organisations connected to the International Woman's Suffrage movement. Its constituent bodies included the Association of

Churchill had suggested saddling the Germans with as many useless mouths as possible--but the return of large numbers of refugees to their homes would constitute a telling propaganda coup for the Germans. In this context, Foreign Office officials worried that "the present good behaviour of the Germans" in Antwerp would lure refugees back.⁵² The second course was pursued by private charity and the government was forced reluctantly to pursue the third expedient.

The Quakers were particularly active in relieving the refugees in Holland. They sent a committee of enquiry to visit the main camps early in November, one of its members being no other than Seebohm Rowntree. Though impressed by Dutch efforts, the committee found appalling conditions: overcrowded and insanitary accommodation, scanty diet, a total lack of occupation for the inmates. There were fears of a major epidemic breaking out and spreading to the Dutch. Clothing was urgently needed but many gifts from Britain--for example, costumes de chasse--were utterly useless. The

German Governesses, the British-German Friendship Society, the English Goethe Society, Franz-Joseph Society, Frauenverein für Innere Mission, Friends of Foreigners in Distress and the Union Internationale des Amies de la Jeune Fille. Its Belgian relief work was thus an outgrowth of its work for enemy and other aliens in Britain and, through the Union Internationale, a lineal descendant of the late Victorian and Edwardian crusade against the white slave traffic: an important source of pressure for a machinery of immigration control before and after 1905.

An American senator, visiting Holland early in 1915, noted growing hostility to the refugees and interned Belgian soldiers. He found the refugees in the big camps were unappealing "riff-raff," while wealthy emigres, who were living comfortably and leaving the relief of their compatriots to the Dutch, had soured benevolence. Albert Beveridge, "On the Doorstep of War", Collier's, 54 (1915):5-6, 30-31.

⁵²FO 371/1911/62618, unsigned minute, 28 October 1914.

committee suggested that refugees be removed to England and that workshops be set up to provide employment for the others. The workshops would keep refugees out of the Dutch labour market and allow them to make goods against their eventual repatriation. The Quakers later established some workshops and worked diligently in Holland. They never played an active corporate role in refugee relief in England, though individuals were members of relief organisations, but preferred to form a "missionary" arm of British relief, concentrating their efforts abroad.⁵³

Quaker initiatives still left the British government with a major problem. The LGB did not want more refugees, as it was still desperately contending with the main influx. The War Office was hostile, foreseeing "an invasion of spies among them:" an apprehension whose fires were stoked regularly by Ernest Maxse, the Germanophobe consul-general in Rotterdam.⁵⁴

⁵³BEL 1/1, Percy Alden, E. Richard Cross, Arnold Rowntree, B. Seebohm Rowntree, The Belgian Refugees in Holland. Report to the Right Hon. Herbert Samuel, M.P., President of the Local Government Board, and to the Government of His Majesty the King of the Belgians as to the number and condition of the Belgian Refugees in Holland (November 1914), 4, 6-7. The four were old colleagues: all were interested in social reform and in 1912 joined with H. W. Massingham, J. Rowntree, J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse in presenting a memorandum to the Cabinet on Labour Unrest and Liberal Social Policy. H. Emy, Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 271-72. Alden was an active member of the WRC.

For a comment on the committee's proposals, see FO 438/4/201, Sir Alan Johnstone, British ambassador at The Hague, to Grey, 15 November 1914.

For accounts of Quaker relief work in Holland, see A. Ruth Fry, A Quaker Adventure (London, 1926), 100-115; and Francesca M. Wilson, In the Margins of Chaos (London, 1944), 5-8. Both books also describe Quaker work with Belgian and French refugees in France and Serbian refugees in Corsica, Tunisia and Yugoslavia.

⁵⁴FO 36-/671/59411, minute by J. D. P., 10 October 1914.

The Admiralty was amenable, but could offer no protection to a regular ferry service, being fully extended protecting troop movements across the Channel.⁵⁵ So, while Maxse for fully a month cabled frantically for firm instructions, his superiors at the Foreign Office shilly-shallied in negotiations with other departments and other governments. It became apparent that nothing could be done in the absence of an overall policy and Grey passed the matter to Samuel to place before the Cabinet.⁵⁶ The Cabinet discussed the matter, probably in conjunction with a debate on the relief of occupied Belgium at a meeting late in October.⁵⁷ The discussion was inconclusive, for F. D. Acland complained to Grey a week later that he and his colleagues in the Foreign Office had not been sufficiently informed of the Cabinet's policy.⁵⁸ And two weeks later another official remarked caustically, after Maxse's labours to despatch refugees on an empty boat leaving Rotterdam had failed, "we have missed a chance of relief because we have no policy." Another pessimistically gauged that it could be weeks before a policy was finally settled. Some blame for the bottleneck was placed on the Belgian government, but this

⁵⁵FO 371/66022, Admiralty to War Office, 1 November 1914.

⁵⁶FO 369/671/59417, F. D. Acland to Grey, 20 October 1914.

⁵⁷I can find no record of such a discussion, but it clearly took place, from remarks by Acland and others, and 21 October seems the most likely date. See also CAB 41/35/54, Asquith to King George V, 22 October 1914.

⁵⁸FO 369/671/64832, Acland to Grey, 30 October 1914.

seems unfair. British officials and relief workers were habitually contemptuous of their Belgian counterparts throughout the war.⁵⁹ Responsibility probably lay with the Asquith ministry's leisurely way of arriving at decisions and with Samuel's disinclination to receive more refugees.

The government sought alternatives to accepting more Belgians. Samuel wanted the French to take as many as possible, arguing that France needed labour and could therefore enable the refugees to be self-supporting, whereas England was not in this position. The French agreed to take a large number and Folkestone and other ports later saw many refugees in transit from Holland to France.⁶⁰ The British also attempted to mollify the Dutch by offering them £50,000 for relief purposes, but the Dutch refused, fearing to compromise their neutrality, though they hinted that they could accept money from unofficial and undisclosed British sources.⁶¹ The Belgian government suggested that official funds could be laundered by passing them through the Belgian Relief Fund,

⁵⁹FO 371/67618, unsigned minute, 6 November 1914; /67754, Foreign Office to Maxse, 7 November 1914, and unsigned, undated minute. For English attitudes to Belgian officialdom, see GP 46046/177, Gladstone to Lyttelton, 14 November 1914. Gladstone evenhandedly blamed Belgian incompetence and British official indecision for the WRC's difficulties. See also, FO 371/1912/66069, Maxse to Grey, 29 October 1914, and GP 46080/83-4, Gladstone to War Office, 9 January 1915.

⁶⁰FO 369/671/64832, minute by Samuel, 15 November 1914.

⁶¹FO 438/4/201, Johnstone to Grey, 15 November 1914.

which the Foreign Office had already pressed to send money to Holland. It is not clear what finally became of the money, which was in any case a drop in the bucket.⁶² The unresolved problem of relief in Holland was to erupt early in 1916 into a bitter feud between the British government, British relief agencies and the Belgian government.

The Dutch problem was increasingly entangled with the even larger problem of relieving the civil population of occupied Belgium. The war had wrought havoc with both industry and agriculture, but the Germans for a time paid little heed to the consequences of their invasion.⁶³ The Belgian government-in-exile was disorganised, demoralised, destitute and powerless, and it was left to neutral powers to fill the breach. The Spanish and American ambassadors in Brussels set up a committee on 26 September and persuaded the British government on 6 October to allow the export of emergency relief supplies to Belgium under safe conduct of the American ambassador.⁶⁴ The American businessman, Herbert Hoover, who had organised relief for thousands of American

⁶²FO 371/1911/72143, unsigned minute, 19 November 1914. £50,000 was only one day's expenditure on refugee relief in Holland. FO 369/671/58417, Maxse to Grey, 12 October 1914.

⁶³The standard history of Belgium during the Great War is Henri Pirenne's La Belgique et la Guerre Mondiale (New Haven, 1928).

⁶⁴BEL 12/2, W. A. M. Goode, "Relief Work in Belgium", a paper read at the seventh ordinary meeting of the Royal Society of Arts, 24 January 1917, 179.

tourists stranded in England at the outbreak of war, was asked to take over the job of relieving Belgium, and so was born the International Commission for the Relief of Belgium.⁶⁵ With its formation the pressures on the British government became much more complex. The British feared that to send food to Belgium would be indirectly to feed Germany, which could levy supplies with greater harshness from the occupied zone. But to extend the blockade to relief vessels would enrage neutrals, especially the United States, and provide the Germans with potent propaganda to undermine civil resistance within Belgium. The British were faced with little choice: they had directly or indirectly to maintain Belgians in Britain, Holland or Belgium itself.⁶⁶ They had to decide which alternative would place the least strain on their resources, cause least friction with allies and neutrals, and give least comfort to their enemies. Bringing the refugees to England seemed the least of evils. Though it strained British food resources, the British promise to the Belgian government to allow food to be shipped to Belgium meant that shipping capacity

⁶⁵Ibid.; also, Burton J. Hendrick, ed., The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page (London, 1924), 310.

⁶⁶See, e.g., FO 371/1911/66820, Grey (?) to Johnstone, n.d.; (1914); and /65719, Eustace Percy, undated minute, 1914. Some officials like Percy had humanitarian objections to letting refugees return to Belgium, fearing their ill-treatment by the Germans. Ibid.; also, FO 369/671/53512, minute by J. D. P., 29 October 1914.

British diplomacy faced similar dilemmas in 1915 over the relief of German-occupied Poland. Kenneth Calder, Britain and the Origins of the New Europe 1914-1918 (Cambridge, 1976), 72.

available to the Allies would in any case be diverted. Feeding refugees in Britain at least meant not having to parley with the Germans and the Americans.

Accordingly, it was decided late in November that five thousand refugees should be brought weekly to England from Holland. Reyntiens, Farrar and Percy Alden were sent by the LGB to begin organising the selection and transportation of refugees. They worked briskly, but transport was a difficulty. A regular shipping service ran three times weekly from Flushing after 6 December and was supplemented a month later by a service from the Hook of Holland. However, the Germans watched these activities with interest, and the danger of submarine attack haunted all concerned. The Admiralty, unable to offer escorts, suggested that the refugees should travel in Dutch steamers, which would enjoy immunity from German attack.⁶⁷ The second service in fact had to be halted after a steamer, not carrying refugees, was torpedoed off Rotterdam on 22 January 1915.⁶⁸ By this time, however, the refugees in Holland had become an important factor in the evolving British wartime employment strategy and determined efforts were made to keep the refugees coming. Without diplomatic push and economic pull, it is unlikely that England would ever have made itself an island refuge on any grand scale. Perhaps the early waves of refugees were

⁶⁷MT 23/249/T 5348/1915, Maxse to Grey, 6 January 1915; H. F. Oliver (Admiralty), memorandum, 13 January 1915.

⁶⁸MH8/7/98/101, report of the Duke of Norfolk's Committee on measures for the assistance and relief of

fortunate in benefiting from governmental confusion as well as from the initial explosion of popular energy and sentiment.

International Interest

Not only was the government for a time reluctant to take more refugees; it would have been happy to rid itself of many on its hands. Offers were not lacking. As early as 1 September, New South Wales offered to take fifty British and Belgian young girls each month for domestic service.⁶⁹ More substantial offers followed the fall of Antwerp. Chile sought Britain's help in persuading the Belgian government to allow twenty-five thousand refugees to settle on the land in Chile. The British, though warmly disposed to the scheme, felt they could not intervene lest "the Belgian Government might receive the impression that Great Britain wanted to get rid of the refugees."⁷⁰ The Belgians vetoed the project. South Africa was likewise rebuffed on a similar land settlement.⁷¹ Somewhat later, some Florida land developers in

Belgian refugees, n.d. (July 1916), Appendix VIII: "Mr. Reyntiens' Organization at Rotterdam."

⁶⁹Public Record Office, Colonial Office files, 532/82, 180, Agent-General for NSW, memorandum, 1 September 1914, and 439, memorandum by T. C. Macnaghten on emigration, 10 June 1915.

⁷⁰FO 123/538/449, R. Paget to F. Stronge, British consul, Santiago, 22 October 1914.

⁷¹FO 369/673/457, Lord Buxton to the Colonial Office, 25 October 1914; minutes by E. Percy and 'R.S.', 5 November 1914. Percy noted enigmatically: "No action. But I wish Australia would do this." Flemish settlers would have been most welcome to the Afrikaaner-dominated Union government, a thought perhaps uppermost in Percy's mind. In

alliance with Philadelphia philanthropists, approached the WRC offering to take some Belgian families on generous terms. Gladstone told them that the WRC had been

. . . urgently requested by the Belgian Authorities to take no steps which would interfere, even in individual cases, with the repatriation of Belgian Refugees now in this country. The service of every able bodied Belgian will be required in Belgium for the purposes of reconstruction.⁷²

The Belgian government was unwilling to sanction any schemes which carried the implication that the war would be long. Thus the Belgian Official Committee resolved that it did not wish, "for the present, to encourage emigration among the Belgian refugees, the actual situation in Belgium rendering a decision on this point premature."⁷³ At this time--in November or December 1914--the battered and exhausted Belgian army was grimly clinging to a small corner of southeastern Belgium, protected only by a great marsh created by opening locks and sluices along the Yser River. The immediate recovery of the rest of Belgian territory was already a forlorn hope, but officially the Belgian government

a sense, the tentative attempts to settle refugees on the land were portents of the large-scale schemes whereby British soldiers were settled on the land throughout the Dominions.

⁷²GP 46079/288-89, F. D. Butler to Gilbert Parker, 8 December 1914; /293, Gladstone to Butler, 24 December 1914.

⁷³Quoted in PP, First Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board to consider and report on Questions arising in connection with the Reception and Employment of the Belgian Refugees in this Country, 1914, Cd. 7750 [hereafter referred to as Cd. 7750, Hatch Report], 30.

had to show a brave face. It is probable that the British government, afraid to antagonise its ally, used the WRC as an intermediary in sounding Belgian official opinion. The WRC itself had to discourage other private bodies wishing to sponsor Belgian refugee emigration, both because of the strong Belgian opposition and because of its own lack of funds. Numerous individual cases were referred to Aldwych, but Gladstone feared that to assist one case of hardship would be to "open floodgates."⁷⁴ The temptation to pass refugees on to other countries was to grow more acute as it became obvious that the war would be long and as the Committee's funds shrank. But the Belgians, having arrived in England, were there till the war ended, for the good or ill of their hosts and themselves.⁷⁵

The WRC found itself embroiled in these international problems through its dealings with the Belgian Relief Fund. An unalterable hostility developed between the two bodies. The Committee charged Lalaing with exploiting public sympathy for refugees in England by not clarifying either the aims of his Fund or the difference between it and the WRC. Thus, the

⁷⁴GP 46078/356, Gladstone to Miss Meriol Talbot (Victoria League), 30 October 1914.

⁷⁵The Canadian government, however, obliquely refused to take refugees when approached by a junior member of the WRC, stating that it did not wish to be suspected of trying to "seek advantage of the misfortunes which for the time being have placed Belgians under British hospitality." GP 46013/10, extract from letter from Department of the Interior, Government of Canada, Emigration Branch, 26 October 1914. The WRC also received offers from private sources in Canada, Georgia, Virginia and Brazil. Cd. 7750, Hatch Report, 30.

Committee asserted with heat and much truth, cheques really intended for its account had gone to the Fund. Lalaing was reaping the benefit of massive fundraising appeals in the English press, especially the Daily Telegraph, a tandem effort by the Observer and Pall Mall Gazette, and the Daily Express in a smaller campaign.⁷⁶ The Telegraph's campaign was particularly effective. Its articles containing subscription lists were headlined "Our Debt of Honour to Brave Belgium," and much play was made with the idealism of children, certificates going to those who collected one pound. The appeal, started in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Antwerp, was intended to be a direct gift to King Albert. The WRC was less than pleased. As its coffers emptied, it hunted desperately for new sources of income and approached the Telegraph, which apologetically refused to help, as the money was "committed in so many terms to the Belgian Government." Gladstone had inferred that the newspaper was diverting funds badly needed for refugees and the accusation spurred the editor to seek assurances from Lalaing that the money would be "devoted by the King to the purposes for which it was intended i.e., the relief of the suffering Belgians."⁷⁷

⁷⁶GP 46013/22-23, Maudslay to Gladstone, 24 November 1914; Daily Express, 2 January 1915.

⁷⁷BEL 8/7, J. Hall Richardson to E. Conway, 28 June 1917; GP 46079/253-54, Harry Lawson to Gladstone, 17 December 1914; /299-300, Lawson to Gladstone, 28 December 1914. Many appeals were conceived of as personal gifts to King Albert. Cf. appeal by Fr. Charles Plater, S.J., in The Tablet, 23 January 1915.

Lalaing reassured him, but the terms of reference of the Telegraph fund and of many gifts, and the vast extent of Belgium's "suffering", gave the Belgian government a virtual carte blanche to use the funds as it wished. In its desperate financial plight, it jealously guarded the funds, despite the immediate crises in Holland and Belgium, and was most unhelpful to appeals for some of the money to be spent in England.

The problem may have been partly personal. Even old friends of Lalaing were alienated from him at this time. Sir Gilbert Parker, whom Gladstone had approached about donations from America, wrote sympathetically:

I agree with you about de La Laing. He has become more impossible in every way. . . . The American Commission [i.e. Hoover's body] has a tale to relate similar to your own in regard to his collecting funds specifically intended for them.⁷⁸

The WRC's accounting officer fumed apoplectically to Gladstone at the "exceedingly loose way" in which the Fund's staff sent on cheques and correspondence intended for the WRC, at failures to keep appointments, and at general dilatoriness. He concluded, "there has been no individual who has been more anathematised by me and the staff in this office than the Belgian Minister."⁷⁹ The widespread annoyance Lalaing occasioned, added to Belgium's increased reliance on Britain, led to his removal in February 1915. The coup de grâce was

⁷⁸GP 46079/221-22, Parker to Gladstone, 11 December 1914.

⁷⁹GP 46079/167-68, Henry Bourne to Gladstone, 2 December 1914.

delivered by Lord Northcliffe, who "insisted", in one of his numerous interventions in affairs of state, that Lalaing must go.⁸⁰ The new ambassador was a powerful politician, the Liberal leader Paul Hymans. Hymans was extremely urbane and under him dealings between the British and Belgians over relief measures seem to have become much smoother. However, not all problems could be traced to personalities. The Belgian bureaucracy was plagued by lack of funds and was still reeling from the enormous dislocations of the previous months;⁸¹ and perhaps there were simply differences of style and outlook between officials of the two countries. The English saw Belgian officials as incompetent.

The Aldwych Organisation

The WRC itself faced enormous stresses on its administrative capacities. The latter half of October was, by its own estimate, the period of greatest strain.⁸²

⁸⁰Hymans, Memoires, 1:134.

⁸¹Apart from its state treasure, which had been moved to England ahead of the advancing Germans, and its revenues from the Congo, the Belgian government had no source of income. In February 1915, the British decided to join with the Russians and French in lending the Belgian government £20 million. CAB 37/124/20, minute of Cabinet meeting on 10 February 1915.

⁸²WRC I, 23.

Nevertheless a pattern of power and a division of responsibility gradually emerged and the Committee grew from a congeries of semi-independent subcommittees and a mass of individuals taking their own separate and often contradictory initiatives into a more centralised and efficient machine. The Committee had four main tasks: to establish a clear and coherent structure of power at Aldwych; to contact and supervise the local committees which swarmed into existence throughout the country; to liaise with other bodies devoted either entirely or partly to refugee relief; and to work out its relationship with the LGB. Of these, the first task was by far the most immediate.

Samuel's offer of financial support to refugees increased the load on the WRC by bringing into being many local committees; at the same time, it gave the Committee the backing of an established bureaucracy. Thus spurred and encouraged, Gladstone and his colleagues decided on a radical reorganisation at Aldwych. The offices were closed for a week early in September while the files were put in order by hired clerks. Various other changes were made, but as this reorganisation was followed by another at the end of September and as constant small changes were taking place, it is extremely difficult to gain a clear idea of the WRC's structure at any one time.

Several things are clear, however, about the whole process of reorganisation. The semiautonomous subcommittees were abolished and formal supremacy over the entire

organisation passed to Gladstone, whose position was variously and unpejoratively described by other workers as that of "Dictator" or "equivalent to that usually held in a commercial company by the Managing Director."⁸³ It is likely that Gladstone assumed this role through a consensus among his fellow "generals", rather than by some kind of palace coup. The other leading figures seem to have accepted his rise to preeminence amicably, though Lady Lugard chafed at her eclipse. Lyttelton, one of his warmest supporters, says Gladstone "formally constituted himself Head of the whole organisation," implying a tinge of autocracy to his move.⁸⁴ Such autocracy was necessary. "For the first months of the war," one worker later commented, "owing to the lack of trained workers, Aldwych was held up all over the country as a byword for muddle and confusion."⁸⁵ Thus, not surprisingly, as the decks were cleared and discipline tightened, more professional workers were hired and the WRC relied correspondingly less on volunteers.

The transformation was not easy and each step on the path to professionalism and efficiency caused much hurt and bitterness. The WRC had attracted scores of aggressive, self-confident upper-and middle-class ladies and gentlemen who had managed to carve out small niches for themselves amid the

⁸³ Lyttelton, 14; Lugard, 16; Times History of the War, 4:463.

⁸⁴ Lyttelton, 15.

⁸⁵ MH 8/1/82/126, L. Bower to Maudslay, 18 January 1916.

general confusion. They were "self constituted and tolerated though entirely superfluous,"⁸⁶ and predictably reacted with hostility to the changes. Lyttelton indeed draws a picture of an almost Darwinian struggle for survival:

General Buildings was a difficult place to work in, swamped as it continually was by uncertainty, and by sudden emergency. But with all its difficulties it was at least a place, at that time, where inefficiency was patent at once, and in the struggle for supremacy in direction, nothing but real ability could survive. I do not think any record was kept of the people who in any one way or another were eliminated.⁸⁷

One who went under was the first honorary secretary, Hennessy Cook. He claimed bitterly to Gladstone late in September that there was "a very serious state of insubordination throughout the office" because of rumours of another reorganisation proposed by Maudslay.⁸⁸ Maudslay formally replaced him as honorary secretary in January 1915 but Cook's protest effectively marked his demise and he was accompanied by Morgan, who probably left for business reasons. Other volunteers left simply because they could no longer afford the luxury of unpaid work. Increasingly, as Christmas drew nigh, workers resigned because their means were running out. Many were of rentier class whose incomes had been adversely affected by the war's disruption of trade and commerce and by rising prices. Their going aided in the smoother running of the

⁸⁶BEL 3, diary of Mary Bidwell.

⁸⁷Lyttelton, 18.

⁸⁸GP 46078, 224-25, Hennessy Cook to Gladstone, 30 September 1914.

Committee's work. Not only were volunteers "unbusinesslike", but they were often extremely unreliable, coming in when they wanted to but not at other times when urgently needed. Nonetheless, for all their failings, volunteers had done yeoman service when they were desperately needed.

The original subcommittees of the WRC were dissolved when Gladstone took control and were then reinstituted as departments. The change in name was also a change in form: where the subcommittees met irregularly, the departments were permanent bodies; where the subcommittees were slow and cumbersome in arriving at decisions, the departments had appointed heads who took decisions more swiftly. They themselves were responsible to Gladstone, who with the advice of others sought to coordinate the department's activities. The pendulum had therefore swung from the near-anarchic individualism of the first weeks to what was in theory a benevolent dictatorship. Like Lord Kitchener, Gladstone was a necessary "man of the hour" in the confused and feverish atmosphere of the war's first months.

But he was not to wield supreme power unchecked for long. Once the worst crisis of 1914 was over but new problems had arisen--problems of finance and allocation not amenable to resolution by a resolute man--the WRC moved into closer relationship with the LGB. The price it paid was tighter, more bureaucratic control of its functions and a Managing Committee was established, with Gladstone as chairman, Maudslay as secretary, and various members whose numbers

were augmented from time to time from both within and without the WRC.

The departmental structure created at this time remained the basic structure of the Committee throughout the war. There were six departments. Two--Correspondence and Finance--handled internal administration; three--Transport, Clothing and Employment--dealt with specific tasks; and the last was a holdall for seven smaller subdepartments, often confusingly referred to as departments by WRC workers. Five of these--Local Committees, Allocation and Reallocation, the Private Relief Fund, Local Authorities, and the Belgian Consulate, which had its offices at Aldwych--were unitary departments, but two were subdivided yet again into sections which were again confusingly labelled departments. One dealt with education, health, "undesirables" and the police. The other dealt with flats, hotels, boarding houses and missing relatives, and contained the Food Committee, which dealt with the WRC's most important ally in the philanthropic world, the National Food Fund.⁸⁹

A mixed bag of amateurs and professionals ran the departments. The Finance, Transport and Correspondence Departments were understandably dominated by professionals, though Gladstone was in nominal command of finance and general financial policy was determined by the Managing Committee. Those departments dealing more directly with the refugees or their hosts were commanded by prominent volunteers. Lyttelton

⁸⁹For an account of the National Food Fund, see chapter IX.

and Mrs. Louisa Samuel ran allocation in the sometimes rivalrous tandem. Lytton looked after local committees until called to the War Office, after which Arthur Tilney Bassett took over. Lady Gladstone oversaw education and Lady Emmott clothing. The Health Department operated fairly autonomously at first under a physician, Dr. J. H. Philpot, but was taken over by Mrs. Samuel in December 1915.⁹⁰ Leggett controlled the Private Relief Fund and a Mrs. Webbe dealt enthusiastically with "undesirables." The Employment Department was "really an auxiliary and supplementary agency" to the Labour Exchanges Department of the Board of Trade and was staffed by several paid employees who had had experience with the Central Unemployed Body for London.⁹¹

The departments coped with the October crisis with varying degrees of success. Transport was a model of efficiency under the widely respected administrator, Campbell, who supervised a large staff, deployed some "40 or 50 omnibuses. . . . for many months," and handled all transport to and from the depots and the local committees. By some quirk his department rather than Allocation assumed responsibility for correspondence regarding prohibited areas and he later annexed the care of Belgian soldiers on leave in England to his care.⁹² His staff worked under more difficult conditions than those of other departments, as many refugees

⁹⁰WRC I, 57.

⁹¹See 239-42 above.

⁹²WRC I, 20.

arrived at night, and the Transport Office remained open till near midnight on most nights long after the mad scramble of October had given way to a more soberly regulated schedule. Campbell's competence inspired great loyalty in his hardworking staff and he fought determinedly at all times for better wages and working conditions for them. He was the ideal man of business whom Lugard and Lyttelton had originally sought: shrewd, experienced and efficient but also thoroughly humane and dedicated to the refugees and his staff.

Clothing, under a well-intentioned but inexperienced amateur, Lady Gertrude Emmott, wife of a leading Liberal politician, fared less happily. It became the favourite pastime of many refugees, before they were dispersed from London or found jobs, to make repeated forays to the clothing depots. Their motives varied: some sold clothes they were given and went back for more; some wanted to accumulate as many clothes as possible for their own use; others were dissatisfied with their first batch of clothes and demanded better garments. Many of the clothes sent in by wellwishers were in poor condition and volunteers at the Warwick Square Depot worked in conditions that were "not infrequently highly insanitary."⁹³ As well as meeting requirements from local committees and private hosts, the Depot supplied government refugees in London and auxiliary depots elsewhere. Some refugees merrily went the rounds till the abuse was controlled through a system of dockets. But it was difficult to keep any

⁹³WRC I, 18.

system going, whatever the good intentions, and Lady Emmott had to report to Gladstone late in October that, though "at first our books were well kept. . . the rush lately has been too great for much clerical work."⁹⁴ The Clothing Department remained a troubled section of the WRC and later became the focus for much debate between the WRC and the LGB over the amount of control the government should exercise over the policies of the Committee.

But the biggest and most burdened department in 1914 was the Allocation Department, and it is time to consider the way in which the WRC faced its primary task of finding shelter for its unexpectedly large care of souls.

⁹⁴GP 46018/346-48, Lady Emmott to Gladstone, n.d. [October 1914].

CHAPTER V

THE DISPERSAL

'It Is Not Easy to Deal with These Masses of Humanity. . . on Business Principles'

The provision of hospitality was the first great problem facing the refugee relief movement. When offers of hospitality abounded, the administrative machinery was missing. By the time a rough and ready machinery had been flung together, the WRC faced a grimmer task. Offers declined steadily and Aldwych had to resort to expedients other than private accommodation. The failure of spontaneous private hospitality steadily forced a reluctant government to intervene. Subsidies were the chief tactic used to bolster the flagging benevolence of hosts and to tempt new offers. Relief bodies themselves resorted to increasingly sophisticated schemes which increased the drain on their dwindling resources. The gap between its income and its expenditure once again had to be closed by the government. Its direct involvement was minimal, but without the support of the state, private hospitality could not have coped beyond the end of 1914.

Smaller Allocation Bodies

The prevailing confusion and uncertainty during the war's first months inevitably precluded the tight control of all allocation work by one body. Instead, several organisations worked in a loose federalism with the WRC. The most efficient of these was the Jewish effort. The Jewish community swiftly took complete charge of Jewish refugees and sent them to Jewish hostels and depots. From here most were sent to private homes, though some remained in hostels throughout the war. The Belgian Jews were actually almost all Russians and Galicians, part of the same great exodus which had brought so many poor Jews to England in the late nineteenth century. Many were still Russian citizens, and the Belgian government considered them a nuisance.¹ Some were repatriated to Russia, but most showed no desire to live again under tsarist rule.² However, by a delicious irony, Jewish refugees were entitled to a dole extracted from a reluctant Russian embassy!³ Jewish relief work was highly efficient, not surprisingly, given the London community's long experience in dealing with poor Jewish immigrants. Jews, more than any other section of the English population,

¹MT 23/360, A. A. Gordon to E. Marsh, 14 September 1914.

²BEL 8/10, Appendix on employment, 10 April 1916.

³BEL 7/1, "Aid for Belgian Refugees", (anon.), 12 September 1914; GP 46078/166-67, F. M. Guedalla to Gladstone, 8 September 1914. Russian acquiescence might have been influenced by the presence of Lord Rothschild at the head of the Jewish delegation which sought the aid!

knew what to do when faced with swarms of destitute and disorientated aliens, and they had a relief apparatus ready for action in 1914.

The Jews' Temporary Shelter in Whitechapel, the most famous organ of Anglo-Jewish help to immigrants since 1885, led the way. Refugees from Belgium began arriving in August and the Shelter's limited facilities were seriously strained by early September.⁴ Despite its poverty and overcrowded quarters, the local Jewish community responded generously and the Shelter's chairman informed F. M. Guedalla of the WRC that "the poor Jews of Whitechapel. . . . are taking these Jewish families into their own homes as fast as they come over." In contrast, he alleged, richer Jews were "in complete ignorance that there has been a complete influx of Jews from Belgium."⁵ However, the more affluent sections of English Jewry were already moving to the aid of the refugees and late in August or early in September the Council of the Temporary Shelter was expanded to become the Jewish War Refugees Committee.⁶

Its first task was to find large buildings in which

⁴1920 Report, 52-53; Greater London Record Office, London City Council files [hereafter referred to as LCC], Emergency Committee I, minute 51, 10 September 1914.

⁵GP 46078/166-67, F. M. Guedalla to Gladstone, September 1914. For overcrowding in the East End, see Chaim Bermant, Point of Arrival (London, 1975), 159-60.

⁶1920 Report, 53, says the end of August; Greater London Record Office, London County Council files, Public Control Committee, register of applications under the War Charities Act 1916 [hereafter referred to as PC/CHA/3], 5/440 application of JWRC, March 1917, says September 1914.

to hold arriving refugees. The Shelter could accommodate only one hundred people, but the takeover of the Poland Street Refuge on 5 September solved the first crisis. Poland Street in its turn was swamped by the second wave of refugees in October and on 3 November the LGB gave the JWRC a big, empty building, the Manchester Hotel. The career of the Hotel typified much of the interaction of the government and private philanthropy at this time. The Board had been lent the hotel by an insurance company, possibly in lieu of rates and taxes: so its generosity cost it little. The Board undertook, however, to furnish the building and to place there as supervisor one of its officials, C. F. Roundell, who had been made responsible for Jewish refugees two weeks earlier.⁷ His duties were vaguely defined: he probably had little power over the staff, as these were Jewish volunteers, while the JWRC was responsible for maintaining its own institutions. It managed to survive unaided till February 1915, when Ernest Schiff, the dedicated supervisor of Poland Street, applied to the WRC for a grant for the Jewish Committee. At first Aldwych was inclined to pay half the Jewish Committee's weekly expenditure, but then decided on a fixed grant of one thousand five hundred pounds per week. No reason for the change was stated. The Jews may have sought it, but it is more likely that Aldwych feared to commit itself to an agreement which might entail unforeseen rises in expenditure. The fixed grant was a compromise satisfactory

⁷Cd. 7763, Special Work, 27.

to both committees. If Aldwych paid a ratio of the JWRC's expenses, debates over the way money was used would invariably arise. The WRC at this stage did not wish to interfere and the Jewish Committee cannot have wished for interference. Schiff accepted the proposals, merely requesting that the grant be renewed "if economic conditions should alter very materially, and cause a distinct change in the prices of commodities."⁸

The episode was instructive. At no point was the government involved directly. The WRC could only be as generous as it was, on the other hand, because it had itself gone cap in hand to the government shortly before and had come to an arrangement of mutual reluctance: the government surrendered funds and the Committee surrendered more of its independence. Financial dearth was the centripetal force in the history of the relief movement. The happily chaotic independence of the early months was a luxury no one could afford as the war dragged on and private resources dwindled or went to new causes. Schiff's letter pointed to a further reason for the mood of deepening insecurity among relief workers: the war had begun an inflationary spiral in wages and prices which cut sharply into the static and limited resources of private organisations.

The JWRC lost more of its independence when the

⁸MH 8/15/38 and WRC 42, minutes of Managing Committee, 16 and 17 February 1915; /48-49, E. Schiff to WRC, 23 February 1915.

government agreed to replace the fixed subsidy, which it was effectively paying via the WRC, with the now more usual capitation grant of 10/- per refugee. The LGB laid down certain stipulations: "employable" refugees must be made to take jobs and all wage earners were to make some repayment for their keep which would be refunded to the Board.⁹ But the stipulations implied less a binding contract than a gentlemen's agreement which the Jewish Committee was left entirely free to interpret as it wished. Indirect aid, partial support, the decided preference for using philanthropic bodies to carry on the actual work of relief, the lack of clearly defined bounds of responsibility: all characterised the government's style of action in this early period.

No other private hostels were quite as large as the Jewish refuges, and few communities breathed the same spirit of intense purpose. Poland Street was a small welfare state: as it had to be, for its long-term inhabitants were poor orthodox Jews gravely hampered in hunting for work by their scruples about Sabbath labour. The refuge provided a dispensary, school and synagogue, and the Hotel was similarly equipped. Both places were overcrowded and, as both were situated in congested central districts of London, playing space for children was an insoluble problem. For the latter reason the Hotel was closed in September 1915 and its

⁹MH 8/7/98/101, Norfolk Committee, 2:3: "Jewish Refugees", referring to a decision of the LGB on 21 June 1915.

inhabitants were dispersed to thirty five smaller hostels in north London. The dense and claustrophobic life of Poland Street continued throughout the war.¹⁰ The two institutions differed largely because they catered for different classes of refugees. The secretary of the Jewish Committee later noted that the opening of the Hotel had made it possible to "sift the better class refugees from the others and to provide more suitable classified accommodation."¹¹ Refugees from more affluent backgrounds were in general drafted to the Hotel.

Class consciousness infused Jewish relief work in several ways. Though the poor Jews of the East End had been first to help refugees, control of relief work was quickly taken over by richer and more powerful members of the community. Guedalla made an appeal for funds to the Jewish public early in September 1914. He had not obtained Gladstone's prior approval and was reprimanded, for Aldwych sternly opposed the duplication of public appeals. But the appeal raised over £40,000 and squarely placed the refugee problem before the wealthier Jews.¹²

¹⁰The most detailed account of the refugees is given by E. Turk in the 1920 Report, 52-54. The story of Poland Street, with special reference to Ernest Schiff, is told in Beth Mayer-Beer, We Must All Fight (London, 1972), 7-22. For a lushly romantic view of Poland Street, see Gabriel Costa, "Refugee Town: The Amazing Establishment at Poland Street", Daily Chronicle, 28 July 1915. See also BEL 8/10, E. Schiff: memorandum, 10 April 1916; and MAB 62/329, minutes of meeting of Metropolitan Asylums Board, 23 October 1914.

¹¹1920 Report, 53.

¹²GP 46078/168-69, "Appeal to the Jewish Community",

A split now appeared between the Jewish establishment and some of the vigorous radical organisations which thrived amongst the Jewish working classes.¹³ The influential Union of Jewish Women, when entering upon relief work in the middle of October, decided to concentrate on helping better-class refugees. Synagogues set up funds to support the Union's work and Herbert Samuel, a prominent Jew, suggested to his wife that she pay 10/- a week to "the Synagogue fund for ci-devant-well-to-do-Belgian-Jewish-refugees."¹⁴ With ample funds at their disposal, the ladies of the UJW established a clearing house in the salubrious suburb of St. John's Wood, much favoured by wealthy English Jews. From there they dispersed their charges to flats, rooms, lodgings or houses. Yet, despite their efficient work, they could boast in April 1915 of having helped only six hundred refugees--a minute proportion of the total Jewish refugee population of more than ten thousand. A disproportionate amount of energy and money was being spent on a few refugees.¹⁵

September 1914; /173-74, Guedalla to Gladstone, 11 September 1914; 1920 Report, 54.

¹³ Some of these organisations are described in W. Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals.

¹⁴ HS A./157/231, Samuel to Beatrice Samuel, 30 December 1914.

¹⁵ BEL 8/10, Union of Jewish Women: a) leaflet for 1914; b) "War Relief" (pamphlet, 16 April 1915); c) leaflet for 1916; d) "War Work" (pamphlet, 1917).

This situation did not go unchallenged. A conference to discuss Jewish relief work in December 1914 was attended by a very small working-class contingent. Friction developed at the meeting over the alleged under-representation of working-class groups, and some delegates accused richer Jews of refusing to "democratise" the proceedings. The Mantle Makers' Union therefore subsequently called a conference of trade unions and workers' organisations in London to establish a separate relief body. Thus was born the Jewish Workers' War Emergency Relief Fund, a colourful if ultimately ineffectual body which spent its energies in internecine warfare with other Jewish relief agencies. It was also rent by internal feuding and ran into trouble with the Charity Commissioners when all relief organisations were obliged to register themselves under the War Charities Act of 1916. The rise and fall of the Workers' Fund had roots deep in the history of the English Jewish community. The relief activity over which the struggle raged was chiefly directed to Jewish distress in eastern Europe: work with refugees in England was merely an offshoot of this international effort. But, despite the idiosyncratic and insignificant role of the Workers' Fund, its struggles parallel some of the tensions which also emerged around the National Relief Fund. It is interesting, however, that although the work of many smaller bodies dealing with Belgian refugees reeked of class bias, there is little evidence elsewhere of internal struggles along class lines such as wracked

Jewish organisations. Perhaps Anglo-Saxons were simply more reserved and less volatile.¹⁶

Another religious minority with a reputation for cohesion, the English Roman Catholic community, was much less effective than the Jews in allocating and looking after refugees. Catholics lacked the strong Jewish tradition of charity and mutual support and had not had to develop structures to cope with distress at home and abroad on quite the same scale as had English Jewry in the previous half-century.¹⁷ Furthermore, almost all the Belgian refugees were, at least officially, Catholic, so the sifting process which had aided Jewish charity was missing. Nonetheless, the Catholic Women's League was an early helpmate of the WRC and allocated more than ten thousand refugees. The League further helped the Committee's allocation work by giving advice on the location of Catholic churches, a factor which to some extent determined the placing of refugees.¹⁸

¹⁶For the story of the Worker's Fund, see the Jewish Workers' War Emergency Relief Fund: Bulletin. A Historical Record of the Origin, Institution and Progress of the Fund (March 1915-April 1917) (London, 1917). Hostility between the Jewish establishment and social democrats also marked relief efforts in the United States: Oscar Handlin, A Continuing Task. The American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1914-1964 (New York, 1964), 24-26.

¹⁷Most studies of English Catholicism concentrate on eminent figures like Newman, Manning and other able apologists and converts. Little true social history has been written. The balance has been rectified somewhat for the period before 1850 by the recent publication of John Bossy's The English Catholic Community 1570-1850 (London, 1975), but the latter nineteenth century remains a blank. The parallels between the Jewish and Roman Catholic communities in England are many and would repay investigation.

¹⁸Catholic Social Guild, Year Book for 1916 (London,

The religious issue at first hampered allocation work. Some hosts stipulated that their guests must be Protestants. But, in fact, the few Protestant arrivals were often taken in hand by a Baptist-led group in Folkestone and sent directly to a network of eager nonconformist church groups.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Aldwych scrupulously strove to soothe English Catholic fears of Protestant proselytising among captive Belgians, and spread its views to other organisations.²⁰ But its scruples, though honourable, were exaggerated: there is little evidence of intense Catholic fears of Protestant proselytising. Aldwych received only one, hearsay, complaint of Catholics obstructing the allocation of refugees, and Gladstone heard the allegation sceptically.²¹ Most refugees perforce were sent to Protestant hosts, and Catholic allocation work was orientated towards special groups such as priests, nuns and children. There were few priests but many nuns, who usually found havens in English houses of their order and, once settled,

1917), 82: WRC I, 11.

¹⁹BEL 6/98, Rev. J. C. Carlisle, "Voluntary Relief Work Under-taken by the Baptist Church, Folkestone", n.d.

²⁰Transport House, War Emergency Workers' National Committee files, Box 3: "Belgian Refugees" [hereafter referred to as WNC/3], 1/4, J. S. Middleton to R. Radcliff, 23 September 1914.

²¹GP 46078, 304-06, Mrs. Kay Murray to Gladstone, 21 October; /319, Gladstone to Murray, 23 October 1914.

became important helpers and comforters of their compatriots.²² Naturally, there was little danger of them losing their faith in Protestant England.

Children were a different matter. For Catholics, the education of children in a Catholic milieu was a shibboleth equal to the Jewish axiom that Jew must help Jew. Thus, Catholic energies were particularly devoted to ensuring that Belgian children received a Catholic education where possible. One local refugee committee found its otherwise comradely Catholic members turning intransigent when the committee decided to place refugee children in the local state schools.²³ But many children had to attend non-Catholic schools, or their parents chose to send them to these schools. English Catholics generally acceded to these arrangements, and indeed were grateful for the generosity of school governors and education authorities who offered free education to Belgian children. But the issue remained a sensitive one and Catholic irritability was expressed on one occasion in the House of Lords. In May 1915 the Catholic Lord Brayne alleged

²²Catholic Social Guild, Year Book for 1915 (London, 1916), 22.

²³BEL 6/2, Ashton-under-Lyne committee, July 1917. Education was also a subject of debate at Dewsbury. The Tablet, 14 November 1914. Education remained an inflammable issue between Catholics and Nonconformists after 1902 and throughout the war, although the main battle was between Nonconformists and Anglicans. G. E. Sherington, "World War One and National Educational Policy in England", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1974, 85-87, 103-07, 288-90; The Tablet, Aloysius Emery to editor, 19 September 1914.

that twenty-one refugee boys at Eton were suffering various restrictions on their free attendance at the nearest Catholic church. Braye deferred his attack when told that the headmaster of Eton was trying to have the restrictions removed. But he warned ringingly that:

The subject is of some public interest, . . . and only recently I received a letter from Canada in which I am informed that the matter has been noticed and has had a disastrous effect upon recruiting among Catholics, who resent the attitude which the most important public school in Great Britain has assumed towards their co-religionists.²⁴

Braye in fact had a purely personal interest in the matter, having endowed the church in question, and got little support from other Catholics. There was no question of the boys' religious rights being fundamentally threatened and the offending headmaster was Edith Lyttelton's brother-in-law, an unlikely bully.²⁵ But Braye's speech indicated how sensitive an issue the treatment of refugees was, at least potentially, for British propagandists. The refugees may have been a weapon in their armoury; but they could be a double-edged sword.

English Catholics generally were concerned less with hunting for examples of Protestant bad faith than with using the refugees in a propaganda campaign of their own. They were

²⁴PD, (Lords), 19 May 1915, 5th ser., 18, col. 1050.

²⁵The Belgian Crown Prince Leopold attended Eton during the war, probably because Lord Curzon's Catholic stepsons had been accepted there. Hymans, Memoires, 2:830; Marchioness Curzon, Reminiscences, 45, 90. The church at Eton was the subject of a lively and arcane correspondence in The Tablet in March and April 1915. Braye's forces were well and

determined to prove that they were as patriotic and philanthropic as their fellow countrymen. Thus, in the words of one reviewer of Catholic refugee relief work for 1914-15:

It may be that Catholics could have taken their share individually in the great national duty of public service in war-time without doing it through a denominational society. This may be so, yet the CWL has undoubtedly performed a . . . service: . . . it has shown once more to our non-Catholic countrymen how quick Catholics are to respond to the call of patriotism and Christian charity.²⁶

In their desire to advertise their achievements, Catholic spokesmen occasionally went too far and claimed the credit for what was not their due. Gladstone once stiffly reproved the CWL's representative on the WRC for this, and received a hurried apology.²⁷ The CWL was probably nursing a mild grievance against Aldwych at this time, or was seeking to excuse its faltering success in finding Catholic hospitality, for when Samuel wrote to Cardinal Bourne a few days later to urge renewed Catholic help in finding homes for refugees from Holland, Bourne in his reply expressed his fear that "the efforts of the League have recently been discouraged by the

truly bested in the debate, but he was unregenerate, as his attempt to blackmail the Eton authorities in the House of Lords shows.

²⁶Catholic Social Guild, Year Book for 1915, 23-24.

²⁷GP 46080/5-6, Gladstone to Mrs. James Hope, 1 January; /11, Hope to Gladstone, 2 January 1915.

War Refugees Committee."²⁸ The hierarchy in fact never gave a dynamic lead to the Catholic community in refugee relief matters and was, if anything, a little embarrassed by the CWL's zealous efforts to get greater Catholic representation on the WRC. Such attempts were minor irritants and relations between the WRC and Catholic bodies were on the whole amicable. The leaders of the latter were, after all, often middle-class English converts, and the presence on the WRC of several urbane and good humoured priests was an emollient when needed.²⁹

Catholics could in any case hardly claim a strong voice in the counsels of the relief movement. Though the CWL and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a venerable Catholic lay charitable organisation, worked hard in London, Catholics were remarkable by their absence from provincial relief work. They pioneered the work in Liverpool, which had a large and vigorous Catholic community, and were among the first to organise hospitality in Leicester, Littlehampton, Brighton, Cambridge and Salford.³⁰ Many local committees invited Catholics to join them, in deference to the wishes of the WRC. But both Catholic and non-Catholic observers

²⁸ Westminster Archives, Bourne Papers, Samuel to Bourne, 7 January; Bourne to Samuel, 8 January 1915.

²⁹ GF 46078/5-6/221-22, Frs. H. W. Cator and J. Christie, S.J., to Gladstone, 30 September 1914.

³⁰ The Tablet, 31 October 1914; BEL 6/30, Baroness von Hügel (Cambridge), Report 1914-16, 4; /133, Leicestershire committee report, 1914-15; /144, Colonel Knox (Littlehampton) to E. Conway, 9 June 1917; /145, H. Taylor (Liverpool CWL) to Conway, 1 September 1917; /212, Mrs. Casartelli

commented on Catholics' generally feeble participation. One Catholic society noted with concern that "Catholics should be to the fore. . . yet in some districts they are leaving the work to others. Thus in one town there is not a single Catholic on a Committee which has raised many hundreds of pounds."³¹ A Scottish relief worker remarked that in her experience "the Institution which seems least anxious to help the Refugees is the Catholic Church."³²

Catholic inaction had several causes. First, Catholics were thinly settled outside the large industrial centres. Second, they tended to come from the lower social strata and to be isolated by both class and religion from much local activity. Even where Catholics were first into relief work, as in Leicester, their example seemingly had little to do with the subsequent growth of a broadly-based relief effort. Third, many Catholics who did enjoy an assured social position were defensive about their Catholicism and may have been wary of labelling themselves too plainly as Catholics.³³ Fourth, Catholic parochial life,

(Salford), report, 18 January 1915. With the possible exceptions of Cambridge and Leicester, these efforts were the work of the CWL. BEL 6 contains the files of local refugee relief committees. Where "report" appears, it refers to a report drawn up in response to a circular from Conway of the IWM .

³¹Catholic Social Guild, Year Book for 1915, 4.

³²BEL 6/100, diary of Mary Boyle, 21.

³³Cf. Douglas Jerrold, Georgian Adventure (London, 1957), 26.

though intense and particularist in its own way, arguably lacked the emphasis on fellowship and social service which was so distinctive a feature of Nonconformist religiosity and which made Nonconformist congregations efficient units of relief. Catholic energies were often consumed by the needs of their school system: the obsession with education drained the life from other areas of Catholic action. Finally, it should be noted that the Catholics of Ireland were willing to receive many refugees, but took less than two thousand, partly for the fortuitous reason that land-loving Belgians who had braved one sea crossing resolutely refused to make a second.³⁴

The War Refugees Committee and Work in London

Though the Jews and Catholics--and for a time the Belgian Legation³⁵--allocated refugees from their own headquarters, all other allocation work emanated from Aldwych, even when not carried on there. Allocation work had two basic arms: cataloguing offers of hospitality and matching hosts to guests. The first was of necessity very quickly centralised at Aldwych. For a time two separate groups had

³⁴PP, Forty-third Annual Report (1914-15) of the Local Government Board for Ireland, 1915, Cd. 8016, xi, xxxix; Forty-seventh Annual Report (1918-19) of the Local Government Board for Ireland, 1919, Cmd. 578, xxi.

³⁵BEL 9/1/1, "Report of the Work done by Miss Lea Rothschild and Miss Miriam Rothschild for the Belgians during 1914-15-16-17-18, written for the War Museum", typescript manuscript, n.d.

existed, a band under Lyttelton having hived off to work from a base at the St. George's Road Hostel. Since they used the files which the Ulster Unionist organisation had handed on, and since Aldwych used another system for classifying hosts and refugees, the results were predictable: some hosts received no refugees, others got two batches. The hostel group experienced delays in getting lists of hosts from the overworked central office and the experiment came to an early end with the return of the outlying group to Aldwych. Each group continued to use a separate system, however, until Lyttelton drew up a scheme which Gladstone approved and gave to her and Mrs. Samuel to control. This marked the clear emergence of a uniform registration system. Under it, the Correspondence Department indexed offers while the Allocation Department dealt with the main tasks of interviewing and placement.³⁶

Despite the failure of the first attempt at decentralising allocation work, complete centralisation was impossible. Even before the fall of Antwerp, General Buildings were hopelessly overcrowded. A first step was taken to ease the congestion by hiring the skating rink two doors away. It was the first of such rinks--forlorn debris of a short-lived prewar roller skating craze--used for refugees in both

³⁶ Lyttelton, 14; BEL 3, Miss A. M. Mercer, "Work with the War Refugees Committee, St. George's Rd.", 1; WRC I, 17.

England and Holland.³⁷ Once again the allocators split into two groups, but this time working in close proximity and using the same vastly improved system. But Aldwych was still overcrowded and the advantages of interviewing refugees at their transit camps outweighed the problems of dispersed effort. So the allocators fanned out to the various depots which the government had set aside for the refugees.³⁸

The depots--the refuges, casual wards and pleasure palaces--were most refugees' first living quarters in England. The indiscriminate herding of the nation's guests into accommodation at best spartan, at worst dilapidated and dirty, and--in the case of the Poor Law institutions--normally reserved for the dregs of society, raised for the first time a problem which bedevilled relief work: should refugees be treated differently according to their class? Class consciousness pervaded responses to the refugees, shaping and distorting relief policy. Members of the WRC accepted almost as an article of faith that they were concerned with the

³⁷Rinks in Folkestone and Amsterdam were used to house refugees, while one at Southampton was used as an internment camp for enemy aliens, and another was converted to become the nucleus of a Belgian munitions factory. FO 412/128, Grey to Walter Page, 7 February 1915; A. Beveridge, "On the Door-step of War", 5; A. Varlez, Les Belges en Exil, 279; Adah De Hart to the editor, Pall Mall Gazette, 20 October 1914. For the ephemeral skating craze, see A. Jackson, Semi-Detached London, 49.

³⁸MH 8/1, Mrs L. G. Samuel to Maudslay, 20 November 1915; Lyttelton, 15.

refugee as an individual. Against this they contrasted the attitude of government officials and Poor Law bureaucrats, whom they perceived as preoccupied with uniformity in the interests of efficiency and economy. In an instructive exchange, the chairman of a local committee reported the non-arrival of a batch of refugees and warned Gladstone that "such treatment by your Committee is not only unbusinesslike but unmannerly." To which a ruffled Gladstone retorted:

It is not easy to deal with these masses of humanity on what are usually called business principles. People . . . have no idea of the difficulty of the business which we have had to do. It appears to be thought that the Belgians are like goods and can be received and despatched with the utmost promptitude and regularity. As a matter of fact, one of our great difficulties is that many of these people are extremely difficult to deal with.³⁹

But concern for the individual more often than not meant concern for the middle class individual. "Better class" refugees were treated better than workers and peasants, who were presumed to be more inured to hardship and thus more physically and psychologically prepared for the trauma of exile than their more "sensitive" compatriots of the upper and middle classes. Preferential treatment later became a contentious issue within the relief movement, but at first there was unanimity that respectable temporary accommodation should be found for respectable refugees before they were allocated.

³⁹GP 46078/325, C. De Salis (Uxbridge committee) to Gladstone, 24 October 1914; /338-39, Gladstone to De Salis, n.d.

The WRC made strenuous efforts to keep genteel Belgians apart from other refugees. When one citizen complained that officers' wives had been thrown together with "gypsies" at Endell Street, Gladstone assured him that he had himself

. . . frequently protested against the class of people such as you name being kept there . . . It is the Local Government Board who are responsible. I have protested again and again against the indiscriminate mixing at the Government Depots of better class Belgians.⁴⁰

The WRC had more freedom to segregate the classes in the two largest depots at the Alexandra Palace and the Earl's Court Exhibition. Whereas the Board firmly controlled the other institutions, it had merely leased the two mammoth structures and left teams of volunteers and officials to turn them into improvised--and rather surreal--reception centres.⁴¹ At the Palace, the herd had to sleep in vast dormitories for men and women; individuals enjoyed little privacy and families were split up nightly. Middle-class refugees fared better. According to the Islington Gazette: "For the better class refugees who feel more keenly the privations of their position, consideration has been shown by providing families with cubicles in which some degree of privacy may be secured."

⁴⁰GP 46078/266, Gladstone to the Hon. A. Holland Hibbert, 15 October 1914.

⁴¹The history of the Earl's Court Camp is told in G. Powell, Four Years in a Refugee Camp. Powell was the MAB officer in charge of the Camp.

Their area was called the "Welcome Club" and had "nice" rooms for reading and writing and a balcony affording an excellent view of London.⁴² Social differences were spatially expressed at the Palace: the upper classes were upstairs, the lower classes downstairs.

Earl's Court was similarly segregated. Workers moved into the Exhibition on 15 October and its metamorphosis was immediate. The first refugees arrived that night, even before the florid debris of a "Sunny Spain" exhibition had been cleared away. The tide of refugees from Antwerp and Ostend then surged in and the embattled staff could make only the most rudimentary arrangements for some weeks.⁴³ However, early in November, Maudslay made a tour of inspection and reported to the WRC executive. After describing the vast Empress Hall with its space for six hundred beds but inadequate lavatories, poor heating and "absolutely no privacy," he concluded that "it would be impossible to make use of this building for anyone except the peasant class." The other huge, ill-ventilated halls should be reserved exclusively for the lower classes." However, he waxed enthusiastic about the smaller, naturally subdivided areas as potential quarters for the gentry, with their own kitchen in a tea-room so that they would not have to go the long distance

⁴² Greater London Record Office, Alexandra Palace Trustees files [hereafter referred to as APT], 75/98, cuttings from Islington Gazette, 30 September 1914, and Daily Mail, 28 October 1914.

⁴³ Cd. 7763, Special Work, 20-21.

to the Empress Hall for meals and "need not then mingle with peasants and the lower orders."⁴⁴

Such tender concern for the susceptibilities of the upper orders led the Committee, despite its meagre funds, into at least one extravagant expedient. With all the beds offered by the depots, there was still at times a shortage of accommodation for refugees--or rather, of suitable accommodation for the middle classes awaiting allocation. Therefore, the WRC began to place refugees in hotels and boarding houses in Bloomsbury, enjoining allocators to use discretion in sending the right class of people "so as to avoid interference with the proprietors' ordinary business."⁴⁵ The hotel-keepers, their usual off-season slump accentuated alarmingly by the war's disruption of tourist traffic and the panic-stricken flight of thousands of American and other foreign tourists, were delighted at the windfall. They themselves may have suggested the plan to the WRC, as one hotelier was a volunteer at Aldwych, and the Committee was given very favourable rates. In general the hoteliers did not exploit the situation too obviously, but keeping refugees in hotels was still far more expensive than any other form of accommodation ever used for refugees and a luxury Aldwych

⁴⁴GP 46013/15-20, Maudslayi to WRC executive, 8 November 1914.

⁴⁵GP 46101/110-11, "Memorandum on Working Rules with regard to Hotel Accommodation", n.d.

could ill afford.⁴⁶

The refugees in hotels were supposed to stay there only a very short time, but the Allocation Department at one point claimed that refugees sent to hotels had often disappeared from view because of the Hotel Department's slapdash filing methods.⁴⁷ As the bills mounted, the WRC strenuously tried to weed out longstaying hotel residents, and a cost-conscious LGB spurred it on.⁴⁸ But the hotels and boarding-houses remained part of the refugee scene for a long time. Some refugees sent back from the provinces in poor health were placed in them. But most were nominees of the Belgian government--either men of the Belgian State Railways and their families who had been called to France to work in the war zone or simply people with connections--and a sense of courtesy overrode the desire for economy. The system was clearly open to abuse, and, while later guests often experienced unavoidable delays in moving on, early habitués frequently sought to evade allocation. They had easily the most congenial lodgings of all and were understandably loath to leave for the unknown hazards of the provinces.⁴⁹ Their

⁴⁶The only case of alleged exploitation involved the hotelier working for the WRC! MH 8/1, H. Bourne to Maudslay, 28 September 1914; Max Muller (Hotel Department) to Maudslay, 1 July; Bourne to Maudslay, 7 July 1915.

⁴⁷MH 8/1, Mrs. L. Samuel to Maudslay, 26 February 1915.

⁴⁸MH 8/66/7, R. B. Cross (LGB) to Maudslay, 7 April 1915; H. W. Francis to Maudslay, 3 June 1915.

⁴⁹WRC II, 43; MH 8/1, Rink Allocation Bureau to Maudslay, 10 April 1915; Muller to Maudslay, 27 January 1915.

stubborn malingering was one reason for the gradual hardening of the WRC's attitude towards better-class refugees.⁵⁰ They were one of the many headaches of the harassed allocators as they sought to disperse London's swollen refugee population.

The Problems of Dispersal

Some of the allocators' problems stemmed from the WRC's initial inexperience; some from the refugees; some from the hosts; and others from government policy.

The allocators were at first unpractised and had to work in a kind of power vacuum, vividly described by a Reading man who went to the Alexandra Palace to collect a group of refugees:

The Alexandra Palace is in a grievous muddle, and badly needs overhauling and placing under a competent head.

I got there about 2 p.m. and was not able to get away before 5 p.m.

I could find nobody who even claimed any authority (for the government, I mean). There was a gentle, grey-haired gentleman, quite polite, willing and incapable, who spoke no French. The only doctor who seemed to be there was equally polite and ignorant. . . . These gentlemen were not the slightest use to me. They offered me refreshments. . . in some private part of the building, but. . . I declined to leave my charges and fed with them.

A sort of Lady Superintendent, who claimed to represent the WRC, & without whose signature (I heard) nobody could leave the building, was off-duty when I arrived. . . and only turned up when the work was nearly done at 4.30 p.m. and then became slightly obstructive. I regret I could pay little attention to her. She seemed to have no system. The details were being jotted down (with my assistance) on loose sheets of paper. She could not make up her mind whether she or I should keep the registration cards.

⁵⁰ GP 46101/121. draft notice to refugees by Gladstone, n.d.

Her lady understudy had worked for me meantime under depressing conditions of muddle, and with a sense that she was exceeding her proper functions. . . .

The staff of Registering Clerks, who speak French and Flemish, are practically the only useful people whom I met. . . .

We really had to make friends with the people and make our own selection, acting through 3 refugees whom we found were speaking both French and Flemish.

Owing to the absence of proper authority, and general muddle, and ignorance of any tongue but English in the staff, we did not get away. . . until five o'clock. We should not have left for another ½ hour, or hour, if we had obeyed the person who rode up in the motorbus, and who ordered the vehicle to await his convenience whilst he made an inspection of the premises.

This we protested against successfully.⁵¹

The WRC at first suffered an excess of such characters, people who combined incompetence with supreme selfconfidence and pulled strenuously in different directions. The haughty officiousness of some volunteers harmed allocation work. In one instance, the staff of an insurance company's north London office painstakingly prepared quarters for a family of refugees, who were settling in happily under a shower of kindnesses when a woman from Aldwych appeared, declared the lodgings inadequate, and marched the protesting family away. The manager was furious: "The absence of feather beds and the presence of unbleached calico sheets was apparently not good enough for the grand folk of the Committee."⁵² Cases like this forfeited the Committee the vital support and sympathy of the public.

⁵¹GP 46078/193-95, H. M. Wallis to Lord Lytton, 16 September 1914.

⁵²GP 46079/6-10, Walter Kilbey to Gladstone, 2 November 1914. The Times, 13 October 1914, criticised the WRC for having been "rather exacting in its

The WRC drew its voluntary staff rather too exclusively from the ranks of the upper middle classes for its own good. More than one outsider disapprovingly noted the ostentatious wealth of some WRC workers. One Belgian visitor to Earl's Court, in an attack on the treatment of refugees there, described aristocratic ladies dispensing kind words and advice to refugees while dressed in the latest fashions and "wearing Fur Coats which have cost a fortune." Gladstone merely found his allusion to furs "gratuitous. . . and as offensive as it is grotesque."⁵³ But a worker with the very efficient and businesslike Glasgow committee was likewise unfavourably impressed by the glittering jewellery and patronising manner of the Aldwych allocators.⁵⁴ While the Committee's policy of distinguishing between the classes of refugees was generally approved by the middle-class public, it enraged some people:

If this is to be the treatment that the generous British public are to receive, if their hard earned subscriptions are to be used in keeping some Refugees in Hotels and luxury while others are in the Workhouses, then the sooner the matter is mentioned in the House and widely circulated in the Press the better.⁵⁵

requirements," and editorialised, "this is no time for over-fastidiousness or for red tape."

⁵³GP 46079/186-91, C. Brunn to Gladstone, 4 December; /194-95, Gladstone to Brunn, 5 December 1914.

⁵⁴BEL 6/100, diary of Mary Boyle.

⁵⁵GP 46079/6-10, Kilbey to Gladstone, 2 November 1914.

The belief that large sums donated by the public were being either squandered or hoarded was widespread and durable, despite the Committee's protests that it had barely £50,000 for coping with an enormous number of refugees.⁵⁶

The WRC was ineffective in countering such bad publicity with publicity of its own. Indeed, it lacked a dynamic link with the press. No eminent journalist or press magnate joined the Committee, even nominally, despite Lugard's background in journalism. Lugard did try to establish liaison with the press, but her plans were killed by the rest of the executive.⁵⁷ When she left Aldwych, the Committee lost its only member with any flair for publicity. The goodwill of the Daily Telegraph and the Pall Mall Gazette was dissipated by the WRC's attempt to appropriate their relief funds. The Committee's genteel staff never understood the power of the "yellow press," with whom it had little to do, and so the WRC was quite defenceless when in 1916 the Daily Mail turned its xenophobic venom on a German-born volunteer worker and the Daily Express tub-thumped about refugee "job-stealers."⁵⁸

⁵⁶GP 46079/194-95, Gladstone to Brunn, 5 December 1914.

⁵⁷GP 46078/186-87, Logard to Gladstone, 15 September 1914.

⁵⁸Lily Friedlander, secretary to the Radical M.P., Baron de Forest, was lent to the WRC by her employer in 1914. A German-born, French-educated, unnaturalised resident of England, she became an important and valued member of the staff at Aldwych. But some of her co-workers waged a vendetta against her, claiming refugees objected to dealing with a German, and one of them contacted the Daily Mail,

But the decline in public enthusiasm was virtually inevitable, and no amount of favourable publicity could have substantially halted it. Sympathy for Belgium was at its height during the German invasion from August till early November. During this time, however, the Committee was unequipped to take full advantage of the goodwill. The Irish Committee found public interest waning because it had received very few refugees when enthusiasm was at fever pitch.⁵⁹ And more than one community, after a crescendo of happy preparations, was deflated by the persistent failure of any refugees to arrive for days or weeks. Local dignitaries, brass bands--generally primed to play the Marseillaise since no one knew the Brabançonne--and crowds of citizens greeted trains only to find that arrangements had been botched in London and the promised refugees were not aboard.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, when refugees arrived belatedly they were warmly

which ran a vitriolic article on Germans in the WRC. The Committee, afraid of unfavourable publicity, was forced to let her go on the understanding that her name would be kept out of the press--a promise immediately broken by the Mail. However, the Managing Committee exacted some vengeance by arraigning the informant before them in a kangaroo court and sacking him: one of the rare cases of retaliatory justice against xenophobes during the war. Deiniol, Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 1 December 1915; MH 8/20/60-64, material on the Friedlander case, early December 1915; GP 46013/163-65, Maudslay to Gladstone, 2 December 1915. The naturalised Austrian Max Muller was forced to resign with Friedlander.

For the Daily Express campaign, see chapter X.

⁵⁹ PP, Local Government Board for Ireland, 1914-15, 1915, Cd. 8016.

⁶⁰ E.g. BEL 6/33, Burton (Parish) Committee, First Report, 5 February 1915; /234, Tenby committee, report, November 1915; Hatfield House, Lord Quickswood Papers, Lord Curzon to Hugh Cecil, 3 December 1914; Western Mail, 14 October 1914.

welcomed. To understand why that welcome wore out, it is necessary to look at the local committees and the stresses they endured.

Hosts and Guests

Local committees began in waves, their pattern closely following the fluctuating British response to the military situation in Belgium and its effects on relief operations in London. Before 9 September, a few committees were formed in large centres such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Bradford.⁶¹ Some began in smaller communities, usually on the initiative of some energetic and flamboyant personality. Such a one was the Hon. Mrs. Inglefield, who formed a committee in Beaconsfield and then almost single-handedly prodded other Buckinghamshire towns into forming committees, blackmailing them by appeals to their civic pride. Another was the editor of the Bexhill (Sussex) newspaper, for whom, in his flaming zeal for the refugee cause, God became "the Great Refugee."⁶² The main wave of committees came after the LGB had circularised local authorities asking them to form refugee relief subcommittees of their relief of distress committees. The committees established in September therefore usually had the formal backing of the local authority as

⁶¹BEL 6/164, Manchester committee Report; FO 369/672/48424, A. W. Holmes (Bradford committee) to Secretary, Foreign Office, 10 September 1914.

⁶²BEL 6/30, Buckinghamshire County committee, Special Report, 30 January 1919; /19, Bexhill Quarterly (special issue), March 1917, 2-3.

well as the enthusiastic support of citizens, and so were very soundly based.⁶³ The deceptive quiet which settled on the Antwerp front later in September led to some tailing off in the formation of committees, but a new burst of activity came with the fall of the city. November saw a drastic decline in the number of new committees and the great wave became a trickle in 1915.⁶⁴ By the end of the great period of expansion, there were about two thousand local committees in the country, a figure which steadily dwindled to around the fifteen hundred mark.⁶⁵

The great majority of these committees were the spontaneous creations of local people. Very often an individual or group of friends and neighbours began by offering to take refugees and then enlisted the entire community to help. But committees were more usually offshoots of established bodies. The churches were a natural focus for relief work and many committees grew out of church beginnings. The first meetings were often held in the parish hall and many congregational committees coexisted with larger local committees.⁶⁶ While the Church of England baptised many

⁶³This information is based on the 256 files of local committees kept in the Imperial War Museum's Women's Work and War Refugees collection.

⁶⁴BEL 6/1-256, numerous examples.

⁶⁵MH 8/7/66, WRC memorandum, n.d.

⁶⁶E.g. Burton-on-Trent, Cambridge and Leicester.

young committees, the pervasiveness of the Established Church makes it difficult to assess accurately Anglican participation in the relief movement. But in striking contrast to the feeble Catholic involvement, Nonconformist congregations were surprisingly enthusiastic samaritans, founding many committees and actively supporting others.⁶⁷

Their zest needs explanation, given the hostility towards Catholicism which prevailed in Nonconformist circles at the time. They were not seeking a Catholic audience to convert through kindness. At least, this charge cannot be laid against the middle-class Congregationalists who were the most active of the Nonconformist denominations in relief work. There are, on the other hand, a few recorded instances of Protestant attempts to proselytise refugees and these involved Baptists and other devoutly evangelical believers or took place in Nonconformist Wales.⁶⁸ But such instances were the exceptions rather than the rule and Belgian observers commented on English scrupulosity in religious

⁶⁷BEL 6, reports of Ashton-under-Lyme, Cricklewood, Long Sutton, Lincoln committees, of the Belgian Relief Committee of the Welsh Presbyterian churches in London, the Congregational Belgian Home, Dorking, and the Streatham Congregational Church committee; GP 46078/262, F. B. Meyer (President of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches) to Gladstone, 14 October 1914.

⁶⁸For Nonconformist anti-Catholicism, see Stephen Koss, "1906: Revival and Revivalism", in A. Morris, ed., Edwardian Radicalism 1900-1914, 76-77. Belgian policy in the Congo and Leopold III's private life were used as ammunition in some Nonconformist anti-Catholic polemics. Cf. R. F. Horton and J. Hocking, Shall Rome Reconquer England? (London, 1910), 178-81. For Welsh anti-Catholicism, see K. Morgan, Wales in British Politics, 68-69. For Protestant

matters. In fact, English hosts were more often shocked by Belgian religious indifference than alienated by the refugees' Catholicism.⁶⁹ In the emotional climate of the war, atheism and indifferentism were feared as corrosive forces, while Catholicism was romanticised as the religion of France and Belgium. Whether the new indulgence towards Catholicism softened all Nonconformist hearts is doubtful, but the evidence suggests that they were generally sensitive to their guests' religious needs. Their enthusiasm for relief work sprang perhaps from a conscious identification with the Liberal tradition of generosity to refugees: nineteenth century Nonconformists had been generous supporters of refugee relief in foreign parts.⁷⁰ More recently, British Nonconformity had been tending to work out its salvation in social activism. Theological liberalism underlay much of this concern, but so did a sense of waning power. After a religious and political revival before 1906, British

proselytising among the refugees, see BEL 3, Bidwell Manuscript; and "The Gospel Among the Belgian Refugees", Literary Digest, 49 (1914): 1124-25.

⁶⁹ For Belgian views, see Davignon, Un Peuple en Exil, 48-50. For British comments on Belgian irreligion, see BEL 6/161, A. Douglas to Conway, 24 July 1917; J. Vrynwy Morgan, The War and Wales (London, 1916), 162-63; H. G. Wells, Mr. Britling Sees it Through, 264-65; and G. Shaw, Plays and Playlets of the War, 180.

⁷⁰ This was especially so of relief work in the Balkans. Nonconformists were deeply sympathetic to Slav minorities within the Ottoman Empire. Richard T. Shannon, Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876 (London, 1963), 160-71.

Nonconformity seems to have entered on a period of decline, especially when the Liberal party which had swept to power with its help failed it over the repeal of the detested Education Act of 1902 which put Anglican and Catholic schools "on the rates." In the disappointing aftermath of 1906, Nonconformists plunged with renewed vigour into a variety of campaigns, from the ambitious National Social Purity Crusade to a more restricted drive against prizefighting, campaigns which their leaders hoped would restore flagging morale and rebuild a sense of corporate purpose.⁷¹ The war killed the dying agitation against the Act of 1902 and diehard passive resisters meekly paid long-withheld rates as a patriotic act.⁷² Therefore, war work provided an acceptable and non-controversial outlet for Nonconformist energies.

But women were the real driving force in the refugee movement. Women's organisations, such as branches of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the

⁷¹I have relied for my interpretation of Edwardian Nonconformity on 1) Stephen Koss, Nonconformity in Modern British Politics (London, 1975); 2) S. Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind, 279-306. Hynes, however, rather suggests a general rearguard action by all churchmen against new secularising forces. He also glosses over differences between Nonconformists, Anglicans and Catholics and indeed within those groups; and 3) Stuart Mews, "Puritanicalism, Sport, and Race: A Symbolic Crusade of 1911", in G. J. Cuming and Derek Barker, eds., Popular Belief and Practice (Cambridge, 1972), 303-31.

⁷²W. H. Oakley, Guildford in the Great War (Guildford, 1934), 22.

majority of which had dropped all suffragist activity to carry on war work, formed their own hospitality committees.⁷³ Such separatism was rare, however, and women's organisations were content to give their enthusiastic support to communal bodies. Branches of the Women's National Liberal Association, for example, worked in hostels and raised money for refugees through the jumble sales, whist drives, dances and conversazioni with which they had long experience and which were acceptable and lucrative sources of income in the days before austerity became both a necessity and a fashion.⁷⁴ The Liberal ladies had come to refugee work through the relief of distress committees which their executive had counselled them to join. The executive had shown itself aware of the political issues raised by the formation of the new distress committees: it was "essential that suitable women of all classes, especially the working-class," should be found a place on them.⁷⁵ Its advice reflected the upsurge

⁷³BEL 6/114, Mrs A. E. Harrington (Highgate and North St. Pancras branch of the London Society for Women's Suffrage) to Conway, 28 July 1917; /129, report of Knebworth branch of NUWSS, March 1917.

⁷⁴At first, in the interests of maintaining employment and morale, people were urged to spend freely. However, insensibly the slogan of "Business as Usual" gave way to an opposite plea for "Economy" as employment ceased to be a problem and as the German submarine blockade produced shortages. The changes were mirrored in women's fashions: ostentatious elegance in 1914 became ostentatious tattyism by 1916. Punch provided a half-cynical running commentary. Punch, 27 January, 18 August, and 10 November 1915; 8 March and 5 July 1916.

⁷⁵Women's National Liberal Association, Quarterly Leaflet, 77 (September 1914): 6, and 78 (December 1914); 20-30.

of hope with which many Liberals greeted the war, an optimism as profound as that of many Tories, though different. Where the Tories saw in the war a chance to foster national virtues of efficiency and duty to the state, Liberals saw a chance to heal the old festering wounds of the strife-torn prewar years in a new spirit of national cooperation. The Liberal Party as the government had suffered most from the peacetime rancour and stood to gain most from a wartime truce. If the war represented a threat to Liberalism, it was also a challenge and an opportunity.

But most women helped refugees for quite spontaneous and unpolitical reasons. They had few ways to express their patriotism, before the voracious war economy and the creation of various women's corps drew them by the thousands from domesticity into direct participation in the war effort. Belgian relief committees were the first active wartime organisations in many towns and villages. The appeal they made was direct, urgent and inclusive. They allowed ordinary citizens to act out in their own parishes those virtues of disinterested benevolence and rapid improvisation which patriotic Englishmen prized as the chief hallmarks of their nation's early response to the war. Refugee relief suited the nervous buoyancy of the time of "Business as Usual" before the long grey era of austerity set in. So women rushed to join the committees and to dominate them. Though men often outnumbered them on the figurehead executive committees, the ratios were reversed on the general

committees which did the real work. Like the War Refugees Committee, the small local committees were acutely conscious of the complex networks of power and influence outside which no philanthropic body could effectively operate. As it happened, the representatives of the communal interests whose support was vital to relief work--the churches, trade unions, tradesmen and the squirearchy--were usually males, and so the executive committees contained more men than women. But such men had many other calls on their time, whereas women, with less stake in the old, were more free to run new organisations. As well, refugee work was considered uniquely women's work, because the qualities of tact and sensitivity which it demanded were viewed as feminine virtues and for the down-to-earth reason that the bulk of the work was taken up with household management: running hostels, catering, and teaching refugees how to shop in an alien system.⁷⁶

The committee's first task was always to find accommodation. There were two main methods of allocation: refugees went to live with host families or were placed in separate quarters, either in cottages for single families or in large hostels. Each method offered its advantages, but each also presented problems which led to an inexorable decline in free hospitality.

⁷⁶WRC III, 58.

Private hospitality had one manifest virtue: it saved the outlay of money and effort that a hostel entailed. But hostels were backed by committees whereas private hosts could only call on their own resources. The first wave of patriotic euphoria began to subside quickly to be replaced by late November by a grimmer awareness that the struggle would be long and bitter. The change coincided roughly with the end of the first battle of Ypres and was reflected in the drastic decline in new committees. In the changed atmosphere idealists began to assess more realistically their ability to provide shelter and support for refugees. Thus, when the WRC was finally able to use some early offers of hospitality, it found them no longer valid. On 30 December 1914, offers for ninety refugees were cancelled, a record for one day, and despite the fact that all the refugees were of the "best" class. A dispirited Maudslay asked Gladstone, "What are we to do. [sic] London is a desert as regards hospitality at the present moment."⁷⁷ The crisis came at Christmas for several reasons. The refugees from Holland were just beginning to enter England before the backlog from the October rush had been cleared. Food prices were also moving steadily upwards as a result of profiteering, higher shipping rates and the loss of German and Austrian imports, while the disruption of world trade depressed the stocks

⁷⁷GP 46013/32-35, Maudslay to Gladstone, 30 December 1914.

on which many middle-class people relied.⁷⁸ Finally, Christmas-New Year seemed a psychologically apt point at which hosts could terminate hospitality. Christmas and Easter were annual rites of passage in the refugee calendar as hosts returned refugees to Aldwych for reallocation.⁷⁹

The financial burden of feeding extra mouths was probably less than the emotional stress of living close upon another family. Language proved a major barrier; many hosts had expected their refugees to speak French and were disconcerted to receive monoglot Flamands.⁸⁰ Social differences compounded the problem. Local committees incessantly asked for refugees who were "middle class," "good class," "of the best class (with servants)," "commercial and professional" people, or at least "of the superior artisan class or small tradespeople" or "good class artisans."⁸¹ However, since the wealthier refugees generally remained self-supporting

⁷⁸E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Home Front (London, 1932), provides a graphic account of the rises in prices as they affected the London working class, and most studies of war-time inflation concentrate on its effects on the working classes. No comparable attention seems to have been directed to the middle classes.

⁷⁹MH 8/20/108, Max Muller to Gladstone, 30 December 1915.

⁸⁰Imperial War Museum, C. F. Harriss, "The Home Front", unpublished journal of the war years, 25, entry for 26 October 1914; BEL 6/19, Bexhill Quarterly (special issue), March 1917, 5.

⁸¹MH 8/15/20, 47, 48, 51, 71: requests to WRC from Peterborough, Wandsworth, Harrogate, Harrow, Hackney and Bath committees, February and March 1915.

for the first months of the war, there was a dearth of desirable refugees, and upper- and middle-class hosts found themselves sharing their homes with Belgians of lower social status.⁸² Some refugees were illiterate and many hosts found their Belgians to be ignorant and uneducated.⁸³

It was too much to expect two national groups with widely different attitudes to coexist in unusually close proximity without friction. Women's hats illustrated the problem in its most innocent form. Observers seized on the hatless condition of many women in the first batches of refugees to arrive in provincial towns as pathetic evidence of the Belgians' plight. Belgian women, on the other hand, were vastly amused by the rigid English protocol dictating the perpetual wearing of hats--even, one presumes, in precipitous flight.⁸⁴ Ideas of hygiene differed. The English middle-class passion for fresh air clashed headlong with a Belgian idée fixe that draughts were unhealthy. The ensuing war of the windows would have been comic but for the irritation it engendered.⁸⁵ Working-class refugees did not

⁸²Interview with Miss Francesca Wilson, London, 2 February 1975; Edith Sellers, "On the Entertaining of Refugees", Nineteenth Century, 77 (1915): 1271-83.

⁸³BEL 6/88, Crowborough committee report, 2 July 1917; /100, diary of Mary Boyle, 4.

⁸⁴BEL 6/99, Glasgow Corporation meeting, speech by Baillie Stewart, 5 March 1915; Justin Wallon, Une Cité belge sur la Tamise (London, 1917), 33.

⁸⁵H. W. Wilson, History of the Great War, 8:216; Sellers, "Entertaining", 1374.

wash as often as their hosts thought they should, while the Belgians' "continental habits--their less highly developed instinct for privacy," as one writer delicately expressed it--caused embarrassment to their more prudish hosts.⁸⁶ Attitudes to leisure were very different and refugees scandalised sabbatarians by breaking the hallowed calm of the English Sunday.⁸⁷ Diet caused problems and the WRC had to issue detailed advice to local committees on Belgian taste in food. Refugees were appalled at British cooking, especially its wastefulness, and yearned for coffee after interminable cups of tea.⁸⁸

Many such problems were surmountable given a modicum of tact and good sense on both sides. But the most frequent and serious complaints against the Belgians were that they were ungrateful, grasping and greedy. Belgian acquisitiveness became a byword. Refugees who arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs might leave for new quarters some months later laden with "baggage trains." Much of their

⁸⁶GP 46046/163, Helen Gladstone to Gladstone, 13 October 1914; L. Housman, The Unexpected Years, 302; BEL 6/50, Chaigley Manor committee report, n.d. Wallon, Une Cité belge, 33, cites Belgian habits of chewing tobacco and spitting as other causes of offence.

⁸⁷GCA Cl/3/58/704, Executive Committee, Glasgow Corporation Belgian Relief Committee, minutes, 8 January 1917.

⁸⁸J. Morgan, The War and Wales, 163; MH 8/15/7, LGB circular, "Personal Requirements of the Refugees", January 1915; Charles Sarolea, How Belgium Saved Europe (Toronto, 1915), 207.

new wealth was obtained with a minimum of dishonesty--the refugees merely accepted every gift that came their way. But others actively cadged and some actually stole from their hosts.⁸⁹ Refugees were heard to criticise England bitterly for its failure to save their country from invasion. For many of them the rhetoric of England's duty to brave Belgium amounted almost to a doctrine of atonement and a dispensation to accept as of right all they were given and got.⁹⁰ Whatever the rationale, the plundered of Belgium at times looked a little like the plunderers of England.

Some of these tensions were less acute where the refugees lived in separate dwellings, in the cottages and hostels. There seems to have been a surplus of large houses in England in 1914. Some had been lying vacant for fortuitous reasons such as the death or departure of the owners.⁹¹ Others were country houses, and occasionally the town houses, of the English wealthy classes, who competed eagerly to convert their supernumerary establishments into either

⁸⁹L. Housman, The Unexpected Years, 199, 301-32; MH 8/7/98/47, correspondence re family Boeyden-van Leke, 16 January to 23 March 1916; BEL 6/53, Cheltenham committee, Report, 3; /100, diary of Mary Boyle, 17.

⁹⁰S. Pankhurst, The Home Front, 110 (quoting from articles in The Workers' Dreadnought by Mary Boyle--who was possibly the Mary Boyle who worked for the Glasgow committee); BEL 6/69, Crediton committee report, n.d.; T. Gaffney, Breaking the Silence, 52; HO 45/10737/261921/629 L. Dunnill to J. Pedder, 25 January 1916.

⁹¹BEL 5/121, Mrs. Higson (Salford committee) to Conway, 13 May 1918; /252, Windermere committee, newspaper clipping (source unknown), 5 August 1915; J. M. Lees, Social Leaders and Public Persons (Oxford, 1963), 92-93.

hospitals for wounded soldiers or hostels for Belgian refugees.⁹² At first hostels were as prestigious as hospitals--which in any case were initially often part of the great Belgian relief movement as their first inmates were wounded Belgian soldiers--but the Belgians gradually became stale news as British casualties mounted on the Western Front.⁹³ Some hostels were closed down to be converted into hospitals, but generally they enjoyed a long life despite their diminished status.

The hostels allowed hosts and guests to keep at a relatively safe distance from each other, but they threw the refugees more closely upon one another. Almost without exception, wherever there was a hostel there were squabbles and feuds among the inmates. As one perceptive relief worker reflected, the refugees "had nothing in common except misfortune." She blamed three factors for the bickering among the colony she ran: "(1) herding, (2) compulsory idleness and (3) uncongenial environment."⁹⁴ Most committees placed

⁹²For comments on the "regular game of musical chairs people played with their houses," see C. Playne, Society at War, 230-31.

⁹³Ivor Montagu, The Youngest Son (London, 1970), 88-89; J. A. Spender, Life, Journalism and Politics (London, 1927), 2:53; Hector Bolitho, Alfred Mond. First Lord Melchett (London, 1933), 179; Stephen Gwynn, ed., The Anvil of War (London, 1936), 42.

⁹⁴BEL 6/79, Dunsfold Committee report, 5.

the onus on class differences. English committees were baffled by the Belgians' subtly different system of social stratification and found that even when they had taken care to put together refugees of the same class, as they thought, the refugees refused to mix.⁹⁵ Fights erupted over rights to bedrooms, places at table, table manners and household duties which most committees asked refugees to perform.⁹⁶ Mixed hostels of Flemings and Walloons were powderkegs, as the Walloons despised the Flemings, and occasionally religious and political differences or sexual rivalry sparked off explosions.⁹⁷ All the tensions of prewar Belgian society were transported to England and flourished in the hothouse atmosphere of scattered refugee colonies living in enforced idleness. The hosts sadly concluded that "community in poverty served rather to increase than to diminish social barriers."⁹⁸

Not all comments were unfavourable to the refugees.

⁹⁵BEL 6/79, Dunsfold Committee; /36, Camberley committee report, 28 February 1916; /178, Newquay committee report, 28 June 1917; J. Morgan, The War and Wales, 164.

⁹⁶BEL 6, reports of Dunsfold, Carlisle, Sanderstead and Upper Norwood committees.

⁹⁷BEL 6/40, Von Hügel (Cambridge) committee Report, 4; /85, Eccles committee report. Belgian history between 1870 and 1914 is almost a tabula rasa in English. Except for studies of the Congo question, biographies of members of the House of Coburg and some very scrappy general histories, there is nothing. Even Dutch scholars have neglected the period: cf. J. Dhondt, "Belgian Historiography written in Dutch, 1909-1971", in B. Slicker Van Bath, ed., Acta Historiae Neerlandicae, 6:201-19.

⁹⁸BEL 6/118, Hull committee Report, 19.

Many committees found their Belgians to be grateful, pleasant, hardworking, accommodating, clean and respectable in every way. The secretary of one small committee ended his report with the simple tribute, "the village sustained a loss when they left."⁹⁹ Some relief workers blamed the host community for bad relations. Villagers sometimes became ill-disposed where Belgians were placed in cottages which were coveted by local families.¹⁰⁰ They tended "to view with suspicion every little action. . . which did not fall in with their ideas," while Nonconformists lectured the refugees about their drinking habits or refused to allow beer into the hostels.¹⁰¹ The WRC had early warned local committees that

the Refugees. . . are in the position of guests. Hosts and guests retain their freedom & their mutual relations must be guided & determined by good feeling and common understanding. . . . Hosts. . . will doubtless remember that all refugees should be treated with generosity & that the lower classes who perhaps have no experience in the reciprocal sense of what should govern the relations between guest & hosts should be treated with special consideration.¹⁰²

This was the ideal, but hosts all too easily slipped into a hectoring paternalism, treating the Belgians as "helpless

⁹⁹BEL 6/20, Bishop's Teignton committee report, 31 July 1917.

¹⁰⁰GP 46046/163, Helen Gladstone to Gladstone, 13 October 1914; Deiniol, Henry Gladstone to Gladstone, 11 June 1916.

¹⁰¹BEL 6/157, Maidstone committee report, 28 June 1916; /218, Shobnall committee report, September 1917.

¹⁰²GP 46101/79-80, memorandum by Gladstone, 29 September 1914.

children" in need of "firm treatment" or "kind firmness."¹⁰³
The faults were not all on one side.

Furthermore, criticism was always tempered by pity and by a pervasive feeling--expressed again and again in committees' reports--that a representative sample of the British population would behave no better and no worse in the same circumstances.¹⁰⁴ The British were never quite sure whether the Belgian refugees behaved badly because they were Belgians or because they were refugees. Public mythology suggested the latter and muted the xenophobia which was never far from the surface of British life. Belgium, which before the war had been despised or ignored by the British public, was hastily translated to a place in the pantheon of nations by its resistance to Germany and in a spate of editorials, articles, books and speeches Englishmen hurriedly constructed an acceptable set of stereotypes with which to understand and pigeonhole their unexpectedly heroic ally. But even the best propagandists, and word-spinners like Henry James (who was an active member of the large Chelsea relief committee), were unable to execute a complete volte face overnight. Therefore, what in peace had been defects in war became virtues. They painted a picture

¹⁰³BEL 6/77, Duffield committee report, 7 March 1919; /245, Warford committee, 22 October 1917.

¹⁰⁴BEL 6/108, Lonely Belgian Soldiers' Fund, Hastings, report, 7 September 1917; /110, Heanor committee report, 23 July 1917; H. Van Dyke, Fighting For Peace, 89; speech by the Lord Mayor of Manchester, The Tablet, 23 January 1915.

of a stubborn, tenacious, conservative, thrifty, hardworking and domestic people.¹⁰⁵ The new myth was laden with ambiguities and these were picked up by local committees seeking to explain how heroic allies could be obstreperous guests:

It was in the sanctity attached to old habits, if at all, that the refugees manifested themselves as unreasonable, in that they were often reluctant to adopt new ways when the necessity was apparent. Yet anyone recollecting their history must have anticipated such a difficulty. The stubbornness and tenacity of purpose which are writ large in the annals of Europe did not always assume an heroic form when applied to the trivial circumstances of ordinary life.¹⁰⁶

The myth thus allowed of disenchantment and rendered it intelligible. In doing so, mythology softened the impact made by the refugees. In a sense, their dispersal to every corner of Britain presaged the great evacuations of British civilians in 1939 and 1940. But, whereas the evacuations shocked middle-class Englishmen into an awareness of the appalling condition of many of their countrymen--a crisis of confidence which helped prepare the ground for postwar social reforms--the refugees' vices were slotted neatly into a view of national character.¹⁰⁷ The Belgians were a revelation to many comfortably-off Englishmen, but not a

¹⁰⁵BEL 6/52, Henry James, "Refugees in Chelsea", source unknown; W. Knight, The History of the Great War, 2:159; The Times History of the War, 2:341; Nellie Pollock, Belgian Playmates: Heroes Small and Heroes Tall (London, 1914), 32-34; Sir Ernest Hatch to the editor, Manchester Guardian, 9 April 1915.

¹⁰⁶BEL 6/118, Hull committee, Report, 32-33.

¹⁰⁷Angus Calder, The People's War (London, 1969; Panther ed., 1971), 40-58.

discomforting revelation.

Despite the many problems, thousands of citizens faithfully kept refugees for as long as their pockets or tempers would allow, and sometimes for much longer.¹⁰⁸ But their experience hardly encouraged others to join their ranks. Offers of free hospitality never died away completely, but diminished drastically after the early months. The crisis at Christmas forced the WRC and the LGB into worried conclave. Samuel at first refused to believe that free hospitality was exhausted and, to confound the sceptical committee, circularised local committees, exhorting them to new efforts, and appealed through the press. But the lavish use of his ministerial name produced derisory results, rather to the Committee's glee.¹⁰⁹ Samuel had to concede defeat: the early mix of a little government help with a lot of private philanthropy had failed. The war was too immense and long-lasting for the free play of philanthropic forces to cope and the government now resorted to pump-priming measures. Before Christmas the Board's work had been limited almost totally to the capital and the ports of arrival. Now it was pulled into bribing or aiding people to take refugees across the length and breadth of the land. Like the armies of France and Flanders, the LGB was digging in for a long war.

¹⁰⁸MH 8/98/210, anonymous letter to Gladstone, 24 May 1918.

¹⁰⁹WRC I, 24.

Pump-Priming

The new plan of attack was worked out at a meeting between Samuel and Gladstone on 20 January 1915. They discussed three main proposals: to billet refugees at seaside resorts, to aid local committees low on funds, and to use flats and hostels in London.¹¹⁰

Folkestone's experience had demonstrated that a seaside town could do well out of refugees and had plenty of accommodation available. Boarding house keepers had inundated some coastal committees with advertisements, scenting a way to fill rooms left empty by the war.¹¹¹ One man wrote to the press suggesting that Belgians be lodged in boarding houses and stressed the advantages of this to Gladstone:

It has been a subject of much adverse comment in various localities. . . that appeals should appear in local newspapers from persons. . . begging for money. . . to furnish places for Belgians, whilst at the same time so many furnished apartments are vacant owing to the War causing people to go into smaller accommodation, - and so many men lodgers having joined the colours [sic].

He further pointed out that lodgings were in most cases kept by widows "and other persons of limited means, trying to pay their rents and rates, and hit very hard by the war."¹¹² In other words, relieving refugees dovetailed neatly with the relief of one of the most acute and persistent forms of

¹¹⁰GP 46102/9-10, memorandum by H. J. Willis (LGB), 21 January 1915.

¹¹¹BEL 6/118, Hull committee Report, 7; PP, Report on the Administration of the National Relief Fund for Scotland, 1915, 1915, Cd. 8169, 5.

¹¹²GP 46080/147-50, J. Landfear Lucas to Gladstone, 16 January 1915.

British distress due to the war.

Both the LGB and the WRC had been hopefully eyeing Wales and its resorts for some time. The Welsh and other western seaside resorts had been badly hit by the war and were in their annual midwinter slump. Gladstone and Maudslay made a trip to Wales on 18 January, probably to sound local opinion, and netted four thousand tentative offers of hospitality,¹¹³ and Maudslay's brother Henry was despatched on a reconnaissance expedition later in the month. He reported optimistically, but there were two snags: the army was billeting thousands of soldiers all along the Welsh coast and was paying rates far higher than the LGB could afford; and boarding house keepers wanted refugees only till the summer season arrived.¹¹⁴ However, after hard bargaining and assurances from the WRC that it would remove refugees in the summer, if the war were still in progress, businesslike agreements were signed between the Committee and the local authorities in a number of resort towns, which were now designated "special areas."¹¹⁵ Blackpool was the biggest, and it was especially important because the lodging house

¹¹³Deiniol, Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 22 January 1915.

¹¹⁴MH 8/1, Henry to Algernon Maudslay, 2 February 1915; MH 8/15/12, report by Henry Maudslay, 27 January 1915.

¹¹⁵GP 45101/185-86, "Terms of Agreement Between the WRC and the . . . Urban District Council", n.d. (ca. January or February 1915); BEL 1/2, "Memorandum on the Reception of Belgian Refugees", January 1915, unsigned.

keepers there were for some reason willing to take refugees for an unlimited period. However, they asked that "only the 'middle class' should be sent -i.e. respectable artisans, clerks, small shopkeepers etc (lower middle class, but none of the lowest class)," because they would not interfere with the "ordinary patrons" during the summer season. They also haggled over the number of children to be sent.¹¹⁶ The hosts this time were businessmen, not philanthropists.

That the profit motive, not pity, underlay the scheme was both an advantage and a drawback. The advantages were several. The WRC had the benefit of knowing exactly where it stood vis-à-vis the local committees, which were under the interested supervision of local authorities aware of the economic importance of the scheme. Conditions were uniform for all refugees and this reduced the jealousy and friction which marred the hostels.¹¹⁷ And finally, the lodging house keepers were experienced at sharing quarters with other families and managing cantankerous guests: they may not have been as warm to the refugees as other hosts, but they were not likely to be as disillusioned. In the special areas, the relationship of hosts and guests was at least clearly defined. On the other hand, the scheme meant a big increase in bookkeeping for the WRC and a new department, "A7," had to be created, while local relief officials

¹¹⁶MH 8/15/16-17, memorandum on Blackpool committee, 11 February 1915, unsigned; MH 8/7/19/1, Maudslay to H. C. Monro, 2 February 1915.

¹¹⁷WRC II, 15-16, 18.

were equally burdened with paper work.¹¹⁸ Some landladies exploited the refugees because the weekly billeting rate of 10/- was supposed to pay for "lodging, food, fuel, light, washing and attendance."¹¹⁹ But the worst problem for refugees in the special areas was boredom. There were no industries in the resorts and few jobs open to the refugees, who became morose and troublesome.¹²⁰ Eventually, all employable Belgians were reallocated, leaving mainly old and sick people in the resorts. But the special areas fulfilled their immediate purpose early in 1915 by taking nine thousand refugees--three thousand of them in Blackpool--and relieving the strain on the congested London depots.

At the same time the WRC moved to slow the alarming rate at which refugees were being sent back by hosts who could no longer afford to keep them. Hosts had begun by asking for financial help from the Committee by November 1914. But the Committee at first had set itself firmly against such help, on two grounds: to help some hosts would lead to a deluge of requests; and "at first there was no test of service," marking off "bona fide hosts who really could not

¹¹⁸MH 8/15/21, "Department A7. Special Areas", unsigned, undated.

¹¹⁹MH 8/1, Edith Lyttelton (?) to Maudslay, 23 March 1915; BEL 1/5, Union Belge (Folkestone) to Leonard Franklin, 1 September 1915; G. H. Stevenson, "Some Friends and Allies: A War Memory", The Army Quarterly, 24 (1932): 136-43, esp. 140.

¹²⁰MH 8/19, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 14 October 1914.

afford to pay in toto" from those who could afford it and those who were out to make money. But Gladstone was beginning to change his mind by late November. The test of service had been well established and it was becoming clear that refusing aid to hosts was a false economy, since it left reallocation as the only alternative and thus involved the loss of vital hospitality and incurred high transportation costs. Gladstone's first thoughts on solving the problem were to get King Albert to approve the use of the Daily Telegraph fund for the relief of hosts--an attempt which failed disastrously--and to get local committees to help individual hosts who were in straits.¹²¹ Instead, the rot continued with entire committees coming to beg for aid as their funds dwindled apace with declining public enthusiasm for the refugees. The LGB told a deputation from the Wimbledon committee the day before Gladstone and Samuel conferred that "the question whether and if so in what form, private generosity might have to be supplemented by National Funds" demanded consideration.¹²² Accordingly, Samuel authorised the WRC to pay up to half the expenditure of committees asking for assistance.¹²³ The Committee accepted

¹²¹GP 46079/118, E. Borah to the WRC, 24 November 1914; /117, Gladstone to W. H. Dickinson, 25 November; /133-34, Gladstone to H. E. Morgan, 26 November 1914.

¹²²GP 46080/157, H. Monro to Gladstone, 19 January 1915.

¹²³BEL 1/2, "Memorandum of an Interview 20 January 1915 between the President of the Local Government Board and Lord Gladstone. . .", n.d.

with alacrity and then rather disingenuously used its new power of the purse to cajole inpecunious committees into taking yet more refugees. It managed this by tying the new grants to the number of additional refugees taken by the committees, though leaving the committees free to spend the money equally on all refugees in their charge.¹²⁴ The committees concerned became known as "Assisted Local Committees." By October 1917 there were forty-five of them looking after 3,219 "new" refugees and 4,692 "old" refugees, so the ploy was quite successful.¹²⁵ However, many committees could take no more refugees and as they came to the end of their resources the WRC stepped in with grants based on a proportion of their weekly expenditure. By October 1917 there were one hundred and thirteen committees, from Leeds with 551 refugees to Swaffham with two, receiving grants for 5,741 refugees in all.¹²⁶ Many refugees in those places thus became, in effect, paying guests, and by May 1916 Gladstone concluded gloomily that "the essence of hospitality is gone."¹²⁷

¹²⁴MH 8/1, WRC to local committees, 26 January 1915; MH 8/15/40, "Memorandum L.C.1 (approved 17/2/15)".

¹²⁵MH 8/31/28-30, "Assisted Local Committees. Report Week Ending October 27th, 1917".

¹²⁶MH 8/31/31-33, "Report of Grants to Local Committee [sic]. Assisted By The Weekly Grant Up To The Whole Expenditure. October 29th, 1917".

¹²⁷Deiniol, Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 31 May 1916.

The shortage of hospitality impelled the Committee to help Belgians set up house for themselves. The WRC dealt initially with the destitute: those with means had fended for themselves. However, two trends emerged late in 1914 and early in 1915. On the one hand, the refugees applying for allocation were "mostly of the Rentier class, proprietaires, lawyers, stockbrokers, doctors, artistes, factory owners, merchants and upper trades-people."¹²⁸ The affluent refugees had come to the end of their resources and since, with the exception of doctors, they were generally unwilling or unable to take jobs since none were available in their field and they did not wish to lose status by taking menial work, they were forced to leave their rented accommodation and seek relief. On the other hand, some penniless refugees had found work and were better able to support themselves. However, Belgians were at a disadvantage in seeking accommodation, as one allocator found after scouring Cricklewood, where a Belgian munitions factory was being established, in June 1915:

Respectable furnished rooms with a common kitchen are very exceptional. The English working man takes unfurnished rooms and he furnishes it by degrees; besides he has ways of acquiring possessions through relations and friends which the Belgian has not got in a strange town.¹²⁹

Accordingly, in December 1914 the Committee followed an example

¹²⁸MH 8/7/66/5, J. C. Grumbar to R. Cross, 30 March 1915.

¹²⁹MH 8/1, Edith Newton to J. Birk, 21 June 1915. For a most graphic description of the flats and maisonettes of Edwardian London, see H. G. Wells, Tono-Bungay (New York, 1908), 98-101.

set by the Jewish WRC and began to take flats and maisonnettes around London to rent to refugee families at low rates. But lack of money held back the plan and the Committee discussed the matter with the Board on 9 January. When Samuel agreed on 20 January to give capitation grants to Aldwych for Belgians in its flats, the Committee rapidly worked out an extremely complicated arrangement with the LGB for a scheme involving two hundred flats. Ostensibly, the cost was to be shared between the Board and Aldwych, but by the device of a "pool," the grants were spread around all the flats and the Board effectively paid almost the entire cost of the project.¹³⁰ The WRC was pleased with the bargain it had driven and with the success of the project, which eventually housed some twelve hundred people. Edith Lyttelton, the founder and head of the new Flats Department, explained the principal merit of the flats thus: "The fact is that by playing on the refugees [sic] desire to have a house of their own we get a contribution from them w. reduces the expense of housing them to at present something like 1/6 a head."¹³¹ Others less cynically emphasised that the flats offered privacy and saved the refugees from "being herded together in boarding houses and hotels" and encouraged

¹³⁰ GP 46046/197-99, Gladstone to Lyttelton, 15 February 1915; GP 46079/274-76, F. M. Guedalla to Gladstone, 22 December 1914.

¹³¹ GP 46046/193-96, Lyttelton to Gladstone, 14 February 1915.

in them a spirit of self-help.¹³² No one saw the paradox of the Committee encouraging Smilesian virtues by the most thoroughgoing interventionism and reliance on state assistance!¹³³

The agreement with the Board also allowed the WRC to establish and expand with some security its own and other hostels, as Samuel agreed to capitation grants for refugees in hostels, which were seen as a way of getting refugees out of the expensive and embarrassing hotels. But the WRC itself played a secondary role in the development of hostels, the field being dominated by two self-willed ladies, the Duchess of Somerset and Lady Lugard, the latter having abandoned the WRC to found her Hospitality Committee for Better Class Belgian Refugees. Both women had redirected their ardour for Ulster to the cause of Belgium, though confining their charity to one class of refugees, for whom they fought for preferential treatment with a panache that embittered the more catholic WRC. By October 1917 the WRC was aiding a total of thirty-six hostels catering for six hundred and

¹³²GP 46080/141-43, M. Muller, report at meeting of Managing Committee, 14 January 1915; GP 46102/30-33, "Flat Scheme", memorandum, unsigned, n.d. (end of January 1915).

¹³³In any case the flats scheme in some ways followed in the tradition of the social reformer Octavia Hill, who set up as a landlord to poor people in order to offer them both cheap accommodation and teach them self-help through close attention to their needs by rent-collectors who were also social workers. The WRC's scheme differed from Hill's in the greater freedom from interference accorded to tenants--who were often middle-class people far different from Hill's slumdweller--and in its reliance on state funding, whereas Hill's scheme was marked by "a strict and

fifty refugees.¹³⁴

All these expedients involved a great deal of effort for the Committee and a large outlay of funds for the Board. In all they managed to find about thirteen thousand billets and to maintain the same number of existing ones, some of which could have been kept up, it may be assumed, without government aid. But those twenty-six thousand places benefited far more than twenty-six thousand refugees, because the refugee population was constantly on the move and boarding houses, hostels, flats and local committees were forever losing old guests and receiving new ones.

Reallocation

The Belgian refugees at times tempt one to think of a nomadic tribe. Only about one half who came to England found a place to abide and settled there for the duration.¹³⁵ The rest experienced at least one shift and many refugees changed addresses two, three or more times. Some seemed incapable of staying in one place--like the Voermanck family who went from London to Tenby to London to Seaton to Llanphanyel between January and July 1915, after which they

rigorous adherence to the tenets of political economy." G. Jones, Outcast London, 194. Jones, 193-96 and 266-70, gives a critical account of Hill's scheme and the middle-class ideology of the 1860s out of which it grew.

¹³⁴MH 8/31/30, statistics on hostels, 29 October 1917.

¹³⁵MH 8/7/66, memorandum by Maudslay, n.d. (ca. June 1916). By this time forty thousand of 130,000 refugees dealt with by the WRC had moved from their original quarters. Allowing for late removals, for the seventy to

disappear from view; or the Provost family who in even shorter order went from London to Lincoln to London to Barmouth to Exeter, doubtless with ever-expanding baggage trains to add to the WRC's transportation expenses.¹³⁶ These were exceptional cases, but the Committee's case files record too many such stories.

There were many reasons for their mobility. Behind all explanations lies an intangible, the psychology of exile and uprooting and those symptoms of restlessness, moroseness and irritability which so many English hosts commented on. But there were many other forces pushing and pulling an individual or family from one place to another. Refugees were pushed on by hosts unwilling or unable to stand the financial and emotional strain any longer; by hosts willing to take more refugees but unable to rub along with those they had; by committees attempting to restore peace within their refugee community by separating feuding parties and malcontents; by bad health, especially in the north, where the bitter climate ravaged the health of many Belgians, who contracted bronchitis or incipient tuberculosis and had to be sent to the warmer south; and by local committees

ninety thousand refugees not dealt with by Aldwych, and the many refugees who came to the WRC to be allocated only after their funds ran out, I arrived at my estimate of a half. But the statistics are extremely confusing and unreliable.

¹³⁶MH 8/7/98/54, memorandum on four cases of re-allocated refugees, unsigned, n.d. (ca. May 1916); H. Campbell to Maudslay, 5 May 1916.

indignant at men who should have been working instead of enjoying the first long holiday of their lives.¹³⁷

More usually refugees were positively pulled from the idyllic boredom of English villages to places where they could find jobs. London was a magnet for all refugees and Aldwych had to lay down rules to guard against local committees too readily allowing Belgians to go there on some pretext. Even large cities like Glasgow were unpopular, especially with the families of soldiers because precious leave time was lost in travelling there. Families who had been separated in flight or the confusion of early allocation efforts desperately wanted to be reunited and some committees who began with a small family of Belgians ended with a clan.¹³⁸

Apart from minor contrary movements--to convalescent centres, for instance--the overall shift of Britain's refugee population was from the countryside to the large cities and industrial areas, especially of England. Seven out of eight refugees lived in England: the Celtic fringe was forbidden ground, too remote, or offered too little employment, though

¹³⁷War Refugees Committee, Second Report (London, 1918), 38 [hereafter referred to as WRC II]; MH 8/8, file of family Van Den Auwere; BEL 6/143, Lincoln committee report.

¹³⁸MH 8/7/98/11, H. Leggett to F. Willis, 6 January 1916; MH 8/1/82/132, memorandum by Mary Bidwell, 10 January 1916; MH 8/26/80-81, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 5 January 1917; May Wedderburn Cannan, Grey Ghosts and Voices (Kington, 1975), 81-82; BEL 6/174, Newark Committee, cutting from Newark Advertiser, n.d., (November, 1915).

Glasgow was the biggest reception centre in the Kingdom after London. Unemployable refugees were left by design in rural and coastal areas. London also had a high proportion of unemployed refugees, usually "better class" Belgians who had supported themselves there for a time before asking for help or the incorrigibly workshy and generally "undesirable" inmates of Edmonton and Earl's Court. Those who found work--the great majority--were scattered up and down the central industrial spine of England, often in colonies around Belgian munition factories in places such as Birtley, Richmond, Twickenham and Letchworth, and in cities such as Manchester and Birmingham.

In this lay one great difficulty, for the areas which were attracting Belgians were also attracting English workers. Overcrowding was a serious problem in areas where war production boomed and the refugees had to join a scramble for accommodation. In some ways they were at a disadvantage because of their unfamiliarity with English society. But in other ways they were greatly at an advantage because local committees found them accommodation, a benefit not enjoyed by many migratory British workers. So it is not surprising that in Glasgow, with ten thousand refugees under an energetic municipally-backed committee and enormous unrest over war-time housing conditions, the ILP leader John Wheatley should have asked some searching questions about the effect of the committee's house-hunting on an already critical

situation.¹³⁹ What is surprising is that there is little evidence of popular agitation against the Belgians in overcrowded areas. The only known rioting against Belgians--at Fulham in 1916--was not explicitly linked to housing.¹⁴⁰ The refugees were not popular where they competed for scarce accommodation, but there was no open conflict. The tact of local committees, the building of special quarters for Belgian munition workers, and, above all, the careful control of allocation procedures by the WRC--all eased what could have been a tense situation.¹⁴¹

The refugees' movements were not confined to the British Isles. Throughout the war, Belgian refugees travelled back and forth along a great quadrangular route between Belgium, Holland, England and France. From Belgium, men escaped to join the Belgian army via Holland, England and France. From Holland, which could offer its refugees little or no employment, thousands returned to Belgium or went to England and France. From England, many refugees went to France: conscripts and volunteers for the army, railwaymen and others ordered there by the Belgian government,

¹³⁹ Glasgow Herald, 21 January 1916, report of meeting of Glasgow City Corporation, 20 January 1916. For the Glasgow housing crisis, see John Butt, "Working-Class Housing in Glasgow, 1851-1914", in Stanley D. Chapman, ed., The History of Working-Class Housing: A Symposium (Totowa, 1971), 55-92.

¹⁴⁰ See 258-60 below.

¹⁴¹ MH 8/18/138-39, "Meeting of Sub-Committee Appointed to Consider the Question of Allocation During the Winter Months", unsigned, 20 September 1915.

people rejoining families and men taking work in Belgian and French munition factories.¹⁴² The current also flowed the other way: many refugees in France and England decided to return to Belgium. Some went to be reunited with their families or because they found exile unendurable. But most were people of means forced back by German economic blackmail.¹⁴³ Others went back out of a sense of duty and with the blessing of their government: nuns, teachers, insurance agents and bank managers, to name a few.¹⁴⁴ And a few went back to spy for the allies. Espionage could cut both ways, however, and the British were extremely worried that returnees might wittingly or innocently disclose valuable information to the enemy. Gradually it became very difficult for people to enter or leave Belgium. Refugees with strategic skills were refused visas to leave England and German control of the border between Holland and Belgium

¹⁴²Albert Chatelle, L'effort belge en France pendant la guerre (Paris, 1934), 104-05.

¹⁴³Manchester Guardian, 11 February 1915; BEL 6, reports of numerous local committees. Some committees disapproved intensely when refugees decided to return to live under German rule, and one committee was almost destroyed by disagreements as to the correctness of a family returning to save their brewing business. BEL 6/248, New Whitchurch committee report. The German administration in Belgium decreed in February 1915 that the estates of all absentee property owners would be subjected to a levy of ten times the normal tax rate. Cf. H. Anthonis, Les Réfugiés belges taxes par les Allemands (Oxford, 1915).

¹⁴⁴Sir Ernest Hatch, "The Belgian Refugees in the United Kingdom", Quarterly Review, 225 (1916): 188-214, esp. 209; BEL 6/105, Grimsby committee report; /120, Ilkley committee report.

tightened.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, movement between England and France and Holland continued throughout the war, and the WRC's transit camps were always full of people coming from somewhere en route to somewhere else.

The dimensions of allocation policy were never static. Between August and October 1914 the problem had promised to be temporary, massive and simple. Instead the WRC found itself dealing for four years with cases whose numbers diminished steadily but who presented increasingly complex challenges to its administrative skills. The Committee became correspondingly more bureaucratised. The broad improvisations of 1914 gave way to sophisticated policies designed to ensure that refugees were well housed and well settled. Allocation policy could never be conducted in a vacuum: it was shaped by manifold considerations regarding the health and welfare of the refugees. Above all, it became increasingly entwined with the problem of the employment of refugees, an issue which assumed great importance as the war progressed and which, with allocation itself and welfare, was one of the three great components of refugee policy.

¹⁴⁵S. Theodore Felstead, Under the German Heel (London, 1940), 4-6, 71; HO 45/10737/261921/571, A. Walker (Glasgow committee) to Hymans, 19 August 1915; HO 45/10809/311425/12, J. Moylan to chief constable, Glasgow, 9 June 1916.

CHAPTER VI

EMPLOYMENT: PART I

'Let Them Not Be Pauperised'

That was war the nemesis of trade was an article of faith for most Englishmen in 1914. The Napoleonic Wars, Britain's last great continental engagement, furnished historical evidence especially for those who predicted a severe postwar slump attendant on demobilisation. Prewar pundits on the shape of things to come, led by the prolific H. G. Wells, had starkly dramatised the economic chaos of a Britain plunged into war. Optimists were cheered by Norman Angell, who was widely interpreted as having demonstrated in his tract, The Great Illusion (1910), that a protracted war among the Powers was impossible because none would dare disrupt the intricate pattern of international trade on which their economies depended.¹ And no Power was more susceptible to war's paralysing effects than Britain, the centre of a vast financial and commercial empire.

The fear of economic depression underlay the swift appearance on 5 and 6 August of the Committee on the

¹Norman Angell, The Great Illusion (London, 1910); H. G. Wells, The War in the Air (London, 1908). Speaking against the war on 3 August, the radical M.P. Josiah Wedgwood prophesied mass unemployment on the basis of his reading of The War in the Air. Josiah Wedgwood, Memoirs of a Fighting Life (London, 1940), 88-89.

Prevention and Relief of Distress, the National Relief Fund and the War Emergency Workers' National Committee. Their existence seemed amply justified by events: the London stock exchange had already closed on 30 July, not to reopen till five months later; food prices rose as householders scrambled to hoard reserves; and unemployment figures soared, especially in luxury trades and the textiles and building industries.²

The first 100,000 Belgians arriving between August and October landed during this period of gloom and uncertainty. At first, the question of finding them employment did not loom large. As noted before, the earliest arrivals were generally wealthy and, given their social status and aptitudes, were unlikely to compete for jobs with British workers. The early canard that only women and children were coming also diverted attention from the employment issue. The WRC saw its task solely in terms of providing hospitality. Relief workers not only shared the universal assumption that the war would be short but were too busy coping with the basic task of finding accommodation to worry about such refinements as providing work. Employment came a poor second to allocation: a judgement with which both the LGB and the

²PP, Report of the Board of Trade on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in October 1914, 1914, Cd. 7703; Public Record Office, Cabinet Papers [hereafter referred to as CAB] CAB 37/121/100, memorandum on unemployment due to the war by Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, 28 August 1914; Forty-sixth Annual Report of the Charity Organisation Society (up to 21st April, 1915), 7-8; David Lloyd George, War Memoirs (London, 1933-36 ;

Board of Trade concurred.³ Finally, it seemed absurd to think about finding jobs for refugees when it was expected that many British workers would be without jobs themselves.⁴

The Board of Trade first broached the topic to the WRC on 11 September, perhaps in response to Samuel's speech of the 9th, but more probably in reaction to the first rumblings of public controversy. The Times' announcement on 9 September that Belgians had gone from Folkestone to work in the Kentish hopfields drew a hasty response from Lord Hugh Cecil, who objected to

. . . the action of those who, animated doubtless by the very best motives, are giving employment to refugees as hop-pickers. Hop-picking. . . is work commonly done by the very poorest of our people, and it will be a grievous hardship and disappointment to them if they are deprived of it; moreover, the influx of a number of labourers who, being strangers and destitute, must take any wages that they are offered might most mischievously lower the general rate of wages.⁵

The fear of destitute foreigners competing with English

1938 edition) 1:61-70; M. B. Hammond, British Labour Conditions and Legislation during the War (London, 1919), 32-64.

³PP, Minutes of Evidence taken before the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board to consider and report on Questions arising in connection with the Reception and Employment of the Belgian Refugees in this Country, 1915, Cd. 7779, [hereafter referred to as Cd. 7779, Hatch Committee, minutes], 1, evidence of U. Wolff (Board of Trade), 2 November 1914.

⁴Hatch, "Belgian Refugees in the United Kingdom", 194.

⁵The Times, 9 and 10 September, 1914.

labour and driving down wages reflected folk memories of the Irish and Jewish immigrants of the nineteenth century who had been hated by elements of the English working classes for just this reason. The Committee was also wary of unthinking patriots harming its efforts by offering jobs to Belgians while English workers were unemployed--particularly after the trade unionist agitation against volunteer needleworkers. And so, the first action of both the government and the WRC was negative.⁶

But the government continued to be concerned about employment. The LGB issued a circular on 25 September requesting that prospective employers of Belgians make their offers through the labour exchanges, whose officers would ensure that no steps taken to find jobs for refugees would "endanger the employment of British workpeople." It was a request, not a command, and depended on employers' goodwill towards the exchanges, which were still struggling through a difficult infancy against the general suspicion of employers and workers alike. As a policy it was rendered more innocuous by the prefatory statement that "it is not intended that official action should be taken in the direction of finding work for the refugees who are temporarily resident in this country."⁷ As yet the government had no policy on

⁶The government forbade the owners of hopgardens to use refugee labour. PD, (Commons), 15 September 1914, 5th ser., 66, col. 873, Sir Harry Verney.

⁷BEL1, LGB circular and memorandum of guidance for local committees, 25 September 1914.

refugees' employment.

Perhaps the LGB and the Board of Trade hoped to persuade the WRC to take responsibility and the Board of Trade once again approached the WRC on 23 September.⁸ But the Committee was too busy and still deeply afraid of "a public outcry prejudicial to the refugees" if Belgians took jobs. Gladstone firmly stated its case on 29 September:

The Committee with the entire approval of the representatives of the Allied Powers have declined to make themselves responsible in any way for the Refugees. It would be wrong, under the guise of hospitality to find them employment to the detriment of British workers who have lost their jobs as the direct result of the War. Hospitality will gladly be given. . . but work for them cannot be found. . . . The Committee. . . consider that such questions must be solved by ordinary economic considerations with which as a Committee formed to discharge a specific duty, they have no concern.⁹

The WRC therefore dumped the problem on Samuel's lap. He accepted responsibility, though ordinarily the Board of Trade dealt with all aspects of employment, and had taken the first steps regarding refugees' employment.¹⁰ Samuel's overlordship of employment policy implied a consensus within the government that employment was too intimately connected with other aspects of the refugee problem to be dealt with adequately by another department. More significantly, his

⁸MH 8/1/82/144, memorandum on employment by Ralph Barsdorf, assistant secretary of the WRC, 6 January 1916; cf. PD, (Commons), 17 September 1914, 5th ser., 66, col. 985, Herbert Samuel.

⁹WRC I, 10; GP 46101/79, memorandum by Gladstone, 29 September 1914.

¹⁰WRC I, 10.

new authority reflected the growing status of the WRC. The Committee was now the indispensable pivot of the relief effort, and so responsibility devolved from the department which in peacetime was the appropriate authority to the department most closely associated with the WRC. On 14 October the Board of Trade acknowledged that the Committee was "not directly interested in providing work for refugees."¹¹ The problem of employment, now daily assuming greater proportions as the last great influx of refugees arrived, was squarely in the government's court.

The Hatch Committee

Samuel responded by making haste slowly. On 24 October he appointed a committee of inquiry "to consider and report on questions arising in connection with the reception and employment of the Belgian Refugees in this country." The advantages the inquiry offered were several. It allowed Samuel to temporise while the outlines of the problem became clearer. It defused hostility, particularly that of labour. It provided information. But even before the committee set to work, it ran into trouble. Samuel had hoped to assuage labour's fears by inviting Robert Smillie, the miners' delegate to the Workers' National Committee, to serve. Smillie in reply urged that C. W. Bowerman, a Trades Union Congress delegate, also be appointed. But even this

¹¹MH 8/82/144, memorandum by Barsdorf.

did not satisfy the rest of the WNC, who were smarting at "the unofficial character of appointments to the Committees set up to deal with various phases of the war crisis." Presumably this was a reference to the WNC's mixed success in obtaining labour representation on local relief of distress committees and its failure to get working-class organisations such as the Co-operative Movement represented on the government's Food Prices Committee.¹² The National Committee therefore decided to make a stand on the minor matter of the inquiry into refugee employment. It gave Samuel an ultimatum: either one half of the proposed committee would consist of "direct representatives of Labour, including women," or the WNC was "not prepared to accept any responsibility in the matter."¹³

The emphasis on "direct" representation was a reminder to the government that Labour was not a docile, homogeneous interest group willing to accept as its voice in the counsels of the nation whomever the government chose. Against the prevailing middle-class assumption that interest groups within the community could be effectively represented by coopted "representative" members--what might be called the theory of indirect representation--the WNC claimed the right for the organised working classes to elect their own

¹² Report of the WEWNC, 4, 13.

¹³ WEWNC, minutes, 19 October 1914, 3; see also Transport House, WNC/3. (Belgian Refugees) 1/16, J. S. Middleton to Samuel, 20 October 1914.

representatives.¹⁴

The WNC's battle with the National Relief Fund over the use of the latter's massive resources and the push for strong representation on the Belgian employment committee illuminate one of the most important themes in the history of the war's impact on the organised working classes. For the first time there was an umbrella organisation covering all sections of the labour movement which could concert policy and push hard for working-class objectives. This strengthening of labour's ability to exert pressure other than through industrial action and its parliamentary wing has not been sufficiently studied.¹⁵ The Committee saw itself as a defensive body, holding the line against "the

¹⁴Organisations which coopted labour representatives naturally tended to choose "respectable" moderate members of the labour establishment. The WNC fought--and lost--a battle with the Trades Union Congress late in 1915 over the issue of direct and indirect representation on the statutory local war pensions committees set up under the Naval and Military War Pensions Act. The WNC and many local labour organisations wanted specially elected representatives; the government and the TUC preferred to rely on nominated labour local councillors. The representation issue was not a simple case of the organised working classes versus the government and middle classes, but divided the organised working classes themselves. Royden Harrison, "The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, 1914-1920", in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (London, 1971), 211-59, esp. 242.

The codicil regarding a woman representative on the Belgian employment committee doubtless reflected the presence of five able women on the WNC and the recognition by male trade unionists that women workers were suffering the worst economic effects of the war.

¹⁵Harrison, "Workers' National Committee", and J. M. Winter, Socialism and the Challenge of War (London, 1974), 184-223, are the exceptions.

destitution which will inevitably overtake our working people while the state of the war lasts."¹⁶ All the same, it conducted an attacking defence, and one of its chief targets was philanthropy. The WNC viewed organisations like the NRF as the pawn of a government anxious to avoid all responsibility for the welfare of distressed citizens. It also charged that the NRF was "lavish" and "unsystematic" in dispensing relief not to the unemployed and the elderly who were suffering from rising prices but to the families of soldiers and sailors. The NRF, in the WNC's view, was relieving not distress but the government.¹⁷ A committee soured by the lethargy and indifference of both government and charity towards the unemployed, the aged and even, despite the NRF, the families of servicemen,¹⁸ could hardly look kindly on the energetic measures taken to relieve a small group of aliens.

The National Committee's primary strategy of getting

¹⁶The Joint Board of the National Executive of the Labour Party, meeting on 5 August 1914, quoted in David Boulton, Objection Overruled (London, 1967), 36.

¹⁷WEWNC, Report, 4; cf. the remark of G. D. H. Cole and W. Mellor that the WNC had "tried to protect the workers from relief committees," in Trade Unionism in War-Time, "The Herald" Pamphlet #5 (London, 1915), 9.

¹⁸For a searing indictment of the policies of the government and a local distress committee towards the families of soldiers, see E. S. Pankhurst, The Home Front, 40-65, 77-90.

representation on all bodies affecting the working classes succeeded in the case of the Belgian employment inquiry. Samuel accepted five of the Committee's seven nominees and Smillie and Bowerman were joined by Arthur Henderson, Harry Gosling and Susan Lawrence. This gave the WNC its desired one half of the committee, but Samuel subsequently added more members "of a non-Labour character."¹⁹ The committee's chairman was Sir Ernest Hatch, a Unionist Free Trader long interested in the problem of unemployment.²⁰ The committee as finally constituted also included Bishop Bidwell for the Catholic church; Edith Lyttelton, Basil Williams and Sir Thomas Elliott for the WRC; two Liberal M.P.s, Sir Frederick Cawley and James Dundas White, the latter a land reformer of the Henry George-ite persuasion; one Liberal Unionist M.P., Herbert Pike Pease; a Tory peer, the Earl of Plymouth; and three civil servants, R. S. Meiklejohn for the Treasury, C. F. Rey for the Board of Trade, and the secretary, Harold Leggett of the LGB. Thus, the WNC nominees were the biggest single bloc on the committee.

The committee met on seventeen occasions between 2 November and 9 December and presented its report late in December, having interviewed seventy-four witnesses, twenty-one of whom were trade unionists, eighteen civil servants,

¹⁹ WEWNC, Report, 18.

²⁰ Hatch may have been chosen as chairman for a number of reasons, his book on unemployment, A Reproach to Civilisation (London, 1906) being only one. Through his commitment to free trade he developed links with both Hugh

eighteen representatives of the WRC and local refugee committees, nine employers, seven representatives of various interest groups such as the Central Chamber of Manufacture, and one refugee. That the trade unionists represented twenty unions and the employers' witnesses only five firms or associations of employers underlined the Hatch Committee's chief purpose, to appease labour's fears of cheap competition. This aim it achieved with a fifty page report and two hundred pages of minutes, the gist of which was encapsulated in a set of proposals. Belgians were not to do unpaid work, nor to work for less than standard British rates in their trade and locality. They were to be found employment only through the government's labour exchanges. If working for a host on a casual basis they were to be paid standard rates; and if working should contribute to their keep at a rate fixed by the local refugee committee, which should also form subcommittees on employment to cooperate with the labour exchanges.²¹ These recommendations met the

Cecil and Gladstone in the early 1900s. P. F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge 1971), 276. When Gladstone was Home Secretary (1905-10), he appointed Hatch chairman of a committee established to settle industrial disputes, and was pleased with his work. GP 46118/182, note by Gladstone, n.d.

²¹MH 8/1/82/114, LGB circular of 3 December 1914, calling attention to resolutions passed by the Hatch Committee, cited in memorandum on employment, 6 January 1916.

wishes of the National Committee, which declared itself fairly satisfied.²²

Labour had feared above all that employers would hire Belgians at lower than the prevailing wages. Immediately before the Hatch Committee began its work, an officer of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers wrote to the WNC voicing his concern at reports that engineering firms were intending to employ Belgians and that one firm was offering lower wages to Belgian trade unionists. Not only were the refugees destitute but Belgian wages were normally lower than British wages. This was a case of trade unions fighting not non-union labour but comrades who were sometimes members of the same international union. The ASE's letter voiced the fears of many union leaders that the continuance of the war would lead to a trade slump and demanded guarantees that Belgian labour would not be kept on "to the detriment of the British Working Man." The official ended by stating the dominant trade union view of the refugee problem and its solution: "it is the duty of the Government to provide maintenance for these refugees so long as employment cannot be found for them without hindrance to native-born workers."²³

²²WEWNC, Report, 18.

²³WNC 3/1/21, Robert Young, secretary of ASE, to J. S. Middleton, secretary of WNC, 24 October 1914. "Native-born" had overtones of the old working-class antipathy to the Jewish immigrants of the late nineteenth century. Birth, not residence, made one British.

'Guests of the Nation'

The argument that the refugees should be entirely a charge on the government or philanthropy might best be termed the Guests of the Nation Thesis. Its proof-text was Samuel's phrase, "the hospitality of the nation," in his speech on 9 September 1914. "Guests of the nation" in the war's early months became a talisman not only for facile propagandists but also more significantly for the thousands of hardworking men and women in local committees. Detached from its original referent, the expression passed into common coinage.²⁴ It is ironic that the same trade unionists who elsewhere demanded work, not relief, for British workers, now enjoined the government to give relief, not work, to unemployed Belgians. There was incongruity, too, in the alliance of trade union leaders whose support for the war was often grudging, to say the least, with middle-class patriots who saw the refugees as living symbols of the justice of the Allied cause. Britain, so their argument ran, owed to Belgium and its heroic people a debt which was all the greater because the Allies had failed to come speedily enough

²⁴Michael Macdonagh, In London During the World War (London, 1935), 20; Catholic Social Guild, Year Book for 1915, 12; BEL 6/17, Berkhamsted Belgian Relief and War Refugees Committee, Report, March 1916. The Anglican Bishop of Birmingham unwittingly offended English Catholics when, in ecumenical dialogue with the Archbishop of Paris, he contrasted the position of the Church in France, where Catholicism was the national religion, with its condition in England, where Catholics were "guests of the nation" and on the defensive. The Tablet, 25 September and 2 and 9 October 1914.

to Belgium's aid. This failure could be repaid only by generosity to Belgian war victims.²⁵ The theory was thus a compound of middle-class guilt and trade unionist self-interest.

Underneath the shared rhetoric lurked, however, two radically different schools of exegesis. For trade unionists and their allies, "the nation" meant the state. Thus, it was state responsibility that Sidney Webb meant when he admonished the government on behalf of the WNC that "the relief of the suffering caused by the War is a national concern, and has to be met by the nation as a whole out of national resources."²⁶ This was the crux of George Bernard Shaw's argument that "a generous grant of public money" was the least Britain could do to rescue the refugees from "the caprices of private charity."²⁷ This was the classic Fabian polarity: the rational, systematising dynamic of the interventionist state against the ungoverned and erratic impulses of the laissez faire tradition. Shaw drew a Fabian moral from the confusion of thought over the employment of refugees

²⁵H. Davignon, "Belgium in England", 90.

²⁶Sidney Webb, draft of WNC resolution, 13 September 1914, quoted in J.M. Winter, Socialism and the Challenge of War, 1916. Winter argues that the WNC was heavily permeated by Fabian thinking through the dominant influence of Sidney Webb. But considerations of immediate self-interest, rather than an overarching vision of the state's role in re-structuring society, accounts for trade unionists' adherence to the "Guests" thesis.

²⁷Shaw, Common Sense, 13.

in 1914: if Britain had heeded the proposals of the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, "the Belgians would have found an organization of unemployment ready for them, and would have been provided for with our own unemployed, not as refugees but simply as unemployed."²⁸

But for most middle-class Englishmen "the nation" meant an amalgam of the British people and state. It followed that refugee relief was only partly the government's responsibility, the main burden falling on the people of Britain as a matter not of expedience but of moral right. Herbert Samuel, in earlier days a Fabian fellow traveller and one of the most important spokesmen for New Liberalism with its emphasis on a greatly expanded role for the state, placed himself in this second camp. Whatever Samuel's words in the past, his reactions in 1914 to the relief of refugees and the unemployed demonstrated the tenacious hold of classical Liberal concepts of the limited state upon even the most "advanced" Liberals.²⁹ Samuel's policy of allowing private citizens to carry the weight of refugee relief was approved by his colleagues in a harried cabinet which could command only a small and overworked civil service. His response was endorsed also by the members of the great many local refugee committees which never approached the government for

²⁸Shaw, Common Sense, 23.

²⁹For Samuel's role in New Liberalism, see especially H. Emy, Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 104, 113, 129-30.

subsidies and took great pride in their sturdy independence.

However, since the relief of refugees both placed a great strain on private resources and threatened the capacities of Britain's small state apparatus, supporters of traditional ways had to circumscribe more carefully than ever the bounds of their work. Where the Fabians, advocating massive state action, sought to obliterate the traditionalists sought to sharpen such distinctions as those between "chronic" distress and distress "due to the war"; between the dependants of servicemen who had earned relief by their patriotic self-sacrifice and the families of unemployed civilians; and between the refugees and the British unemployed. The refugees were held to deserve special treatment as a people set apart by their innocent suffering, and by the world's close attention to the way they fared at the hands of their allies. For a variety of reasons, the first months of exile were a period of recuperation for most of the refugees.

Jobs were in any case at first hard to find for Belgians randomly scattered around the country. When well-intentioned people tried to create work by giving them jobs as domestics and gardeners, they ran into the stern opposition of the WRC, which was always wary of hosts looking for cheap labour--especially young girls for domestic work ³⁰

³⁰ Lyttelton, 12. The WRC continued to keep close watch on the conditions of employment of young girls in domestic service. BEL 3/2, report of A. J. Webbe, WRC Employment Department, November 1916, 2.

and was nervous of trade union reactions. Sir Reginald Pole-Carew, M.P. for Cornwall, S.E., complained to Gladstone late in October that one of his constituents had sought a refugee as a servant because he thought it might be "mutually advantageous," but had been curtly refused. "There is no question," Pole-Carew argued,

. . . of 'displacing British labour'--It is not to be got--and there are other people in this part of the world who are unable to obtain domestic servants locally who prefer to do without some than import girls from other districts, but who would be glad to give Belgians temporary employment if by so doing they could be of any use.

Gladstone replied soothingly that the task of getting jobs for refugees was hopelessly beyond the Committee's power, as it would first have to make laborious enquiries about the availability of English labour. "Our position," he concluded, "is simply one of neutrality." But to maintain neutrality was more easily said than done, though the existence of the Hatch Committee allowed Aldwych to do nothing till the other committee reported. Pole-Carew's letter had ended with a blunt threat which could not be ignored:

My constituents wish to know whether it is intended to permit the Refugees to work for their livelihood, or whether they are simply to be maintained on charity? as, in the latter case, they decline to subscribe to any further relief.³¹

The attack on the view that the refugees should not work thereafter grew steadily. King Albert himself gave it

³¹GP 46078/238-99, Sir Reginald Pole-Carew to Gladstone, 20 October 1914; /311-12, Gladstone to Pole-Carew, 21 October 1914.

impetus with a plea widely quoted as "Let them not be pauperised."³² The chief refrain was that idleness demoralised the Belgians. One woman relief worker warned in January 1915 that "idle hands are getting into mischief, grave moral mischief in some cases," and blamed "a super sentimental feminine movement."³³ And late in 1915 another refugee worker, Edith Sellers, issued a full blast at the sentimentalists. Citing instances where refugees had refused paid employment, she contended that some local committees had "deliberately encouraged . . . and practically bribed [refugees] to loaf by placing a premium on loafing and throwing obstacles in the way of their working." She blamed not the government but "all the good-natured, the sentimental, all those whose hearts are in the right place, wherever their heads may be." Were one to argue that refugees should be made to work, she complained, "the old cry, 'the nation's guests,' would at once be raised, and it would be proclaimed . . . outrageous, quite Hunnish in

³²Manchester Guardian, 9 April 1915, Sir Ernest Hatch to editor.

³³GP 46080/180-82, Mrs. H. A. Hoskier to Gladstone, 26 January 1915. Hoskier, betraying the impatience typical of the many "tough-minded" proponents of the ideology of national efficiency, saw in the lack of policy on Belgian employment a symbol of the failings of the Asquith government: "we may as well begin now rather than submit to the everlasting wait until circumstances force our hand which is the regular practice of most Govt offices & of many private Capital interests."

fact."³⁴ Sellers thus linked the debate on employment to the much wider controversy over the degree of state encroachment upon the citizens' traditional rights which the war rendered necessary. For one side, winning the war meant conscripting the entire energies of the nation, whereas voluntarists argued that the use of compulsion by the state was tantamount to embracing "Prussianism," the ethos of the German empire which British propaganda now trumpeted as the war's sinister cause.

But events rather than ideology shaped the main outlines of refugee employment policy. The early fears of a trade slump rapidly vanished as the war called forth British productive energies in a way which peace never had. The preoccupation with unemployment gave way to a hunt for manpower which took administrators and employers beyond the traditional labour market. Women ultimately became the main source of new labour, but the first source tapped, other than workers from industries hit by the war, was the thousands of able-bodied Belgians scattered throughout Britain. While many refugees did have to be pushed to abandon their comfortable life of leisure, most eagerly took work when it became available, not least because the wages must have seemed very high after the low wages of Belgium. Impersonal economic forces decided the matter of employment and compulsion gathered up only a remnant of diehard "loafers."

³⁴Edith Sellers, "On the Providing of Work for Refugees", Nineteenth Century, 78 (October 1915): 847.

It is difficult to gauge exactly when the situation began to change. The decision to bring refugees over from Holland, taken in December 1914, came from a new governmental awareness of the war industries' growing need for labour, but was dictated more urgently by diplomatic considerations, particularly the need to placate Holland. Although refugees began finding work at a very early stage, Maudslay could still inform Gladstone in July 1915 that "the labour question is still the most difficult problem of the day."³⁵ When Hatch optimistically declared that "the great majority of Belgian refugees. . . are now in receipt of wages" and Samuel quoted him to try to justify compelling refugees to provide their own boots and clothing, WRC workers indignantly refuted him.³⁶

It was true that workers with scarce skills found ready employment. The munitions, woollen and bootmaking industries, all booming because of the war, faced a desperate shortage of skilled labour as they raced to fill government contracts, while the construction of large temporary camps meant a heavy demand for carpenters, joiners and navvies. Competition was fierce for skilled workers.³⁷ Nonetheless,

³⁵GP 46013/117, Maudslay to Gladstone, ca. July 1915.

³⁶MH 8/1, Lyttelton to Maudslay, 10 March 1915.

³⁷Cd. 7779, Hatch Committee, minutes, 9, evidence of C. H. Moore, Rolls-Royce. Rolls-Royce had hired six refugees and was loath to disclose how the men had been found, as other firms were also hunting for Belgian artisans. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, aided by the WNC, kept a close eye on firms' efforts to recruit skilled Belgians. WNC 3/1/22, Middleton to R. Young, 5 November 1914.

the combination of Belgian supply and British demand did not mean that all eligible refugees found jobs immediately. Though the Board of Trade on 30 September instructed all labour exchanges that refugees could be registered for unemployment, for a time it neglected to inform refugees, hosts and employers of the change in the government's mood. The public were informed two weeks later through the press, and to acquaint Belgians of their employment rights, the Board then published in French and Flemish a notice to be widely displayed in all exchanges above lists of jobs printed in the two languages. Yet by 31 October only forty-six refugees had applied on the special forms, and of these only seventeen applied for jobs advertised in the separate category for refugees. The representative of the Labour Exchanges Department lamely explained to the Hatch Committee that

. . . it has appeared to be the government's policy to advance cautiously in this matter, and up to the present time, the advertisements. . . have not been exhibited at the hostels and any other places where the refugees are provided for and are therefore likely to see them.

His hesitancy was telling: the government, indeed, had no policy. Deprived of coherent directions from above on a matter fraught with domestic and foreign overtones, civil servants erected the facade of a policy behind which to shelter until a genuine policy had been hammered out. The paralysis that afflicted the Asquith government at its highest levels spread thus in myriad ways down through the

bureaucracy. In the confusion of the time, civil servants and politicians looked for salvation to inquiries and investigations like the Hatch Committee.³⁸

How successful was the Committee? It admirably fulfilled its tasks of assuaging labour's fears and providing a breathing-space for the government. When a Labour M.P. late in 1914 twice asked the President of the Board of Trade whether the government would move on the question of Belgian artisans who were being employed at "considerably under trade union rates," Runciman blandly referred him to the Committee, then still in session.³⁹ The Committee provided useful information to civil servants partly through its report and perhaps more by acting as a forum in which trade unionists, civil servants and relief workers declared their views before what in effect was a council of their peers.⁴⁰ Several Committee members--Lady Lyttelton, Rey, Meiklejohn and the labour representatives--were themselves important shapers of

³⁸ Cd. 7779, Hatch Committee, minutes, 3, evidence of U. Wolff, 2 November 1914. The mushroom growth of war-time committees drew much criticism, however, and the government saw fit to publish regular lists of the committees.

³⁹ PD, (Commons), 16 and 18 November 1914, 5th ser., 68, col. 226 and 438, replies of Sir Walter Runciman to written questions by R. Hunt.

⁴⁰ But it should be noted that the Board of Trade could have obtained much of its information about likely and unlikely industries and regions where refugees could be employed from its normal sources of industrial intelligence.

policy. They emerged better informed on the complexities of the employment problem: a signal benefit.

The Register of Refugees

Hatch also claimed one important side effect of his Committee. To provide it with reliable statistical information, Samuel arranged with the Registrar-General, Bernard Mallet, for the creation of a centralised system for registering refugees. As the first instructions from Mallet came shortly after 19 October and de Jastrzebski, the official in charge, did not begin work until 23 October with a hastily recruited temporary staff supervised by two or three permanent officers of the Registrar-General's Department, the register came rather late in the day to be of much use to the Committee. The two organisations were indeed siblings, not parent and child, as Hatch claimed. The register was established after the fall of Antwerp and the complete breakdown of early, private attempts at keeping track of refugees for the purposes of allocation and reuniting families separated during flight.⁴¹ Several organisations--the WRC, the WARC and the Belgian consulate--had begun separate but overlapping registers, organised differently and containing different

⁴¹Cd. 7763, Special Work, 28. The weight of evidence suggests that the need to trace missing persons was the strongest motive for the register. Ibid; de Jastrzebski, "Register of Belgian Refugees", 133. The fear of German spies in refugees' clothing may have been a subsidiary factor: PD, (Commons), 14 September 1914, 5th ser., 66, col. 756, question of Sir J. D. Rees and reply by Herbert Samuel.

information. De Jastrzebski characterised these early records as

. . . made by inexperienced persons, in circumstances of unprecedented confusion and hurry, when the information had to be extracted from dazed and bewildered persons of little education, through the medium in many cases of interpreters whose knowledge of one of the two languages employed was extremely limited.⁴²

Now the government, or "official" register was to replace this ramshackle arrangement; though the consulate and the WRC's Missing Persons Department did not go down without a fight and the Commission won the right to control a separate register of wounded Belgian soldiers.⁴³

The decision to centralise registration and place it under direct government control was a measure of the failure of private initiative to cope with an unprecedented problem. But, characteristically, the government--or, in this case, its civil servants--chose to rely heavily on the efforts of the voluntary bodies. Rather than start completely afresh and organise his own registration system, Mallet decided to accept the existing records as the basis for his own register. De Jastrzebski later criticised this as a profound miscalculation, since the records abounded in errors and omissions, and their reproduction in the card index involved an altogether disproportionate amount of subsequent labour in

⁴²De Jastrzebski, "Register of Belgian Refugees", 134.

⁴³GP 46079/97-98, 228-29, Mallet to Gladstone, 20 November and 11 December 1914; /99, Gladstone to M. Pollet, 20 November 1914.

the endeavour to correct them.⁴⁴ Mallet's mistake was understandable: without much warning he had been given an urgent task to fulfil with an inexperienced staff, and there may have been great pressure from Hatch and Samuel to furnish quick results. The problem with beginning anew was that it would demand an enormous correspondence and long delays waiting on returns from refugees all over the country. Instead, the Registrar-General took the apparently short route and the result was a slow and painful start of the new register. Yet, through enthusiasm and hard work, the staff were able to supply the Hatch Committee with statistics on the vocational backgrounds of thirty thousand refugees.⁴⁵

The Hatch Committee, judged in terms of the energy it expended and the hopes it aroused, must be accounted a failure. For example, it spent much time exploring ways of using Belgians in agricultural work, interviewing sixteen witnesses, most of them closely connected with agriculture. This intense interest in agriculture stemmed from British preconceptions of Belgium as a land of small farmers, thrifty, efficient and imaginative in their exploitation of meagre resources, and from the great interest evinced before

⁴⁴T. de Jastrzebski, "Register of Belgian Refugees", 134.

⁴⁵PP, First Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board to consider and report on Questions arising in connection with the Reception and Employment of the Belgian Refugees in this Country, Cd. 7750, 1914 [hereafter referred to as Cd. 7750, Hatch Committee, report], 32.

the war by men of most parties and persuasions in the land question, and specifically in the issues of urban allotments, reafforestation and the reclamation of waste lands. Those three indeed formed staple items in the long debate over unemployment in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.⁴⁶

The Committee reaped what Rowntree had sown in Land and Labour: Lessons from Belgium, and prevailing myth was buttressed when some of the first Belgians to arrive in England proved to be--or were perceived to be--people from inland areas and therefore, by inference, peasants.⁴⁷

The Hatch Committee was not alone in its absorption in agriculture. The first question in Parliament on refugee employment dealt with agricultural work, and the WRC received letters from a number of people eager to use the Belgians in agricultural schemes.⁴⁸ In fact, there was plenty of agricultural work available and the Committee expected that it would increase early in 1915.⁴⁹ But there were never enough Belgians to fill the vacancies. The Committee soon discovered that of the thirty thousand refugees whose vocations were known, only 654 were classed as agriculturalists. The refugee community was very different in

⁴⁶José Harris, Unemployment and Politics (Oxford, 1972), 334-47.

⁴⁷M. Macdonagh, In London During the World War, 20; H. Davignon, "Belgium in England", 93.

⁴⁸Cf. 208-09 above.

⁴⁹Cd. 7750, Hatch Committee, report, 27.

composition from the total population of Belgium. Briefly stated, the Flemish and urban elements were over-represented and "the agricultural refugees were only one-eighth of what they should have been to be proportionately represented." In any case, as agricultural workers had been estimated in the latest census to be only one quarter of the Belgian work-force, myth had never jibed with reality. The refugees were town and coastal dwellers: Antwerp provided 26.5% of the refugees and Brussels, Ostend, Malines and Liege in that order provided altogether another 29.3%.⁵⁰ The farmers stayed on their farms.

Thus, all the Committee's diligent sifting of information on the availability of agricultural work had been fruitless. Even more of its time had been spent looking at the prospects for using Belgians in special agricultural schemes. Quite a number of people had seen Belgium's difficulty as England's opportunity to learn new agricultural techniques. Proponents of various land reform schemes and societies which, as part of the eclectic drive for "national efficiency" before the war, had preached England's need to use its land more productively, leapt happily forward with suggestions that refugees be given waste land to cultivate and that they be established on farms of their own where they could demonstrate their supposedly excellent techniques to

⁵⁰T. de Jastrzebski, "Register of Belgian Refugees", 142.

British farmers. There was widespread interest in Belgian methods of intensive cultivation and various societies pressed these foregoing proposals.⁵¹ But, for technical and economic reasons, the Committee decided that all such schemes were impracticable.⁵²

Early Employment Schemes

The vast majority of refugees were not touched by these schemes, nor did they possess skills for which any demand then existed in England. These were obviously the hard core of the employment problem. The Committee, sharing the still common belief in a short war, assumed that high unemployment would continue and was concerned already with the question of refugee repatriation. From these two pre-occupations came its main concrete proposal: the establishment

⁵¹Cd. 7750, Hatch Committee, report, 27; WNC 3/1/64, Joseph Duncan to J. Middleton, 17 February 1915; LCC/Emergency Committee/ Papers/ 3, correspondence regarding Belgian refugees and agricultural allotments, 11 December 1914 to 18 February 1915. Paget was chairman of the Belgian (1914) Organization Society Ltd., which, despite its general title, was concerned with finding agricultural employment. Paget asked whether the Council would consider using Belgians to carry out a model experiment in intensive cultivation on waste land at Eltham. The Council was sceptical, feeling the scheme would be expensive and unlikely to appeal to the bulk of allotment holders, who were working class and interested not in "choice" vegetables but in coarser vegetables for which the methods of intensive cultivation were not necessary. Significantly, perhaps the only attempt at something like such a scheme was made in the middle-class suburb of Hampstead Garden Suburb.

⁵²However, the idea of using the Belgians in special schemes did not die. As late as 1917 an intensive farm was established at Harrow and labourers were sent there from the Earl's Court Camp. But this project bore more resemblance to one of the long-established English labour colonies where it was hoped that demoralised and unemployed town-dwellers would

of refugee workshops. The idea had been suggested by the workshops established in August for unemployed English workers and a lead was soon to be given by Bradford, Leeds and Hyde.⁵³

Workshops exercised a varied appeal on English observers. Many were greatly worried at the anomic effects of exile on the refugees, and hoped that workshops would create some sense of organic community. The Guardian commented on a workshop in Bradford:

The first object of the scheme is to foster a sense of communal duty and interests among the refugees at Bradford, and to save them from the desolating effects of lonely brooding over their cares, and to develop a desire to work for the benefit of all their compatriots. . . . Not only has this aim been largely realized already, but. . . the social intercourse and the self-chosen discipline of study and labour are bracing these men and women to meet with greater fortitude the tribulations which the war has brought upon them.⁵⁴

Stated thus, the appeal of workshops was well nigh universal: the moralism of the report might have been expressed as easily in some Tory newspaper as in the Liberal Guardian.

But the workshops which endured throughout the war became in fact merely havens for unemployable refugees. The largest was at the Earl's Court Camp, to which were returned a motley assortment of refugees who could not find permanent accommodation or satisfactory employment elsewhere: the unfit,

be regenerated by rural labour, than a model farm demonstrating the superiority of Belgian farming techniques. Deiniol, Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 25 May 1917.

⁵³Hatch, "Belgian Refugees", 203-04.

⁵⁴Manchester Guardian, 15 February 1915, article on

the old, the mentally retarded and the emotionally unstable. The workshop was opened in November 1915 and concentrated on work suitable for its labour force, easily taught tasks such as joinery, casemaking and the making of army tents. Skilled tinsmiths, blacksmiths, tailors and bootmakers also served the large community within the Camp.⁵⁵

Most of the smaller workshop schemes which survived elsewhere kept going because they provided both work and solace for women who were, for various reasons, unable to take jobs. The shops enabled mothers of families to do part-time piecework, but were probably more important and effective as social centres than as factories. For the committees which established them, they were very time consuming, though one suspects they fulfilled a social function for the men and women who ran them. They helped few refugees and, as a WNC report later commented, "with the exception of a very few cases the workshop system (which was at best a makeshift) was not found necessary."⁵⁶

"The Bradford Scheme". Some of the refugees in one large hostel were put to work growing vegetables for the city's refugees.

⁵⁵ Anon., The Condition of the Belgian Workmen Now Refugees in England (London, 1917), 8-9; G. Powell, Four Years in a Refugee Camp, 32, 70.

⁵⁶ Susan Lawrence wrote a somewhat sceptical, though still positive memorandum on the workshops for the WNC, in which she stressed their value in preparing refugees for repatriation. WNC 3/1/89, "British Industries and the Resettlement of Belgium", 19 July 1915.

The Hatch Committee, having laboured mightily, produced two command papers, a set of guidelines (which could as easily have been drawn up by one or two civil servants), and the workshop scheme. Its final product, no more productive than the rest, was the Government Belgian Refugee Commission. Anticipating the spread of workshops as the only answer to widespread joblessness among the refugees, the Committee wanted the shops to be systematically organised, and so it recommended that a central body be created to act as steward. Accordingly, in January 1915 Samuel appointed Hatch to head a Commission which included Elliot, Henderson (soon replaced by Bowerman, the most powerful figure in the Labour movement to be intimately involved in refugee relief) and Lawrence from the now redundant committee. Samuel's willingness to adopt the proposal suggests that the forces which were to sweep the Belgians into Britain's labour force had not yet become evident. The Commission looked back to the period of "Business as Usual," not ahead to the time of full employment.

Like its progenitor, the Commission worked hard and accomplished little. The few workshops set up were the result of local initiative and the Commission was able to do little except pile more paperwork on local relief workers already deluged with a bewildering array of forms and instructions from government and private bodies. The Commission never won the confidence of the WRC and the establishment of a labour exchange at the Rink in February 1915 increased the distance between the two organisations. Aldwych was by this time the

undisputed centre of the refugee world and the Commission included only one WRC representative. Indeed, shorn of its grand title, the Commission was Hatch and Hatch was the Commission. For all his huffing and puffing, he could never breathe life into it. Aldwych regarded him as a self-important interloper, responded unenthusiastically to grandiose schemes which needlessly complicated its complex allocation work, and considered the Commission superfluous. In July 1915, Samuel abolished the Commission after a period of worsening relations between the two organisations.⁵⁷

To console him, Hatch was appointed Government Commissioner for Belgian Refugees at the stunning salary of £1200 per annum, which made him by far the most highly paid relief official.⁵⁸ He needed to be a Napoleon of organisation to earn his keep. Instead, he achieved little in an ill-defined role and a pointed question in Parliament by the ILP member, Will Anderson, sealed his doom. Walter Long,

⁵⁷WRC I, 34; GP 46013/47-49, Maudslay to Gladstone, early 1915; GP 46081/146, Gladstone to Lytton, 13 May 1915; /201-02, memorandum by Gladstone, 22 June 1915.

⁵⁸The Treasury, still fighting a grim rearguard action against an avalanche of war expenditure, rather surprisingly approved the salary at first, perhaps considering it a cheap price to pay for the winding up of the expensive Commission. At the same time, the Treasury anomalously rejected the application for a subsistence allowance from Sir John Barran and J. H. Whitehouse, the hitherto unpaid inspectors for the Commission, on the time-honoured grounds of "restricting to the uttermost all Civil public expenditure." T. 128/1, T. Heath to Secretary, LGB, 29 July 1915. But Hatch's appointment was for three months only, and the Treasury refused a renewal. T. 128/1, Heath to secretary, LGB, 12 October 1915.

Samuel's successor, answered that Hatch had resigned.⁵⁹

Anderson's question was in fact a delayed time bomb, and its prime target was not Hatch. When the Commission was dissolved, the WNC was not officially informed and was enraged to find it had not been consulted. Apparently none of its three representatives had been told the Commission was to disband, and the WNC chose to see in this an insult to the labour movement. Worse, it discovered that some of its representatives on the long-dead Hatch Committee had never known the Committee had been replaced by the now-deceased Commission. The WNC demanded the recall of the Committee and when nothing happened resolved on 16 September to have a question put in Parliament to the President of the LGB.⁶⁰ Two and a half months elapsed before Anderson put the question, too late to draw blood. Long skated over the big issue and paid more attention to the unimportant matter of Hatch's salary.

The WNC came out of the affair looking rather silly. It had been left far behind by events, had not kept itself well informed on developments in refugee relief, and had seen two powerful members ignore its instructions at one point. There is no need, however, to assume that the WNC had been

⁵⁹PD, (Commons), 30 November 1915, 5th. ser., 66, col. 541, question of Will Anderson and reply by Walter Long.

⁶⁰WNC, minutes, 15 July 1915, 5; 12 August 1915, 16 September 1915, 4; WNC 3/1/83, Middleton to Bowerman, 16 July 1915; WNC 3/1/85, Middleton to Bowerman, 23 July 1915.

reduced to impotence. It continued an active existence throughout the war and remained a clearing house for information on social conditions and a forum through which the labour movement could thrash out industrial and social strategies. But if this incident is indicative, the WNC was hampered by a lack of clearly defined authority, having no means for enforcing collective obedience or for systematically collecting information. Members showed great unanimity and invoked the Committee's authority on vital matters, but otherwise went their own way. That the WNC chose to make an issue of the Hatch affair seems at first glance puzzling. But it suggests the great importance laid on "representation" as the organised working class's most potent political weapon in a time of mixed threat and opportunity, when the normal parliamentary means of exerting pressure had been weakened by the party truce. In this case, representation seems to have become an end in itself.

More Sophisticated Policies

In any case, the WNC had not been the victim of a plot to exclude it from a voice on refugee employment matters. The Commission had been dissolved merely to make way for a more efficient arrangement. Aldwych was now to deal with employment and a new Employment Department was established there. Henry Leggett was to go to Aldwych as the LGB's representative supervising expenditure and taking charge of the new Department. Elliott and Bowerman, who had served on both the

Committee and the Commission, would join the WRC's Managing Committee as part of the arrangement, and thus the WNC now had direct representation on the body responsible for every aspect of refugee relief policy. The change was not entirely to the WRC's liking, especially as Hatch had told Gladstone that the Labour members of his Commission felt that "they shd have a leading part as a Govt Committee in the general direction of business" of the WRC.⁶¹ Gladstone certainly feared an amalgamation of the two bodies because it would weaken the WRC's independence.⁶² He need not have worried: the Commission did not amalgamate with Aldwych but was swallowed by it. Significantly, the Commission's chairman was not invited to join the WRC's inner council, nor did Aldwych at first suggest for inclusion any Labour member from the old Commission. Bowerman was appointed by Samuel. The leadership of the WRC had been solidly aristocratic and middle class from the beginning and its leaders displayed unease at the prospect of aggressive working-class leaders joining their closed circle. Bowerman's appointment breached the dike of privilege, but little changed: he proved a hardworking and amiable colleague and caused few if any ructions.⁶³

⁶¹GP 46102/136-40, memorandum by Gladstone, n.d., (middle of 1915).

⁶²GP 46081/201-02, memorandum by Gladstone, 22 June 1915.

⁶³Bowerman was a moderate member of the Labour Party and had long enjoyed friendly contacts with Liberals. Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour (London, 1967), 171.

Gladstone had also declared himself content with the existing division of labour, whereby the WRC left the Board all responsibility for employment matters. Instead, the WRC was made to accept the direction of employment policy, the only important area of refugee work hitherto outside its purview and a responsibility it had steadfastly refused to shoulder in 1914.⁶⁴ The change was the result of a growing awareness, both within and without the WRC, that employment and allocation policies were integrally connected and could no longer be kept separate.

At first the WRC had concerned itself simply with dispersing refugees from overcrowded London depots as quickly as possible. But declining free hospitality and an expanding employment market together made necessary a coordinated policy of reallocation. 1914 arrangements would no longer do in 1915. As one observer commented in January 1915, "the Labour exchanges only consider the labour side and not the hospitality side,"⁶⁵ while the reverse applied, though to a lesser extent, to the WRC. Maudslay recognised this some months later:

When the LGB utilised the machinery of the Labour Exchange to secure employment for refugees great difficulty was experienced in assessing to an individual

⁶⁴GP 46101/139, extracts from minutes of Executive Committee, WRC, for meetings on 21 September and 12 November 1914; GP 45994/311-15, correspondence between Gladstone and M. Waller, Home Office, 27 to 30 October 1914.

⁶⁵GP 46080/166-67, H. E. Tillard to Gladstone, 23 January 1915.

applicant suitable work which would give employment and do away with the necessity of removing his family from free hospitality in which he was settled down, to a strange district where accommodation was difficult to obtain without considerable outlay on behalf of the refugees.⁶⁶

Maudslay thus underlined how closely employment and allocation were entangled with a third factor, the provision of welfare in its broadest sense. Security figured large in the felicific calculus of the average refugee. Without strong moral support, he was unlikely to strike out into the English unknown. As in so many other ways in the industrial history of the First World War, Owen triumphed over Bentham: the theory of the fully mobile worker, rationally pursuing a self-interest conceived solely in economic terms, was ignored in practice by government, industrialists and philanthropists. In terms of the WRC, this meant that Lady Lyttelton and Mrs. Gilbert Samuel, codirectors of allocation policy, joined the Managing Committee of the WRC at the same time as Elliott and Bowerman.

The Labour Exchanges Department of the Board of Trade had recognised early the need for close liaison with Aldwych. It established a special exchange for refugees at the Rink in February 1915 and a month later pushed for the two offices to be moved to the same part of the building to render cooperation more complete. At the same time, Board officials moved against "the confusion arising through other agencies at

⁶⁶GP 46013/120-24, Maudslay to Gladstone, 13 August 1915; "The Labour Question and the Domiciliary Question".

Aldwych placing refugees in employment," and the WRC agreed to tell the Belgian consulate, the chief offender, that all refugees seeking work should be referred to the Rink exchange.⁶⁷

But the WRC was slow to accept the exchange as an integral part of its establishment. Labour exchanges were still a very new phenomenon. Although a few municipalities established them in the 1880s and 1890s and more than twenty were set up under the Unemployed Workmen Act of 1905, it was only with the Labour Exchanges Act of 1909 that they were begun on a national and uniform basis. By the outbreak of the war there were just over four hundred. But they still faced widespread hostility and criticism. Trade unions had their own methods of finding work for their members and initially possessed a far more intimate knowledge of conditions in their own trades than the Exchanges' relatively inexperienced officials. In the absence of highly developed official statistics--which the exchanges were created to gather--knowledge and experience for a time were much more effective than William Beveridge's laborious bureaucracy.

The exchanges were seen also as the spearheads of state interference in the economy, feared as much by trade unionists as by employers. Hilaire Belloc saw them as harbingers of the "Servile State" and his argument was widely

⁶⁷MH 8/7/66, "Memorandum I", n.d.; MH 8/20/13-15, F. A. Norman to Maudslay, March 1915; MH 8/15/101 and 109, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 25 and 29 March 1915.

quoted among socialists and trade unionists despite its fundamental anti-socialism.⁶⁸ Henry Pelling's contention that the organised working classes were suspicious of many reforming measures of Edwardian governments is admirably demonstrated in the early history of the labour exchanges.⁶⁹ Trade unionists interviewed by the Hatch Committee paid the exchanges little respect, and were joined by employers who preferred to rely on their own tried and tested sources of supply. Farmers and agricultural workers manifested strong hostility, and the spokesman for the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries told the Committee of

. . . a strong prejudice. . . in the minds of the majority of farmers against the labour exchanges. They complain that if they apply to a labour exchange for farm labour, the men supplied. . . are practically useless.⁷⁰

The Board of Trade representative preferred to attribute the exchanges' ill-success to "general ignorance" rather than the downright antagonism of farmers, but complained that his department's overtures to the Central Chamber of Agriculture, the chief farmers' organisation, had met a dampening response.⁷¹ Officials of other departments later added their

⁶⁸James Hinton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement (London, 1973), 44-48.

⁶⁹Henry Pelling, "The Working Class and the Origins of the Welfare State, in Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian England (London, 1968), 1-19.

⁷⁰Cd. 7750, Hatch Committee, minutes, 15, evidence of E. J. Cheney, Board of Agriculture and Fisheries.

⁷¹Cd. 7750, Hatch Committee, minutes, 3, evidence of Mr. Wolff.

own criticisms of the Labour Exchanges Department, while the WRC was unhappy about the exchanges' ineffectiveness in placing refugees in jobs.⁷²

The exchanges indeed worked at a disadvantage. They were trammelled by having to enforce and observe government regulations on the employment of refugees, and were thus forbidden to deal with unmarried men or men of military age. Their competitors, local committees as well as private firms and recruiting agencies, went ahead without bothering about such "red tape." But the WRC was not inclined to be understanding and grew impatient as reports came in from local committees about refugees who had repeatedly but unsuccessfully applied for work through local exchanges. Gladstone used one such complaint as a test case during a conference with the LGB on employment in July 1915, and the meeting decided that the WRC was not to consider itself obliged to act only through the exchanges, but to deal with special cases by its own "personal endeavours."⁷³

A long, critical discussion of the exchanges dominated the first meeting of the expanded Managing Committee, held the day after the conference. Bowerman, at first their defender, finally conceded that the exchanges had failed in refugee work. He, Elliott and Lyttelton were then

⁷²FO 371/2284/95306, minute by Eustace Percy, n.d. (mid-July 1915); MH 8/17/111, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 22 July 1915; GP 46081/278-79, Gladstone to Hatch, 29 July 1915.

⁷³MH 8/17/125, minutes of meeting at LGB, 28 July 1915.

delegated to consider more effective ways of finding jobs, especially by seeking trade union cooperation. Gladstone felt that this "very new departure" would be useful but would "not find favour with the Labour Exchange people who have always resented independent recruiting by Trade Unions."⁷⁴ The WRC's openly critical attitude stung the Board of Trade, for both Maudslay and Gladstone commented on the exchanges' "tolerably good record" during August.⁷⁵ The WRC's leaders had learned not to expect much from the exchanges and considered their officials inefficient and unimaginative. Theirs was the folk wisdom of the day. Though the exchanges ultimately proved their effectiveness, their early history illustrated how brave new systems do not always demonstrate overnight their superiority over custom and rule-of-thumb.

By the end of the first year of the war, the machinery of employment policy was substantially assembled. The emergence of a coherent policy on employment was slow and in many ways reflected the confusion of the English nation as it sought to discern what kind of war it faced. The Belgians were one of many new challenges and the responses of trade unionists, civil servants, politicians and members of the public were

⁷⁴MH 8/17/25, minutes of Managing Committee, WRC, 29 July 1915; GP 46081, 278-79, Gladstone to Hatch, 29 July 1915.

⁷⁵GP 46013/120-24, Maudslay to Gladstone, 13 August 1915; GP 46082/23, Gladstone to Hatch, 19 August 1915.

shaped by the wider fears and, occasionally, hopes which the war had induced. The conscious responses of interested parties themselves, however, at first affected only slightly the speed with which Belgians entered the British workforce. The first refugees to find work found it with little effort. Others were not so fortunate and needed aid in getting jobs.

CHAPTER VII

EMPLOYMENT: PART II

'Belgian Job-Stealers'

Despite the improvements wrought in the middle of 1915, employment policy continued to be marked by confusion and disagreement. An exasperated Eustace Percy minuted in October 1915:

I have not the slightest idea what is going on in the medley of separate organizations dealing with Belgian labour. We are in danger of a great deal of confusion, and the one thing certain is that we are disregarding the Belgian Government in the grossest way. . . .

At the same time his colleague Maurice de Bunsen noted that Grey had soon to explain to the Belgian government the various steps taken in England regarding Belgian labour, "as to the nature of which he is at present as ignorant as are the Belgian Government."¹ Their complaints led to a conference in November between representatives of the Foreign Office, LGB, Board of Trade and Ministry of Munitions. The Belgian government and "unofficial bodies of Belgians" were blamed for some of the confusion and Grey wrote to Hymans, the Belgian ambassador, explaining that the British departments dealing with employment wished to deal

¹FO 371/2284/55707, minutes by Percy and de Bunsen, 27 and 29 October 1915.

solely with the Belgian Official Committee.²

The proximate cause of British irritation was a socialist body, the Union des Comités, presided over by Emile Vandervelde, the Belgian socialist leader. The Union had annoyed the WRC by soliciting funds in towns where local refugee committees were badly in need of money. In addition it had tried to negotiate directly with the committees on matters of refugee welfare. As a result the conference directed Percy to instruct all local committees "not to correspond with any such Belgian busybodies."³ The Union had barged into the field of employment by forming its own Bureau pour la Protection du Travail Belge a l'Étranger, one of whose functions was to be the recruiting of labour within Belgium for work in France and England. The solidly bourgeois and aristocratic Belgian Official Committee viewed with extreme disfavour the activities of this upstart committee, run by a leading Belgian socialist, Louis de Brouckere. The Belgian labour movement was polarised between socialist and Catholic unions, and the BOC feared that to give its blessing to one organisation would offend others and hinder recruiting in Belgium from among workers in non-socialist unions.⁴

²FO 371/2284/165414, Grey to Hymans, 11 November 1915.

³FO 371/2284/165414, Percy, minutes of meeting on Belgian labour at LGB, 9 November 1915; MH 8/19/252 and 271, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 4 and 12 November 1915.

⁴FO 371/2284/165794, E. Carton de Wiart to W. Beveridge, 21 September 1915; Beveridge to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 15 November 1915.

The clandestine recruitment of workers from within occupied Belgium for the Allied war effort was one of the most unusual and little-known aspects of the Belgian diaspora. It was an adjunct to the more substantial operations of Allied recruiters among the refugees in Holland and is best described within that framework. The British government decided to begin shipping refugees from Holland late in 1914 mainly to ease the burden borne by the Dutch. Despite serious problems with transportation, refugees were brought to England at a steady rate from December 1914. By March 1916 over twelve thousand men and seventeen thousand women had been carried on specially chartered boats.⁵ When U-boat attacks forced the temporary cancellation of the service early in 1915, Willis of the LGB confided to Graeme Thomson of the Ministry of Transport: "To speak frankly we should be well content if things remained as they were in this respect. We feel that we have practically redeemed our pledge by taking a large number of refugees from Holland." However, the LGB bowed to the war economy's urgent need for armament workers particularly. But for self-interest the British record on Belgian refugees might have seemed much less generous. The shipment of refugees from Holland was essentially part of British economic policy rather than an exercise in philanthropy. Willis made this

⁵MH 8/7/98/202, Norfolk Committee report, VIII, July 1916.

clear:

From the public point of view we are only seeking to bring over "Belgian refugees," and you will of course regard this letter as confidential. We might get into difficulty in Holland if it were generally known that we had an organization for bringing over workmen whom we require for military purposes.⁶

Removing refugees from Holland was recruitment dressed in the garb of relief.⁷

Because of the discrepancy between stated and real aims, the work of removal was always conducted furtively. On the one hand, the Dutch government, which must have known what was going on, had to be kept officially ignorant and not placed in a position of having to enforce strict controls to safeguard its neutrality. Holland was the main stamping-ground for spies and agents of both sides during the war and the Germans displayed a close interest in the Government Commission set up under two officials of the Board of Trade, Reyntiens and Graddon, to act as the official British recruiting agency.⁸ Even deeper secrecy had to shroud the Commission's activities in getting skilled workers out of occupied Belgium with the help of its Belgian agents. No

⁶MT 23/349/T 5348/1915, Willis to Graeme Thomson, 5 March 1915.

⁷Maudslay made this brutally clear to a Belgian colleague late in 1915. MH 8/1/82/27, Maudslay to Robyns, 10 September 1915.

⁸MH 8/7/98/101, Norfolk Committee, report, VIII, July 1916; HO 45/10747/261921/318, memorandum by Ernest Maxse, British consul-general in Rotterdam, 5 January 1915; HO 45/10809/311425/43, Maxse to Arthur Balfour, 4 June 1917.

figures are available for the number who came, nor any details of the means used to help them escape across the electrified Dutch frontier.⁹ By August 1916, however, a Ministry of Munitions official was forced to conclude that the supply of vital skilled engineering workers from Belgium was "practically exhausted."¹⁰ The men recruited thereafter were presumably able-bodied but unskilled workers already in Holland.

The significance of Belgian refugees in the great programme of finding "substitutionary" labour for British workers who enlisted is not sufficiently recognised.

Substitution normally meant "dilution," the replacement of skilled men by less highly trained, though usually adequate workers, most of whom were women. Till 1916 the existence of a pool of unemployed skilled men was an important wind-fall to Allied governments, as they showed by devoting so much attention to snatching a small number of such workers from German hands. Skilled men were invaluable not only for their individual worth but also for training less skilled workers. "Dilution" usually meant placing seven or

⁹The work of British agents in Holland and Belgium is told in S. T. Felstead, Under the German Yoke; Henry Landau, All's Fair: The Story of the British Secret Service Behind the German Lines (New York, 1934); Marthe McKenna, Spies I Knew (London, 1933).

¹⁰Public Record Office, Ministry of Munitions files [hereafter referred to as MUN], MUN 5/78/327/104, W. A. Colegate, "Memorandum on the Importation of Foreign Labour for Munition Work", 28 August 1916. See also CAB 42/26/7, "Importation of Labour from Abroad", memorandum by Ministry of Munitions for War Cabinet, 7 December 1916.

eight unskilled workers under one skilled man. Even if there was a plentiful supply of unskilled workers, the expansion of munitions factories could not go ahead without a backbone of skilled men.¹¹ The Belgian skilled workers in Holland and Belgium had an importance far outweighing their numbers.

Joining Up

Not all the men who left Holland and Belgium were destined for England's arsenals. Many who escaped from Belgium--perhaps as many as forty thousand--did so to join the Belgian army and were joined by some of the refugees living in Holland.¹² The business of spiriting potential combatants out of a neutral country was always delicate and the Dutch on one occasion prevented a shipload of "refugees" from leaving.¹³ The volunteers--known to British officials by the code name "The Invisible Army"--were passed hurriedly from Tilbury to Folkestone and thence to France with

¹¹For the importance of skilled workers in munitions factories, see G. D. H. Cole, Trade Unionism and Munitions (Oxford, 1923), 131-32. Cole is very useful on how "dilution" and "substitution" schemes worked: 32-40, 83-114, 176-87. See also J. Hinton, Shop Stewards' Movement, 140-62.

¹²Adrien de Meeus, History of the Belgians, trans. G. Gordon (London, 1962), 352.

¹³FO 371/7912/67909, Sir A. Johnstone to Foreign Office, 6 November 1914. The Dutch action was merely a gesture and the ship was allowed to leave a day later: /68915, Johnstone to Grey, 7 November 1914.

the minimum of publicity. Security lay behind the haste, but so did the fact that there had been a "great leakage" from early batches which had gone through London.¹⁴ The disappearance en route of many men throws some doubt on their motives for volunteering. Perhaps the attraction of London proved too great after the boredom and austerity of life in Belgium and the Dutch camps, and before the grim drudgery of the front, or perhaps moral pressure had been used to induce reluctant men to agree to fight.

Many refugee males in England also found employment in their country's army. Some volunteered freely. Others were compelled to go, at first by strong pressures from the Belgian community, the WRC and private hosts and committees, and later by law. The same forces which pushed many British men to join the forces worked on Belgian men, only more strongly. Attacks on able-bodied "shirkers" began early. The WRC deflected some early critics by referring them to the Hatch Committee, which eventually recommended that no Belgian male of military age be given employment.¹⁵

¹⁴BEL 1/5, report by Leonard Franklin on the LGB's war refugee work at Folkestone, 4 May 1915. The decision to send the men direct from Tilbury to London was taken without informing the military authorities: a rare and interesting example of civilian officials--here the LGB, Board of Trade, police, the WRC and the Aliens Office--changing policy without consulting the military. The boot was normally on the other foot.

¹⁵GP 46078/286-87, Violet Markham to Gladstone, 19 October 1915, and /300, Gladstone to Markham, 20 October 1915.

Throughout 1915 questions were asked in parliament of spokesmen for various government departments. All received the stock answer that military service for refugees was a matter for the Belgian authorities and the refugees themselves.¹⁶

At first the Belgian authorities were too busy re-organising their battered army and establishing themselves at Le Havre to bother about rounding up stray eligible men. But the LGB, responding to a widespread sentiment that "such persons should not be kept here in idleness but. . . . ought to be serving their country in a military capacity," approached the Foreign Office late in October 1914. Lalaing was contacted and replied merely that his government would "appeal" to men between eighteen and thirty years and would appreciate British help in the matter. More concretely, responsibility for Belgian military matters within Britain was vested in the LGB and British military authorities in cooperation with the Belgian military authorities. Like so many other hurried decisions taken at that time, this was little more than a vague gesture in the "right" direction.¹⁷

¹⁶PD, (Commons), 8 February 1915, 5th ser., 69, col. 228, question by Will Thorne and answer by Herbert Samuel; 17 February 1915, col. 1116, question by Vernon Kellaway and answer by J. M. Robertson (parliamentary secretary, Board of Trade); 19 October 1915, 64, col. 1595, question by Thorne and answer by H. Tennant, under secretary for war.

¹⁷FO 369/671/61254, H. C. Monro to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 19 October 1914; /63931, Lalaing to Grey, 26 October 1914; Crowe to secretary, LGB,

The British authorities initially were fully engrossed in dealing with thousands of wounded British soldiers and exerted no direct pressure on young eligible males.¹⁸ But strong indirect and informal tactics, especially the denial of jobs and even accommodation to eligible men, were used.¹⁹ The WRC willingly tried to persuade and coerce men to enlist, presumably because the presence of healthy civilian males diminished public sympathy for the refugees, and more soldiers meant fewer refugees and fewer headaches over allocation.

Many Belgian men were not eager to enlist. Recruiting offices were established at the Rink, the Alexandra Palace and Earl's Court. When eighty-five men passed before the recruiting officer at the Rink on 31 October 1914 and only sixteen volunteered, the rest were given two weeks to "think it over."²⁰ The implied threat was sheer bluff, as no clear policy had been laid down and the Belgian army was

31 October 1914. For a coincident judgement on Asquithian early wartime policies, see A. Marwick, The Deluge, 94.

¹⁸PD, (Commons), 1 March 1915, 5th ser., 70, col. 581, Samuel in answer to question. There were about eighteen thousand in England in March 1915.

¹⁹FO 371/1913/75608, minute by R. Paget on letter from Belgian refugee in Holland charging that young Belgian men in Britain were being forced to enlist, 28 November 1914.

²⁰GP 46013/11, Maudslay to Gladstone, 31 October 1914.

then in no condition to train and equip recruits.²¹

However, the net closed inexorably thereafter. The Belgian government began by asking the British police to arrest deserters, and although the British steadfastly refused to do this, the Home Office agreed to deport malingerers under the Aliens Restriction Order, but only "if necessary." The Army Council shared this reluctance, believing intervention by the military authorities was "unnecessary and undesirable."²² Few men were actually deported, but the threat of deportation greatly strengthened the hand of recruiters.

There matters stood still till 1 March 1915, when the Belgian government decreed that all males between eighteen and twenty-five must enrol for enlistment. Men

²¹BEL 1/3, report of conference at LGB regarding convalescent depots for wounded Belgian soldiers, 25 November 1914; FO 369/671/61254, minute by R. Paget, 20 October 1914; FO 371/2288/13870, minute by Sir E. Davidson, 10 February 1915. The Belgian army at the outbreak of war mustered about one hundred thousand men. By January 1915, the War Office estimated its strength at only fifty thousand men and Sir John French was trying to have it amalgamated with the British army. King Albert refused because "the army was practically the only remaining emblem of Belgian nationality." CAB 42/1/10, memorandum by War Office for Committee of Imperial Defence, 6 January 1915; and /16, notes by the secretary to the War Council, 13 January 1915.

²²FO 371/1910/72376, Lalaing to Grey, 16 November 1914; /80902, E. Troup (Home Office) to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 9 December 1914.

refusing to enlist were to be deported.²³ The law, by extending Belgium's system of selective conscription at a time when no compulsion applied to British males, subdued popular resentment against male refugees. Resentment expressed throughout 1915 was local and largely industrial in character. English trade unionists, especially dockers and miners, accepted Belgian workers warily and were quick to protest where they thought Belgians were being paid less --and in one case more--than standard rates or were a threat to works safety because of their ignorance of English, an especially grave problem in mines.²⁴ The WRC moved quickly whenever it heard of trouble, removing labourers from Sandbach, Cheshire, after a strike by local workmen and refusing to renew a grant to the Shrewsbury committee until the committee was able to disprove allegations that local employers were paying sweated rates to refugees.²⁵ Prompt

²³BEL 1/3, report of conference on convalescent and reformed Belgian soldiers held at LGB, 17 March 1915.

²⁴WNC 3/1/52, Ben Tillet (secretary of Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers Union) to J. Middleton, 7 January 1915; "F.S." to Arthur Henderson, 7 January 1915; MH 8/18/5, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 4 August 1915, discussion re labour troubles at High Wycombe and Llandebie. J. V. Morgan, The War and Wales, 152-53, alleged that miners in one Welsh colliery demanded the dismissal of Belgian miners but were rebuffed by the owners. The case does not figure in WRC records. By March 1915, 140 Belgian miners were working in English collieries and one hundred in Welsh mines. In the former, they worked below ground; in the latter, most worked on the surface. They were reported to be doing well: PP, Report of the Departmental Committee appointed to inquire into the Conditions Prevailing in the Coal Mining Industry Due to the War, Minutes of Evidence, Cd. 8009, 1915, questions 82-87, 372-74, 377-80, 430, 800-02.

²⁵MH 8/16, 82, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee,

action solved most problems and local grievances were not reported in the national press.

Anti-Belgian Feeling

The situation changed markedly in 1916. Beginning late in 1915, a growing storm over enlistment in England led to the first Military Service Act in January 1916. Now all unmarried men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one were liable to conscription. Suddenly, Belgian males were better off than their British counterparts, and for the next five months anti-Belgian resentment slowly boiled. The WRC became alarmed at "serious and justifiable dissatisfaction" at the way some Belgian men were taking jobs vacated by British men called to the colours or were starting small businesses which competed with British firms crippled by the loss of workers.²⁶

The feeling against the Belgians was only part of a much wider anti-aliens campaign, directed particularly at the Jewish immigrant community. Most immigrant Jews were Russian citizens and many had fled Tzarist conscription laws. They showed little stomach for fighting in the armies of Russia or any of its allies, though a few did return to enlist with the Russian army. The Belgians were in some measure the victims of a long-established anti-alien tradition and the anti-Belgian agitation in 1916 was

12 May 1915; MH 8/21/3 and 26, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 6 and 13 January 1916.

²⁶WRC I, 49-50.

derivative, using stereotypes habitually applied to the poor Jews of London. The Yellow Press indiscriminately assailed both Jews and Belgians. The Daily Sketch began the attack on Belgians with an article on 17 May 1916 headlined "Aliens Stealing British Jobs," the Daily Express waded in with several articles about "Belgian Job-Stealers," and the Daily Mail, shouting "Fight or Go," exulted on 1 July at "consternation among the Alien Job-Snatchers" of the East End when the government announced that all eligible allied aliens must join the British army or be deported.²⁷

The press campaign seriously alarmed the WRC for it threatened to confuse the Belgian refugees with the unpopular Jews in the public mind. The Committee's alarm was increased when anti-Belgian rioting erupted in the London suburb of Fulham late in May, just after the opening of the press offensive. The riots are the only recorded instance of mob violence against refugees and the information about them is scanty. A COS report to Aldwych spoke simply of "street riots on two days." They may have been mere pub brawls.²⁸ But poisonous letters to Aldwych from anonymous Fulham residents made clear the depth of local hostility. "A Fulham Tradesman" and "a ratepayer who has Sons and Husbands and Brothers all fighting and their Business Ruined" both pointed to conscription as the root cause of local

²⁷Daily Sketch, 17 May 1916; Daily Express, 3 June 1916; Daily Mail, 1 July 1916.

²⁸BEL 1/6, report of H. A. Leggett, 30 May 1916.

bitterness. Not only were Belgian men at liberty while British men of the same age were in the army, but the relief scales enjoyed by refugees were now actually higher than the meagre official allowances to the families of British soldiers.²⁹

Though the WRC moved to investigate and remedy the sources of annoyance in Fulham, it seemed at first helpless to respond to the inflammatory press attacks. The Committee now paid for neglect of the popular press and its first public reply was published not in the relevant newspapers but in the unoffending Times.³⁰ However, the Managing Committee demanded the right of reply to a Daily Express article of 3 June, called "'Hurt In Our Dignity.' Belgian Job-Stealers To Be Called Up," and on 10 June the Express published the Committee's refutation under the heading "Belgians Clamour For War Work. Refugees Who Are Not 'Job-Stealers'." The writer argued that the refugees were saving

²⁹MH 8/6/98/63, "A Fulham Tradesman" to W. Hayes Fisher, parliamentary secretary, LGB, and "a ratepayer who has Sons and Husbands and Brothers all fighting and their Business Ruined" to National Food Fund, both 23 May 1916; Deiniol, Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 31 May 1916. It is interesting that both letters came from small tradesmen. Anti-semitism among the German lower middle classes has been thoroughly studied. Less attention has been paid to xenophobia among the same classes in Britain. British scholars' obsession with the war's impact on workers and the poor has deflected attention from this important group. Significantly, the Daily Mail "Fight or Go" article laid special stress on the Jewish artisans and small manufacturers--tailors and bootmakers--who were doing well out of the war.

³⁰The Times, 27 May 1916, "Belgians and English Workshops. Reply to Prejudicial Statements".

Britain millions of pounds by supporting themselves and by contributing usefully to the war effort.³¹ Such efforts availed little and Samuel announced under questioning in Parliament on 1 June that the government regarded the enlistment of allied aliens in the Forces as a matter of great importance.³²

Though it is clear that the aliens in question were Jewish, the WRC followed the debate closely. The press campaign had linked together the fortunes of Belgians and all other aliens and the WRC was desperately anxious to disassociate the Belgians from the wider hostility. Samuel's hint that the government was prepared to throw a sop to the anti-aliens came just as the WRC moved in the same direction. Meeting on 26 May to consider the Fulham riots, the Managing Committee discussed a letter Gladstone had drafted to the Belgian ambassador, Hymans, and on 30 May Maudslay had "an interchange of views" on the riots with Hymans.³³ The Committee presumably recommended to the ambassador that Belgian conscription laws be made as stringent as the new English Military Service Act. Hymans travelled to Le Havre, and as a result of his visit the

³¹Daily Express, 10 June 1916; MH 8/23/62, minutes of Managing Committee, WRC, 16 June 1916.

³²MH 8/23/44, clipping of report on debate on aliens and conscription, The Times, 2 June 1916.

³³MH 8/23/18, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 26 May 1916; MH 8/6/98/63, Gladstone to Hymans, 26 May 1916; Maudslay to Gladstone, 20 May 1916.

Belgian government on 21 July 1916 extended conscription to all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one: exactly the terms of the English Act.³⁴ Although the Belgian army needed men, the Arrête Loi Militaire of July 1916 seems to have been a political gesture rather than an act of military necessity.³⁵ Militarily, the Loi Militaire was in fact probably more trouble than it was worth. It applied to the fewer than one million Belgians living outside occupied Belgium. Many of the eligible males had already volunteered or been conscripted. Military tribunals on the English model had to be set up to deal with the residue in England and most of the candidates were rejected on the grounds of their health or their employment on essential war work. Haggling over this last category of men became the pattern for the rest of the war. On the one hand, the Belgian army, though in a quiet sector of the front and sheltered by the inundations of the Yser, suffered steady attrition from bombardment, gas attacks and disease and wished to rebuild itself after the devastating losses of

³⁴ MH 8/24/89, cutting from L'Independance Belge, 23 August 1916.

³⁵ It was a gesture naturally unpopular with exiled Belgians, and Hymans was angry and embarrassed when the WRC innocently made public his responsibility in its first annual report. GP 46013/216, Maudslay to Gladstone, 28 November 1916. The Belgian government had been reluctant to extend conscription for fear that the German authorities in Belgium would take reprisals and accelerate the programme which had begun in May 1916 of forcibly deporting Belgian workers to Germany.

1914 in readiness for the reconquest of Belgium. On the other hand, the factories supplying the armies needed labour.

The British government laid down guidelines prohibiting the employment of men eligible for armed service. But no policy governed the recruitment of refugees in Holland, while problems arose over the status of men not liable for service under earlier regulations who became eligible under the two Military Laws of March 1915 and July 1916. The Belgian Government, after the passage of the first law, pledged that conscription would not apply to skilled workmen employed in England.³⁶ Anxious employers badgered government departments with whom they had contracts and the departments contacted the Foreign Office.³⁷ Bargaining became more direct with the creation of the Ministry of Munitions in July 1915, and this ministry became the de facto authority on matters relating to employment and military service for a large proportion of the refugee workforce. After the passing of the July 1916 Loi Militaire it sternly reminded employers and factory managers that

. . . it is essential that no Belgian subject fit for service in the Army should be retained upon munitions work in this country unless he can be shown to be

³⁶FO 371/2284/36441, Villiers to Grey, 26 March 1915.

³⁷FO 371/2284/31485, Willis (LGB) to under secretary of state Foreign Office, 17 March 1915; /78446, O. Murray (Admiralty) to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 15 June 1915.

genuinely indispensable to the output of munitions.³⁸

But in practice the Ministry showed no great generosity towards the needs of the Belgian army.³⁹ Other departments similarly kept a firm grip on refugees in their employment, such as men of the Belgian mercantile marine now working for the Admiralty.⁴⁰ The British were very successful in keeping useful refugees, partly because of the weak and dependent position of the Belgian government and partly because the Belgian army after 1914 was never bled as badly as the British and French armies.⁴¹

The French were more serious rivals, however, than the Belgian army. Once again the realisation that the war would be long and labour-hungry wrought a reversal of attitudes. In 1914 the British tried to persuade a reluctant French government to take refugees who could be offered jobs by French companies.⁴² But early in 1915

³⁸MUN 5/78/327/101, "Note on the position of Belgian Munition Workers", n.d. (probably late 1916).

³⁹See, for example, MUN 5/78/327/23, memorandum of interview between Baron de Broqueville and J. Spicer (Ministry of Munitions), 27 June 1916.

⁴⁰MT 23/674/T 97299/1916, minutes, unsigned, 3 and 9 October 1916.

⁴¹The law as passed and the law as applied were quite different. The Belgian army was slow to call up many newly eligible men. MH 8/25/108, press cuttings, Daily Mail: "Lancashire" to editor, 6 November 1916; reply by E. Carton de Wiart, Belgian Official Committee, 9 November 1916.

⁴²FO 371/1912/67361, correspondence between French and British governments, 14 October to 14 December 1914.

something of a free-for-all developed between English and French recruiting agents. The latter proved adroit in poaching skilled Belgian workers from British armaments firms as the men's first short term contracts expired.⁴³ British officials also complained that French agents were secretly hiring refugees in Holland, luring them with impossibly attractive offers. To add insult to injury, the men were getting free passages to England paid for by the Board of Trade, by feigning interest in working in England, and then were going straight on to France.⁴⁴ A policy of coordination, first suggested by the Hatch Commission,⁴⁵ seemed sensible, but the Board was initially unenthusiastic. The British had been "getting the lion's share" of the refugees in Holland and would now be expected to share more of the windfall with France, which could offer many refugees

⁴³FO 371/2284/36172, N. Cubitt, Army Council, to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 27 March 1915. The Army Council wished to stop the practice on grounds of security: foreign workers employed in munitions factories should not be allowed to leave the country till the war was over. The Board of Trade detained some of the men for a time at Folkestone, but soon realised it could not keep highly skilled foreign workers in England against their will. BEL 1/5, report of Folkestone committee, 4 May 1915.

⁴⁴FO 371/2284/74007, W. R. Hearn, British consul-general in Paris, to Grey, 4 June 1915. However, Belgian officials complained that the British Commission in Holland was guilty of the same offence. Workers were led to expect wages and conditions better than prevailed in Holland, only to find they could not get jobs, were paid lower wages, or could not get accommodation for themselves and their families. MH 8/7/98/54, memorandum by Eugene Venesoins, Belgian consul (posting unknown), n.d. (early May 1916).

⁴⁵FO 371/2284/25603, Rey, Board of Trade, to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 4 March 1915. The

the added inducements of a common language and a common culture.⁴⁶ The Belgian government was, as always, jealous of any move which might weaken its control over its subjects and erode their attachment to Belgium. Its sights set on a massive programme of postwar reconstruction, it was afraid that Belgians would "acclimatize" to France and tried to stipulate that agricultural workers requested by France should be settled in colonies, to "be easy to collect again."⁴⁷ The policy worked out by the Board of Trade and the French Ministère du Travail between April and July 1915 took little account of their feeble client's wishes.⁴⁸ By the end of the war there were many more Belgians in France than in England. It seems probable, however, that most of those who had gone there from England and Holland went at the behest of the Belgian administration in Le Havre and worked and lived in north-west France in the zone

Commission's proposal dealt only with the exchange of Belgian workers between France and England. The French were more interested in the refugees in Holland. FO 371/2284/46219, Delcassé to Lord Bertie, 14 April 1915.

⁴⁶FO 371/2284/46219, minute by Percy, 19 April 1915.

⁴⁷FO 371/2284/82408, minute by Percy, 23 June 1915; MH 8/7/98/54, memorandum by Venesoins.

⁴⁸One junior Foreign Office official deplored the lack of consultation with the Belgian government and protested that the British were "treating Belgian subjects rather like contract labourers." FO 371/2284/40144, minute by R. Sperling, 7 April 1915. He was ignored. The lack of consultation worked both ways however, The Belgian government occasionally called Belgian workers to France without giving proper notice to British authorities and the WRC. WRC II, 16.

immediately behind the Belgian sector of the front. The region became a "little Belgium" in France.⁴⁹

Belgian Industrial Enclaves

There was no comparable zone of Belgian settlement and industry in England, but colonies grew around a number of factories entirely run and staffed by Belgians. Several factors favoured this growth of Belgian industrial centres in Britain. First, the refugee community included all the human talent required: managers, directors, engineers, accountants and skilled technicians.⁵⁰ Some firms despatched key personnel to England during the collapse of Belgium and were quickly able to reassemble their staffs when the time was ripe. Both the largest private munitions firms, Pelabon at Richmond and Kryn and Lahy at Letchworth, started this way. Some engineer/entrepreneurs were no strangers to the task of beginning an enterprise in a foreign country. The founder of one firm spent most of 1915 setting up a blast-furnace in Spain. The invasion of Belgium had been a hard school, in which men with initiative and a flair for improvisation came into their own. Charles Pelabon, for example, took over a German-run factory

⁴⁹See chapter V, footnote 144. A. Chatelle, L'effort belge en France pendant la guerre, is the best account of the Belgian colony in France.

⁵⁰Except where otherwise stated, the following information is based on A. Varlez, Les belges en exil, 250-85. A subsidiary source is J. Wallon, Un Cité belge, passim, which deals mainly with the Pelabon factory and colony at Richmond.

in Antwerp during the siege, turned it to armaments production, kept it running till the last hours before the city's surrender, shifted operations to Zeebrugge (only to be thwarted by the fall of the town within two days), crossed to England, at once found a small workshop, began production again and delivered his first shells to the Belgian army by the beginning of November.

The special needs of the Belgian army were the second inducement to Belgian industry in exile, as Belgian and British weapons were of different calibre. The requirements of the tiny Belgian army were mainly supplied, however, by its own arsenal in Le Havre, and only the Pelabon works, factories in Birmingham and Colnbrock, and the small London Screw Company depended on Belgian orders, and then not exclusively.⁵¹ Production for the omnivorous British army naturally generated far more activity. The established mechanisms of British armaments supply broke down badly in 1914, the failure ultimately helping to bring about the coalition government of May 1915 and the creation shortly afterwards of the giant of wartime departments, the Ministry

⁵¹MUN 5/78/327/12, "Note on difficulties which have arisen in regard to Belgian Labour", J. G. Spicer, liaison officer between Ministry of Munitions and Belgian government, 19 October 1917. The Birmingham and Colnbrook factories were run by the Belgian government. HO 45/10809/311425, J. Sealy Clarke to J. Moylan, 29 December 1917.

of Munitions, under the dynamic Lloyd George.⁵² Although the huge British arms firms expanded their production at break-neck speed, there was ample room for smaller rivals and an urgent need for firms producing vital components. Thus, the Société Belge de Mécanique made casing for shrapnel and another firm manufactured automotive parts.

Both doctrine and experience approved the establishment of Belgian factories. To English observers, they were pleasing symbols of Belgian self-help. By providing an economic basis for the growth of "natural" Belgian communities, they provided an ideal answer to the problems of the WRC and to the worries of other groups about the anomic effects of exile.⁵³ Furthermore, the experience of large British employers of refugee labour suggested that Belgians worked better when under their own foremen and following their familiar workshop practices. Conversely, segregation removed a source of friction between Belgians and British trade unionists firmly wedded to their own methods.⁵⁴

But there were severe hindrances to the growth of Belgian industry. Finance was a problem. The sources of Belgian refugee capital formation are obscure. In some cases, consortia of individuals pooled their private

⁵²P. Rowland, Lloyd George, 301-13.

⁵³1920 Report, 13-14. Significantly, the Hatch Commission was the first British body to urge the establishment of special Belgian factories.

⁵⁴FO 371/2284/180492, David Lloyd George to Emile Vandervelde, 22 November 1915; anon., Condition of the Belgian Workmen, 8.

resources and achieved a modest success. The vast, lucrative empire in the Congo and Belgian investments in countries such as Italy and Britain itself were sources of capital and credit. Several Belgian banks transferred their operations to London and provided a vital underpinning to the industrialists' ventures.⁵⁵ Still, Belgian entrepreneurs were ill-placed in the scramble for capital. Likewise, lacking existing plant which could be readily adapted to war-time production, they had to scrounge factory space and machinery wherever they could get them. Though they often performed superb feats of improvisation, several thriving small concerns could not expand for lack of space. Finally, the big British firms skimmed the cream of skilled unemployed Belgian workers in England. Vickers alone hired three thousand refugees, mostly skilled men. The two Belgian firms which started when there was an abundant supply of skilled labour far outstripped other Belgian private enterprises.⁵⁶

They themselves were dwarfed, however, by the National Projectile factory at Birtley, County Durham.

⁵⁵A. Varlez, Les belges en exil, 200-01; Z. A. B. Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War (London, 1971), 27. Several Belgian organisations gave advice and aid to Belgian businessmen. War Refugees Committee, Information of Interest for Belgian Refugees (London, 1915), 3-4 and 6.

⁵⁶MH 8/27/167, "Statement showing number of Belgian refugees employed in various Belgian factories in and around London", 3 February 1917. Pelabon: 2020 workers; Kryn and Lahy: 1675; General Stores and Munitions Company: 450; Vandenplas Successors: 300.

Complex economic and political factors shaped the history of the Birtley works. In July 1915, against a background of continuing crisis in armaments production, Lloyd George initiated a programme of national projectile factories. Unlike the national shell factories his ministry was beginning to build, these were to be built and managed by private enterprise under government supervision and with government grants.⁵⁷ At this point three Belgian entrepreneurs offered to supply all the labour for a munitions factory to be built by the government. They in return would manage the plant. Instead, the Ministry saw them as the answer to the problem of how to staff a projectile factory which Armstrong Whitworth had agreed to build at Birtley. The men became employees of Armstrong and began work.⁵⁸

Their reach exceeded their grasp, however. The project foundered on the problem of an inadequate supply of skilled labour. Above it, it became apparent that the Anglo-French agreement on the sharing of refugee labour had not succeeded and some hard bargaining ensued between officials of the Ministry of Munitions and the French Minister of Munitions, Albert Thomas, before the British won the "lion's share" of the traffic and the way was cleared for Birtley.⁵⁹ Even so, Holland and occupied Belgium could

⁵⁷P. Rowland, Lloyd George, 319.

⁵⁸MUN 5/78/327/20, draft account of negotiations for creation of the Birtley factory, n.d. (1917).

⁵⁹MUN 5/78/327/22, "Report of a visit to Paris and Le Havre in connection with Belgian Labour", G. Spicer,

not provide enough skilled men and so the Ministry turned to the only sure source of supply--the Belgian army. Britain had been withdrawing skilled men from the forces since the middle of 1915 and the Belgian government was persuaded to follow suit. After several months of negotiation an agreement was reached in February 1916. The deal represented a remarkable gesture of solidarity by the Belgian government, which seems to have gained few concrete advantages from the arrangement. The British provided the labour force and managerial staff but had no stake in the factory's output. The original Belgian managers were sacked. Armstrong Whitworth were to control the cartridge factory at Birtley--the adjacent Belgian factory would produce only shells--and were given a handshake which they thought was not golden enough. Though aggrieved at being ousted from the shell factory, they abided reluctantly by an undertaking to help and advise the new Belgian managers.⁶⁰

The Riot at Birtley

The Birtley scheme proved productive of grievances. Though it eventually grew to calm maturity, its first eighteen months were marred by discontent among the workers.

December 1915; and "Report on second visit to Paris and Le Havre, regarding Belgian labour", 21 December 1915.

⁶⁰MUN 4/473/1646, "Instructions to Major G. E. Morgars upon his appointment as Representative of the Minister of Munitions at the Birtley National Projectile Factory", n.d. (ca. February 1916); MUN 5/78/327/22, memoranda of conferences at Ministry of Munitions, 31 December 1915, 11 and 31 January, 8 and 9 February 1916,

Throughout 1916 discord and bitterness slowly festered, to erupt savagely on the night of 21 December, when 2,000 men of the total workforce of 4,000 attacked a building housing a small force of Belgian gendarmes. When one of the gendarmes' officers panicked and inadvertently shot a young boy in the leg, a murderous situation was avoided only by the timely arrival of English police and the effective intervention of a respected English official, Byron Dolphin. The riot caught British officials by surprise and the Ministry appointed a committee of inquiry which hurried to Elisabethville--the official name of the ninety-five-acre Belgian enclave--to uncover the causes of unrest.⁶¹

Accommodation, recreation and discipline were the three main sources of grievance at Birtley. Because there were no lodgings available in the neighbourhood, the workers had to be quartered on the site. But the erection of huts and cottages lagged and skilled workers arriving late in 1915 were angered to find they had to help build huts and perform

by G. Spicer; "Note of interview with Mr. Kidd, Messrs. Armstrong's representative at Birtley", 12 January 1916. Armstrong were at first happy to wash their hands of Belgian labour, fearing opposition among their skilled workers to "dilution" by unskilled Belgians; they changed their mind on finding that their workers accepted dilution. They also doubted the efficiency of Belgian management. Addison, Lloyd George's successor at the ministry, suspected Armstrong of obstruction. Christopher Addison, Four and a Half Years (London, 1934), 1:251.

⁶¹MUN 4/2099/CRV/8/017, "Report on the disturbance at Birtley on December 21st., 1916", 18 January 1917; minutes of evidence taken at Birtley by commission of inquiry [hereafter referred to as inquiry, minutes], 29 and 30 December 1916. Also /CRV/B/013, "Birtley Belgian Village:

unskilled labour. The early arrivals had to sleep on hay in unheated sheds during the middle of the winter of 1915-16.⁶² Living quarters improved markedly after the Ministry extracted increased subsidies from a reluctant Treasury and accelerated construction.⁶³ But the authorities failed to provide enough badly needed recreational halls before the winter of 1916 set in. Elisabethville in December was a cold, cheerless camp in a bleak, damp valley: "les steppes d'Elisabethville."⁶⁴

A stern discipline added to the general cheerlessness. Under British law, soldiers recalled to munitions work reverted to civilian status. Under Belgian law, they remained soldiers, subject to military discipline. The discrepancy between their lot and that of English soldiers irked many of the men, especially the large number who for a time had virtually reverted to civilian life as reformés,

Revolt of Belgian Workers": miscellaneous minutes, memoranda and letters, December 1916 and January 1917.

⁶²MUN 5/78/327/30, draft account; G. Spicer, "Report of visit to Birtley on December 15th, 1915", 1, n.d.

⁶³T 132/1, T. Heath to secretary, Ministry of Munitions, 24 November 1915; John Bradbury to secretary, Ministry of Munitions, 4 January 1916.

⁶⁴Camille Fabry, Nos "Hors-Combats" à Elisabethville-Birtley (Seraing-en-Meuse, 1919), 20. It should be noted that the huts were well-built: "among the most compact and comfortable houses I have ever seen," according to one man who lived in them after the war. Harry Letch, Gleanings about Birtley (Durham (?) 1970). The village was well-planned, and one observer claimed it was laid out "very largely on 'Garden City' lines." Elliott Dodds, "The Story of Elisabethville"[sic] . The World's Work (June 1918), 51-57.

soldiers invalidated out of the army, before finding themselves once more clamped under military law. The freedom enjoyed by the minority of civilian refugees in the factory also invited invidious comparisons.⁶⁵ British officials pressed the Belgian government to declare the men civilians but were refused. Changing the status of soldiers in England would adversely affect morale at the important Le Havre arsenal and, indirectly, morale at the front. The men at Birtley were already privileged in receiving standard English wages, whereas the Le Havre workers received the meagre Belgian army allowance. The Catholic government of Baron de Broqueville saw the proposal as something of a Trojan horse, by which trade unionist principles would be smuggled into the armed forces.⁶⁶

⁶⁵In January 1917, the workforce at Birtley was 476 civilians and 3,521 soldiers, of whom 1,140 had been withdrawn from the front and 2,381 were réformés. MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, report on disturbances, 2-3. Reformés officially remained soldiers after a Decree passed by the Ministry of War in November 1914. The Decree was based on the belief that Belgian invalids would be doubly disadvantaged in the search for jobs as long as their country remained occupied. The law was thus intended as a welfare measure, but with the changed economic climate became an irritant to the less badly injured men. Edward T. Devine and L. Brandt, Disabled Soldiers and Sailors (London, 1919), 263, 427-28; H. Campbell, Belgian Soldiers at home in the United Kingdom (London, 1917), 45. The government's policy was to ship as many reformés as possible to France and to collect others in retraining centres. Maurice des Ombiaux, Un Royaume en exil (Paris, 1917), 94; BEL 1/3, reports of conferences on convalescent soldiers held at LGB, 25 November 1914 and 17 March 1915. Late in 1915 almost all soldiers leaving hospitals in England and France were virtually conscripted to Birtley. MUN 5/78/327/20, draft account.

⁶⁶MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/267, Charles de Broqueville to Christopher Addison, Minister of Munitions, 25 January 1917,

The fear of socialism pervaded the responses of both British and Belgian officials to events at Birtley, though they responded differently. The strike came against a background of growing industrial strife on the Tyne and elsewhere.⁶⁷ The authorities' prompt reaction to the Birtley riot--every attempt was made to avoid calling in the army, though troops of the Tyne garrison were placed on alert--stemmed from a fear that Birtley might set the spark to a general conflagration in munitions factories throughout the country and particularly in the north-east.⁶⁸ The commission of inquiry sought to find if socialist agitation lay behind the outbreak.⁶⁹

In fact, anti-socialism helped to cause the riot. About six weeks earlier, Emile Vandervelde and Charles Duncan, an M.P. who was also honorary secretary of the Workers' Union, with which all trade unionists at Birtley were affiliated, addressed a meeting at the plant. They

and report to Addison by commission of inquiry on meeting with de Broqueville at Le Havre, 27 February 1917; /017, unsigned memorandum, n.d. (early 1917).

⁶⁷J. Hinton, Shop Stewards' Movement, 174-77, 186-87, 193-95.

⁶⁸MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, inquiry, minutes, 32, evidence of Maurice Gibb, representative of Ministry of Munitions, Birtley, and General R. A. Montgomery, commander of Tyne garrison; /013, Spicer to R. V. Vernon, 23 December 1916: "British people would never tolerate Belgian work enforced at the point of a bayonet."

⁶⁹MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, inquiry, minutes, 25, 79, 85, questions by E. A. M. Innes, Q.C., president of commission.

protested against munitions workers being treated as soldiers; hence the commission felt that "this meeting had a mischievous influence on the peace of the colony."⁷⁰ The meeting certainly led to an upsurge of trade union activity at Birtley and had been called to begin a membership drive. The drive coincided with and may have contributed to an ugly scene on 14 November, which the authorities strangely chose to ignore, when five hundred men attacked the gendarmes.⁷¹ In the meantime, in response to the "socialist" challenge, Commandant Gaston Blaise, head of the Belgian munitions programme, hurried to Birtley. Instead of placating the men and removing the restrictions which Vandervelde had warned him were causing serious discontent, Blaise ordered an immediate tightening of discipline.⁷² This proved a prescription for disaster. The riot--which began over a trivial matter, the imprisonment of a soldier who wore a civilian cap when parading before an officer to request leave--⁷³ was the

⁷⁰ MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, report on disturbance, 6-7.

⁷¹ C. Fabry, "Hors-Combat", 62-64; MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, inquiry, minutes 2-3, evidence of W. G. Morant, chief constable of Durham. W. T. Kelly, secretary of the Workers' Union, warned the Ministry of Munitions in December that serious trouble was brewing unless the "reign of terror" was stopped. MUN 5/78/327/21, Kelly to secretary, Ministry of Munitions, 7 December 1916.

⁷² MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/013, Spicer to Villiers, n.d. (January 1917); MUN 5/78/327/14, Spicer, "Note of an Interview with Père Delouche on Wednesday 14th February" (1917); HO 45/10737/261921/676, Spicer to Movlan, 5 December 1916.

⁷³ MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, report on disturbances. The wearing of uniform had become a grievance for two reasons. First, partly as a result of Blaise's visit, men were forced

outcome of the visit. Membership in the Workers' Union shot up after the riot. Though the Union posed very little real threat, the Belgian authorities themselves created what they strove to destroy.⁷⁴

The equation of socialism with sedition underlay both governments' response to the riot. The Belgian government's attitude was clear and consistent: the riot was a "révolte" and the English refusal to take immediate counter-

to wear uniforms on the job. They complained the uniforms, which were expensive--the men had to buy them--got dirty. Second, as a result of a request from the chief constable, and in expectation of licensed premises being established in Birtley, the Chef du Village declared most pubs in the area out of bounds. To ensure observance, the men were to wear uniforms whenever outside the village. The uniform thus became the symbol of all the restrictions and frustrations of life in Elisabethville. MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, report on disturbances, inquiry, minutes, 16-17, evidence of Joseph Stassen; HO 45/10737/261921/685, Morant to under secretary of state, Home Office, 19 November 1916.

⁷⁴C. Fabry, "Hors-Combat," 63; MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, inquiry, minutes, 98, evidence of Verhaert, 29 December 1916. Birtley became the strongest Belgian trade union branch in the United Kingdom, with three thousand members. Paul Thompson rightly points out that the "revolt on the Clyde" has blurred for historians the reality that many of the trade unions which were most successful during the war were conservative and limited in their ideals and strategies. He cites the Workers' Union as a prime example. It grew to be the second largest British trade union by 1918 and had enjoyed great success among unskilled and semiskilled workers; yet the philosophy of its leadership was "scarcely distinguishable from that of conservative businessmen." The Edwardians (London, 1975), 236. His judgement is confirmed by the record of the Union at Birtley. When the authorities decided to deport the president and secretary of the Birtley branch--for allegedly encouraging workers to keep down production--the Workers' Union secretary connived to the extent of having the men sacked from their posts at a stormy meeting. The men were not, however, deported. MUN 5/78/32, "Memorandum regarding the position of workmen Bauwens and d'Emal at Birtley", Spicer, September 1917; Spicer to Moylan, 21 October 1917; C. Fabry, "Hors-Combat," 63.

measures represented a "veritable capitulation."⁷⁵ The Catholic regime was struggling at this stage to keep control of the war effort firmly in its own hands and tended to see Vandervelde's malign influence everywhere.⁷⁶ The Belgian socialist movement before the war had been strongly antimilitarist, so there were superficial grounds for its nervousness. But in fact Belgian socialists like Vandervelde and Camille Huysmans were leaders in the great European socialist repudiation of noninvolvement in the war and remained staunchly anti-German throughout the war.⁷⁷

The English official response was more subtle. Instead of blaming Belgian socialist agitators, the English authorities tended to see Belgian workers as originally innocent of socialism until contaminated by contact with English trade unionism. The notion that Belgians were naturally docile workers, though perhaps an unconscious mirror image of trade union fears that the refugees would

⁷⁵ MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/013, Gaston Blaise to Vernon, 26 December 1916.

⁷⁶ Vandervelde became a member of the Conseil d'état --approximate to the Privy Council--in August 1914; a minister without portfolio in January 1916; and Minister of Food in August 1917. The Catholic cabinet opened its ranks to Socialists and Liberals with the greatest reluctance. Roger Avermaete, Nouvelle Histoire de Belgique (Brussels, 1971), 525-26; MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, unsigned memorandum, n.d. (ca. late January 1917). See also Bernard Waleffe, Some Constitutional Aspects of Recent Cabinet Development in Great Britain and in Belgium (Brussels, 1968), 44.

⁷⁷ Robert Abs, Emile Vandervelde (Brussels, 1973), 188-96.

provide cheap exploitable labour, was rather naive in view of the vigour of Belgian socialism and trade unionism before the war.⁷⁸ The civil servants who administered Birtley did not equate trade unionism with socialism. But they did assume that for all practical purposes British trade unionists were as antimilitarist as continental socialists: trade unionists were not dangerous radicals, they were dangerous conservatives. Wedded to traditional workshop practices, stubbornly concerned only with their own sectional interests, they were the enemies of the expansionist, undoctinaire, war-winning élan vital which the Ministry of Munitions symbolised. Like the rigid exponents of laissez faire, they had to make way before the men of push and go.⁷⁹

Birtley had been conceived as a way of neutralising English trade union influence. Every precaution was taken to ensure that refugees who had been "contaminated by their association with Trade Union methods in other British works"

⁷⁸A. de Meeus, History of the Belgians, 342. Belgian Catholic unions were much smaller than socialist unions, but were stronger in Flanders. Despite the involvement of Vandervelde and the workman Bauwens, a leading socialist before the war, the workforce at Birtley may have been predominantly affiliated with Catholic unions. One Ministry official dismissed WRC reports of grievances at Birtley as "gross exaggerations, and some of them may be attributed to the Belgian Socialist element on the Committee, which is bitterly opposed to the Clerical element, which is considered to be dominant at Birtley". MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/013, Vernon to Addison, 22 December 1916.

⁷⁹This is not of course to deny the real fears of the threat from radical trade unionism and socialist bodies. I would stress that the British attitudes to events at Birtley were less consistent than the Belgian thesis that the riot was a mutiny led by socialist provocateurs.

were excluded.⁸⁰ "Contamination" above all meant deliberately hindering output: Dolphin spoke of his experience at a plant near Birtley where "there was friction between the British workman who wanted to limit production, and the Belgian who did not."⁸¹ Untrained men were to receive instruction from other Belgians and while training were to be housed together "away from the influence of other works."⁸² When in 1917 the Belgian government decided to begin recalling for service soldiers working at Birtley, a proposal to fill the gap with British workers was rejected, because "the Belgians will get even more impregnated than they are at present with ordinary British Trades Union principles, and the result will be serious trouble of one kind or another."⁸³ So Birtley stayed Belgian. Belgian trouble-makers were deported or, in most cases, simply recalled by the Belgian army.⁸⁴ British officials, still inclined to rate Belgian demagoguery a poor second to "ordinary British Trades Union principles," advised the Belgian government to temper its wrath with discretion, but made clear they considered

⁸⁰MUN 5/327/22, Spicer, "Memorandum regarding supply of Belgian labour for Birtley", 24 December 1915, 2.

⁸¹MUN 5/78/327/10, "Notes of an interview with J. B. Dolphin", 22 April 1919.

⁸²MUN 5/327/22, Spicer, memorandum regarding labour, 5.

⁸³MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/013, Vernon to Gibb, 16 January 1917.

⁸⁴MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, report on meeting with de Broqueville, 27 February 1917.

the maintenance of discipline a purely Belgian matter.⁸⁵

Finally, the British pushed for the establishment of an impartial tribunal to hear grievances and to act as a safety valve which would take "the wind out of M. V[ander-velde]'s sails."⁸⁶ The Belgian government finally accepted the logic of this more supple antisocialism late in 1917 and the tribunal was established.⁸⁷ One of the reasons for the explosion on 21 December had been the lack of a fair system under which men could make complaints and appeals. Not only were industrial "offences"--such as asking for higher pay--punished by the military commander, but complaints about the management of the factory were tried by the management.⁸⁸ The main complaint had been favouritism. Most of the workers at Birtley were Flemish, but the managerial staff and skilled workers were mainly Walloon.⁸⁹ Flemish hostility to the Walloon civil and military authorities probably played an important, if submerged, part in the riot, and may have

⁸⁵MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/267, Addison to de Broqueville, 18 April 1917.

⁸⁶MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, unsigned memorandum, n.d. (January 1917); also, inquiry, minutes, 46-47, evidence of Gibb, 1916.

⁸⁷MUN 5/78/327/32, Gibb to Spicer, 28 September 1917.

⁸⁸MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, inquiry, minutes, 59-60, evidence of Captain Algrain, chef du village; 83-84, of A. Dopagne; 101, of Verhairt, 29 December 1916.

⁸⁹MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, inquiry, minutes, 35, evidence of Gibb; 106-07, of Albert de Brabandere.

explained the Belgian government's tough reaction. Birtley was very much a microcosm of what was happening within occupied Belgium and all the Belgian refugee communities. Flemish demands for provincial autonomy and greater language rights became a bitter issue, and late in 1917 and early in 1918 the Belgian army faced for a time something like a mutiny by Flemish soldiers demanding the division of the army into Flemish and Walloon regiments.⁹⁰ Birtley had been a storm-warning.

For all their fears of trade union influence at Birtley, English officials were genuinely sympathetic to many of the grievances which the commission of inquiry uncovered. British pressure led to the gradual demilitarisation of Birtley. The hated gendarmes left in May 1917. Military discipline remained intact--but was more flexibly administered. Licensed premises were established and the men were allowed into local pubs, though only in uniform. As soldiers were withdrawn to the forces, they were replaced by civilians and more families arrived. In this way Birtley, which had been planned as a model village and became for a time almost a prison, became by 1918 a thriving community humming with life.⁹¹

⁹⁰R. Van Overstraeten, War Diaries of Albert I, 193-96; J. Miller, Belgian Foreign Policy, 26.

⁹¹C. Fabry, "Hors-Combats", passim, describes a rich variety of political, cultural, musical, dramatic, religious and friendly societies and a Union Sportive covering a range of sports; also MUN 5/78/327/6, note on history of Birtley, probably by Spicer, n.d. (1918).

All the Belgian industrial enclaves prospered, as is evident from the absence of references to them in the files of the WRC's welfare departments.⁹² Nor did any of the other colonies cause so much anxiety to the two governments.⁹³ However, the riot ushered in a glacial period in Anglo-Belgian relations. The British had treated the original negotiations on Birtley as mundane economic bargaining, but unable to offer the Belgians any tangible returns from Birtley, they stressed Belgium's noble self-sacrifice in contributing its soldiers. The Belgians for their part clung to every tattered shred of dignity they could muster and gave the agreement the status of a treaty.⁹⁴ They were therefore deeply disillusioned to find their authority over the soldier/workers circumscribed by British law and custom.⁹⁵ Birtley, so propagandists fondly proclaimed, was "a piece of Belgium wedged into the centre of

⁹²Accommodation was the main problem for refugees at places like Richmond and Letchworth. A. Wallon, Une Cité belge, 24.

⁹³There was much discontent over wages among the soldier/workers at Birmingham, but no serious outbreak of violence. MUN 5/78/327/12, Spicer, note on difficulties with Belgian labour. Wages were not a serious grievance at Birtley. High wages actually contributed to discontent: the men had plenty of money and nowhere to spend it.

⁹⁴MUN 5/78/327/22, memorandum of conference on 8 February 1916 to consider draft agreement submitted by Belgian government, 4.

⁹⁵MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/267, report of meeting with de Broqueville, 7, 27 February 1917. De Broqueville fumed that if he had realised how his control would be limited by the intricacies of common law he would never have signed the

British territory."⁹⁶ It was not, however, quite Belgium, and it was certainly not Britain. The problem of jurisdiction centred in 1916 on the powers of gendarmes to enforce Belgian military law in an industrial situation in English territory.⁹⁷ In 1917 the reverse problem arose: how could the powers of an industrial tribunal be upheld in a factory not controlled by the Ministry of Munitions and in which the writ of the Defence of the Realm Act did not run?⁹⁸ Neither problem was resolved to the satisfaction of both parties, and the Belgians were deeply aggrieved. In the middle of the acrimonious aftermath to the riot, King Albert noted in his diary for 11 February 1917: "One sees quite well that small countries must beware of the big ones even when the latter call themselves Allies."⁹⁹ Though his wry criticism was prompted by a discussion on other matters with the British commander-in-chief, Douglas Haig, the King might well have been thinking of Birtley.

agreement. See also, /013, Vernon, chronology of events, 24 December 1916.

⁹⁶MUN 5/78/327/6, A. Debauche, text of speech, 9 March 1918.

⁹⁷MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, inquiry, minutes, 9-10, Morant, 29 December 1916.

⁹⁸MUN 4/2099/CRV/B/017, Kellaway to U. Wolff, 23 January 1917; unsigned memorandum, n.d. late January 1917 .

⁹⁹R. Van Overstraeten, War Diaries of Albert I, 155-56. The King had also fallen out in January with the British and French over his decision not to ignore President Wilson's peace note of December 1916. J. Miller, Belgian Foreign Policy, 28.

The Women Find Work

The events at Birtley caused bad feeling, but they did not interrupt the steady flow of Belgian refugees into English munitions factories. Lacking deep roots in their neighbourhoods or attachment to any employer, the refugees were particularly suited to leading the great movement of workers from their old jobs to the well-paid if often dangerous drudgery of munitions work. Naturally the fittest --the skilled, the sturdy, and the adventurous--found work earliest. But Belgians continued to be an important source of labour throughout the war. Between the beginning of 1917 and April 1918 nearly 15,000 found jobs. Of 43,000 aliens approved for munitions work up to 31 January 1918, 32,200 were Belgians, and of 1,104 aliens recruited that January, 546 were Belgians. In April 1918, there were 57,000 Belgians registered as employed and so it would seem that munitions work absorbed well over half of all the refugees who found jobs.¹⁰⁰

Of the 57,000, 10,000 were women. Like their men-folk, Belgian women progressively entered the workforce, but more slowly and never as significantly. If little attempt was made to get work for refugee men at first, even less

¹⁰⁰HO 45/10809/311425/81, Sealy Clarke (M.I.5), lists of aliens approved for munitions work up to 31 January 1918 and during January 1918. (It should be noted that the list excluded those permitted to leave the country. Since a large number of skilled men were withdrawn from Birtley alone during 1917, it is possible the figure would be several thousands higher.) BEL 7/1, file on employment of Belgian refugees supplied by Ministry of Labour, "Belgian

attention was paid to the women. Susan Lawrence did not allow the Hatch Committee to forget the serious unemployment among English women workers in 1914. The Committee solved the problem of what to do with refugee women workers by ignoring it. Nevertheless two groups of women aroused widespread early interest.

Girls were eagerly sought after as domestic servants. The "servant shortage" had been a stock item of middle-class discussion before the war and the shortage became more serious as domestic servants--four hundred thousand of them by the end of the war--went into munitions factories.¹⁰¹ As late as August 1916 the WRC was receiving "numerous requests daily" from women seeking domestic servants.¹⁰² Domestic servants were the single biggest occupational group among female refugees and an estimated ninety-five percent of them remained in service in England. However, most of these were probably servants who had come with their employers and remained with them, and few

Refugees. Summary by Principal Occupations and Trade Groups of Belgian Registration Orders and Placings for the five weeks ended 12th April 1918, together with the total of Belgians placed up to date (12th April 1918)." The lists make plain what the WRC noted in its second report, issued in 1917: that the definition of "munitions work" became extremely wide as armaments production increased. The WRC was particularly concerned because refugees classified as working on munitions had to comply with numerous regulations, causing the WRC much work. WRC I, 48.

¹⁰¹A. Marwick, The Deluge, 97; John Burnett, ed., Useful Toil (London, 1974), 135-74.

¹⁰²MH 8/1, W. Webb, WRC Employment Department, to Maudslay, 3 August 1916.

families received Belgian servants.¹⁰³ Laceworkers also received much attention. Belgium was famous for its lace and a handful of lacemakers had no problem finding an outlet for their work. An Anglo-Belgian Lace Association was set up under the dynamic Mrs. Inglefield, prime mover of the refugee relief movement in Buckinghamshire, who had been active in the long struggle to save the declining English lace industry.¹⁰⁴ She and her helpers saw an opportunity to draw public attention to the native industry by capitalising on sympathy for refugee laceworkers. Like many another wartime charity, the Association made up in prolix sentimentality what it lacked in real strength, and propagandised energetically. The ghosts of the Flemish weavers of centuries earlier were recalled in 1914, however, by Belgians as well as British, and this time not in a spirit of grateful comradeship. The Belgian Official Committee was

¹⁰³1920 Report, 76. The figure of ninety-five per cent was derived from a small sample of 2,768 women workers. As Marwick points out, domestic service was not wiped out by the war. Roughly one quarter of British domestic servants left service during the war, but about half returned to service after the war. Vera Brittain, Women's Work in Modern England (London, 1928), 11; Theresa M. McBride, The Domestic Revolution (New York, 1976), 80, 111-15. McBride describes long term economic and social changes which caused the decline of domestic service after 1890. She stresses an increasing concern for privacy and domesticity among middle-class females which led fewer households to hire servants. She does not explain why many middle-class spokesmen--including a number whose works are included in her bibliography--expressed concern at the "servant problem": meaning, in part a shortage of servants.

¹⁰⁴Pall Mall Gazette, 19 September 1914, G. Hubbard, Winslow (Bucks) Lace Industry, to editor.

uneasy about the Association's efforts, being "anxious to prevent the capture of the industry" by England. It preferred to deal with one body, the committee of which contained "distinguished Belgians," than allow various firms such as Harrod's to set up their own lacemaking model workshops with the assistance of the Association.¹⁰⁵

But most women were wives, mothers and dependent daughters. As long as their menfolk found work, they were kept more than busy coping with the difficulties of looking after family groups, which often included grandparents and sometimes nephews and nieces. Women were encouraged to stay out of the labour market in two ways. Local committees which established hostels almost invariably expected refugee women to help run them. Hostels were often big enough to employ full time refugee cooks, cleaners, housekeepers, gardeners and handymen.¹⁰⁶ This was particularly the case in the first two years of the war. The big hostels dwindled or closed as their inmates developed greater self-confidence and were drawn away by the prospect of good wages instead of the board, keep and pocket money offered by the hostels.

¹⁰⁵ MH 8/1, "Extract re Lace Workers", n.d. (late 1914). The WRC refused a request from the Belgian Co-operative Society of Lace Workers for a loan. MH 8/15/54, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 3 March 1915. BEL 7/2, "Anglo-Belgian Lace Society", [sic] contains propaganda by the Association.

¹⁰⁶ Glasgow's extensive network of hostels relied heavily on refugee labour. BEL 6/100, diary of Mary Boyle, passim.

Workshops also dealt mainly with women, not least because the middle-class women who ran relief committees felt happier dealing with women than with men. The workshops' function was more psychological than economic and many closed later in the war for the same reasons as the hostels. Both hostels and workshops made heavy demands on the time and energy of English relief workers, demands which became increasingly burdensome as the refugees ceased to be helpless alien victims and became a settled and sometimes irritating part of the English scene. The parting of hosts and refugees was often marked by mutual relief.

Even unmarried women were slow to find work. There may have been cultural reasons for this, as the Cambridge Town Committee suggested in its report for 1915:

Some of the young unmarried women have taken posts as resident or daily governesses, nursery governesses, companions or mothers' helps. It appears, however, to be less customary in Belgium than it is here for grown-up young women to take factory or commercial employment away from the parental home and the conditions of life in a foreign country not unnaturally make some of the older refugees shrink from allowing their girls to leave them.¹⁰⁷

Many local committees tried to find home-based work for unmarried daughters of middle-class and lower-middle-class families. A favourite ploy was arranging for the daughters of well-bred Walloon families to give tuition in French. Such efforts met with only limited success and the girls had

¹⁰⁷BEL 6/39, Report of Cambridge Town Committee for 1915, 6. (There was a Cambridge County Committee as well.)

to go further afield for work. On the other hand, girls were often able to stay with their families because of the general drift of refugees from small towns and rural areas to big cities where all members of the family had a good chance of finding work. Many girls found jobs in the very industry from which they were first excluded, the dress-making trades. Over one thousand entered teaching, mainly in the schools established for refugee children: another example of the way women tended to find work servicing the needs of the refugee community itself.¹⁰⁸

After July 1916, however, Belgian women entered the general British work force at an accelerating rate. They were lured by higher wages and pushed out in many cases because their husbands had been called up and Belgian separation allowances were very low. The manager of the WRC's Employment Department gave the following reasons for the large increase in the number of applications for work in the middle of 1918:

The constant and increasing pressure on people to work. The enormous wages now paid even to young lads and girls for munitions work have attracted many young people, who now come to us. The wives of men who have been called up have recently been seeking employment more than before.

The routing out of people in the Provinces who have been brought to London and with great success placed in work here.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ 1920 Report, 90.

¹⁰⁹ MH 8/7, W. Webb to Maudslay, 30 July 1918. Webb's analysis, including the coercive implications of the word "routing," might have applied to the people of Britain as a whole. Standard histories of the war emphasise the

The harsh pressures of life in wartime England overcame custom and timidity.¹¹⁰

One heterogeneous category of refugees, however, put up a stiff rearguard fight against external pressures. Professionals, white-collar workers, and rentiers--members of what a committee formed to deal with their special problems called "the Professional and Commercial Classes"--¹¹¹ were unwilling or unable to take jobs available to them. Above all, they passionately desired to find employment in their old occupations, but circumstances were against them.

compulsion used to fill the army but tend to attribute the vast changes in the workforce to the pull of higher wages and the push of higher prices, when they bother to explain why women entered the workforce in large numbers. A. Taylor, English History, 38; L. Woodward, Great Britain and the War of 1914-1918, 470-73; A. Marwick, The Deluge, 100. The full story of how reluctant civilians were chivvied to the burgeoning industrial areas, there to endure separation from their families, overcrowding in unpleasant quarters and long hours, remains to be told.

¹¹⁰ Despite the Cambridge Town Committee's belief that Belgian women were more home-bound than their British sisters, this may not have been the case. Citing Rowntree, Land and Labour, Aristide R. Zolberg argues that "a higher proportion of children and women were economically active" in Flanders--which provided most of the refugees--than elsewhere in Belgium. "The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium: 1830-1914", Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 5 (Autumn 1974): 179-235; esp. 194. The Cambridge Committee, which went to great lengths to be sent only socially acceptable refugees, was very probably talking about Walloon women of the middle classes.

¹¹¹ IWM, EMP 1, files on employment, report to Herbert Samuel by Belgian Refugees Sub-Committee appointed by Central Charities Committee of Social Welfare Association for London, 22 November 1915. The Sub-Committee was established in October 1914 but did not begin active work until April 1915 when, in one of the arrangements which

Doctors, once certain legal barriers were removed, realised their aim.¹¹² But of the 350 lawyers no more than a handful were able to follow the law in England. Language and the strangeness of the common law were insuperable barriers.¹¹³ Language also defeated clerical and administrative workers: fluency in English mattered far more in the office than on the factory floor. The refugees also lost the race for clerical jobs. Employers gave preference to unemployed English clerks, as long as they were not strapping youths who should have been off to the war. Women were even stronger rivals. Early in the war shortages of clerical staff caused by uncontrolled enlistment in the armed forces could have been filled by Belgians, but by the time an agency existed to seek work for them, English women had filled the vacancies and demonstrated their capabilities. Women also deprived Belgian men of their chance at many light jobs in munitions factories later in the war.¹¹⁴ Employers preferred to hire the women rather than take on alien males while English employees were doing their patriotic duty by enlisting.

became increasingly typical of refugee relief work, the government agreed to subsidise the Sub-Committee's activities. Except where otherwise stated, the following information is taken from the report.

¹¹²FO 371/1912/67333, Almeric Fitzroy, Privy Council Office, to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 4 November 1914; /82649, Kidston, consul, Le Havre, to Foreign Office, 14 December 1914; Hatch, "Belgian Refugees in U.K.", 209.

¹¹³Hatch, ibid.

¹¹⁴WRC II, 48.

To these natural obstacles professional and white-collar refugees added a fixed antipathy to most of the work available. They wanted their old jobs or nothing, and the WRC had to force more than one intractable commercial traveller or musician to take munitions work by threatening to cut off all support.¹¹⁵ Distaste for manual labour and a horror of socially demeaning labour were the crux of middle-class unemployment. Some middle-class refugees accepted their impoverishment philosophically and did their best to adjust to their new situation, taking work as it came their way. Propagandists made much of a poet turning out shells at Twickenham and doctors and lawyers working at Kryn and Lahy's Letchworth factory.¹¹⁶ These were very much the exception rather than the rule in the first half of the war. The Belgian middle and upper classes fought to maintain their ante-bellum status with a passionate determination. The leaders of the WRC, themselves of the same class, responded sympathetically at first. But special privileges for the already privileged became an increasing embarrassment to the WRC and an affront to its sense of fair play. The conflict between class sympathy and ingrained notions of social hierarchy on the one hand and the war-induced principles of equality of sacrifice on the other was to pose the WRC its severest dilemma.

¹¹⁵MH 8/1, J. C. Grumbar, Allocation Department, to Maudslay, 13 October 1915.

¹¹⁶Emile Cammaerts, "The Belgian Refugees. 75% At Work In This Country", The Observer, 20 February 1916.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIEF

'The National Duty was Hospitality and not Bare Relief'

The pervasive and generous ethos of "hospitality" encouraged a comprehensive range of welfare measures from which the refugees benefited. But the benefits were not bestowed equally upon all refugees, a fact which caused some controversy within the relief movement. The debate demonstrated how closely welfare, allocation, and employment policies were entangled and reflected the influence of the Charity Organisation Society upon English philanthropy, an influence still strong but slowly dying. Refugee relief provided a vindication of techniques pioneered by the COS, but it likewise provided a novel challenge to the social philosophy behind those techniques. For perhaps the first time, English charity had to deal with distress which transcended the bounds normally dividing "the class that does social work" from "a class less comfortably off."¹ The result was a real, though not radical erosion of some traditional assumptions about philanthropy, a change which

¹Greater London Record Office, COS files, C/100/50, Bermondsey committee report, 1917-18, 4.

reflected the wider erosive effects of the war on the English voluntarist tradition.

In one sense the refugee relief movement had no ideology. Its central organisation, the WRC, began as an ad hoc response of a collection of diverse people to an immediate problem. Some of the minor organisations began with well-articulated philosophies, but these were swiftly thrust aside by the consuming and mundane work of relieving immediate needs. Indeed, the experience of both the National Food Fund and the Women's Emergency Corps, two organisations which sought to blend practical relief work with a grander aim of national reinvigoration, suggests that, though the war may have matched many unheard prophets with their hour, their goals could not be realised by traditional philanthropic activity. The propagandists and the philanthropists had to go their separate ways--the philanthropists wholly occupied with the struggle to continue their work under increasingly difficult conditions, the propagandists gradually turning their hopeful gaze from the war itself as a testing ground for their theories to the postwar era. During the war, the "national efficiency" movement was subsumed in the "reconstruction" movement. Thus, a man like Christopher Turnor, president of the National Food Fund and a leading writer on agricultural reform, lost all interest in the Fund after the defeat of his propagandist allies, resigned, and turned his energies

fully to writing about and agitating for postwar land settlement and redistribution.²

The pragmatic, nonideological nature of the relief movement was increased by the fact that most people in the movement were motivated at first not by an overwhelming compassion for the refugees--though, of course, pity played its part--but by a simple desire to do, to be involved in the war effort. It was largely accidental that refugee work and not some other form of philanthropic or patriotic endeavour claimed them first. Still, prevailing notions of charity, and the rhetoric with which Englishmen had greeted the arrival of the refugees, provided a set of primitive assumptions which were refined by the experience of the next four years. Not everyone agreed on every aspect of relief policy, and debates on detail often reflected fundamental differences of opinion.

The dominating force in British philanthropy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was undoubtedly the Charity Organisation Society. The Society was founded in 1869 to bring some order from the chaos of London's numerous but uncoordinated charities. Basing its social programme on the economic orthodoxy of the day, the COS underestimated the extent of poverty, believing it to be

²MH 8/3/50/246, minutes of Executive Committee, NFF, 28 February 1916; Paul Barton Johnson, Land Fit For Heroes (Chicago, 1968), 220. For the NFF and WEC, see chapter IX.

the result not of social structure and economic organisation but of defects in character. The Society therefore sharply distinguished between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor, or paupers. Pauperism meant more than poverty: it was "an habitual reliance on others, due to want of self-control and foresight."³ The COS diagnosed two main causes of pauperism: indiscriminate charity and lavish Poor Law relief. Accordingly, it constructed what the Webbs later dubbed the "parallel bars" theory of social welfare. Statutory and voluntary bodies were to work in harness, but autonomously, each dealing with a different clientele. The undeserving were to be deterred from their improvident and parasitic ways by a stringently administered Poor Law, while the deserving poor were to be helped to happy self-sufficiency by the gentler hand of private charity.⁴

The COS made many enemies. It was schoolmasterly towards other charities and its attacks on such popular late Victorian charities as Dr. Barnardo's Homes and the Salvation Army were ill-judged. Later, as state intervention in social welfare increased, the Society's opposition to

³ Charles S. Loch, quoted in C. L. Mowat, The Charity Organisation Society (London, 1961), 68.

⁴ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The Prevention of Destitution (London, 1911), 225-26. For a eulogistic chronicle of the COS, written by one of its leaders, see Helen Bosanquet, Social Work in London (London, 1914). C. Mowat, COS, and Madeline Roof, A Hundred Years of Family Welfare (London, 1972), are both sympathetic or temperately critical studies. Kathleen Woodroffe, From Charity to Social Work (London, 1968), 3-74, is more critical, and the Webbs, Destitution, 226-38, hostile.

such measures as the feeding of needy schoolchildren (1906) and to old age pensions (1908) alienated many of its own supporters. The Society's leadership was radically out of sympathy with new social and economic thinking and the COS clashed repeatedly with Fabians, socialists and younger Liberals like Violet Markham who called for more state welfare. The stern rules governing the selection of applicants for relief and the success of local branches in forcing the harsher administration of Poor Law relief in their districts earned the Society the nickname "Cringe-or-Starve."⁵ At the same time, the findings of researchers like Rowntree and Charles Booth discredited the Society's facile assumption that relatively few citizens were suffering the effects of poverty. The most significant symptom of the Society's declining prestige in the Edwardian era was the sharp decline in the number of young, intelligent recruits on whom it depended for its continuance. The COS was acutely aware of its unpopularity and spent much time in self-examination in the prewar years.⁶

But the COS had made important contributions to British welfare work and was still active and powerful in 1914. It was by no means as uniformly harsh as some of its critics depicted it, and advocated extensions of state action in areas like public housing and health. The Society

⁵M. Rooff, Family Welfare, 321.

⁶C. Mowat, COS, 127-69.

also publicised the plight of the blind and the mentally retarded and its activities in many areas led not only to legislation but also to the founding of other specialised charities such as the Invalid Children's Aid Association.⁷ Indeed, the COS's greatest importance lay probably in the technique of social work which it developed and the training it gave to people who subsequently pioneered many areas of social work. The COS was founded on the premise that charity must be "scientific:" that is, it must be based on the rigorous investigation of problems. Consequently, its committees of inquiry compiled much detailed information on social issues which the Society energetically disseminated, and its members were frequent witnesses before government commissions. The COS was represented heavily on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws of 1905-09, the Majority Report of which significantly reflected its views. But its greatest achievement was the development of social casework, which had become its most important function by 1914.⁸ Casework meant carefully investigating the applicant's circumstances, formulating a plan of aid geared to those circumstances, and diligently following through the plan to a successful conclusion. In this general sense, casework was practised by other bodies before the COS. But the Society refined

⁷This point is made very effectively by M. Roof, Family Welfare, 85-100.

⁸Ibid., 250.

casework techniques. As Mowat describes it:

In the casework of the C.O.S. seven things were combined: district offices, the case paper, the use of a professional staff, the emphasis on the character as well as the circumstances of the applicant, the preservation of the family and family responsibility, the classification of names, and co-operation between different agencies, both public and voluntary.⁹

Most of these elements were to be present in the work of the WRC.

The COS had little to do with the WRC in the latter's early days. Of the founders of the WRC, only Lady Lyttelton seems to have had any, indirect, connection with the senior organisation.¹⁰ The COS central office and its local branches were from the first heavily engaged in the movement to relieve English distress through the National Relief Fund, the local distress committees, and above all, the Soldiers and Sailors Family Association, which as we have seen collapsed for a while and needed strenuous resuscitation. Furthermore, the Society at first looked askance at the WRC as one of the "sporadic and independent schemes" it wished to discourage, and the Fulham COS branch was criticised heavily for undertaking refugee work which,

⁹C. Mowat, COS, 39.

¹⁰She was president of the Personal Service Association, which from 1908 recruited thousands of volunteers for social work and cooperated closely with the COS. V. Markham, Return Passage, 60; H. Bosanquet, Social Work, 94. In adopting COS methods but accepting the need for the State to provide financial support and a measure of backing for private organisations, the PSA and its allied organisation, the Guilds of Help, may have been the bridge between the pristine COS and the more eclectic WRC. For the Guilds, see Michael Moore, "Social Work and Social Welfare:

it admitted, was "to a certain extent superficial and non-constructive."¹¹ But, as the WRC evolved from an ephemeral allocation bureau into a mature welfare agency, the two societies came closer together. The meeting ground was the Private Relief Fund.

The Private Relief Fund was the fulcrum of the WRC's welfare work. Briefly stated, the aim of the work--firmly in the tradition of the COS--was to make each refugee family a fully self-supporting unit. At first this had been out of the question for many families whose breadwinners were penniless and jobless, and unnecessary for wealthier refugees who were able to live in leisure on their savings while awaiting the end of hostilities. But, by the beginning of 1915, many poorer refugees had found jobs and were in receipt of incomes, while many of the wealthier found their funds running low. However, a large number in both categories were not as yet in a position to become either entirely self-sufficient or entirely dependent on charity. At the same time, the WRC found its supply of hosts drying up. As a result of its own needs and those of the refugees, the WRC made a special appeal to the public in February 1915 for funds with which to supplement the incomes

The Organisation of Philanthropic Resources in Britain, 1900-1914", Journal of British Studies, 16 (Spring, 1977): 85-104.

¹¹COS/Reports/J, Forty-seventh Annual Report (1915-16), 2-3; /Districts Sub-Committee/Vol. 32, letter of COS Administrative Committee to subscribers, 3 September 1914; /C.100/48, Fulham committee report, 1916, 6-7.

of families who, with a little help, would be able to stand on their own feet and not become a heavy charge on the WRC and--since the government was now subsidising the Committee --the British taxpayer. The money was put into a special fund which became the PRF. But the charitable public had tired of refugees by this time and the amounts subscribed were too small. Once again the LGB stepped in and agreed to subsidise the Fund, which now became the channel for government capitation grants to many categories of refugees.¹²

The PRF rapidly became the biggest department at Aldwych, reflecting the relative importance of welfare work as opposed to allocation, which declined after the first six months, and employment policy, which largely solved itself as the wartime boom took hold. The PRF staff grew to thirty-eight out of a total staff at Aldwych of about one hundred and forty. Sixteen were interviewers, eight of them Belgians; five were investigators, a position probably analagous to that of caseworker; and five were volunteers who composed the committee which administered the Fund. The committee, which met almost daily, was reconstituted several times. Beginning small, it grew to a swollen fourteen, as representatives of various interests were added. When the government agreed to provide financial backing, the LGB insisted that H. A. Leggett, its man at Aldwych, become the new chairman to act as watchdog against extravagance and

¹²1920 Report, 17.

inefficiency.¹³ In 1916, several representatives of the Belgian Official Committee were invited to join so that the needs of the refugees could be better understood,¹⁴ and some months earlier four prominent members of the COS were coopted to advise on English social conditions.¹⁵ Their co-option was clear evidence that the Fund was self-consciously modelling its own work on that of the Society.

The debt was manifested in many ways. First, the PRF relied heavily on COS branches in the London area to act as investigators, visiting refugees, ascertaining their needs and recommending the most effective methods of relief.¹⁶ In the provinces, where there were few COS branches, the Fund used local relief committees and, where no committees existed, local officials and clergymen.¹⁷ Thus, like the COS, the Fund relied greatly on local expertise. Secondly, it developed uniform methods of analysing applications through forms similar to the COS case paper and which were occasionally referred to as "case sheets." Applicants were carefully interviewed and the

¹³WRC I, 45.

¹⁴MH 8/1/82/29, H. L. Woollcombe, COS, to Maudslay, 6 September 1915; WRC II, 26-27.

¹⁵WRC II, 4.

¹⁶COS/C.100/48, Hammersmith report, 1916, 2; /Ad. Committee/Minutes/51, 303, minutes of meeting, 30 March 1916.

¹⁷WRC II, 23.

details of every interview were meticulously entered in dossiers. By late 1917 the WRC had fourteen thousand dossiers covering an estimated forty thousand persons.¹⁸ Though the staff were not "professional" social workers with previous training in case work, they acquired a rich store of knowledge about their clientele over four arduous years. The PRF also stood in the COS tradition by its unrelenting zeal for the principle that the sources of help available to the refugees must be coordinated.¹⁹

The War Refugees Committee explained and defended its methods in the nuances of the COS, though without its stridency or precision. The Committee had no mortal enemies and shunned public combat with other bodies as much as possible. Consequently, its spokesmen--above all, Gladstone and Maudslay, the two most powerful voluntary workers--expressed themselves in allusive generalities and polite obliquities. Not surprisingly, they sometimes contradicted themselves. For the WRC sought to steer between two opposing methods, two conflicting demands, two conceptions of relief work. On the one side stood the rock of impersonal, inelastic and stingy proceduralism. The LGB and the Poor Law which it administered epitomised this danger. On the other side lay the whirlpool of unthinking extravagance

¹⁸ WRC II, 34

¹⁹ Ibid., 33; MH 8/7/98, unnumbered file, memorandum by WRC Education Committee, n.d. (late 1916).

unfettered by any rules. Certain other charities, notably those dealing with wealthier refugees, represented the other peril.

Seemingly innocuous statements by WRC leaders frequently contained implicit criticisms of the Board and of other charities. In one of the most succinct expressions of the Committee's aims, Gladstone explained in its first annual report that

The object of the Committee was to provide maintenance for the period of the War in "reasonable comfort" and to bear in mind, but with due regard to the taxpayer, that the national duty was hospitality and not bare relief.²⁰

The government was not allowed to forget Samuel's speech of 9 September 1914: the refugees were entitled as of right to generous treatment from the British people, treatment markedly different from the spartan relief afforded by the Poor Law. But, since by this time the government was subsidising most relief activity, private charities had to temper generosity with the responsible use of public funds. In the next annual report, Maudslay noted that the chief requirements for relief workers were "tact, sympathy and firmness."²¹ In the COS canon, government officials sinned against the first two commandments and many philanthropists against the third. In the jargon of Edwardian discussions of social welfare, "sympathy" was used habitually of voluntary aid in contrast to the "impersonal" style of

²⁰WRC I, 45.

²¹WRC II, 33.

government agencies. Thus, the Majority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws had noted that "voluntary aid was more sympathetic and more elastic than official assistance can be."²² "Elasticity" was another vogue word. In reporting on its work for 1917-18, the Fulham branch of the COS, which had been deeply involved in refugee relief, declared that

. . . it is difficult to imagine how even the most humane Government Department can arrange for sufficient elasticity in the administration of public funds to assure that every misfortune shall find its solace and its remedy. . . .²³

The WRC spoke in tones not much different from this. Again and again its apologists denied that "hard and fast rules" could be applied to the refugees because of "the infinite variations in individual circumstances." While accepting the desirability of "maximum scales and general rules," the Committee asserted the need for "some elasticity."²⁴

Elsewhere, Gladstone magisterially advised Samuel, after a group of refugees were transferred abruptly back to London from Liverpool, that "the Committee's experience is that you

²²Maurice Bruce, The Making of the Welfare State (New York, 1966), 203. Voluntarism and "elasticity" were habitually juxtaposed. Thus, in a discussion of Belgian civilian spy rings during the war, one writer later emphasised that a) none of the spies were "in the pay of this or that Government," and b) the spy system was consequently marked by great "elasticity," which made it hard for the Germans to destroy it. M. McKenna, Spies I Knew, 11-12.

²³COS/C.100/50, Fulham committee report, 1918, 4-5.

²⁴WRC I, 44-45.

cannot treat refugees as bales of wool."²⁵

The rebuke was significant. In one context, its tone suggested the self-confidence of the mature WRC. Its workers proudly came to regard the Committee as the only agency with comprehensive knowledge of a complex problem. Their identity as an initiate priesthood was affirmed by the almost liturgical intonation of phrases like "the long and arduous work of investigation, discussion and decision," "the work is arduous and difficult," "careful and anxious scrutiny," "a delicate adjustment of all the sources of help," "nicely balanced methods of assistance," "sympathetic discrimination," and "wise discriminating treatment."²⁶ Admission to the ranks of that priesthood was at one point almost explicitly denied to any professional:

Indeed, the kind of work required could not have been secured by money. The energy, sympathy, insight, enthusiasm, so essential in personal intercourse with the refugees could only be found among those who were spontaneously called to the work, not only by public spirit, but by a certain consciousness of personal fitness.²⁷

The distinction drawn here was not between the amateur and the expert. Neither was that implicit in the remark in the Committee's final report that its volunteers had worked with an "enthusiasm and devotion. . . quite beyond the reach of

²⁵GP 46082/54-56, Gladstone to Samuel, n.d. September 1915.

²⁶WRC II, 33; MH 8/3/50/247, "A.T." to J. Eshelby, secretary of National Food Fund, 29 February 1916.

²⁷War Refugees Committee, Third Report (London, 1918), [hereafter referred to as WRC III], 58.

the official procedure of a Government Office."²⁸ The distinction was between the man endowed with a moral passion for his work and the mere employee doing a routine job. That the distinction was expressed as a contrast between government officials and voluntary social work simply reflected the experience of the age, the two standards of treatment meted to the deserving and the undeserving. As it happened, philanthropists looked after the deserving, and tailored their approach accordingly, while government officials looked after the undeserving. The problem, so philanthropists like Gladstone and Maudslay implied, was that the officials had become so used to dealing with the undeserving poor that they had become unfitted to deal with any other cases of distress.

The WRC summed up all the self-confidence of the old philanthropic tradition, still thriving despite government encroachment and the attacks of Fabians, other socialists, and working-class leaders. But it was a self-confidence based on a reading of the past. When the WRC's leaders thought of state bureaucracy, they thought of the LGB, not the new expanding departments of the Edwardian era, the departments from which sprang so many creative and dynamic civil servants of the stamp of Beveridge and Morant. When they thought of the LGB, they thought of its obstructionist Poor Law wing, not of the fast-growing public health

²⁸Ibid., 59.

wing under Newsholme and Newman.²⁹ The contempt of philanthropists for their nominated rival, a state welfare bureaucracy, seemed amply vindicated by the record of the Edwardian LGB. The Board had satisfied few people, with the exception of its own people and COS rigorists. The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission called for the complete break-up of the Poor Law, while the Majority Report wanted the Poor Law modified.³⁰ But little was done and the performance of the old working-class Lib-Lab, John Burns, as President of the Board, was one of the conspicuous failures of the Liberal government before the war. Burns was viewed widely as a mere puppet, with the permanent officials of the Board as the real obstacles to Poor Law reform.³¹ With the LGB nullified, the reformist energies of the new Liberalism flowed through the Board of Trade and the Exchequer under the dynamic Churchill and Lloyd George. Burns was replaced by Samuel in February 1914, too late for Samuel to prove himself before the war broke out. The Board's reluctance to take responsibility for refugee relief did nothing to dispel its reputation as unimaginative,

²⁹For the LGB at this time, see W. A. Ross, "Local Government Board and After; Retrospect", Public Administration, 34 (1956): 17-25. For the split between its two wings, see Kenneth D. Brown, "John Burns at the Local Government Board: a Reassessment", Journal of Social Policy 6 (1977): 57-70; and Frank A. Brimelow, "The Royal Poor Law Commission, 1905-1909", unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1971, 173-92.

³⁰J. Bowle, Samuel, 108-09; H. Samuel, Memoirs, 84; M. Bruce, Welfare State, 208-10.

³¹For a dissenting opinion on Burns, see K. Brown,

unsympathetic and enervated. Maudslay, himself not Fabian, socialist, or of any deep political persuasion, expressed the prevailing wisdom of the WRC's membership when writing to Gladstone after an LGB official had inspected Aldwych: "the Poor Law Mind has not the slightest knowledge of what our Committees are doing or the nation as a whole in comparison with the M.A.B. and the L.G.B. efforts."³² The energy and flair shown by private individuals in rushing in to help refugees where government departments feared to tread seemed to justify the claims that philanthropy was superior to state welfare.

Yet a note of uncertainty and defensiveness underlay the apparent confidence of the Committee and its allies. The sensitive antennae of the COS picked up warning signals of a widespread disenchantment with old attitudes:

"Charity," as popularly understood, is under a cloud today. On all sides we hear that in any effort made by the country to deal with misfortune and trouble of every kind "there must be no Charity about it." It is almost worse to be "tainted" with "Charity" now-a-days than with "Poor Law."³³

The writer, secretary of the Fulham COS, was almost certainly thinking of his branch's experience in refugee work. For

"John Burns". Brown is critical of Burns, but argues that he achieved more than he is normally given credit for, and that he agreed with the views of his permanent officials and was not merely their puppet.

³² GP 46013/151-52, Maudslay to Gladstone, 23 October 1915.

³³ COS/C.100/49, Fulham committee report, 1917, 6.

members of the relief movement showed as much aversion to the word "charity" as they showed to its official counterpart, "relief." But if both words were equally tainted, then how to describe relief work? The "guests of the nation" thesis provided a convenient escape from the dilemma of language. Thus Lady Lugard proudly declared that the aim of her Hospitality Committee for Better Class Belgian Refugees was "to provide for everyone according to their station, quite simply, but in a spirit of hospitality which is not allowed to degenerate into charity."³⁴

Charity was degenerate because it was, in its own way, as demeaning as state relief, whereas "hospitality" was a neutral, even positive concept. Where charity was condescending, hospitality was "kindly." It implied a more or less equal relationship between hosts and guests, instead of the sharp gulf which divided the recipients of poor relief and charity from the rest of society. The gulf was, according to traditional theory, a moral gulf. But it was also a class gulf. Those who needed help, it was assumed, would be drawn from the labouring classes, while those who gave it would be their social betters. It was almost unthinkable that large numbers of middle-class or upper-class people would ever need to go on the rates or approach the COS. The war, especially in the shape of the refugees,

³⁴BEL 3/file of Lady Lugard Hospitality Committee, Report, 1915-16, 8. Cf. The Tablet, 7 November 1914, "The Catholic Women's League in War Time".

challenged that complacent assumption.³⁵

Though the vast majority of refugees were drawn from the working class and lower middle class, few committees were established specifically to help them. Class solidarity meant relatively little to English trade unionists fearful that the refugees would provide cheap labour, and working-class refugees had to look to themselves for protection of their own interests, mainly through Vandervelde's Union de Comités. In contrast, the minority of middle-and upper-class refugees were able to draw on the ample sympathy of their English peers. Doctors, lawyers and architects were all looked after by special committees of their English fellow professionals.³⁶ Not only did many local committees specify that they wished to receive "better class" refugees, but many of the hostels established in the London area were designed to cater exclusively for them. The committee running the Hostel for First Class Belgians in Chelsea openly avowed its sectarian intent, as did the Duchess of Somerset's Homes for Better Class Belgian Refugees and Lady Lugard's

³⁵ It is true that organisations for the relief of impoverished members of the "better classes"--e.g., the Distressed Gentlefolk's Aid Society--existed long before the war. There were also many bodies for the relief of struggling or destitute artists and other professionals. But their scope was limited and they existed precisely to shield their clients from the degradation of applying to the Poor Law or to other charities along with all sorts and conditions of men.

³⁶ For a typical effusion over the sufferings of the better classes, see The Tablet, 7 November 1914, "Uprooted Flowers of Belgium".

committee.³⁷ Bodies like these justified their existence usually along the lines of the prospectus of a private school established by a relief committee in the coastal resort of Aldeburgh:

It is hoped that the Home may be of service to the daughters of professional and commercial parents, and of middle-class people generally (who would probably shrink from appealing to public charity), while it is thought that the children of the very poorest class may safely be left to the charge of the large organisations which are working for the refugees.³⁸

Lady Lugard likewise explained that her committee catered for "a class of Belgian refugees who would not very easily be brought under any scheme of Government relief."³⁹ In other words, there were to be two standards of relief, based squarely on the criterion of class.

The WRC itself accepted the double standard. Its leaders were members of the same privileged strata as Lady Lugard, the Duchess of Somerset and their charges, and class sympathy almost as profoundly coloured their reaction. Thus, Lady Lyttelton begged Gladstone in October 1914 to set up hostels for better-class men, remarking that "they are very nice people some of them--I mean men one could have to stay with one."⁴⁰ And Gladstone at one point contemplated temporarily

³⁷PC/CHA/3/1, 47, application to Charity Commissioners for registration as a war charity by Hostel for First Class Belgians, 27 September 1916.

³⁸BEL 6/14, prospectus of Aldeburgh committee, n.d. (October 1914).

³⁹BEL 3/ Lady Lugard Hospitality Committee, Report and Statements of Account. . . 1914-15, 4.

⁴⁰GP 46046/175, Lyttelton to Gladstone, ca. October 1914.

withdrawing the services of the WRC's allocators as a way of bringing to heel the government, which had been refusing to provide for "well-to-do" refugees outside the official depots.⁴¹ The charge against the LGB, therefore, was that of impartiality. The WRC's leaders generally shared the common acceptance of what was called "differentiation," the policy of separating the better-class refugees from the rest, giving them more aid and more personal attention, and subjecting them to less coercion.

The establishment of separate hostels for the better class was, as the WRC's first report acknowledged, the chief method of differentiation. The "respectable classes" were carefully segregated from other refugees to protect them from "close association with rough and sometimes undesirable people."⁴² Even unwed mothers cared for by the "preventive and rescue" department of the WRC under Mrs. Webbe were housed in separate hostels, as "the mixture of refined girls of the better social class with those of the rougher class was

⁴¹GP 36101/175, memorandum by Gladstone, n.d. (late 1914).

⁴²WRC I, 9. Late Victorian and Edwardian writers on social problems worked on a contagion theory of morals which assumed that when the respectable and the unrespectable were thrown together in adversity, the bad would contaminate the good. Cf. Rachel Vorspan, "Vagrancy and the New Poor Law in late-Victorian and Edwardian England", English Historical Review, 42 (January 1977): 69.

undesirable."⁴³ Mrs. Webbe was proud of her "complete system of classification" through segregated hostels.⁴⁴ Her use of the word "classification" pregnantly suggested the class-consciousness which infused the casework methods of the COS. Investigation was a means of segregating the classes, of separating the respectable from the residuum.⁴⁵

Segregation made possible the more generous treatment of better-class refugees. Their hostels were plusher than the ordinary hostels because they received higher capitation grants from the government as well as enjoying the largesse of the small and wealthy coteries which supported them. Lady Lugard sought to ensure that all her hostels "were placed on the footing of economic gentlemen's households, with a suitable staff usually of Belgian servants, and in each case a lady in charge who undertook the duties and responsibilities of a hostess."⁴⁶ The WRC could not compete with such munificence, but it did its best. The PRF was guided by the principle that "people of good standing

⁴³MH 8/7/98/203, report of visit of inspection by Miss Ina Standfield, 4 March 1918.

⁴⁴BEL 2/3, Report of Mrs A. J. Webbe's Department. Rescue and Preventive Worker to the War Refugees Committee, November 1916, I

⁴⁵Cf. the general thesis of G. Jones, Outcast London.

⁴⁶BEL 3, LLHC, Report. . . 1914-15, 5. The normal capitation grant, set in January 1915 (as a maximum) was 10/-. Lugard managed to get first 12/6 and then 15/-. At the outbreak of the war, British old age pensioners received 5/- weekly.

should have additional assistance. . . if necessary."⁴⁷

Better-class families living in private accommodation got larger food rations, and the WRC on occasions criticised the National Food Fund's Inspection Committee for failing to perceive that people whose rations it had recommended for reduction were in fact "of superior class."⁴⁸ Health care was heavily class-biased. Fashionable optometrists and dentists looked after the eyes and teeth of better-class patients, a luxury denied to the rest. Better-class women had their babies in the dignified comfort of the Duchess of Marlborough's Home, while poorer mothers went to public hospitals. Chronically-ill refugees and those convalescing after surgery were similarly segregated. Poorer patients were consigned to the Poor Law infirmaries while their betters, "for whom the infirmaries' surroundings would have been unsuitable," were tended in private nursing homes.⁴⁹

The WRC gladly paid the reduced fees involved in almost all these cases, despite the admittedly "heavy" and "formidable" expense and despite the availability of free treatment in public institutions.⁵⁰ Special treatment for better-class refugees was not considered extravagant. It was

⁴⁷MH 8/15/59, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 5 March 1915.

⁴⁸MH 8/2/50/227, Maudslay to secretary of NFF, 25 January 1916.

⁴⁹WRC III, 38-40.

⁵⁰Ibid., 39.

simply unthinkable that such people should have to resort to the Poor Law. English public assistance--the Poor Law, public hospitals and the homes run by the Salvation Army and other bodies--was for working-class people only, and the WRC's policy tellingly indicated the enormous social stigma which still attached to the Poor Law despite its gradual "humanisation" over recent decades.⁵¹

Indeed, efforts were made to protect all refugees, regardless of class, from the taint of the Poor Law. In October 1914, the LGB decreed that refugees temporarily housed in workhouses while awaiting allocation "must be kept entirely apart from the ordinary inmates," and the London County Asylums Board later suggested that Belgian "lunatics" should be "granted the privileges of classification as private instead of poor law patients."⁵² Nonetheless, it was generally considered that poorer refugees were inured to grim conditions and could adjust to the atmosphere in public institutions, whereas the well-bred could not.

A theory of relative deprivation underpinned the policy of differentiation. As the WRC reminded its supporters,

. . . in the case of refugees who were rich or well off in Belgium, it is impossible to provide maintenance comparable to previously existing conditions. In many

⁵¹For the campaign to humanise the Poor Law, see F. Brimelow, "Royal Poor Law Commission", 38-53.

⁵²BEL 1/2, memorandum by War Refugees Department of LGB, 22 October 1914; 1920 Report, 24.

cases the maximum help which can be given to this class is relatively far less than that given to the poorer classes of refugees.⁵³

Since even the most generous scales of relief still fell distressingly short of the required standard, attempts were made to close the gap by creating a pleasant environment for the refugee elite. As Lady Lugard explained to the LGB shortly before the battle of the Somme, "to receive better-class refugees in a manner which may not too painfully contrast with their habitual family life" entailed a "necessary complement of servants, nurses, governesses, etc."⁵⁴ Her refugees also enjoyed long spells "convalescing" at the seaside on the flimsiest of excuses.⁵⁵ She was inordinately proud that her thousand refugees "were all in personal relations with her and had been more or less 'members of one family circle.'"⁵⁶ She carefully tried to "classify" her hostels "in such a way as to bring friends and potential friends and acquaintances into the same circle," and

⁵³Cf. PP, LGB (Ireland) Report, 1914-15, Cd. 8016, 1915, lxi: "Care was taken to avoid any pauper taint, the quarters of the Refugees were kept distinct from those of persons on relief, special dietary was given and the newcomers were treated like guests as much as possible."

⁵⁴MH 8/7/98/71, Lugard to Willis, 22 June 1916.

⁵⁵MH 8/7/98/81, case of Baronne Fallon, July 1916; BEL 3/LLHC, Report. . . to January 31st, 1918, 7.

⁵⁶MH 8/20/106, report of A. Tilney Bassett on interview with Lady Lugard, December 1915.

attributed the harmony which prevailed in her hostels to this sensitivity to subtle social gradations. Lugard aimed to maintain "a fairly dignified and comfortable standard of living."⁵⁷ The dignity was as important as the comfort.

Most relief organisations carefully respected the dignity of the better-class refugees. Though the refugees were "guests," it was difficult to disguise their actual dependence on the goodwill of their English hosts. Here, as elsewhere, the double standard operated, and was betrayed persistently in language: "the Government depots were for the most part unsuitable for refugees of the respectable classes;" committees aimed to provide "an environment suitable to meet the needs" of upper class Belgians or hospitality "of a kind specially acceptable to better class Belgians;" on the other hand, a certain hostel was "not a bit fit for the better classes."⁵⁸

Suitability, acceptability, fitness: these norms were rarely invoked in discussions of the environment provided for working-class refugees. Whereas the environment had to be adapted to the needs of one small group, the rest were expected to adapt themselves to whatever situation in which they found themselves. "It is certainly difficult," Lady

⁵⁷ BEL 3, LLHC, Report. . . 1914-15, 5-6.

⁵⁸ WRC I, 8; 1920 Report, 1916; MH 8/1/82/102, Lyttelton to Maudslay, n.d.; GP 45992/293-94, Lady Katherine Lyttelton to Samuel, 18 January 1915; BEL 6/69, secretary of "Eskhaven" Belgian Refugee Home, Croydon, to Conway, 1 October 1917.

Lyttelton wrote to Gladstone early in 1915, "to persuade the better class to trust themselves to a Committee, but the lower middle class and the peasants can obviously be dealt with locally."⁵⁹ The elite enjoyed much more freedom of choice than the mass of their compatriots, and this freedom became one of the main points of dispute between Lady Lugard's committee and the WRC.

It must be repeated that Aldwych always accepted that the better class were entitled to more sympathetic treatment. When, in an attempt to resolve a deadlock over where power finally lay between the two organisations, a second PRF committee, jointly composed of representatives of both, was formed in May 1916 to deal exclusively with better-class refugees, the WRC went out of its way to see that a special interviewing room was "suitable [sic] furnished and made as comfortable as possible."⁶⁰ But Lugard exasperated Gladstone, Maudslay and others of her former colleagues by her refusal to investigate the circumstances of refugees in her care.

When all the refugees were equally the guests of the nation, the elite had the universally acknowledged privilege of being fussy about their accommodation. But, as the British authorities realised the labour potential of the

⁵⁹GP 46080/205-07, note by Lyttelton, 26 January 1915.

⁶⁰MH 8/22/113, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 5 May 1916.

refugees, and as public attitudes swung from insisting that refugees do no work to insisting that they find jobs, the WRC's attitude slowly hardened. It never abandoned "the methods of persuasion" with its own refugees when attempting to get them to work, but used its procedures for investigating and reviewing the increasing numbers of PRF cases to "raise the question of employment" with the refugees concerned. At the same time it strengthened the power of its Employment Department.⁶¹ For the incorrigibly workshy, Maudslay at one point proposed that, since "persuasion by kindness has its limits," a register of "sheep" and "goats" be compiled so that the Belgian government could discriminate against slackers on their repatriation at the end of the war.⁶² A much more effective and immediate sanction lay to hand in the shape of the Edmonton Refuge, the equivalent in the refugee world of the old deterrent workhouse. There were many subtle ways of encouraging a refugee to take work.

As growing numbers did take employment, a related problem arose. To what extent should refugees previously totally dependent on a host or committees begin to contribute to their maintenance out of their wages? Some local committees, especially in the West Riding of Yorkshire, took a strong position, seeking to leave refugees only one third

⁶¹WRC II, 22; WRC III, 22, 30; MH 8/21/25, memorandum by Leggett to Willis, 22 March 1916.

⁶²GP 46081/222, Maudslay to Willis, 28 June 1916.

of their wages and to reprise one third for maintenance and to bank one third against the day of repatriation. The policy caused much ill-feeling in some areas and the LGB vetoed it as ultra vires. Refugees were also expected to pay towards health expenses according to their means, the investigation procedures of the PRF and other departments once again being the method of putting pressure on the unwilling.⁶³ There were many of these: Gladstone wrote to Maudslay in May 1916 of "the 'try-on' wh [ich] is constantly being attempted." Many refugees had "an intelligible passion for saving" against the day of repatriation, but this the WRC could not recognise. "Our task," he concluded in the brusque tones of a government official, "is simply maintenance."⁶⁴

Such hardheadedness was anathema to Lady Lugard. Though she did not object in principle to asking her refugees to contribute to maintenance, she was horrified at the invasion of their privacy involved in investigating their income along WRC lines. Similarly, she was loath to compel her guests to work, claiming that most of the men in her hostels were old or delicate.⁶⁵ The WRC admitted "the difficulties in getting Belgians of the professional and

⁶³WRC II, 18, 61; GP 46013, Gladstone to Basil Pato, 1 December 1916.

⁶⁴MH 8/7/98/67, Gladstone to Maudslay, 31 May 1916.

⁶⁵MH 8/21/26, Lugard to Willis, 7 February 1916.

commercial classes to do manual labour," but Gladstone's irritation with the tenderhearted Lugard slowly boiled into rage at her refusal to abide by the general policies which had been established regarding payment towards maintenance and employment.⁶⁶ He bluntly criticised her for being "too generous with Government funds & for keeping the better-class refugee in idleness."⁶⁷ "The point really is," he pounded at Willis in December 1915, "whether her refugees are able bodied and capable of taking employment." He made patent that he thought they were capable, and went on:

The argument that her people are of the superior classes cannot hold water. To begin with, her refugees are by no means all of superior class. But if they were what does it come to? Because people are "superior" they are to be entertained at a higher rate and in far better quarters than "common" people. They are to be entertained in a state of laziness and are to be exempt from the pressure which the Board rightly insists should be placed on the tens of thousand people [sic] who are maintained in far less favourable conditions. This is exceptional treatment for which in my opinion there is no justification.⁶⁸

This was perhaps the strongest statement ever made by a senior official of the WRC on the question of the equitable treatment of all refugees. Faced with the grossly privileged status of Lugard's refugees, the class sympathies of men like Gladstone were slowly eroded. The WRC's initially strong

⁶⁶MH 8/21/26, memorandum of Maudslay to Willis, 22 March 1916.

⁶⁷BEL 2/1, Miss Ethel Conway, interview with Gladstone, 14 January 1918. Cf. GP 46082/91-92, Gladstone to Willis, 9 December 1915.

⁶⁸GP 46082/97-98, Gladstone to Willis, 13 December 1915.

belief in differential treatment was modified by a strain of egalitarianism.

Or so it seemed. Yet it may be doubted that Gladstone ever again spoke as trenchantly. Elsewhere, he emphasised what had been a subsidiary point in his tirade: "her refugees are by no means all of superior class."

Aldwych consistently complained that Lugard was not restricting herself to her original commission, but was extending her care of souls to middle-class people.⁶⁹ Differential treatment for different classes was one thing; but different treatment for refugees of the same class was another. "We cannot have two standards for that class of person," Maudslay firmly declared.⁷⁰ Even Lady Lyttelton, Lugard's fellow-traveller on the WRC, feared that one of Lugard's plans for a system of flats might cause trouble among the middle-class refugees who were the chief tenants of the Committee's own more frugal flats scheme.⁷¹

Lugard was in every sense a born imperialist, always seeking to expand her dominion, but her committee was slowly compelled to restrict its activities to the better class. The terms of its surrender were spelled out in an

⁶⁹MH 8/21/53, Gladstone to Willis, 17 January 1916; /22/56, Maudslay, note on interview with Walter Long, 31 March 1916.

⁷⁰GP 46013/201, Maudslay to Willis, 31 December 1915.

⁷¹GP 46013/80, Maudslay to Gladstone, 3 June 1915; GP 46081/178, Gladstone to Lugard, 4 June 1915.

agreement with the LGB in July 1916. Lugard had to promise that refugees receiving the special capitation grant of 15/- as against the normal grant of 10/- weekly were only of the better class, were "really in need of hospitality," should contribute to their maintenance if they had some income, and should be found work if possible so that they could become fully self-supporting.⁷²

There was a fatal weakness in the policy of class differentiation. As even the practised Lugard was forced to admit, "there was a considerable practical difficulty in determining the exact lines of demarcation between classes."⁷³ It was perhaps the fatal flaw of traditional philanthropy. In an ordered class society, where the recipients of charity were members of a deferential lower order, welfare policies based on treating people differently according to the criterion of "respectability"--which was a fusion of moral and class categories--could thrive. But when the patterns of deference, the submissiveness of the receiver to the giver, broke down, or powerful political forces were marshalled on the side of the recipients of relief, the props of the old philanthropy had to give way. This happened in the case of the Belgian refugee. It happened, too, on a wider scale with the rise of a self-confident, politically important

⁷²MH 8/24/21-22, Willis to Lugard, 7 February 1916.

⁷³MH 8/21/114, Lugard to Willis, 7 February 1916.
Cf. MH 8/7/98/79, Margaret West to Maudslay, 31 July 1916.

working class led by sophisticated men who themselves gained a share in the administration of social welfare.

In the changed social and political climate of early twentieth-century England, the arguments for the equal treatment of all citizens who were in need, regardless of their character, possessed one supreme advantage over the discriminating moralism espoused by the COS. That was the virtue of simplicity. The COS itself confessed the difficulties which the Belgians presented to its tried and true methods:

Assistance work is never easy, but the difficulty of this is hard to parallel. By the nature of the cases antecedents are practically unascertainable. As guests of the nation refusal of their applications is almost barred.⁷⁴

New Liberalism, with its insistence on state assistance as a right, not a privilege, did not face such dilemmas. The anguished threshings of the refugee relief movement over differentiation help explain why Liberal policy-makers like Lloyd George and bureaucrats like William Beveridge should find the principle of equity not only politically but also administratively attractive.

Not that the old philanthropy caved in altogether. The experience of the WRC suggests the remarkable continuity of the old ways of thinking. Old assumptions were weakened, but not destroyed by the war, as the history of civil defence preparations just before the Second World War suggests.

⁷⁴COS/Reports/J, Forty-Seventh Annual Report, 1915-16, 3.

Describing the planners' decision to rely on the agency of the Poor Law--now refurbished under the name Public Assistance--to organise facilities for bombed-out families, Richard Titmuss remarks:

A philosophy of life, cool, detached, and secure, which failed to contemplate the possibility that such things as clothing, rough shelter, soup and margarine might have to be provided by the community for others besides the deserving poor was almost bound to call upon the poor law. It was inconceivable, according to this philosophy, that the accident of war. . . would alter the fact that the poor would still be the poor and the fortunate the fortunate.⁷⁵

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

⁷⁵R. Titmuss, Social Policy, 251.

CHAPTER IX

WELFARE WORK

'A Delicate Adjustment of all the Sources of Help'

The war, in the guise of the refugees, exposed some of the difficulties inherent in the old philanthropic worldview which divided the "deserving" from the "undeserving." But refugee relief also demonstrated the great sophistication in method and approach to which charitable agencies had attained by 1914. If the war weakened the philanthropic impulse, it weakened a movement which was at the height of its powers. The WRC in particular developed a highly comprehensive system of welfare measures for its refugees who were, in many ways, better cared for than British citizens in dire straits. Above all, they did not face the threat of the workhouse. Nor, though the WRC followed in the steps of the COS, did refugees ever have to cringe in order not to starve.

The aid dispensed to refugees fell into several categories. At its simplest, aid meant gifts in kind, such as clothing or food. But the increasingly complex needs of a semipermanent refugee community demanded more sophisticated aid. Financial relief was given indirectly through free or cheap health care and education and directly through grants

in aid of wages. Finally, the WRC and other bodies helped refugees in many intangible ways: giving them advice, helping them through the maze of English bureaucracy, tracing missing relatives, and generally acting as their moral guardians.

As we have seen, the clothing department was one of the first branches of the WRC. The mania for making and collecting clothes from which the department initially benefited reflected the popular craving for symbolic patriotic service during the war's first months. Much of the clothing, like much of the frenetic activity of that period, was useless, but it gratified the givers and meant that some refugees were clothed more than generously. But, successful as were the WRC's clothing appeals, private giving soon failed to keep up with the huge numbers of refugees. To add to the problem, many clothes were useless because they did not suit Belgian tastes and were deemed unsuitable by discriminating distributors: "Belgian gentlemen won't take the capes we had and they are too good for the peasants."¹ Boots were especially sought after but there were never enough in stock.

Several makeshifts were devised to close the gap between supply and demand. Gladstone arranged for the GPO to send large quantities of unclaimed clothing found in the

¹GP 46078/347, Lady Emmott to Gladstone, 28 October 1914.

the mails to the clothing depot, and railway companies also handed in unclaimed clothing.² But these sources were as unreliable as private giving, and there was still no nexus between supply and demand. The WRC was allowed some flexibility by gifts of money earmarked for the clothing department, but these donations were never large and, as other charities blossomed, contributions for clothing dried up at the same rate as contributions to the WRC's general coffers.³ Gradually it became obvious that the clothing department could not cope unaided.

The WRC's first remedy was to economise. In February 1915 the Managing Committee decided that no more clothes were to go to government institutions, which now had to provide for their inmates.⁴ Secondly, the Committee moved to curb abuses, especially after a refugee's trunk was opened at the Rink to reveal seventy shirts and twenty pairs of trousers.⁵ The distribution of clothing from four improvised depots had encouraged hoarders, and the centralisation of distribution in new premises near Aldwych in March 1915 checked some fraud, while a complicated system of vouchers provided another safeguard. Thirdly, in March

²1920 Report, 20.

³GP 46081, 1-4, Emmott to Gladstone, n.d. (March, 1915) .

⁴MH 8/15/33, WRC, Managing Committee, minutes, 12 February 1915.

⁵GP 46081/43-45, H. Bourne to Gladstone, (n.d. March 1915) .

1915, the WRC was forced to ask the government for help. The LGB accepted responsibility for subsidising clothing work to the extent of £1 per refugee. But the Board tied strings to its aid and sent an official and several clerks to help Lady Emmott. The "help" was in fact thinly veiled control.⁶

Food

The collection and distribution of food followed a pattern similar to that of clothing. That is, it began in the conditions of spontaneous generosity which prevailed at the beginning of the war, became rapidly institutionalised, and then, as the harsher economic climate and multiple pressures of the war weakened private benevolence, came to depend on government subsidy. Although the WRC received gifts of food for its reception centres, it never directly entered the catering business. Instead, food distribution became the preserve of two other novice wartime organisations, the National Food Fund and the Belgian Refugee Food Fund. Despite its more specific title, the latter was much less important than the NFF, from which the BRFF had itself seceded.

The NFF could trace its antecedents to the prewar movements for women's suffrage and for land and food reform. As part of the great outburst of patriotic activism which

⁶MH 8/15/33, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 12 February 1915.

began in August 1914 as war became likely, a group of suffragists founded the Women's Emergency Corps.⁷ They aspired to create a kind of COS of wartime philanthropy, a body which would prevent overlapping and waste by coordinating effort and establishing a central register of voluntary workers.⁸ But the energies unleashed by the war were too dynamic to be channelled smoothly and nothing came of their ambitious project. Nonetheless, the WEC attracted many volunteers and, searching for work to give them, hungrily seized on Belgian relief. The Corps created a Belgian Department which supplemented the work of the WRC and which was swallowed up by the larger refugee organisation early in 1915. However, WEC workers meeting refugees at docks and

⁷Since the WEC entered public life on 6 August--cf. The Times, 6 August 1914--it seems that planning had begun before the outbreak of war. Its prompt appearance, as well as those of the Prince of Wales' Fund and the War Emergency Workers' National Committee, reflects the growing sense of impending catastrophe during the week before 5 August.

Mrs. Gilbert Samuel of the WRC was a leading member of the WEC. One of the founders, Mrs. Evelina Haverfield, was an erstwhile aide to Sylvia Pankhurst in the East London Federation of Suffragettes. Pankhurst wryly noted Haverfield's drift towards a militarist, authoritarian position, a trend epitomised by her membership first in the faintly paramilitary WEC and then her founding of the Women's Volunteer Reserve, whose Honorary Colonel was the Marchioness of Londonderry and whose members were "uniformed, drilled, saluting their officers, preparing to play their part at the Front." S. Pankhurst, The Home Front, 38. Haverfield's defection suggests that the war merely accelerated the disintegration of the radical wing of the suffrage movement. At the same time, it is only fair to say that the war increased Sylvia Pankhurst's commitment to socialism and hostility to the wealthy and powerful and that the Marchioness was opposed to the militarism of some of her colleagues. Marchioness of Londonderry, Retrospect (London, 1938), 111-13.

⁸Imperial War Museum, Women's Work and War Refugees

railway stations began collecting food for their reception centres from Covent Garden and other markets and then formed themselves into a food committee which hived off in October to become the National Food Fund.⁹

The story of the WRC was now reenacted. What began as women's work was largely taken over by men. The NFF also had its Lady Lugards, in a Lady Williams, who went off to set up the supernumerary BRFF, and Lady Julia Chance, wife of the prominent conservative authority on the Poor Law, Sir William Chance. Lady Chance stormed out of the NFF after a bitter row over the educational work of the Fund. The Fund had been set up not just to feed refugees and "necessitous British Poor," but to campaign against "the waste which now prevails in almost every British household whether rich or poor."¹⁰ The dominant group on the Fund's executive decided that the immediate and urgent work of feeding refugees must take precedence over the long term schemes, and the disgruntled educationalists resigned.¹¹

Collection, Voluntary Organisations file, 1/1, files of the WEC, including cuttings from Daily Telegraph, 24 March 1915, and The Times, 8 August 1914.

⁹BEL 5/files of WEC, Belgian Department, report of Mrs. Morton Evans, July 1917; report by Mrs. C Merston, 21 February 1920; Mrs. Eustace Miles, Untold Tales of War-Time London (London, 1930), 24-25.

¹⁰MH 8/2, unnumbered pamphlet between items 122 and 123, n.d.

¹¹See MH 8/2, passim, for the swelling controversy which came to a head in June 1915.

The two food funds were invaluable assets to the relief movement. First, they attracted massive gifts of food and money, especially from overseas. The dominions, the USA, and British colonies in South American countries sent large shipments of meat, flour, potatoes, sugar and other food-stuffs.¹² Secondly, the NFF had close contacts with bodies such as the London Chamber of Commerce which received many such gifts and was able to put the case for special consideration to be given to the refugees.¹³ Thirdly, the NFF had even closer ties with British commercial distributors through an affiliated body, the Smithfield Markets Belgian Relief Fund, and was thereby able to get gifts of surplus food as well as to buy food at greatly reduced prices.¹⁴ Fourthly, by centralising the purchase of food, the Funds were able to get food at cheaper rates than could individual hostels of Belgian families. Fifthly, the NFF set up a fairly efficient system for distributing food to refugees in the London area. Aldwych was extremely satisfied with its work, and tended to discount complaints about the quality of the food.¹⁵ The cheap food enabled the WRC and other committees

¹²MH 8/2, passim.

¹³Cf. MH 8/17/114, WRC, Managing Committee, minutes, 22 July 1915.

¹⁴For the Smithfield Markets Committee, see BEL 8/13, annual reports of the Smithfield Markets Belgian Relief Fund, 1915-18.

¹⁵MH 8/1/50/67, correspondence between WRC and Convent of Jesus and Mary, Willesden, April 1915.

to maintain refugees on the limited government capitation grants, and some committees were seriously jeopardised when their food rations ceased.¹⁶ The flats scheme particularly depended heavily on NFF food. Finally, the two Funds saved the inexperienced WRC all the costs of running a food distribution scheme of its own on its very limited resources. At the height of their activity, the BRFF was feeding about two thousand and the NFF six thousand refugees daily. One Aldwych official, seeking to describe the NFF to a foreign donor, was moved to call it "the greatest distributing medium for food that practically ever existed."¹⁷

Certainly, the Fund was the largest body of its kind at the time and was very different from the traditional soup kitchens and food charities of Victorian and Edwardian times. The refugees on its books received a balanced weekly ration from which the only omission was milk, though the supply of greens was erratic at times.¹⁸ Ironically, Belgians benefited from the Edwardian nutritionist or "food reform" movement long before large numbers of English citizens reaped the same benefits through the canteens of the

¹⁶MH 8/2/50/168, Mrs. Erskine Childers, Chelsea WRC, to Maudslay, 11 October 1915.

¹⁷MH 8/2/50/129, R. F. Barsdorf, assistant secretary, WRC, to W. Bayne, secretary of British Patriotic Fund, Montevideo, 15 November 1915.

¹⁸For a brief, unfriendly account of soup kitchens and food charities, see H. Bosanquet, *Social Work*, 337-31; also B. Gilbert, *National Insurance*, 104-07. MH 8/2/50/68, Eshelby to Maudslay, 22 April 1915.

Ministry of Munitions and the policies of the Ministry of Food.¹⁹ The creation of the Ministry of Food inevitably involved the very close supervision of the Funds' work and both were wound up when general rationing was introduced in 1918.²⁰ But their position had been deteriorating since the middle of 1915 with the steady dwindling of gifts in kind and increasing difficulties in shipping food from overseas. Gradually, the NFF tightened its criteria for giving relief and became progressively more dependent on the LGB, which agreed to subsidies after urgent lobbying by the WRC.²¹

Health

In the matter of health, the government for once moved faster than the WRC. The prewar anti-alien agitation had made it sensitive to the danger of immigrants introducing infectious diseases into Britain, and so the LGB had tried to secure the medical inspection of refugees before

¹⁹However, it should be noted that food reformers opened cheap kitchens in poor areas during the war. Pankhurst describes the resistance their authoritarian methods met from the people of Bow. Home Front, 43-45. Playne mentions, without explanation, that by 1917 "there were 30,000 associations and 1,200 committees working hard on food economy and propaganda". Carolyn Playne, Britain Holds On 1917-1918 (London, 1933), 68. Unfortunately, no scholars to date seem to have investigated this very promising subject.

²⁰WRC II, 6; BEL 8/4, undated notes of BRFF. For the deepening food crisis, see C. Playne, Britain Holds On, 65-68. For the Ministry of Food and a critical account of rationing policy, see D. Jerrold, Georgian Adventure, 210-16.

²¹WRC II, 21; MH 8/2/50/113a, Eshelby to Maudslay, 11 August 1915; 1920 Report, 24-25.

they left Belgium. The first medical cases among the refugees in Britain were dealt with by doctors at the depots of the MAB. But the condition of the refugees who had fled in the last days before the final collapse of Belgium was so desperate that the WRC set up a dispensary near Aldwych under a voluntary committee of British and Belgian doctors and staffed by a Voluntary Aid Detachment. It soon became apparent that more than an outpatients department was required for many of the sick and so, early in November, the WRC established a separate Health Department.²²

Thereafter, the Board and the Committee gradually worked out a rough division of responsibility. The Board agreed to look after serious cases in the country and established a small hospital near Aldwych. The hospital was a monument to the old anti-alien sentiment, for it was opened "avowedly with the object of protecting our home population from the dangers inseparable from the incursion of a large alien element."²³ The WRC also had to look after chronically-ill, maternity, convalescent and dental cases and to provide surgical devices such as trusses and artificial limbs.²⁴ In other words, the bulk of the work was

²²MH 8/7/98/31, "War Refugees Committee Dispensary", 17 February 1916; GP 46101/150, "Health Department", n.d. December 1914 .

²³WRC I, 17.

²⁴WRC II, 61; MH 8/15/24, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 5 February 1915; /25-26, H. Monro, LGB, to Gladstone, 5 February 1915.

left to private charity, and the Health Department proceeded to build up a wide-ranging network of health care based, as we have seen, on the generosity of hospitals, nursing homes, doctors, dentists and pharmacists throughout the Kingdom, all of them providing free treatment or charging reduced rates. Such generosity predictably decreased as the war lengthened and the government had to subsidise health care more heavily. Some of the divisions of responsibility were in any case poorly defined from the beginning. Nonetheless, thousands of refugees received medical help of some kind at small expense to the British taxpayer. Where possible, the refugees contributed according to their means, which the WRC was able to assess accurately by checking its dossiers.²⁵

The Health Department's work was extremely varied. One of its most important tasks was providing maternity facilities, and a number of hostels--segregated, as we have seen, along class lines--were set up specifically as maternity homes. The Department's work here overlapped with that of Mrs. Webbe's department, as many of the mothers, following a wartime trend, were unmarried. As well as supplying midwives, Aldwych gave help in homes where the mother had other young children to look after. A Belgian charity, l'Oeuvre des Consultations Infantiles Belges, provided layettes for babies in London while the Clothing Department clothed those

²⁵WRC II, 61.

in the provinces.²⁶ Both the LGB and the WRC laid great stress on the health of children--one of the important interests of the day since the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, appointed in the wake of national concern over the poor quality of recruits for the British army during the South African War, published its findings in 1904.²⁷ The children of Earl's Court Camp were reported to be in ruddy health as a result of regular weekly bathing, medical inspection in the school there, and a close watch on clothing.²⁸ Medical supervision at Earl's Court was strict, as the authorities wanted to ensure that no carriers of disease were dispersed from there throughout the country. Despite the government's fears, very few cases of infectious disease were found among the refugees and these were easily isolated. But the controls were also a sop to public opinion. The authorities and lodging house keepers in the special areas were extremely sensitive to the topic of infection, and the discovery of cases of smallpox and measles on occasions threatened to halt the flow of Belgians to places like Blackpool.²⁹

²⁶1920 Report, 24.

²⁷For a discussion of the enormous interest in the health of the nation after the South African War, see B. Gilbert, National Insurance, 107-08, 120-23.

²⁸G. Powell, Four Years in a Refugee Camp, 36.

²⁹GP 46080/286-87, W. Cartledge, Mayor of Blackpool, to Gladstone, 11 February 1915; MH 8/7/96/58, E. Tudor Owen, LGB, to Maudslay, 6 May 1916.

Chronic cases, especially old people, went to nursing homes or Poor Law infirmaries. The LGB placed consumptives in sanatoria, but here again the familiar division of labour manifested itself, though in reverse. The WRC founded a colony in Gunnislake, Cornwall, for consumptives discharged from the sanatoria as unlikely to benefit from further treatment.³⁰ Many refugees deemed in need of convalescent treatment were sent to seaside resorts, in some cases to reside, in others to vacation. The grounds on which such decisions were made were quite broad, and many of the convalescents were "neurasthenia" cases. The WRC noted a high and constantly rising rate of psychiatric disorders among the refugees which it attributed to "the impatience of the refugees and their general anxiety brought about by the conditions of war."³¹ "Lunatics" were at first dealt with by local institutions, but late in 1916 the Board decided to concentrate all Belgian "lunatics" in one place and fifty-four were transferred to the London asylum of Colney Hatch, where they could be looked after by French- and Flemish-speaking attendants. Others were shipped to France at the request of the Belgian authorities.³² As for the ordinary refugee forced to seek medical help for minor ailments, he was indebted not to the government but to the

³⁰1920 Report, 22.

³¹WRC II, 76.

³²London County Council, The Council and the War (London, 1920), 54; MH 8/24/116, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 7 September 1916. By an administrative quirk, "lunatics" were dealt with by the Transport Department at Aldwych.

general practitioners of Britain.

Education

Many of the refugees were children and their education soon became a matter of concern to their parents and to the English authorities. The first wartime report of the Board of Education considered the influx of refugee children as one of the war's main effects on education.³³ The WRC was for a time too busy with allocation to give much attention to education, and schooling arrangements depended on local circumstances. However, in November 1914, the WRC recognised the importance of education by establishing an Education Department.³⁴

For most children the problem of schooling was simple, and easily solved. They went to the local elementary school, rapidly picked up a command of English, followed English curricula, and by all accounts "got on very happily with both teachers and pupils."³⁵ Secondary schooling presented more problems. The schools were fewer and more widely scattered than elementary schools, and they charged fees. However, joining in the surge of overwhelming public sympathy for the Belgians in 1914, educational authorities,

³³PP. Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1913-1914, 1915, Cd. 7934, 4.

³⁴WRC I, 17-18; MH 8/7, unnumbered file, "Memorandum 3", n.d.

³⁵WRC II, 52.

whether county boards of education or the governors of private schools, responded generously. The London County Council led the way in the middle of October with a decision to waive fees for Belgian students in its schools, and many private schools offered free places or charged greatly reduced rates. Indeed, it became fashionable to have a Belgian student at one's school--as long as he or she was of the right class.³⁶ But even with the burden of fees removed, many parents found the hidden costs of secondary education--books, materials, transportation, lunches and uniforms--beyond their means, and the Education Department had to dip deeply into the funds which the Managing Committee had allotted it.³⁷ The schools themselves, especially private boarding schools, began to feel the pinch of rising wartime prices and in 1916 the WRC lamented that "latterly free education, apart from the national schools, became as rare as free hospitality." Once again, private generosity was unable to last the unexpected length of the war and the government was forced to cover the cost of board. It was a typical compromise, involving the government in some expense but saving it the further expense of paying for the children's education.

³⁶LCC/EDUCATION/AGENDA/11, Education Committee. agenda, 14 October 1914. See LCC, Council and the War, 53-54, for a general account of its work with refugees.

³⁷WRC II, 53; MH 8/1/82/135, Fr. Christie to Gladstone, 25 January 1916.

The suitability of the education provided was an even more difficult problem than those of availability and cost. There were three arguments against the education of Belgian children in the English school system. The first was religious. The Catholic Church, quiescent in other areas of refugee relief, took an active interest in education. The effective head of the Education Department was a Jesuit, Fr. Christie, and the Department worked closely with a Belgian Education Committee which was led by another priest, the Abbé Michiels, and completely controlled by the Belgian hierarchy. The Catholic authorities, both British and Belgian, wished to ensure a Catholic education for as many children as possible and probably most of the private schools which offered free places were Catholic. However, there were limits to the number of Belgian children they could take, though most girls requiring secondary education were admitted to convent schools.³⁸ The second argument was cultural. Parents feared that their children would grow up poorly educated in their own language and culture. One Flemish priest at an educational conference called by the WRC frankly declared that Belgian schools were needed "not only in order that Belgian studies might be developed, but in order that the Flemings might have their nationality

³⁸MH 8/31/18-20, "Educational Conference summoned at the request of the War Refugees Committee", 18 October 1917.

developed."³⁹ Girls were once again better off than boys, because many convent schools had French- or Flemish-speaking nuns on their staff, and there were many more refugee nuns than priests.⁴⁰ The third argument was educational. The English and Belgian systems differed in many ways, and parents feared that their children would be severely handicapped by the curricular differences when they resumed their schooling in Belgium. Most parents had not been deeply concerned at first, when it was universally expected that the war would soon be over. But as the war settled into a stalemate, they became seriously alarmed. Some even chose to return to Belgium for the sake of their children's education.⁴¹

A loose system of Belgian schools therefore developed to meet this need. The first schools entirely for Belgian children were actually government-run institutions at Earl's Court and Poland Street.⁴² Schools were also established where there were large aggregations of Belgians, as at Blackpool, but the host community sponsored these. More often, special classrooms were set aside at schools where there were enough Belgian pupils to warrant the appointment

³⁹Ibid., 18.

⁴⁰WRC II, 55.

⁴¹MH 8/7/98/50, Michiels to Maudslay, 25 March 1916; BEL 1/5, committee of l'Union Belge, Folkestone, to L. Franklin, 1 September 1915.

⁴²LCC/Emergency Committee I, minutes, 84, 8 October 1914; G. Powell, Four Years in a Refugee Camp, 38.

of a Belgian teacher. At first, neither the WRC nor the leaders of the Belgian community were interested in setting up separate schools, the Committee arguing that the refugees were too scattered. It was not till the children had spent one school year in England and were facing their second, with no end to the war in sight, that the Belgian community's leaders acted.⁴³ Bishop de Waechter, delegate in England of the Belgian primate, Cardinal Mercier, decided to establish a chain of elementary schools. Despite its concern that Belgian children should receive a Catholic education, the English hierarchy was unenthusiastic because of the cost which the project would inevitably entail. The WRC disclaimed any financial liability beyond the payment of fees for poorer students, and the Belgian government could promise only a very small subsidy. Cardinal Bourne agreed with Christie and Maudslay that the funds available were so low as to be "absurd," and was less than happy to learn that the Belgians proposed to augment them by appealing to English Catholics.⁴⁴ But the Belgians persisted and painfully established their schools in makeshift premises on shoestring budgets. By the end of the war, there were over one hundred primary schools with about eight thousand

⁴³GP 46078/321, J. Paley Yorke to Gladstone, 23 October 1914; /336-37, Gladstone to Paley Yorke, 26 October 1914; BEL 6/4, report of Aldeburgh Belgian Children's Home, 24 November 1914.

⁴⁴MH 8/8/112, "Interview between Cardinal Bourne, Fr. Christie and Mr. Maudslay", 16 September 1915.

students, thirteen écoles moyennes with 1,400 students, and two écoles normales with about 250 students.⁴⁵

A number of boarding schools were also created to meet a widespread demand. In contrast to British practice, in Belgium even working-class and lower-middle-class parents sent their children to boarding school, and many wished to do so now they realised that the war would drag on indefinitely. The argument for boarding schools was an a fortiori one: if day schools protected the children's national identity, then boarding schools would do the job even better. Family welfare was another consideration: many women whose husbands had been called up, and who had taken jobs in munitions factories to supplement the meagre separation allowances paid by their impoverished government, begged the WRC to place their children "under proper supervision and control" in a boarding school. However, English boarding schools were ill-equipped to deal with lower class children and the WRC was hard-pressed to find "suitable" schools.⁴⁶ Eventually, boarding schools were attached to the two écoles normales, both in suburbs of London, but the queue was

⁴⁵BEL 3/Appendix VII, enclosure by Fr. Inglebeen for Mrs. E. Childers, 30 January 1917: "Schools for Belgian Children"; WRC III, 35.

⁴⁶MH 8/7/98, unnumbered file between 101 and 102, memorandum by Education Committee, n.d. late 1916 ; BEL 3/Appendix I, L. Lovatt to Lyttelton, 11 October 1914, and Rev. Lionel Ford, headmaster of Harrow, to Lyttelton, 9 November 1914.

always long.⁴⁷

The Belgian school system was a remarkable achievement, given the feeble resources of the Belgian community. Their government paid for some books and for teachers' salaries--which were so inadequate that the WRC at one point contemplated designating the teachers for relief.⁴⁸ Parents contributed if they had the means and the system benefited from the increased affluence of the refugees later in the war. But the schools could not have functioned without British help. The NFF provided meals for six hundred children in the "Flemish Schools" and the WRC contributed money and expertise towards the establishment of the schools, hunting for premises and buying furniture.⁴⁹ The WRC also acted as agent for the British government in dispensing maintenance grants to boarders who could not afford the fees, subject of course to "careful investigation of the parents' means."⁵⁰

The expansion of the Belgian school system and the corresponding increase in the Education Department's work illustrated how the WRC was pulled again and again into ever more complex administrative responsibilities. Perhaps, by an effort of will, it could have set its face sternly against

⁴⁷WRC III, 35.

⁴⁸MH 8/31/18-20, educational conference, esp. 19.

⁴⁹MH 8/26/109, WRC, minutes, of Managing Committee, 25 January 1917.

⁵⁰MH 8/7/98/50, Michiels to Maudslay, 25 March 1916.

increasing its responsibilities beyond the bare minimum. But the logic of the "guests of the nation" thesis and the policy of differential treatment served to enmesh the WRC ever more deeply.

Fulham

Again and again the WRC found that there were no obvious limits to the work of relief, other than those imposed by dearth of money and manpower. Nothing illustrates better the way in which every circumstance seemed to conspire to draw the WRC into more and more sophisticated relief work than the case of the Fulham refugee colony after the anti-Belgian riots of May 1916.

By early 1916 a large number of poor working class Belgians from Antwerp and Ostend had drifted into the worst area of the London suburb of Fulham. By September 1915 the NFF was already feeding seven hundred people there--roughly one eighth of all the refugees on its books--and for some time had been contemplating opening a special depot there.⁵¹ But the WRC itself, lacking close communication with the huge refugee population of the metropolitan area, seems to have paid little attention to the Fulham colony, and was content to let the Fulham COS act as its agent.⁵² However,

⁵¹WRC II, 24; COS/Reports/J, Forty-seventh Annual Report, 1915-16, 5; MH 8/2/50/163, Parker to Maudslay, 23 September 1915.

⁵²WRC I, 24.

the riots in May 1916 jolted Aldwych sharply to attention. The most important fruit of its close scrutiny of the situation which led to the riots was of course the Bill extending Belgian conscription. More specifically, the WRC moved to rectify the severe problems of the Fulham refugees.

Ironically, it found that the Fulham refugees, far from being a pampered minority, were one of the worst pockets of deprivation among the many refugee communities in Britain. On 20 September, a delegation of senior relief officials visited Heckfield Place, the worst slum, to verify reports that "families were living in cellars and basements without any furniture, beds or bedding, and generally under very distressing conditions." The delegation used even stronger language after their visit: the people of Heckfield Place were living "in absolute piggery." The officials felt that the residents would be much better off in Earl's Court, but the refugees resented this:

They were unanimous in stating that they did not wish to go to Earls [sic] Court and that what they required was some beds and furniture together with a money grant if possible. These families are from a very low social strata [sic] of the population. It seems clear that to give money grants would have practically no effect in bettering their position [condition?], and if grants were given in these cases there would then be no chance whatever of persuading them to go and live in Earls Court Camp. Mr. Peto was of opinion that grants should not be given in these cases, that the families should be urged to go to FCC [sic], but that if they refused, as there was no power to make them go, the utmost that could be done for them would be to provide a modest amount of beds and furniture.⁵³

⁵³MH 8/25/7, memorandum by H. A. Leggett, 30 May 1916: "Visit to Heckfield Place, Fulham".

After several months' deliberation,⁵⁴ the Committee decided that the problems of the Place and its environs were too overwhelming to be solved by any one method. The existing system of remote control had failed. So, early in December 1916, the WRC decided to establish a branch office in Fulham. It politely asked the COS, which had so obviously failed in its task, to step aside, claiming that it was bowing to pressure from the Belgian Legation and the BOC who did not "like the cases of Belgian refugees being regarded purely from the point of view of charity for the relief of distress."⁵⁵

The office was established early in 1917 under an Aldwych veteran, Miss Newton. Under her energetic command, a major effort was made to rehouse as many people as possible, mainly by establishing a system of flats for which the WRC acted as a landlord.⁵⁶ Other families were helped with furniture and money grants, while the full majesty of

⁵⁴MH 8/23/95, /24/115 and /25/3, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 30 June and 7 and 21 September 1916. The whole process of investigation took a remarkably long time, though the WRC had taken interim measures to relieve the situation at Fulham, reviving the dormant plan for a food depot and giving a hefty donation to the Fulham Flemish School, for which it also arranged better premises.

⁵⁵GP 46013/231, Basil Peto to Rev. J. Pringle, secretary of COS, 11 December 1916. The argument was probably a pretext since the Tottenham COS continued to act as the WRC's agent in another area with many poor Belgian families. WRC II, 24.

⁵⁶MH 8/26/29, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 8 December 1916.

the Poor Law, in the shape of the District Relieving Officer, was invoked to force intransigents to "improve their methods of living."⁵⁷ Newton used the carrot and the stick, offering prizes for the houses and flats which were kept in the best order: a hallowed COS technique.⁵⁸ Fulham indeed became a model of the WRC's COS-derived methods in action and the Fulham colony even became something of a laboratory for the whole relief movement. For instance, a careful study of the eating habits of the Fulham refugees was made during 1917 and 1918. Their diet was checked against published dietary scales to see "how far the money grants running were justified"--a euphemism for economising.⁵⁹

Many themes are worth noting in this story. The first is the WRC's reliance on the methods of the COS. But the second is the supplanting of the COS by an organisation which, because it could rely on the state for fairly generous funds, was able to tackle the problems of Fulham in much more thoroughgoing fashion. The local COS patently failed to cope with the acute problems of Heckfield Place, perhaps not least because the old COS reliance on people with knowledge of local conditions was misplaced where the distressed were aliens. The WRC's passion for careful investigation comes out at every point, and the study of diet as a way of

⁵⁷MH 8/26/79-80, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 5 January 1917.

⁵⁸WRC II, 25.

⁵⁹WRC III, 25.

assessing the size of grants exemplifies the "fine tuning," the "delicate adjustment" which marked Aldwych's policy. The familiar horror of the word "charity" marks the letter to the Fulham COS, while the coercive aspects of WRC welfare policy are reflected in Peto's proposal to withhold grants in order to force refugees into Earl's Court.⁶⁰ But the incident also makes clear the limits of coercion. The refugees' stubborn refusal to leave the squalor of Fulham for the clean security of the Camp suggests that by the middle of the war Belgian communities had developed with minds of their own and a strong preference for freedom from the restraints many refugees endured during their first months in England, a time symbolised by the Camp and its efficient paternalism.

But the Fulham riots above all raised the issue of differentiation in a new form. This time, the contrasts were not between classes of Belgians but between native English and the refugees. The WRC insisted from the first that, even where Belgians had found employment and were earning wages equal to those of many English workers, they were subject to subtle disadvantages which made extra help necessary. The refugees had no extended and established family networks and therefore no one to fall back on "in

⁶⁰ It should be noted, however, that Peto, then the Commissioner for Belgian Refugees, was not a member of the WRC and was opposed and finally overthrown by the Committee partly because of his highhanded and injudicious methods. For Peto, see chapter XI.

times of stress;" they had no stock of furniture and household goods with which to furnish their own lodgings in a housing market where furnished accommodation was scarce and expensive; and, being utterly unfamiliar with English shopping patterns, were "quite unable to get the same value for 1/- as an English workman."⁶¹ The WRC was always aware of the resentment which extra help, however warranted, could cause among English workers. But Walter Long, when he took over control of refugee work from Samuel in December 1915, felt that Aldwych needed reminding that, while "elasticity" was desirable, "hospitality should not be construed as an obligation to place the refugees actually in a better position than that occupied by corresponding classes of our own people."⁶² Leggett, the LGB's representative at Aldwych, had earlier strongly emphasised that, unless care was exercised, refugees who were working and getting supplementary grants would be better off than British workers and that "if this becomes general there is bound to be trouble with the Labour Party." The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, through their representative at Aldwych, Bowerman, also made it known that they felt strongly on the matter.⁶³

⁶¹GP 46081/218-23, Maudslay to Willis, 28 June 1915; GP 46082/29-32, A. A. Allen to Gladstone, 21 August 1915; WRC I, 32. Cf. BEL 6/118, Hull Committee, interim report, 13.

⁶²WRC I, 45.

⁶³BEL 1/6, memorandum by Leggett, 24 August 1915, 9.

Leggett repeated his warning to a chastened Committee a week after the riots, and predicted that the problem of supplementary aid to refugees would grow worse. Above all, the passing of the Military Service Act early in 1916 had created an entirely new situation, in that many English families "of all grades and classes of society" would be "placed in a position analogous to that of the Belgian refugee who had no resources of his own." He went on to attack strongly the generous policy on grants, arguing that it encouraged refugees to look to Aldwych for help in "any and every kind of emergency," no matter how trivial; that the grounds on which grants were given were becoming broader; and that the refugees had been in England long enough to learn to fend for themselves and shop cheaply. He was particularly sardonic about what he surmised would be the lavish style of the newly-formed PRF committee for better-class refugees and was generally against making class a factor in relief policy. Regarding Belgian white-collar workers earning standard rates of pay, a group which was particularly fond of seeking aid from the PRF, Leggett tartly commented: "I imagine that there are many English clerks in no better position and who have no one to apply to and whom no Charitable Society would assist for a moment under these conditions."⁶⁴

⁶⁴BEL 1/6, report by Leggett, 30 May 1916. But, in fact, Leggett was not against special help being given to the better class refugees, especially those who went out and found manual labour. Cf. BEL 1/6, Leggett's report, 24 August

Leggett's was the authentic voice of the Poor Law administrator so detested by the WRC, stressing above all the equality of all before the Poor Law and cynical about the dangerously antinomian proclivities of philanthropic caseworkers. But his was also the voice of many Englishmen in 1916 and the Committee listened. A more stringent policy on grants resulted. Likewise, early in 1917, the WRC curtailed its food rationing schemes because "the policy of giving free food, and particularly the foods that are unprocurable by the British public at ordinary shops, might give rise to strong feeling in certain districts of London."⁶⁵

The Fulham rioters had made their point: that it was in many ways better to be a poor refugee than a poor Englishman in 1916. And their protest helped drive home a lesson that the British governing elite learned slowly and painfully in the Great War but which they grasped firmly in the Second World War: that a people at war demand above all fair and equal treatment for all citizens, regardless of class.

1915, 9, and Gladstone's similar view. MH 8/7/98/67, Gladstone to Maudslay, 31 May 1916.

⁶⁵MH 8/7/98/135, Maudslay to Willis, 15 March 1917. Cf. WRC II, 31, for the WRC's sensitivity to English susceptibilities in its policy on the treatment of truant Belgian schoolchildren and their parents.

CHAPTER X

THE REFUGEES AND ALIENS CONTROL

'Un Camp de Concentration'

The refugees were friendly aliens welcomed officially in England. But they were aliens and the country was at war. Beginning with the original Aliens Restriction Order of 5 August 1914, the refugees were caught in a maze of regulations controlling their freedom of movement. They could not, except with the greatest difficulty, return to Belgium; they could not reside in many areas of Britain; and they had to notify the police of every journey they made. The restrictions affected their search for jobs, housing, and places of convalescence and relaxation. The effect on Belgian morale was great. Many felt, as one Belgian commentator put it, that "le Belge est un peu dans un camp de concentration."¹

If the regulations made life miserable for the refugees, they likewise brought a mountain of unwelcome work to an already overburdened and understaffed police force. Nor were the regulations welcomed by the two official agencies in charge of the refugees, the LGB and the WRC, or other departments, such as the Board of Trade and the Ministry of

¹H. Davignon, Un Peuple en Exil, 58.

Munitions, interested in rapidly injecting the refugees into the economy. As a result of pressure from all these sources, the restrictions were gradually loosened. But they were never abolished, because the military authorities were firmly retentionist and were backed by public opinion. The refugees were never able to escape the stigma attached to aliens in general. Their story forms an important segment of the wider story of British policy towards aliens during the war and its culmination in the important Aliens Restriction Act of 1919.

British measures of control, carefully drawn up before the war to cover aliens already in Britain, had to be constantly revised to deal with the many new and unforeseen eventualities which the war brought. The original Aliens Restriction Order of 5 August had to be amended twenty-seven times during the war. Though most were directed against enemy aliens, some dealt specifically or indirectly with the Belgians.² The Order as first proclaimed dealt solely with enemy aliens, compelling them to register with local police, forbidding travel without a permit more than five miles from home, banning them from living in most of Scotland, the coastal districts of south and south-eastern England, and military districts, without special dispensation, and nominating eleven ports through which they could enter or

²T. Roche, Key in the Lock, 92.

leave England.³ Of these provisions the prohibited areas clause most affected the refugees at first. When the Order was drafted before the war, its framers had in mind only the small, settled enemy alien community. No one had foreseen the sudden invasion of over one hundred thousand friendly aliens. To complicate matters further, the vast majority of refugees came in through Folkestone, which lay in a prohibited area.⁴

To deal with the unexpected problem of alien friends, the government issued a consolidating order on 9 September, just as Samuel was announcing the government's policy on refugees. The order laid down that friendly aliens had to register with police in the prohibited areas. On the same day, the LGB issued a circular, followed by another two weeks later, advising local authorities against placing refugees in the prohibited areas and stressing that refugee committees should only be formed there with the approval of the local police.⁵ The advice was not heeded by a WRC beset with numerous problems of internal organisation. But the flood of refugees in October caused the government to

³MH 8/1, copy of "Statutory Rules and Orders, 1914. No. 1374: Aliens Restriction (Consolidation) Order, 1914", 9 September 1914.

⁴HO 45/10737/261921/29, memorandum by J. F. Moylan, Home Office, 21 October 1914; GP 45985/166, Gladstone to Princess Christian, 27 October 1914.

⁵Cd. 7763, Special Work, 15.

take a sterner line. On 21 October, the Home Office extended the list of areas prohibited to aliens and put pressure on the LGB to ensure refugees were not sent into them. The net effect of the various orders and circulars was that no new refugees were to go to any prohibited areas in the south and south-east coast; that refugees might be received in other prohibited areas if the local chief constables approved; and that refugees already settled in prohibited areas need not be disturbed unless the local police or military authorities required it.⁶ These extensions of the original order opened the way for a three-cornered contest between the LGB and WRC, the Home Office and police, and the War Office and Admiralty. With so many bodies involved, a uniform policy proved difficult to achieve, and the regulations and their interpretation continued to change throughout the war. Each change, though often designed to simplify matters, added to the confusion.

The prohibited areas were a case in point. Warned in advance by the Home Office, the LGB sent a circular to all towns and counties covered by the order of 21 October. But on the day the order was issued, Sir Horace Monro, secretary of the LGB, wrote to John Pedder, his opposite number at the Home Office, confessing that the Board was in some doubt as

⁶Cd. 7763, Special Work, 15.

to the precise areas affected by the regulations.⁷ Towns in the interior of coastal counties complained that nothing except administrative convenience explained why they were included and asked to be exempt. Many communities were then busily forming refugee committees in the second wave of enthusiasm for the Belgians which followed the fall of Antwerp, and the WRC was naturally eager to harness their energies. The Home Office assured Gladstone on 22 October that neither itself nor the LGB proposed ordering the removal of all refugees from the strategic prohibited areas, but told him that refugees in Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex "should be thinned out gradually as opportunities occur."⁸ The WRC was therefore obliged to cancel some thousands of offers of hospitality in the affected areas but called on the people concerned to help financially.⁹ The decision caused great disappointment among communities in the prohibited areas and harmed the WRC, which, though not responsible, took much of the odium.

However, it was not until a month later that refugees were officially forbidden to live in prohibited areas. The LGB and the Home Office had at first been content with one

⁷HO 45/10737/261921/47, H. Monro to J. Pedder, 21 October 1914.

⁸GP 46101/119, memorandum by Gladstone, "Prohibited Areas. Report of Conversation with Mr. Moylan (Home Office) on October 22nd 1914."

⁹GP 46101/122, memorandum issued to Press Association by WRC, 23 October 1914.

of the gentlemen's agreements so common in the hectic and novel situation of late 1914. But Moylan on 2 November criticised "the informal character of the agreement" which had caused "considerable difficulty and confusion," to which the press had added by "various conflicting and misleading announcements."¹⁰ Moylan's charge was supported by evidence from many localities. Local police were not always sure how to interpret the regulations and their actions varied accordingly. Some assumed that refugees were banned from prohibited areas. Thus, when the town of Chingford in Essex was declared prohibited on 8 November, the police informed refugees in Chingford that they would have to leave. Backed by intense local indignation, the three-weeks-old refugee committee made "strong representations." The police relented: refugees already in Chingford could stay, but no more were to come into the town.¹¹ Other chief constables were more aware that they had no powers to forbid refugees to reside in their bailiwicks and that these powers rested with local military commanders acting under the terms of the Defence of the Realm Act.¹²

But the regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act were not readily invoked. In one case, the British

¹⁰HO 45/10737/261921/92, minute by Moylan, 2 November 1914.

¹¹BEL 6/55, Chingford committee, "Report 1914-1919".

¹²HO 45/10737/261921/92, ibid.

authorities bent over backwards to be polite to an offending refugee committee. This was headed by Dr. Charles Sarolea, a flamboyant publicist and Belgian consul in Edinburgh. Sarolea insisted on bringing refugees into Edinburgh despite a courteous request from the chief constable, to which Sarolea replied with an aggressive article in the Scotsman. The Scottish Office sought help from the Foreign Office, which in turn asked Lalaing to speak to Sarolea. Two months later, Sarolea was still successfully defiant.¹³ Probably his talent for publicity and his consulship spared him rougher handling. But his case shows how slow civilian departments were to use the all-encompassing powers of "Aunty Dora."

Chief constables were often more lenient than military commanders. Thus, the chief constable for the Isle of Wight was inclined on rather cynical grounds to accept refugees into Ryde, where a local committee had been formed: "They wd be confined to 2 or 3 houses, completely under his obs[ervatio]ns & control, & they wd give the charitably disposed something to do & keep them quiet."¹⁴ The Home Office refused permission, just as it later rejected a

¹³FO 369/671/64867, J. W. Dodds, Scottish Office, to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 28 October; Crowe to Lalaing, 1 November; FO 371/1913/85094, Dodds to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 19 December, Crowe to Lalaing, 23 December 1914.

¹⁴HO 45/10737/261921/9, "H.W." to Pedder, 11 October 1914.

Foreign Office request to reconsider the expulsion of a Belgian family from the island.¹⁵ The Home Office's firm line was probably a concession to the War Office, which it was currently fighting to a standstill over plans to extend the limits of the prohibited areas on the south coast.¹⁶ When the WRC a few months later asked that a Belgian priest be allowed to convalesce on the Isle, Pedder returned a courteous and regretful refusal: "I am sorry I cannot do this. The local Military Authorities have taken an absolutely rigid line against the entry of any new aliens into the island and the Home Office and Police are powerless."¹⁷ The ladies of Ryde had to find other things to "keep them quiet."

The boundaries of the prohibited areas continued to be a matter for dispute and negotiation throughout the war. One outraged observer described the situation late in October 1914 as "perfect chaos." Belgians were living in prohibited areas yet no "responsible" deputy lieutenant or magistrate had any authority to instruct the police to remove them. He described the confusion in Lincolnshire.

¹⁵FO 371/1913/79532, Pedder to under secretary of state, Foreign Office, 4 December 1914.

¹⁶HO 45/10737/261921/172, Pedder, minute, 19 November 1914; /192, Cubitt to under secretary of state, Home Office, 25 November 1914.

¹⁷GP 46081/121, Gladstone to Pedder, 29 April 1915; annotation by Pedder, n.d.

The local military commander had ordered all Belgians to leave districts within twelve miles of the coast. At the same time, the LGB was asking the Lindsay relief committee to arrange, without restriction of area, for the reception of refugees, while it was "generally believed by responsible magistrates that the Home Office are under the erroneous belief that the original instructions are being carried out. . . and even desire the extension to 40 miles." It is not surprising that local committees were bewildered and demoralised by these inconsistencies. Even where no confusion existed, some local committees were abruptly destroyed when local commanders declared their areas to be defended harbours or military bases.¹⁸

As accommodation became critically short and the government assumed more responsibility for refugees, the LGB began pressing for a diminution in the size of the prohibited areas. This was one of Samuel's stratagems in his unsuccessful attempt to flush out more offers of hospitality in January 1915. Monro wrote to the Home Office suggesting that at least some coastal hinterlands might be made available to refugees "without prejudice to naval and military interests." The Home Office was sympathetic if sceptical. Pedder felt that areas of inland Kent and Sussex and some eastern areas "might be contracted a little." However, he pointed out that the Home Office had no control over Liverpool and Cardiff,

¹⁸The Times, 27 October 1914, Lord Heneage to the editor.

both mentioned by the LGB, because these, as defended ports, fell under the Admiralty and War Office.¹⁹

In most discussions of the control of refugees, the battle lines remained the same. At one extreme stood the WRC, whose interests lay in securing the utmost freedom for its charges to live and move anywhere. The Committee's members were all personally involved with the refugees and generally identified with their grievances and with the complaints of local committees. The LGB's interests were the same as the Committee's and the two normally stood together. As civil servants, however, the Board's officials tended to view matters more dispassionately. Monro's chief argument for restricting the prohibited areas in January 1915 was saving the public purse by inducing more hosts to receive refugees.²⁰ As a government department, the Board had to operate by the conventions governing interdepartmental negotiations and to proceed diplomatically. Nonetheless, the LGB stood squarely with the WRC on most issues.

At the other extreme stood the military departments.

¹⁹HO 45/10737/261921/298, Monro to under secretary of state, Home Office, 7 January 1915; memorandum by Pedder, 8 January 1915. That these latter were not inclined to leniency was shown late in 1915 when Hatch asked for certain districts on the Ayrshire coast to be set free from restrictions. The War Office and Admiralty turned this modest request down flat. Glasgow City Archives, C 1/3/54/604, council executive committee, minutes, 3 December 1915.

²⁰HO 45/10737/261921/298, Monro.

The War Office was generally harsher than the Admiralty, which had fewer areas to worry about. The War Office and local military authorities established a reputation for arbitrary and inflexible behaviour towards English civilians during the war and were certainly no less exacting to aliens. The families and dependents of soldiers were shamefully neglected and only the unrelenting efforts of the War Emergency Workers' National Committee and others like Sylvia Pankhurst wrung better treatment from them.²¹ If the generals at the front showed themselves at best unimaginative and at worst incompetent and callous, their colleagues in England demonstrated similar failings.

The unattractive record of the War Office deserves some explanation. Inevitably, soldiers are concerned with military matters to the exclusion of much else. In 1914 a small military establishment used to dealing with a small professional army had to adjust to a war of unprecedented size and to providing men and material on a mammoth scale. Furthermore, the most able senior staff officers at first went to France in droves, leaving elderly or less competent officers behind to cope with the complex and unexciting task of mobilisation.²² These men were overwhelmed by the task of training and equipping Kitchener's recruits. All else was subordinated. The Home Office held the middle ground.

²¹WNC, Report, 6-7; S. Pankhurst, Home Front, passim.

²²F. A. Johnson, Defence by Committee (London, 1960), 136.

On the one hand, it was responsible for the internal security of the country and therefore shared the military's fears of espionage and sabotage. On the other hand, it was a civilian department and its officials were more sympathetic to the LGB's problems. Its members were amused by the excessive military fear of spies in refugees' clothing and the department's self-interest dictated a moderate policy. Its police force, not the military authorities who demanded the controls, bore the brunt of keeping track of refugees. And the English police became increasingly overworked during the war. Many policemen volunteered during the period of uncontrolled enlistment and the depleted force was asked to cope with masses of paperwork thrown up by mushrooming regulations.²³

Aliens were only one group whom the police were required to watch. There were conscientious objectors after 1916, deserters from the army and black marketeers, while the vast movements of population caused by the new war industries entailed new supervisory tasks. In the case of aliens, the police confronted a bewildering array of orders, which they were hardpressed to interpret let alone administer. Different regulations prevailed at different times for friendly aliens; for neutrals; for Belgian refugees; and for various categories of aliens of enemy nationality deemed friendly, such as Czech and Polish subjects of the Hapsburgs

²³G. W. Reynolds and Anthony Judge, The Night the Police Went on Strike (London, 1968), 22, 25.

and Armenian and Jewish subjects of Turkey; for Belgian soldiers as against Belgian civilians; for Belgian réformés as against their comrades on leave; for officers as against NCO's and privates; for alien seamen; for children as against adults; for men as against women; for English women married to aliens; for refugees as against other aliens who had entered the country at different times during the war; and for the metropolitan area as against the rest of the country.²⁴

De Jastrzebski of the Registrar-General's Department complained in 1918 that these special categories of Belgian refugees, differentiated according to time of entry into England, were causing unnecessary paperwork to his department, which had to collate all returns on the refugees. The definition of "Belgian refugee" in the Aliens Restriction Order was extremely broad: "a person who, being either a Belgian subject, or an alien friend recently residing in Belgium, has arrived in the United Kingdom since the commencement of the war." Moylan replied that it would be too difficult to amend the definition and instructed de Jastrzebski to use his commonsense and to exclude most unusual cases from the general definition.²⁵

²⁴A. B. Thomas, St. Stephen's House. Friends' Emergency Work in England 1914 to 1920 (London, n.d.), 27-28.

²⁵HO 45/10737/261921/716, de Jastrzebski to Moylan, 1 May 1918; Moylan to de Jastrzebski, 19 June 1918. For the definition of "Belgian refugee," see HO 45/10890/355329, "The Aliens Restriction Order (showing amendments made by

Moylan took more than six weeks to make his reply, which probably indicated his contempt for the enquiry. Home Office officials were consistently critical of the Registrar-General's Department's handling of registration. Relations which had begun badly²⁶ were not improved by a string of longwinded and loosely worded circulars which the Department sent to police.²⁷ The police were confused frequently by contradictory interpretations of the law emanating from Somerset House and the Home Office, though they always chose to abide by the decisions of the latter.²⁸ De Jastrzebski seems to have been an elderly amateur and his amiable style clashed with the methods of the professionals at the Home Office. On receiving a copy of de Jastrzebski's self-effacing paper to the Royal Statistical Society, Pedder commented: "One would gather from this paper that alone they did it at Somerset House. H.O. memory runneth to the contrary."²⁹

subsequent Orders in Council, and by Orders of the Secretary of State, down to March 4, 1918)", 25.

²⁶HO 45/10737/261921/92, minute by Moylan, 2 November 1914.

²⁷HO 45/10737/261921/4a, F. Bigham, Scotland Yard, to Moylan, 4 February 1916.

²⁸Ibid., T. H. Ward, Registrar-General's Department, to chief constable, Buckinghamshire, 29 December 1916; chief constable, Bucks, to Ward, 9 January 1917; chief constable, Dorset, to Registrar-General, 22 December 1916.

²⁹HO 45/10737/261921/669, annotation by Pedder, 6 July 1916.

The Home Office adhered to one policy throughout the war and held it against all threats. It sought to control the refugees with the minimum of fuss and bother. That there should be a system of registration was never in dispute. No department attacked registration. The LGB needed it for many reasons, the Board of Trade Labour Exchanges Department and its successor the Ministry of Labour needed statistics on employment, as did the Ministry of Munitions, and the military departments demanded it for the sake of the security of the realm. For the Home Office "the principal object was the supervision of alien undesirables."³⁰ But the Home Office wished to achieve this end with the utmost economy of means. Whenever other departments became too enthusiastic in recommending new regulations or the tighter administration of existing ones, the Home Office swiftly deflated them or complied with ostentatious ill-grace.

The new and blundering Ministry of National Service, established in 1917, ran afoul of the Home Office when it attempted to organise a comprehensive register of aliens for its purposes of national mobilisation. Pedder observed:

The Ministry appears to be going in for an orgy of statistics and compilation of lists. . . . It is rather dreadful to contemplate this multiplication of work, and the small prospect of value from it.

So far as we could without appearing to be destructive we have. . . turned the feverish activities of the Ministry first of all in the direction which gives the best promise viz. the employment of alien

³⁰HO 45/10833/327753/16, minute by Moylan, 9 June 1917.

enemies, and have offered assistance and advice before they wander into the wider and barren fields of the alien friends.³¹

The Ministry in fact got its way and Article 22C was added to the now lengthy Aliens Registration Order in February 1918. All male aliens between the ages of eighteen and sixty-one were forbidden to work in most industries connected with the war effort without the Ministry's permission.³²

A similar clause, Article 22A, governing the employment of aliens in munitions works, led the Ministry of Munitions into a clash with the Home Office. The Ministry had agreed originally to prosecute infringements of the article, which obliged aliens to have permits to work in munitions. But it lacked the machinery to enforce the order, which was widely flouted.³³ The police were therefore asked to do the job. This occasioned an angry remark by Sir Leonard Dunning of the Home Office: "The Ministry of Munitions is constantly growing, while the police are rapidly becoming fewer and are having fresh duties assigned to them." He therefore felt that the police should not have to bear the burden and the request was refused.³⁴ His comment betrayed

³¹HO 45/10839/33052/19, minute by Pedder, 2 December 1917.

³²HO 45/10890/355329, ARO, 4 March 1918, 20-21.

³³HO 45/10809/311425/31, unsigned minute, 17 January 1917.

³⁴Ibid., minute by Dunning, 18 January 1917.

the animosity widely felt among the established branches of government against the mushrooming and aggressive new war-time departments, of which the Ministry of Munitions was the prototype and the most powerful.

But the military departments made the most demands and aroused the Home Office's anger most often. Registration was the cause of friction. Keeping track of refugees became a heavy load on the police, especially in prohibited areas. At first, refugees were free to go where they wished. Then after 9 September 1914 they had to register. When the central register of refugees was begun in October, registration was voluntary, though all refugees dealt with by the WRC were automatically registered. The register was primitive and useless for keeping track of refugees who changed addresses.³⁵ Even as it was being established Lalaing, voicing the Belgian government's anxiety to exert what control it could over Belgian exiles, suggested that all refugees be compelled to register. The Home Office supported him, as did the Army Council even more strongly, being convinced that

. . . no measure short of official police registration will serve to detect the presence among the genuine refugees of undesirable persons who may have come to this country for the purpose of espionage or from any other improper motive.³⁶

³⁵ De Jastrzebski, "Register of Belgian Refugees", 134-35.

³⁶ HO 45/10737/261921/92, minute by Moylan, 2 November 1914; /172, Cubitt to under secretary of state, Home Office, 15 November 1914.

Consequently, registration was made compulsory by the Aliens Restriction (Belgian Refugees) Order of 28 November 1914. All refugees over sixteen years of age had to obtain a certificate of registration and to report every intended change of address to the nearest police station. The police at his point of departure would warn the police at his destination of his impending arrival and his registration on arrival would be notified to the Registrar-General. Refugees failing to comply could be prosecuted.³⁷ When similar obligations were imposed on all friendly aliens in another amendment to the Order in April 1915, Belgians were required in addition to have "satisfactory identification papers" before they could enter a prohibited area. This meant in effect a passport or certificate of nationality. Since passports were a rarity before the war and many refugees had lost their papers during flight, the stipulation caused many problems for the refugees, the WRC and the police, who had to interpret the meaning of "satisfactory." The April order also contained an important innovation. Henceforth, all hotel and boarding-house keepers had to keep a register of all aliens over the age of fourteen who stayed in their premises.³⁸

³⁷Cd. 7763, Special Work, 15; de Jastrzebski, "Register of Belgian Refugees", 134.

³⁸HO 45/10734/258926, circular to chief constables by Sir Edward Troup, Home Office, 21 April 1915, 1-3.

Finally, in January 1916, all refugees entering prohibited areas were to have identity books, to be given only to refugees with proper passports issued within the previous two years or with Belgian consular certificates of nationality.³⁹ These more sophisticated forms gradually superseded the old registration certificates and with them the edifice of control was substantially complete.

The edifice had grown as a result of constant interaction among the departments concerned. The most vigorous proponent had been the War Office and it usually demanded scrupulous enforcement of the rules. When, after persistent pleadings with the LGB in November and December 1914, the WRC passed over an indifferent Board and went straight to the Home Office to ask that a small number of consumptive refugees be allowed to enter sanatoria along the south coast, the Home Office responded cautiously, fearful that the military authorities would challenge any unilateral decisions to exempt refugees from the rules. The Army Council finally assented to the request in January 1915, but only on the proviso that all names were first submitted to the War Office for its approval. Pedder was disgusted: "an absurd condition but H.O. can't help it."⁴⁰

³⁹ MH 8/798/22, Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Order, 1916, 27 January 1916.

⁴⁰ HO 45/10737/261921/214, Gladstone to S. W. Harris, Home Office, 30 November; Harris to Gladstone, 2 December; Pedder to Harris, 2 December 1914. /214, Cubitt to under secretary of state, Home Office, 2 January; minute by Pedder, 6 January 1915.

The Army Council's attitude smacked of phobia. The WRC had pointed out that living in a sanatorium was "almost tantamount to being under police supervision."⁴¹ But the Home Office's stance was pliant throughout the negotiations. The affair illustrated the normal behaviour of the three departments. The War Office plainly held the trumps at this stage, when the refugees were an entirely new problem and the military situation on the continent was just reaching a stalemate unfavourable to the Entente.

War Office concern about the refugees must be seen in the context of a deep anxiety about national security which led to the growth of a vast bureaucracy. The War Office staff expanded during the war from a strength of around two thousand to fifteen thousand persons by the armistice. Of these, four thousand were engaged in security and intelligence work.⁴² The Home Office regarded the new bureaucracy growing in the womb of an old department as coldly as it eyed the upstart new ministries: both were wasteful and created much unnecessary work. Of one military intelligence branch, Troup commented: "MO5.7. . . are always bent on piling up paper safeguards which so often defeat their own object by absorbing the time and attention that

⁴¹HO 45/10737/261921/214, George Montagu to Harris, 12 December 1914.

⁴²Sir Sam Fay, The War Office at War (London, 1937) 36-37.

ought to be given to real detective work."⁴³

Whereas the War Office by habit placed its reliance on strong law, the Home Office approach was more supple. The difference stemmed from divergent appreciations of the role of laws and statutes. The professional soldiers at the War Office were accustomed to the simplicity of King's Regulations and to having ample means of enforcement. The civil servants at the Home Office were much more experienced at drafting law than newcomers like de Jastrzebski and the soldiers and were used to working under the watchful eye of politicians, lawyers and interest groups. They knew the limits of the law and they were in direct and constant contact with the police. They knew how practicable were the regulations they drafted.

Consequently, the Home Office kept a critical watch on the busy swarm of military bureaucrats. Its officials tore apart "cumbersome" draft amendments to the Aliens Restriction Order prepared by MI5.⁴⁴ They replied sceptically to the Army Council's request for tougher enforcement of the registration order to help the Belgian government round up deserters or reluctant recruits, arguing that the results would be "infinitesimal" and that the Belgian government was failing to use the existing, adequate

⁴³HO 45/10780/227601/312, minute by Troup, 12 August 1916.

⁴⁴HO 45/10809/311425/49, minute by Moylan, 11 August 1917.

regulations.⁴⁵ And they were quick to point out dangers lurking in amendments proposed by the War Office.

Early in 1917, a branch of military intelligence, M15A, was established to take over the administration of Article 22A of the ARO, which dealt with the employment of aliens in munitions work. Department PMS2 of the Ministry of Munitions had previously undertaken this work and had also dealt with strikes, labour unrest and sabotage. Although PMS2 was abolished, MI5 did not take over all its functions, which were split between the Special Branch of Scotland Yard, which took charge of strikes and labour unrest, and the Ministry of Munitions, which continued to deal with sabotage.⁴⁶ A few months later, the War Office began pushing for the extension of Article 22A to cover aliens in "any kind of war service which might offer them special opportunities for espionage or mischief if evilly disposed." The Home Office raised no fundamental objections to the amendment, but were worried about some of its implications if it were not worded carefully. Pedder felt that the amendment was much wider than was needed for MI5's purpose. He had a further fear:

. . . as it stands the amendment might land H.O. in the position of being pressed to exclude aliens from

⁴⁵HO 45/10737/261921/455, correspondence between Cubitt and Home Office, 4, 11 and 14 May 1915, and minute by Troup, n.d. (May 1915).

⁴⁶HO 45/10809/311425/39, minute by Moylan (?), n.d. (April 1917?) .

all sorts of trades e.g. Russians from the tailoring trade whenever the English members of the trade thought themselves pinched by alien competition.⁴⁷

The amendment was passed, though only after careful redrafting by the Home Office, and Pedder's fears were not realised.

On another occasion, Pedder attacked the military departments for abusing the regulations regarding the registration of aliens at hotels and boarding houses. The regulations required British subjects to register at these places, but only to ensure that aliens complied with the rules. Although no mention was made of what had caused Pedder's wrath, it seems that the War Office and Admiralty had sought to trace deserters by extending the order to cover all guests, regardless of nationality. "Both the Naval and Military Authorities forgot," Pedder stressed,

that the object of this form is not to enable the movements of British subjects to be traced. If it had it would have been ultra vires of the A.R.O.

The object is to catch aliens and obligations can be placed on British subjects only so far as may be necessary to distinguish them from aliens.⁴⁸

Thus, the Home Office in general acted as a watchdog for the liberties of the citizen against the dangerous zeal of the military.

However, the Home Office was more than willing on

⁴⁷HO 45/10809/311425/47, Vernon Kell (MI5) to Moylan, 26 July 1917; /49, minute by Pedder, 11 August 1917. These discussions eventually led to the passing of Article 22C of the ARO in February 1918.

⁴⁸HO 45/10780/227601/312, minute by Pedder, 10 August 1916.

occasions to connive at bending the law in cases involving Belgian refugees. The refugees were strangers to English law and could therefore be bluffed more easily than English citizens. The most flagrant case of bluffing involved Belgian trawlermen operating out of Milford Haven who began refusing to go to sea in the middle of 1915. Some wished to find better-paid jobs in munitions, but fear was the main motive, after one trawler was sunk by a U-boat. The Belgian Ministry of Marine, acting for the boat owners, asked the Home Office to forbid the men to leave their employment. After some searching, officials of the Board of Trade dredged up an antique Order-in-Council which they thought could be applied to the men. The Home Office agreed that "we might stretch a point here" and the men were duped back to the ships. Their services were urgently needed, because many British fishermen had been called up for minesweeping duty, and sympathy for the "specially unfortunate position of the Belgian Government" had swayed the decision to stretch the law.⁴⁹

Belgians were harried by the authorities in other cases. Late in 1916, the Metropolitan Police cracked down on disreputable cafés, mostly kept by Belgians, in the Tottenham Court Road area. But the Home Office and the

⁴⁹HO 45/10788/299216/23, correspondence between trawler owners, Belgian Ministry of Marine, Home Office, chief constable, Pembrokeshire, Board of Trade and superintendent of mercantile marine, Milford Haven, 25 June to 27 October 1915.

Police Commissioner, Sir Edward Henry, found it difficult to strike on a formula which would ensure that such places, which they feared were the haunts of alien enemies, could be closed.⁵⁰ A new amendment to the ARO, Article 25, gave the police the power to close premises believed to be frequented by enemy or undesirable aliens or owned by aliens and conducted "in a disorderly or improper manner, or in a manner prejudicial to the public safety."⁵¹ But the Belgian proprietors proved remarkably adept at evading the law, by formally transferring their licences to accomplices between the times the police gained a conviction and got a closure order from the Home Office.⁵² The police occasionally ignored the ruse and served the order on the outgoing tenant, but Scotland Yard knew this action would not stand up in a court of law.⁵³ Pedder had foreseen the problem and suggested that the police should try to scare off any alien planning to open a licensed house by warning him "that his house was likely to be closed if he took out a licence." Moylan also suggested that the police might be able to arrange with the excise authorities to refuse all applications from aliens if

⁵⁰HO 45/11014/324204/7, correspondence between Moylan, Troup, Henry, Bigham and Godley, Home Office legal advisor, 2 December 1916 to 13 March 1917.

⁵¹HO 45/10890/355329/ARO, 4 March 1918, 22.

⁵²HO 45/10885/347079, memorandum by Moylan, "Amendment of A.R.O.", 23 July 1917.

⁵³HO 45/11014/324204/28, Bigham to Pedder, 29 May 1917.

the police so advised. There was in fact no statutory power to refuse licences on grounds of unfitness but, he suggested suavely, "an undesirable alien is hardly likely to contest a refusal," and presumed the excise commissioners would co-operate.⁵⁴ But the commissioners refused because such action was illegal.⁵⁵ For once, the Home Office, which had so often cried "ultra vires" against War Office statute-making, was checked by the scruples of another department. Belgian refugees were often bluffed and bullied, but they were never left utterly defenceless.

Interestingly, magistrates, who often dealt harshly with English offenders against wartime regulations--notably conscientious objectors--seem to have been fairminded towards the refugees. The caf  s affair showed that the police could expect no support in the courts for illegal actions, even actions ostensibly taken for the security of the realm. In another case, a London magistrate in 1918 acquitted a refugee charged with failing to register with the police when he briefly left his place of residence. The decision, based on the dictum that "residence is not broken by a temporary absence if there is an *animus revertendi*," threatened to destroy the elaborate registration system for friendly and

⁵⁴HO 45/11014/324204/11, minutes by Pedder and Moylan, 13 March 1917.

⁵⁵HO 45/11014/324204/14, (?) Pascoe, Board of Customs and Excise to under secretary of state, Home Office, 25 May 1917.

neutral aliens. The Home Office thought that the best course was to let the matter blow over and to avoid bringing similar cases before that magistrate.⁵⁶

The authorities possessed one final sanction against refugees which they could not use against British subjects: deportation or even a species of internment. The Home Office finally got rid of two disreputable café owners by arranging for one to be called up for the Belgian army and the other to be sent to a labour colony in France.⁵⁷ Other refugees who had not technically broken the law but were a constant source of trouble to the WRC were sent out of the country. They were not, however, sent to Belgium, but to the Netherlands and France. Men faced the added sanction of conscription for causing trouble, but a number of women were deported.⁵⁸

The authorities dealt strictly with refugees not least because they had to take seriously the danger of public hostility to aliens. When the ARO was consolidated in

⁵⁶HO 45/10800/307293/228, anonymous minute, 18 June 1918. It must be noted, however, that the conviction of an alien who failed to register on a short trip away from home had earlier been upheld by the High Court. *Ibid.*, /205, F. Stanley Clarke, chief constable, Gloucestershire, to Kell, 22 January 1918. As always, it is impossible to generalise about the magistracy.

⁵⁷HO 45/11014/324204/28, minute by Moylan, 6 June 1917.

⁵⁸BEL 4/4, Henn Collins, report, 20 December 1916: case of Irma Galloy.

November 1916, a new clause was inserted giving the police extended powers for scrutinising aliens' identity books. Pedder frankly admitted it was a sham: though unlikely to be used often, it seemed "to have a good deal to recommend it from the point of view particularly of an appearance of efficiency in the alien hunt."⁵⁹ Moylan likewise perceived that the Ministry of National Service's plans to place all aliens under its control for the purposes of mobilisation would be an unproductive administrative nightmare but was justifiable as being "something in the nature of window-dressing."⁶⁰ The prohibited areas were perhaps the main example of the measures in which high British officials placed little faith but which were kept in being to please public opinion.

By the middle of the war, even the military realised that the refugee population had been well and truly "sifted" for spies or saboteurs.⁶¹ Furthermore, the refugees were by then widely distributed throughout the country and unlikely to flock back into the prohibited areas. Accordingly, the War Office agreed to a Home Office proposal to remove the special restrictions on the Belgians and they became subject to the same regulations as other alien friends by the

⁵⁹HO 45/10890/355329, ARO, 11-12; HO 45/10956/321843/2, Pedder to Troup, 2 November 1916.

⁶⁰HO 45/10832/326555/49, minute by Moylan re Article 22C, 14 December 1917.

⁶¹HO 45/10737/261921/672, minute by Moylan, 20 September 1916.

consolidating order of November 1916. Instead of having to get permits from the police before entering a prohibited area, they could now acquire identity books. This step, as one local committee instantly recognised, "did much to facilitate the free movement of refugees and amounted practically to a repeal" of the registration policy.⁶² By this stage, numerous refugees had been allowed to enter prohibited areas to work in munitions factories and the old policy had caused much inconvenience.⁶³

The "harassing necessity" of reporting temporary changes of address was, however, never totally done away with. As the war drew to a close, the Home Office began to reconsider the question of prohibited areas as part of the general planning for postwar aliens restriction legislation: legislation made necessary by the incessant clamour of the press, certain sections of the public, and a strong body of M.P.s. One official predicted that the prohibited areas system would not survive the armistice and might as well be abolished at once, since "under the conditions of modern war as recently developed it is understood to be something of an anachronism." At the present time the only difference between prohibited areas and the rest of the country was that in the former a

⁶²HO 45/10956/321843/69, Troup to chief constable, 17 November 1916; BEL 6/118, fourth report of Hull committee, 21.

⁶³See, e.g., HO 45/10737/261921/350, W. Beveridge to under secretary of state, Home Office, 2 February 1915.

chief constable might require an alien friend to leave-- a power used very rarely. He added piously that abolishing the prohibited areas "could properly be represented as a graceful recognition of the claim of allied and friendly aliens in removing them from the sphere of arbitrary police action."⁶⁴ Coming as late as it did, the gesture must have seemed hollow to the many aliens who had suffered unnecessarily for four years. Pedder agreed with his colleague and saw a chance to relieve the Home Office of "some of its overwhelming and unfruitful work." But he warned against hasty action:

Care must be taken not to give a handle for the anti-alien agitators to take hold of and work up a fresh agitation. . . . Prohibited areas. . . are really extinct. But they have caught the public ear, and I fear that to abolish them would cause agitation.⁶⁵

The refugees and other aliens were victims offered up by the governors to the passions of the mob. It was expedient that a few men should suffer for the sake of the people. The alliance of witch-hunting yellow press and popular parliamentary demagogues--the Daily Mail, the Horatio Bottomleys and the Pemberton Billingses--had set their stamp on postwar

⁶⁴HO 45/10899/371591/1, J. Fischer Williams, "The Armistice and the Alien Question", 11 November 1918. Fischer Williams was wrong in assuming the prohibited areas were an anachronism. They were introduced again in the Second World War.

⁶⁵Ibid., minute by Pedder, 16 November 1918. Cf. HO 45/10800/307293/246, minutes of meeting of Central Committee of Chief Constables, 3 October 1918, and minute by Moylan, 19 September 1918.

aliens policy.

Ironically, the Belgian government did little to alleviate some restrictions. It wholeheartedly approved of regulations which provided useful information on its subjects. The refugees' main protectors were the Belgian Official Committee and the WRC. The former was the more sympathetic, the latter the more effective. But the WRC had its own reasons for supporting the registration rules and merely challenged harsh interpretation by local police authorities.⁶⁷ Even when the Home Office was contemplating abolishing the rules at the armistice, the official in charge thought that the Belgians should not be exempted, since "in view of measures of repatriation it is desirable that close touch should be maintained with them."⁶⁸ Thus, although the refugees suffered less from public hostility than enemy aliens, they suffered more from the paternalism of their guardians. As a result, they were generally better off than enemy aliens, but decidedly more hemmed in and hedged about than other friendly aliens.

They bitterly resented the anomaly. Belgian sailors--many of whom were not strictly speaking refugees--had the misfortune to be subject not only to the stringent

⁶⁷MH 8/16/83, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 12 September 1915; MH 8/7/92/4, Pedder to Maudslay, 14 January 1916; MH 8/25/85, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 3 November 1916.

⁶⁸HO 45/10899/371591/1, Fischer Williams.

rules governing alien seamen but also to other regulations applied to them as refugees. The chief constable of Pembrokeshire and the aliens officer in Swansea fell out over the interpretation of these rules early in 1915. Haldane Porter decided for simplicity and accepted the constable's stricter approach.⁶⁹ In the case of the sailors, the Belgian government for once took up its nationals' cause and protested. The morale of the men who ran the ships between the Congo and Europe was important and the Belgian government was spurred by frequent complaints about men being denied leave to go ashore at the end of long, dangerous journeys. The Belgian sailors were particularly incensed because they were being treated "comme espions ou ennemies" while "les marins d'autres nationalités sont traités d'une façon beaucoup plus liberale."⁷⁰ Yet the Home Office backed its alien officer at Hull, where Belgian ships regularly berthed, and liberal leave was granted to Belgian seamen in ships working for

⁶⁹ HO 45/10788/299216/10, chief constable, Pembrokeshire to collector of customs, Swansea, 13 March; collector of customs to under secretary of state, Home Office, 15 March; Haldane Porter to collector, 23 March; collector to Haldane Porter, 27 March; minute by Haldane Porter, 29 March 1915.

⁷⁰ HO 45/10788/299216/28b, E. BackgeGauw, ship's captain, to F. Alexander, 1 July; (?) Dew, president of Union Armateurs Belges, to (?) Bultinck, Belgian Ministry of Marine, 8 July; Bultinck to Haldane Porter, 27 July; minute by Moylan, 28 July; and /28a, Belgian consul, Hull, to Pollet, 2 August; Bultinck to Home Office, 24 August; /28c, Bultinck to Director, Naval Transports, 26 July; minute by E. Davies, 28 August 1916.

the Admiralty only in April 1918.⁷¹

The refugees proper did not at first pay much attention to the difference between the restrictions on them and the more relaxed rules for other friendly and neutral aliens. But as more clauses accumulated around the original ARO, murmurs began. The abrupt dismissal of three hundred Belgian men from an explosives factory at Queens Ferry, a short distance from the Gladstone estate at Hawarden, provoked a wrathful outburst from one Belgian official:

Myself as well as the Belgians as a whole were confident that being citizens of a country having sacrificed everything to the common cause and having given an unprecedented example of faithfulness in the fulfillment of the engagements she has signed, they would have been fairly treated but what is happening now gives a painful denial to this belief. . . . Are the Belgians to be put on the same level as the enemy aliens?

The argument was calculated to make British officialdom wince and it succeeded. The Board of Trade apologised and explained the action to the BOC.⁷²

Many British officials were personally embarrassed at the anomalous treatment of Belgians. In an interesting

⁷¹HO 45/10788/299216/38, minute by Haldane Porter, 8 April 1918.

⁷²MH 8/7/98/20, A. Deldine to A. Barrett, WRC, 23 January 1916; J. S. Nicholson to Willis, LGB, ca. 26 January; anonymous LGB official to Maudslay, ca. 26 January; Maudslay to Willis, 27 January; MH 8/21/59, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 27 January 1916. The Belgians had been used to build the factory and could not be kept on because no alien could be employed in a factory making high explosives (as opposed to projectiles and casings). Their sacking had been unnecessarily abrupt, due to bungling by the Ministry of Munitions.

reversal of form, the Army Council in October 1916 quashed a proposal by the chief constable of Kent to have refugees evicted en masse from his area. The Council gave several practical objections--the lack of accommodation elsewhere and the Belgians' indispensability to Kentish munitions works. But the main argument was a blend of humaneness and realpolitik. The special legislation required to expel the Belgians

. . . would be expressly directed against the members of an allied and suffering nation, who are already under stringent regulations not enforced against other allied or neutral nationalities. It would undoubtedly be considered by the Belgian Nation to be an invidious and unmerited distinction: there is no doubt that the enemy would exploit it to the full.⁷³

The Army Council rarely talked of suffering.

Several chief constables along the south coast took a stern line against refugees. As many of the refugees who most fervently desired to be domiciled in the coastal resort areas were wealthy and well connected people, a confrontation was almost inevitable. It came when a Belgian businessman tried to convalesce in the resort of Worthing, in the territory of the exclusionist chief constable of West Sussex. The man was handed an undiplomatically worded form-letter lumping Belgian refugees and alien enemies together in the nether world of those aliens needing special permission from the chief constable, while informing all other aliens that

⁷³HO 45/10737/261921/602, Brigadier-General H. J. Du Cane, General Staff, Second Army, Central Force, to chief constable, Kent, n.d. (late October 1915).

they could enter as long as they had an identity book and registered on arrival and departure. The Belgian was outraged: even an American of German origin could go freely where he could not. The Belgian Legation took up his case and used it to press for the relaxation of the rules applying to residence on the south coast. The Home Office was mortified, though its first reaction was to try to persuade the Legation that there was no discrimination against Belgians and that this "information" should be disseminated through the Belgian press in England. Privately, it was furious with the Worthing police. Moylan described them as "exceptionally stupid" and told the chief constable to replace the officers at Worthing with "officers properly acquainted with the Aliens Restriction Order and with some courtesy." More generally, the Home Office sought MI5's opinion on whether some coastal areas could be opened to "Belgians of good standing," pointing out that they were unlikely to do much harm to the war effort at places like Brighton and Hastings, and certainly no more than Swiss or Spanish nationals. Moylan was stunned and delighted when MI5 replied that instead of allowing piecemeal relaxations it preferred to repeal Article 18A of the Aliens Restriction Order. 18A had established the special registration of refugees and had now been superseded in any case by Article 18B governing the

issue of identity books.⁷⁴ The generous response of the War Office suggests that the Home Office had been unnecessarily timid on past occasions. It would be unjust to characterise all soldier-bureaucrats as always callous and insensitive.

While the military authorities were concerned with the refugees solely on grounds of national security, the police concern about them was wider. Refugees might be spies; they often infringed, through ignorance or neglect, the regulations pertaining to them; they might commit serious crime; and they might be generally immoral and "undesirable." The police caught no Belgian spies; charged many refugees with infringements of the regulations; arrested a few criminals; and laid hands on a large number of prostitutes, thieves, drunks and brawlers. Despite British alarm when rumours spread in October 1914 that the inmates of Antwerp's prisons had been freed and would try to enter Britain along with the respectable refugees, few Belgians were involved in spectacular crimes, though one of the most lurid wartime murder cases involved a Belgian butcher and his mistress, who killed and dismembered his former mistress in November 1917. It became notorious as the "Blodie Belgium" case, from a note

⁷⁴HO 45/10737/261921/674, Leon Deyden to Ministere des Affaires Étrangères, 4 August 1916; (?) de Ramaix, Belgian Legation, to secretary, Home Office, 23 August; minute by Moylan, 26 August; Sealey Clarke (MI5F2) to Moylan, 11 September 1916; /675, Moylan (?) to de Ramaix, 25 August; minute by Moylan, 23 August; /677, minute by Moylan, 16 September; minutes by E. H. W. (MI5F), 20 September, and Moylan, 10 October; Moylan to secretary, War Office, 13 October 1916.

found on the victim .⁷⁵

But most Belgian criminals were of the petty kind. Women figured as much as men in the WRC's files on undesirables. While men were often thieves and sometimes pimps, women were sometimes thieves and often prostitutes. Some of the latter were professionals who came over in 1914 and began immediately plying their trade.⁷⁶ But probably the vast majority were single girls or women with husbands at the front who took to the streets to make a living or to supplement their income. The war considerably eroded traditional sexual standards. Sexual liaisons provided an escape from the greyness of wartime life and long hours of work and a salve for lonely men and women torn out of their family milieux. Mrs. Webbe, of the WRC's department for undesirables, found that most of the women prisoners she dealt with had been convicted of theft or prostitution and that the latter were often young girls without families in England who found it difficult to get work.⁷⁷ She took a very sympathetic view of their problems and resented the "undesirables" tag being attached to her department, preferring to be called a "Rescue and Preventive Worker."⁷⁸ In marked contrast, her predecessor,

⁷⁵Sir Basil Thomson, The Story of Scotland Yard (New York, 1936), 241-48.

⁷⁶GP 46046/172-74, Lyttelton to Gladstone, 30 October 1914.

⁷⁷BEL 3/2/2, report by Mrs. Webbe, 1917, 1-2.

⁷⁸MH 8/1/82/139, Webbe to Maudslay, 28 January 1916.

Mrs. Henn Collins, on leaving the WRC to form her own committee to deal exclusively with the hard-case refugees at Edmonton, unabashedly chose the name, "Committee for Belgian Undesirables." The WRC was appalled and asked the LGB to persuade her to choose a more neutral name, noting that "it was an expressed wish that the term 'undesirable' should not be used in connection with Belgian Refugees."⁷⁹ Presumably, leading refugees had expressed the wish.

The word "undesirable" had in fact many connotations and changed its meaning according to circumstances and the outlook of the person using it. When used of allocation, it could mean refugees who were argumentative, neurotic, or unhygienic in their habits and unable to get along with hosts or fellow refugees. When used of employment, it meant the incorrigibly work-shy. When used by the police and the WRC, it meant anything from professional criminals to drunkards and libertines.⁸⁰ As a hold-all term, "undesirable" was the true child of its prewar parents. In the controversy over alien immigration, it had been used to describe refugees who were a threat to English standards of living, morality, health and, finally, a threat to the very foundations of the state. The leaders of the refugee community and the

⁷⁹MH 8/2/50/247, Maudslay to secretary, LGB, n.d. (late September 1915); MH 8/1, unnumbered file, Mrs. L. G. Samuel to Maudslay, 28 January 1916.

⁸⁰Cf. GP 46102/1. Transport Department, "Summary of Refugees returned as Undesirables and for re-allocation for the period 9th November to 31st December 1914".

refugees' official English protectors were rightly sensitive to the epithet's application to the refugees. Through it the innocent Belgians became linked in the popular mind to the enemy aliens, heirs of the old anti-alienism. Significantly, the Belgian community finally reacted against even the apparently innocuous and value-free word "alien" and the government issued a D-notice in May 1918 warning newspapers not to describe Belgians as aliens. There was much in a name.⁸¹

The police campaign against the Belgian cafés of London in 1916 illustrated the extent to which even responsible officials had become confused about the meaning of "undesirable alien." Sir Edward Henry sent a police officer in November 1916 to investigate twenty-eight cafés near Tottenham Court Road after receiving numerous allegations that these were "meeting places for spies and other dangerous persons." All the cafés visited were Belgian, with unimpeachably patriotic names like Café Roi Albert and Café General Joffre. They were little more than cramped and dirty rooms

⁸¹Imperial War Museum, Press Bureau files, D.670, 14 May 1918. The Press Bureau issued three D-notices-- notices advising the press that it was "not in the public interest" to print certain information regarding Belgian refugees. The first, D.424, 13 July 1916, cracked down on press attacks on refugees who were evading work or military service. The second, D.471, 6 October 1916, repeated the injunction and added to it the advice not to give publicity to trials involving Belgians. The first was made at the request of the Ministry of Munitions, the second at the request of the LGB, the third at the request of the Ministry of Information.

in which coffee, mineral waters and ale were served. Most of the habitués were Belgians, with some Canadian and British soldiers and a few women, some of them obviously prostitutes. The men were drinking, talking or playing draughts. The police saw little disorder or drunkenness, but found the basements invariably filthy and reeking of urine. Upstairs were bedrooms, in two of which soldiers were in bed with prostitutes. Six places boasted automatic pianos, but only one café had space for dancing. One proprietor said he had once allowed dancing but had been stopped by the police. The cafés began to empty by 10.30 p.m. and most were closed an hour later. The chief language spoken was French.⁸²

Out of such innocuous, if seedy material Henry spun some damning conclusions. The cafés clearly harboured "prostitutes and other undesirables" and the automatic pianos playing "late into the night" were symbols of these decadent and "squalid" places. The look of the cafes and their customers, he averred, "give rise to the belief, probably with justice, that immorality and other irregularities take place and that these restaurants are the meeting places for alien enemies and spies." His report led to the amending of the ARO to ensure stricter control of alien-owned premises. In the process, a measure originally designed to control

⁸²HO 45/11014/324204/7, anonymous, report to Sir Edward Henry, November 1916; Henry to under secretary of state, Home Office, 28 November 1916, 1-2.

possible rendezvous for spies had developed, as the legal officer for the Home Office perceived, into a measure for

. . . the suppression or restriction of low class places of resort run by friendly aliens (mostly Belgians) whose habits, though degrading, were hardly a danger to the safety of the realm, and perhaps no more objectionable than what goes on in many places run by British subjects.⁸³

That the Commissioner of Police, head of an overstrained force, made so much of the relatively harmless cafés suggests the extent to which the English police had come to see themselves as the long arm of middle-class respectability, guardians of the nation's virtue as well as of its property. The aggressive campaigning of bodies like the National Vigilance Association, the Social Purity Alliance, the Crusade for Social Purity, and other bodies which flourished in the late Victorian era and were still clamorous in the early twentieth century, pushed and persuaded the police into actively overseeing the morals of citizens. Samuel Hynes has brilliantly described the "organization of morality" and contends that, for the socially conservative purity crusaders, concern about spreading sexual licence was connected to anxiety about the stability of the social order and the security of the state. Sexual degeneracy meant racial decline, the erosion of the nation's martial strength, and the subversion of social order based on Christianity and the family. Sexual, religious and political

⁸³HO 45/11014/324204/11, (?) Godley, quoted in minute by Moylan, 1 March 1917.

radicalism went together. Hynes further links the purity crusades to the strong currents of xenophobia in Edwardian England. His focus is on the distrust of foreign ideas, but of course the anti-aliens of the first years of the century had charged immigrants with sexual degeneracy.⁸⁴ Henry's anxiety about a few seedy cafés must therefore be seen in the context of the social and intellectual life of the Edwardian era. Anti-alienism had become a veritable mishmash of attitudes and ideas and Henry, like most busy men, had neither the time nor the intellect to sort out the various strands.

The affair of the cafés serves to indicate the essential continuities between the war and prewar years. Underneath the apparent domestic truce which the war occasioned, old skirmishes continued, sometimes more fiercely as new weapons were added to old armouries. Many peacetime prophets joyfully responded to the blasts of war. Food reformers, land-use schemers, purity crusaders, temperance bodies and women's paramilitary groups of all kinds basked in their enhanced respectability and rushed to exploit their opportunity. The women's organisations did best and recruited

⁸⁴Hynes, Edwardian Turn of Mind, 254-307. Sexual degeneracy covered a multitude of mores acceptable in other cultures. The English never lost their suspicion of the Belgian café with its very different atmosphere. Thus, in April 1916, under the heading "Rowdy Belgians", a London newspaper carried the story of a scrimmage between police and refugees drinking at a cafe in Edmonton. The list of characters included an artist named Bourgeois, an engineer named Bouillon and an Inspector Trundle. The cafe had a history of brawls, but Trundle's disapproving gaze on this occasion had been drawn by the sight of a crowd dancing and

many volunteers for auxiliary war work. The military and authoritarian flavour of many of the bodies was reflected in their names: the Duty and Discipline Movement, the Women's Emergency Corps, the Women's Defence Relief Corps, and the Voluntary Aid Detachments, to mention only four.

The easier sexual atmosphere of wartime profoundly alarmed bodies like these. Several began a system of women's patrols, bands of women who kept close watch on women around military camps and other danger areas. At first armed only with their invincible self confidence to embarrass men and women caught in or near flagrante delicto, the patrols later were given official recognition and from them sprang Britain's women police. Though the patrols founded by the Women's Emergency Corps were the most important, the first step seems to have been taken by Miss Margaret Damer Dawson who, as a member of the Chelsea WRC in 1914, was moved to act after seeing soldiers and women consorting while she was scouring London into the small hours looking for accommodation for refugees. Refugee relief may claim a modest share in the beginnings of at least one modern British institution.⁸⁵ The patrols' early tactics were based on a

playing mouth organs outside the cafe. MH 8/22/between 84 and 85, newspaper cutting, n.d. (ca. 14 April 1916).

⁸⁵ Barbara McLaren, Women of the War (London, 1917), 62-63; A. Marwick, Women at War, 142-43, 81-82.

long tradition of moral patrolling developed by bodies like the National Vigilance Association and reflected the point of view, described by Hynes, that sexual morality was not a private matter.

The war made necessary many forms of intervention by the state. The economic, fiscal and military interventionism of 1914-1918 is well-recognised by historians. Very little attention has been given to the attempts to regulate aspects of citizens' lives normally regarded as private. Special regulations gave the police and their auxiliaries unprecedented opportunities for surveillance. The Belgians can claim some of the credit for forcing all British subjects to register at hotels and boarding houses as a means of ensuring that all refugees and other aliens registered. A new brand of British law-breaker appeared: the person registering under a false name. Some visitors gave false names as a joke, but most cases involved unmarried couples claiming to be husband and wife on weekends at resorts. Resort police forces reacted diversely. The chief constable of Ayrshire feared that not to prosecute would bring the law into contempt, whereas the chief of police at Margate wanted nothing to do with a divorce case for which the police registration book had been subpoenaed. The Home Office response was to emphasise that the regulations were only for security and "should not be made use of for the purpose of enforcing

morality." It counselled "a wise discretion."⁸⁶

A determined attempt to use the registration rules for enforcing morality was made by the Bench of Justices at Durham, when five Belgians from Birtley were gaoled in 1917 for one month with hard labour for staying overnight with prostitutes in Durham. The Clerk to the Bench strongly disagreed with the ruling. He doubted that any offence had been committed, and pointed out that no Englishman could be prosecuted for sleeping with a prostitute. The men had been punished simply for violating the moral code of the magistrate. The justices later backed down but urged the Home Office to amend the ARO to legalise proceedings against "Belgian Aliens who come into our city for purposes of immorality and stay one or two nights. . . notwithstanding that they may be in possession of their identity cards and otherwise may be complying with the existing Restrictions." The Home Office refused: the ARO was designed to secure the safety of the realm, not to punish the immoral.⁸⁷ The Home Office remained true to its principle of resisting attempts to use the ARO in ways for which it was not designed.

⁸⁶HO 45/10780/227601/148, chief constable Ayr, to under secretary of state, Home Office, 9 July 1915; /382, chief constable, Margate, to Home Office, 7 January 1918; minute, Pedder, 9 January; /393, minutes by W.J.H.B., 13 April, and Moylan, 25 April 1918.

⁸⁷HO 45/10800/307293/152, Clerk of Bench of Justices, City of Durham, to under secretary of state, Home Office, 24 April 1917; minute, Moylan, 24 April; Clerk to under secretary of state, 31 May; Home Office to Clerk, 9 June 1917.

Certain features emerge from the maze of regulations governing the Belgians in England. By a curious irony, the most pitied and admired foreign community in Britain was also the most heavily supervised, except for the more unfortunate enemy aliens. The restrictions on the refugees were partly a corollary to the privileges they enjoyed as the cossetted guests of the nation. But above all they were victims of wartime panic. Even at the height of their popularity, the refugees could not escape the stigma of their foreignness. And even the most scrupulous guardians of Englishmen's civil rights against arbitrary wartime legislation relaxed their vigilance when foreigners were involved.

However, the refugees were not defenceless. Their best protection was the self-interest of the departments most concerned with them and the genuine concern of the WRC and the leaders of the Belgian community. There was no simple pattern of defenders, neutrals and attackers. Even the refugees' staunchest friends agreed on the need for special regulations while the military occasionally were more moderate than the jaded and cynical police. Cynicism indeed coloured the attitudes of the authorities to many aspects of control. Some of the regulations served no useful purpose. They were an elaborate charade to please powerful anti-alien sentiment.

During the war the grounds of hostility towards aliens changed. Economic, racial and moral arguments gave way first

to military arguments and then, with the Russian Revolution in 1917, to political arguments based on the fear of international communism. But the transition was not tidy.

Instead, wartime attitudes to aliens were a witches' brew of economic, racial, moral, military and political fears. Even high officials could be remarkably muddled in their thinking.

It is significant that in the aftermath of the classic instance of confused thinking--the attempt to control Belgian cafés--one official should see a chance to close down communist meeting places in London.⁸⁸ The Edwardian anarchist and spy scares had sown seeds which flowered during the war.

⁸⁸HO 45/11014/324204/14, minutes, Moylan, 2 April 1917.

CHAPTER XI

SAMARITANS AND BUREAUCRATS

'This Great Work must not be
Controlled by Junior Officialdom'

The old boundaries of public relief and private voluntary charity tend to be obliterated, the State is assuming the role of co-ordinator, and the Society has before it a task requiring all its ability and accumulated experience to adapt itself to the claims of a new era.¹

o wrote the Battersea branch of the COS at the end of one year of war. The COS perhaps had more adjustments to make than most voluntary organisations. But the refugee relief movement experienced important shifts in its relationship with the government between 1914 and 1918, shifts which did not escape the eagle eye of the COS. Thus, the Paddington branch of the COS commented in its report for 1916 that perhaps the outstanding feature of the past year or two from a C.O.S. point of view. . . has been the extent to which the State has intervened in work hitherto carried on by the C.O.S. and other bodies." As evidence it cited the cases of the National Relief Fund and the War Pensions Committee, and the fact that the War Refugees Committee was

¹COS/C / 100/47, annual report of Battersea committee, 1914-1915, 17.

"now under the direct official control of the L.G.B."²

A profound ambivalence characterised the relationship of the Committee and the Board. The WRC was a private charity which depended heavily on government funds. Conversely, the government had publicly accepted that refugee relief was a national responsibility yet chose to rely primarily on voluntary effort. Both the government and the WRC were aware of the ambiguities of their division of labour, but it was never possible for the one completely to take over refugee work and dispense with the other. Despite a public appearance of harmony, the two were frequently at loggerheads, sometimes over details of policy, but more often over the question of power which disputes about detail raised. Who was to have final say in refugee relief policy? The government's bargaining point was money, the Committee's expertise. Yet the matter was not so simple: the WRC could maintain that it was saving the government a vast outlay of public money, while the government could point to the facilities and trained staff it provided. The government, because it held the power of the purse, had the stronger position. But the WRC was able to use a species of moral blackmail: the refugees were officially guests of the nation, yet much of the burden was effectively being carried by only a small segment of the nation.

²COS/C/100/48, annual report of Paddington committee, 1915-1916, 6-7.

Finance

The financial history of refugee relief is simply told. The refugees became increasingly a public charge as the curve of private benevolence flattened out and even declined. Most of the WRC's funds were accumulated in its early days. The Committee received £53,000 in 1914. By June 1916 the total stood at £97,000 and by June 1917 had struggled only £5,000 higher. In the Committee's last eighteen months, only £4,420 dribbled in.³ Thus, the WRC's financial position, unhealthy from the beginning, was disastrous during the last two years of the war, especially when inflation is taken into account.

The discrepancy between donations in the two halves of the war hints intriguingly at the war's erosive effects on the traditional prop of most charitable activity, the middle classes. The war's impact on the living standards of segments of English society is too complex to allow of easy generalisations, and most studies have concentrated on the working classes. But such evidence as there is suggests that, while the wartime economic boom enriched many investors--the detested "profiteers"--many members of the middle classes suffered.⁴ At the same time, it is clear

³WRC I, 41; WRC III, 16.

⁴To this writer's knowledge, studies of the middle classes in wartime are nonexistent. While wages are given much attention, other forms of income--salaries, stipends, dividends and "rent"--are dismissed in a sentence or two. The war seems to have hit some middle-class people and missed others. Some professional groups, such as lawyers,

that segments of the working classes which benefited from the war did not see fit to support charities such as the WRC, preferring to spend on consumer goods, to accumulate nest-eggs, or to subscribe after 1917 to war savings schemes. The WRC had to compete with the government as well as with other charities for the spare cash in the pockets of the people. In sum, the war led to a redistribution of the national income which did not favour traditional philanthropy.⁵

While the Committee could spend only derisory amounts on relief, government expenditure on the refugees rose inexorably. From the outset the Board bore all costs of transporting refugees and maintaining them in the depots. On 1 September 1914, the LGB received a special grant of

flourished. Shopkeepers did well. But the dislocation of the stock exchange affected many investors. And families whose husbands enlisted did badly, despite better allowances for officers' dependents, if only because many were unwilling to abandon overnight the appurtenances of upper-middle-class life, such as private schooling for children. The leisured rentier reaches of the middle classes, from which the WRC drew many of its volunteers, are ignored in histories of the war. That many rentiers were hurt by the war therefore remains an assumption of this thesis derived from sketchy evidence in the files of the WRC. Where books deal with the middle classes, they often forego analysis for insubstantial impressionism. For example, F. W. Hirst, The Consequences of The War to Great Britain (London, 1934), 235-86, devotes one paragraph to the middle classes: a paraphrase of a newspaper article about a pawnbroker who found increasing numbers of middle-class people furtively coming to pawn belongings during the latter half of the war. He fails to explain why this was the case. Cf. A. Marwick, The Deluge, 136-38; Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, The English Middle Classes (first ed., 1949; New York, 1950), 77, 227-28.

⁵ Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum (first ed., 1971; Harmondsworth, 1973), 186-214.

£10,000 from the Treasury to meet the "necessary expenditure on the maintenance of Belgian Refugees." The £10,000 vanished in three weeks and had to be supplemented by another £10,000.⁶ By the time the last Belgian had been shipped home, the British government had spent approximately £3½ millions on refugee relief. The Board's own activities accounted for about half that sum, while the WRC took the rest. When it closed its offices on the last day of 1918, the Committee had received £1,713,205 from the Exchequer. Viewed from one angle, the government had become a lavish patron of worthy philanthropic causes.⁷

Though lavish, the government was by no means eager. The Board agreed to lift the WRC's burdens only in stages. The process really began with the agreement of January 1915 covering the special areas scheme.⁸ The agreement set several important precedents. First, it established not only that the government would help to finance allocation work but also the scale on which the government was to give help generally to the WRC. Secondly, it showed that, if the government was unwilling to give money, it was also remarkably coy about asserting control over the channel through which so much of its money was to flow.

⁶T/128/1, T. Heath to secretary, LGB, 16 September and 10 October 1914.

⁷1920 Report, 5; WRC III, 15.

⁸See chapter V.

The billeting rate of 10/- weekly for refugees in the west coast resorts, decided upon in January, became the basis for all subsequent government capitation grants for refugees. When compared with the old age pension of 5/-, it was generous. But it had not been based, significantly, on a comparison with old age pensioners nor with the scales afforded by the National Relief Fund to the families of soldiers and sailors and to unemployed British workers. Instead, it was worked out to be competitive with the War Office billeting rate, which at that time stood at around 18/-. So an ad hoc decision on costs in one small area of refugee work broadened out to include all refugees who sought official help and to occasion a government outlay on refugees well above the "national minimum" set for old age pensioners. The anomaly developed because the refugees were thought of as part of that same network of exceptional wartime circumstances as the vast enlistments in the armed forces, and not as part of the normal pattern of British civil distress.⁹

The rate of 10/-, arrived at fortuitously, became the norm for relief subsidies when, in March 1915, the government was called in to subsidise the WRC's flats and hostels projects, to pay the entire cost of refugees staying in hostels and boarding houses, and to provide funds for the

⁹ A point explicitly made by the Duke of Norfolk's Committee of inquiry into the WRC, MH 8/7/98/202, report of the Norfolk Committee to Walter Long, July 1917, 10.

Private Relief Fund. An eight-month lull followed with only minor increases in government aid to the Committee. A general campaign for retrenchment begun in July 1915 may have accounted for the pause. Even with the best intentions to halt expenditure, however, the Board was reduced to muttering feebly to Aldwych about "the necessity for the strictest economy," while finding itself being called upon to pay subsidies to hitherto financially self-sufficient organisations like the National Food Fund which had been forced to ask the Committee for help.¹⁰ The WRC itself was in desperate straits by October 1915 and the Board accordingly agreed at the eleventh hour late in November to foot the Aldwych wages bill, which had grown alarmingly as volunteers dropped away or were forced to ask for a wage or stipend by the failure of their private income.¹¹ On 1 January 1916, the Board took over the payment of office expenses, apart from rent, rates and taxes, and at the end of 1915 agreed to pay these charges too. Thus, for the last two

¹⁰R. Titmuss, Social Policy, 140. The LGB sent a circular pleading for economy to all local authorities in August 1915. MH 8/20/113, H. W. Francis, LGB, to Maudslay, 14 September 1915.

¹¹BEL 1/7, audit report to the LGB of H. Carson Roberts, LGB auditor at Aldwych, 13 July 1916, 5; MH 8/1/82/8, Mrs. I. G. Samuel to Maudslay, 31 August 1915:

"Miss Byrne has approached me with reference to a salary! Lady Byrne has lost heavily through the war. Her sisters now are 'earning.' She feels she must also keep herself. She is very nice about it and perfectly willing to go on for a while here voluntarily--but if we are unable to pay her soon she feels she ought to find a paid job."

years of the war, the entire cost of administering Belgian¹² refugee relief was borne by the government.

Inspections and Inquiries

Naturally, such a shift in the financial balance of power involved a shift in the relationship between the Board and the Committee. Each increase in government support meant an increase in government control. During 1914, the LGB and the WRC cooperated, but dealt with distinct spheres of relief. There were disputes where authority was not clearly delimited, as in the government depots where volunteers and officials had to work together. But both bodies controlled their own officials and deployed their own funds. This neat separation of powers ended in January 1915 and a long and gradual process of fusion began. The government agreed, in effect, to allow a private body to administer large sums of public money and the Board--always with one eye on the frowning Treasury--sought to make sure that the money was wisely spent. To this end, it conducted periodic inspections of the Aldwych machine; it placed its own officers in strategic positions at

¹²Though the War Refugees Committee dealt overwhelmingly with Belgians, it took its name seriously. During the war, Aldwych helped French, Russian, Italian, Serbian and Romanian refugees. It actively cooperated with the Serbian Relief Fund (founded on 23 September 1914) in seeing to the welfare of several hundred Serbian boys brought to England to be educated. MH 8/7/98/115, Maudslay to Lord Rhondda, 22 December 1916. WRC II, 4; WRC III, 9; MH 8/22/35, minutes of Managing Committee, 30 March 1916. For the Serbian Relief Fund, see Harry Hanak, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the Great War (London, 1962), 64-80.

Aldwych; it instituted careful auditing of the Committee's books. It did everything, in fact, short of taking over Aldwych lock, stock and barrel. The reasons for its reluctance to assume direct control were simple, and were first expounded by Samuel when he concluded the agreement with Gladstone in January 1915. Direct control was financially and politically inexpedient. He wished the fact of government support to be kept well hidden from the public. Thereafter, the Board's attempts to balance the two aims of control and secrecy dominated the story of its relations with the WRC.

Inspection was the Board's first weapon of control. The WRC was inspected on three main occasions and was visited by highranking LGB officers on several other occasions. In October 1915, Samuel appointed F. J. Willis of the Board and R. S. Meiklejohn of the Treasury to study the workings of the WRC. They made several visits and reported at the end of November. The inquiry grew out of the Committee's financial crisis of that time. Samuel at first contemplated a larger committee, with three members each from the Board and the WRC and one from the Treasury, but in the end pared it down to the two civil servants, probably to speed its work and avoid the possibility of conflict which the larger committee offered.¹³ The WRC accepted the fact

¹³MH 8/19/191 and 214, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 14 and 21 October 1915.

of an investigation gracefully. A probe by government officials offered a chance to clear up some nagging though minor disputes with the LGB and the Treasury.¹⁴ Furthermore, despite its mendicant status, the Committee was still confident of holding its own against the Board. Its mood was expressed by Gladstone on 11 October: "Our (WRC) money runs out at the end of Nov. I have opened negotiations with the Gov^t on our subsequent relations. I am not going to be run by the LGB but they know they cannot run Aldwyth."¹⁵ This insouciance stemmed partly from the government's recognition of the WRC as "the only official body to administer the regulations existing as to the care of Belgian Refugees in this country."¹⁶

Gladstone's complacency was also fed by the awareness that the WRC was at that moment a prize coveted by two leading politicians, a piquant reversal of the situation late in August 1914, when no Minister had wanted to touch refugee relief, which the Committee must have savoured. When Asquith formed his coalition ministry in May 1915, he sacrificed Samuel to make way for the Unionist Walter Long. Samuel was demoted to the Postmaster-Generalship. To

¹⁴MH 8/18/131, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 22 September 1915.

¹⁵Deiniol, Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 11 October 1915.

¹⁶MH 8/1/82/3, quoted in memorandum by Maudslay to Gladstone, 3 July 1915.

sweeten the pill, Asquith allowed him to retain refugee relief in his portfolio: a remarkable expedient, since relief work was still the domain of the Board's officials, who had to juggle their Belgian work with other duties. Samuel's fief was tenuous. Long chose to try wresting it from him just as Willis and Meiklejohn began their work and did so just as they presented their report.¹⁷

Internal needs also dictated the WRC's acceptance of the inquiry. A major reorganisation was in the offing at Aldwych and the Managing Committee wished to divest itself of many voluntary staff who had rendered faithful but not always efficient service since August 1914. The inquiry provided an excuse, a way of putting the onus for unpopular changes on to the government's broad shoulders. The Germans provided another deus ex machina with a bomb which destroyed the Rink on 13 October, the day before Samuel decided on the inquiry. The Managing Committee used the bomb and the inquiry as excuses as sacked workers deluged it with petitions and

¹⁷The Committee watched from the sidelines with great interest but surprisingly little sentiment. Maudslay somewhat preferred Samuel because after fifteen months the WRC was just getting him "nicely in order," while Gladstone, who expressed no preference, announced jauntily to his brother: "We are having a very interesting time at Aldwych with the Govt. Long and Samuel are fighting for the supervision of us & the WRC is for the present tertius ridens." His neutrality is the more striking given his personal and political ties to Samuel. But he was speaking in his role as head of an organisation which had had many opportunities to grow cynical about the motives of politicians. GP 46013/158, Maudslay to Gladstone, n.d. (November 1915) ; Deinol. Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 14 November and 2 December 1915.

complaints.¹⁸

Finally, Gladstone and Maudslay were confident throughout that they could impress their views on Willis and Meiklejohn, especially as Henry Leggett, the Board's representative at Aldwych, agreed with the Committee's position on most topics.¹⁹ Their confidence was justified and the inspectors suggested no drastic or unpalatable changes. "This was not unexpected," the WRC noted archly, "as the financial system had been devised in concert with the Board, the Comptroller and Auditor-General, and the Treasury."²⁰

The next investigation was more formidable. At first Long seemed happy to accept the situation as he found it and a relieved Gladstone announced after an early interview that "the position in short is 'as we were'."²¹ Yet only four months later, Long appointed a committee of inquiry chaired by the Duke of Norfolk. His reasons were ostensibly political rather than financial, the desire to placate the

¹⁸MH 8/1/82/42, Maudslay to C. Baschwitz, 19 October 1915; /126, Maudslay to L. Bower, 19 January 1916.

¹⁹GP 46013/155, Maudslay to Gladstone, 4 November 1915. Gladstone later inferred that "the report was mainly drawn up as an inducement to the Treasury to grant the money for the staff." MH 8/20/104, memorandum by Gladstone on interview with Long on 21 December 1915.

²⁰WRC I, 41.

²¹MH 8/20/104, interview with Long, 21 December 1915.

Belgian community, as there had been "much unrest among some classes of refugees" in recent months. Some of the Belgian irritation was directed in some unspecified way at the size of PRF grants. Both the Belgian Official Committee and the Belgian ambassador had warned Long of widespread dissatisfaction among the refugees.²² But the Committee seems to have been Long's way of trying to resolve several months of discussions between the WRC and the BOC over closer cooperation. Both Long and Hymans, the Belgian ambassador, were strongly in favour of closer ties between the two bodies, but neither the WRC nor the BOC wished to become too close. The Managing Committee felt that its discussions of refugee affairs might be seriously embarrassed if Belgian representatives attended regularly; the BOC did not want to be compromised within its own constituency by becoming too closely identified with the policies of the British government and the WRC. What the Belgian community did want was to know precisely where, in the complicated web of government

²²GP 46082/223-24, Duke of Norfolk to Gladstone, 30 April 1916, 22. WRC I, 36; GP 46013/197-99, Maudslay to Gladstone, 2 January 1916; BEL 1/7, report of meeting of BOC, 14 March 1916; MH 8/22/107, Baron Goffinet to Gladstone, 18 April 1916.

and private relief agencies, final authority lay.²³

The Norfolk Committee's composition reflected its political, rather than purely administrative, purpose. England's leading Catholic aristocrat was assisted by three politicians: the Belgian Edmond Carton de Wiart, the Unionist Basil Peto, and the Liberal J. W. Pratt. Their investigation was thorough. They met on eighteen days and interviewed sixteen witnesses, including Samuel, two senior LGB officials, four WRC members, the heads of two provincial relief committees, and four Belgian representatives. In their report, submitted on 3 July, they spoke of the "critical phase" through which refugee relief was passing, while Carton de Wiart appended a memorandum playing down economic grievances and emphasising "moral factors." Many Englishmen had over-reacted against their early romantic response to the refugees and hosts were weary of longstaying guests. Many Belgians

²³By this time the Belgian community was well-established and thriving: as evidenced by a multiplicity of organisations for every purpose social, cultural, economic, political and religious, most of which are described in A. Varlez, Les Belges en Exil. The community's internal politics had become correspondingly more complex. The BOC and WRC were prompted to discuss closer cooperation in January 1916 partly to head off the challenge of Vandervelde's alliance of socialist committees, which "strive to do all sorts of things for the Belgian cause without any real backing, ostensibly because Aldwych fails in its duties to the Belgian Refugees." GP 46013/202-03, Maudslay to Gladstone, 4 January 1916.

had become depressed and embittered as their exile dragged on.²⁴ But most of the report dealt with the dreaded subject of funding and control. Caught offguard by the switch of emphasis, the WRC scrambled for minor concessions from Long but had to accept the report's main proposals.

The third main government investigation of the WRC was far less dangerous. In February 1918, the government appointed a committee under Sir John Bradbury to investigate the hydra-headed wartime bureaucracy and recommend ways of lopping it back. As a small, semiofficial branch of one of the civil departments of government, the WRC's position was vulnerable. But it faced the Bradbury inquiry as a grizzled veteran of bureaucratic infighting and the inquiry itself was perfunctory. Two inspectors, one a businessman with little knowledge of the civil service, paid a quick visit to Aldwych and drew up a report containing glaring errors of fact, as Gladstone, striking the typical Aldwych note when dealing with meddlers, informed Bradbury: "We who are familiar with the intricacy of Belgian Refugee affairs and who have been in it [sic] up to the neck from the first reject in toto this not very formidable and really paltry

²⁴MH 8/7/98/101, Norfolk report, 3-4. H. Davignon, "Belgium in England", 96-97, speaks of widespread disenchantment among the refugee liberal elite who had looked to England "as the chosen land of parliamentary institutions" and instead found the Aliens Restriction Order.

attack on our work."²⁵

Few changes were made as a result of the investigation. In any case, Darwinian processes within the "inspired jungle"²⁶ of Lloyd George's administration more effectively reduced the WRC's scope than any intervention from the Treasury-minded echelons of government. The fittest departments flourished at the expense of the weak. The WRC never paid as much as some other new departments offered their workers and after 1916 found increasing difficulty in keeping its staff. Questions of salaries and conditions for

²⁵GP 46084/74, Gladstone to Sir John Bradbury, n.d. (end of 1918); Cf. WRC III, 62-69. The inspectors criticised, among others, Sir Thomas Elliott--at that time himself an inspector with the Bradbury Committee! PP, Third Interim Report of the Committee appointed to inquire into the Organization and Staffing of Government Offices, 1918, Cd. 9220, 24.

²⁶The phrase is W. N. Medlicott's Contemporary England 1914-64 (London, 1976; first ed., 1967), 51. Some idea of the immense growth of the civil service is provided by the Bradbury Committee:

| | Men | Women | Total |
|----------|--------|--------|---------|
| 1/8/1914 | 45,000 | 8,500 | 53,000 |
| 1/4/1917 | 54,000 | 51,000 | 105,000 |
| 1/2/1918 | 62,000 | 86,000 | 148,000 |

The Committee confessed that it had found no large blocks of staff doing useless work but pointed to generally inefficient use of staff in new departments. These departments had been created hurriedly, their staffs had been collected at short notice, and they all suffered from a dearth of skilled staff. Many heads of new departments were businessmen hired on the understanding that they would be given a free hand to use their own methods and so their superiors were unwilling to create difficulties by insisting on strict conformity to normal rules. PP, Final Report of the Committee appointed to inquire into the Organization and Staffing of Government Offices, 1919, Cmd. 62, 2-4. With appropriate changes, the description fits the WRC.

its staff occupied much of the WRC's correspondence with the Board in 1917 and 1918. Thus, in October 1917, the new and glamorous Air Board poached a number of General Buildings' unglamorous but essential charwomen.²⁷ Typists, including some with vital skills in Flemish and French, went off to plum jobs elsewhere and interpreters were offered lucrative posts in other departments.²⁸ Yet, even though staff discontent continued to rise, it never reached the stage of open revolt or mass desertion.

These two contrapuntal themes--the WRC's inability to offer good wages and its ability to retain the loyalty of its staff--reflect its ambiguous status. Nothing illustrated better that the Committee was neither fully a voluntary agency nor fully a government department than the questions of war bonuses and war service badges. Both raised the same problem: were the employees of the WRC employees of the government? War bonuses were introduced first into industry to counteract the rising cost of living. They spread to the civil service and when the LGB agreed to pay the WRC's wages in November 1915, the workers at Aldwych became eligible for war bonuses. But the Treasury admitted their eligibility only grudgingly. The more highly paid workers were not included and the Treasury made clear that it wanted the

²⁷MH 8/7/98/161, correspondence re loss of charwomen at Aldwych to Air Board, September - October 1917.

²⁸MH 8/7/98/186, Maudslay to LGB, 13 February 1918; /195, Maudslay to LGB, 25 April 1918.

Managing Committee to screw every last cunce of unpaid or lowly-paid effort out of workers before they were allowed to exchange the freedom and status of volunteers for the security of employees. An attempt by the WRC to gain equal pay for its overwhelmingly female staff also received short shrift from their Lords of the Treasury.²⁹

Beginning in late 1914, the Admiralty and the War Office had begun to adopt the practice of issuing badges certifying that their employees were engaged in work of national importance and therefore could not be spared for the armed forces. The custom had developed to protect employees against harassment by zealous patriots, especially women.³⁰ Other civil servants were soon clamouring to be issued the protective badges. The WRC, despite its pride in its autonomy, was one of the first to press its workers' claims. Pressure from below underlay the whole badging movement and the WRC was no exception. Maudslay informed Gladstone of staff desires early in 1915:

I think if we are working for the Government which we really are, the Government should allow the Executive Committee the Service Buttons supplied to helpers at the Admiralty and War Office. I think a word from you

²⁹T 128/1, Heath to secretary, LGB, 19 December 1916; /2, Heath to secretary, LGB, 16 August 1917; T 13/30, Heath to under secretary of state, Home Office, 2 October 1917; MH 8/7/98, Willis to Maudslay, 26 March 1918.

³⁰A. Marwick, The Deluge, 58-59.

would put that right and be enormously appreciated anyhow by everybody I know, including myself.³¹

Staff pressure kept up but the Managing Committee remained firm to the end of 1915 that WRC employees, although paid by government contributions, were not civil servants. Therefore, the Committee did not feel able to claim that its workers were employed on government war work.³² Political necessity, the need to assert the WRC's real independence of the government, overrode sympathy for Aldwych workers then enduring the enormous pressures on civilians during the desperate dying days of the old voluntary system under Lord Derby.³³ Paradoxically, the Managing Committee changed its mind after conscription was introduced. Although badging

³¹GP 46013/47-49, Maudslay to Gladstone, n.d. (early 1915) . Harassment transcended all class barriers. Middle-class men were probably far worse off than many workers. Middle-class theorists frequently cast doubt on the patriotism of the working classes anyway and right-wing theorists always assumed that a large measure of compulsion would be needed to get workers into the army. No such theory exculpated the upper-middle-class male, as the unrelenting campaign against rich shirkers in the pages of Punch attests.

³²MH 8/17/73, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 1 July 1915; /20/78, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 15 December 1915.

³³Lord Derby was appointed Director-General of Recruiting on 11 October 1915, in a last attempt to make voluntarism work. Derby devised a plan blending conscription and the voluntary principle. Men were asked to "attest" to their willingness to enlist if and when called upon to do so. Only single men were to be called up. The plan failed.

L. Woodward, Great Britain and the War of 1914-1918, 157-58. The "Derby Letter" asking men to attest caused great disquiet at Aldwych. GP 46013/153-54, Maudslay to Gladstone, 15 December 1915.

had lost its efficacy against an immediate threat of enforced enlistment, a new anxiety began to spread not only among the male workers but the women as well. Already people's minds were turning to the end of the war and to the demobilisation of huge armies. As Gladstone informed Long, in pleading his workers' case:

These workers fear that in the competition for employment after the war, their chances will suffer materially in comparison with others unless they are in a position to show that they were employed during the war in work which was recognised as work connected with and arising out of the war.

The workers no longer expected to get a badge, nor did they want the status of civil servants, "nor. . . any privileged position with regard to the Military Service Act."³⁴

Conscription had diminished some of the anxieties of wartime life, had inspired a certain fatalism missing under voluntarism. But the future was becoming increasingly dark and uncertain, just as the framework of the present was taking firmer shape. Long assuaged some of the staff's anxieties by agreeing to give testimonials to Aldwych workers stating that they were engaged on work of national importance.³⁵

The WRC got good value for the government's money from its staff throughout the entire war. Long after the

³⁴MH 8/22/48, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 7 April 1916; /122, Gladstone to Long, 1 May 1916.

³⁵MH 8/22/140, Long to WRC, 9 May 1916.

euphoria of 1914 had died away, the staff at Aldwych laboured hard, working long and inconvenient hours when necessary--as was often the case especially with the Transport Department--without overtime. The distinction between volunteer and paid worker was always indistinct. While volunteers gradually accepted pay, paid workers agreed to do extra work on a voluntary basis. The staff therefore intensely resented the stock Treasury view that their salaries compared "very favourably with those received by temporary employees performing similar duties in Government Departments."³⁶ Out of their resentment they and the Managing Committee gradually forged the standard Aldwych view of the history of refugee relief.

A growing feeling that the government had betrayed a trust permeated the WRC during the latter half of the war. The Belgians were by the government's own admission a national responsibility. The Committee accepted that "nation" referred first and foremost to the private citizens and local institutions of England, to a gemeinschaft rather than a gesellschaft. Private effort had floundered, but it was unthinkable that the national effort should flag. Therefore, the state was morally obliged to redeem its pledges by making good the honest defects of the relief movement. Instead, its officials seemed bent on seeking every way of cutting corners

³⁶MH 8/7/98/116, Campbell to Maudslay, 28 December 16; /101, Maudslay to Rhodes, 6 January 1917.

and reducing expenditure on the refugees. The corollary of this view was that the government had been very much the junior partner of private philanthropy in the relief of the refugees. Gladstone reminded his opposite number at the LGB in 1918 that

. . . it must always be remembered that excellent as the services of the Board's officers have been, they came in when the main troubles and responsibilities had been worried through while M[audslay]. and some others bore the heaviest burden from the start. The Govt did not assume supervision & control because of any failure on the part of the W.R.C. & its organization; but because private persons who had voluntarily incurred the cost of several millions could not continue to bear the whole load, & national hospitality had to be eventually paid for out of national funds. By stepping in before the Govt were prepared. . . private individuals saved the Govt an expenditure of many millions & secured terms of maintenance wh. still operate to the public advantage.³⁷

Gladstone had long tired of the way all the burden of relief work had been shunted onto what he was fond of calling "the willing horses."³⁸ But, significantly, though he was admitting the inadequacy of private effort, his new emphasis on state involvement went no further than a call for state funding. This was a shift indeed. Gladstone had been always acutely conscious of the need to conserve government funds. But it was not an admission of the need for state intervention in welfare work along lines advocated by the Webbs and the labour movement. "The state" was not to oust "private charity." Rather, the two were to blend.

³⁷GP 46084/37, Gladstone to Willis, 19 July 1918.

³⁸WRC I, 24; WRC II, 9.

Philanthropists were to become social workers, using techniques pioneered by charitable agencies and retaining much of the freedom they had enjoyed in the past. To understand why the members of the WRC could evaluate its own role so positively and the government's role so disparagingly, it is necessary to go back to the negotiations in January 1915 and Samuel's request for secrecy.

The Screen

Samuel wanted Aldwych to act as a "screen or break-water" behind which the government could shelter.³⁹ The idea of the Screen, as it came to be generally known, was to "keep alive the impression that it was not from the State but from a voluntarily supported fund that the assistance was being given to those local committees who found it necessary."⁴⁰ The Screen was, simply, a campaign of deception, with the conspirators the government and the WRC, and the victim the philanthropic sections of the British public.

The WRC complied assiduously with Samuel's request for the eighteen months that the Screen stood. Gladstone quickly spread the word around Aldwych that workers were to remember "that there is no Government scheme at all. The Government do not appear."⁴¹ Newspapers were scanned

³⁹MH 8/7/98/66, unnumbered untitled file: probably draft of WRC I, 24 July 1916, 23.

⁴⁰BEL 1/7, Carson Roberts audit report, 11.

⁴¹GP 46046/191-92, Gladstone to Lyttelton, January 1915.

anxiously for dangerously revealing references to government involvement in relief. When the Manchester Guardian announced in December 1915 that "the Government, aided by a network of committees all over the country, has succeeded in sorting out and settling the huge mixed population of Belgians," Maudslay wrung his hands: "I think there is a little too much 'Government'! How are we to keep up the screen in view of this?"⁴² When it was realised that refugees--whom the Screen was also meant to mislead--might be concluding that the WRC was really a branch of the LGB because the Committee's mail was franked by the Board, Rhodes and Maudslay seriously discussed the advisability of changing the system of franking.⁴³ Little was left to chance.

Of course, absolute secrecy was impossible to maintain. Many local committees received funds which they knew derived not from the impecunious WRC but from the government, though this fact was seldom divulged to them beforehand. No one was sworn to secrecy. The Screen merely meant slowing the spread of information about the government's financial undertakings to the relief movement. The Screen prevented a rush of applications from committees who were nearing the end of their resources for funds from the government alias the WRC:

⁴²Manchester Guardian, 17 December 1915; GP 46013/184-85, Maudslay to Gladstone, 17 December 1915.

⁴³MH 8/7/98/37, Maudslay to Rhodes, Rhodes to lay, 25 and 26 February 1916.

It should be made clear at the outset to all Committees applying for financial assistance that the funds at the disposal of the WRC are limited and no intimation should be given that a grant can be made until every other means of dealing with the matter have been exhausted.⁴⁴

Local committees receiving grants for some of their refugees were shielded from the importunities of other refugees' hosts who, if they knew the government was paying, might press for aid instead of carrying the burden of hospitality alone any longer.⁴⁵ Finally, the refugees themselves were to be kept ignorant of the government's role in funding relief. Thus, they were led to believe that the WRC paid for the entire Private Relief Fund, flats scheme and food rations.⁴⁶ Inevitably, the refugees learned the truth.⁴⁷ But Willis and Meiklejohn reported in November 1915 that "the

⁴⁴MH 8/20, Willis-Meiklejohn report, 4. My emphasis.

⁴⁵Ibid.:

"We feel that the grants in the past have been too readily given and that sufficient care has not been taken to impress upon the local Committees the necessity for economy, and the fact that every possible effort should be made to raise fresh funds in the districts before coming to London for assistance."

⁴⁶MH 8/7/98/37, Maudslay to Rhodes, 25 February 1916.

⁴⁷But in general the Screen was almost too successful in deceiving the refugee community. A myth persisted among the refugees, despite constant WRC disclaimers, that their own government was paying for the relief work from a British loan which would have to be repaid after the war. The myth helped explain why so many refugees seemed "ungrateful" to the British. MH 8/7/98/180, A. L. Tale to "Refugee Relief Committee Aldwych", 5 December 1917; WRC II, 1-2, 16-17.

secret has been well kept and that the WRC have acted with much discretion in carrying out a very difficult and delicate task on behalf of the government."⁴⁸

The Screen was thus a fiscal stratagem, a way of keeping government expenditure within limits. Samuel and his officials made one basic assumption: state and private spending in the same area were incompatible. State expenditure would not breathe life into an ailing movement; it would give it the kiss of death. Samuel could cite a recent precedent to back up his fears. When the Liberal government in 1906 had made a grant of £200,000 to supplement the Queen's Unemployed Fund, a private fund established under the Unemployed Workmen Act of 1905, it had discovered that public contributions began falling.⁴⁹ Admittedly, contributions had only diminished, not ceased. But in the circumstances of 1915 there was a strong presumption that news of government spending on refugees would start volunteers abandoning their self-imposed burdens.

In one sense, the Screen was a taxation measure. It was a means of screwing more money and more unpaid labour out of patriotic citizens, most of whom could afford some sacrifices. Philanthropy was always a form of self-taxation

⁴⁸MH 8/20, Willis-Meiklejohn report, 12.

⁴⁹J. Harris, Unemployment and Politics, 178-79. Beveridge's prediction in 1906 that "the day of such funds. . . is over" was premature: the National Relief Fund very like the earlier scheme, with the government relying private body to finance public relief policy. Ibid.

and especially attractive to governments for that very reason. One of the ways the war eroded the philanthropic ethos was in its sharp increase in taxation on the upper levels of society and its spread of taxation down the social scale. The drastic changes in the structure of taxation, made especially after McKenna introduced his first budget in September 1915 as successor at the Exchequer to the surprisingly mild and ineffectual Lloyd George, were one factor which lessened the need for the Screen.⁵⁰

But Samuel's recognition of the importance of sustaining the philanthropic community's will was well founded. Posing as a completely unsubsidised body, the WRC served the government well. Over and above the unpaid labour performed by thousands of volunteers, labour which would otherwise have fallen to the LGB's staff, and the funds actually collected and spent by the relief movement, and the even greater amount of gifts in kind, such as foodstuffs and clothing, were other, less visible savings. Voluntary bodies like the WRC and the National Food Fund paid pepper-corn rentals for their premises whereas the government had to compete on the open market.⁵¹ And private charities

⁵⁰ The argument that the Screen was a form of taxation now rendered unnecessary and invidious by the McKenna budgets of September 1915 and April 1916 was made explicitly by the LGB's auditor at Aldwych in July 1916. BEL 1/7, Carson Roberts report, 14.

⁵¹ GP 46084/68-69, Gladstone to Willis (draft), n.d. 1918) .

were supported by a hidden superstructure of skilled labour. Established accounting firms like Deloitte, Plender and Griffiths audited their books gratis. Lawyers gave them free advice. The medical profession gave thousands of hours of unpaid or cheap service. If the voluntary societies collapsed or were too closely identified with the government, all this supporting edifice would also crumble. That at least was the fear.

But the Screen was a political ploy as well as a financial ruse. First, the WRC was in effect a sweating employer whose paid employees from the beginning worked long hours for low wages. If the government became too closely tied to the Committee, Samuel feared that it would lay itself open to attacks in parliament from the Labour Party.⁵² Secondly, the employment of refugees was a potentially explosive political issue and Samuel wanted to shield himself from becoming the focus of trade unionist anger. Third, he feared a confrontation with the anti-alien M.P.s who surfaced with a vengeance during the war: "Questions of police, morals

⁵²Samuel's arguments for this and the following points are given in MH 8/7/98/66, draft of WRC I, 23-24. But it is not clear from the context whether the relevant passage is reportage or a gloss. The former is more likely. The writer added his own explanation:

"A Government Department is not equipped for the mass of varying detail work of the essentially personal kind which falls to Aldwych. Mr. Samuel probably felt that without the Screen direct financial responsibility might speedily lead to entire Government control. With the Aldwych machinery broken it would be difficult in these times of war pressure to set up a new organisation of an efficiency up to the Government standard." (24)

and conduct often arise. Having regard to the sufferings and hard case of Belgium, it was desirable to avoid the dangers of unwise questions being asked in Parliament."⁵³ The Screen symptomised the nervousness of the Liberal government as it made the traumatic adjustment to total war.

Yet, designed to protect the government, the Screen had a quite unintended effect: it shielded the WRC from the government itself! By admitting his fears, Samuel handed Gladstone and his colleagues a weapon which they eagerly exploited. The WRC worked diligently throughout 1915 and the first half of 1916 to construct a scenario which fulfilled Samuel's prophetic fears. The relief movement was depicted as massive and yet teetering on the verge of collapse. Let the government only make a move towards exerting control and the shaky mammoth would come crashing down. When A. Carson Roberts, an LGB auditor appointed to Aldwych in December 1915, reported to the Treasury and the Board in July 1916, he noted how he had been indoctrinated:

When I first became connected with the work I was deeply impressed by what I was told of 'three thousand local committees' of whom about 130 received support from central funds: I was told many times that this 130

⁵³The Screen seems to have worked effectively against the parliamentary anti-aliens. As late as December 1917, long after the Screen had ceased to operate, Noel Pemberton Billing, a notorious anti-alien, asked a question which showed he thought the WRC to be some kind of committee of inquiry. W. Hayes Fisher, the incumbent President of the LGB, made little effort to enlighten him, tersely describing the WRC as "an administrative body distributing Government funds." MH 8/7/98/179, cutting from Hansard for 10 December 1917.

was on the point of being increased very greatly, and heard much of the great numbers who were coming upon the central funds as it was becoming generally known that others were obtaining state aid.⁵⁴

Only the WRC, disguised as another struggling poverty-stricken charitable organisation, it had been implied, was preventing a disastrous run on the government bank. For a small investment and no questions asked, the government was reaping a handsome dividend.

The Screen thus suited the WRC's interests. But there is no need to assume that Committee members were being cynical when they claimed to be saving the government vast sums. Gladstone's assertion that the WRC had saved the government millions of pounds was echoed regularly by others at Aldwych. Each of the WRC's annual reports dwelt with satisfaction on immense savings to the Exchequer, the Board's officers were often reminded of the same fact during routine dealings with Aldwych workers, and volunteers prefaced pleas for raises in salary by pointing out how they were saving the country money.⁵⁵ The Committee may have exaggerated its own importance at times, but the belief greatly boosted its self-esteem and stiffened its resistance to government interference in its work.

That interference was rarely substantive. The

⁵⁴BEL 1/7, Carson Roberts audit report, 11-12..

⁵⁵WRC I, 41-43; WRC II, 37-38; WRC III, 2; GP 46084/37, Gladstone to Willis, 19 July 1918; 768-69, Gladstone to Willis, n.d. (late 1918) ; MH 8/7/98/90, Henn Collins to Willis, 26 March 1916.

government rarely disagreed with the Committee on aspects of refugee welfare work, and the Board was strangely neutral while Lady Lugard and the Managing Committee attacked each other over the treatment of the better classes. Money lay at the heart of most of the conflicts between the LGB and the WRC. The Board was placed in a dilemma: to economise in one way--by use of the Screen--it had to countenance what it considered waste and extravagance in the use of its own funds by the semiautonomous WRC. As long as the government relied on voluntary help, its officials realised that inefficient accounting was inevitable, especially given the bewildering variety of grants which flowed from the WRC to local committees.⁵⁶ The Committee for its part was determined to uphold the principle of generosity against what it thought the Board's flinty stinginess, arguing that the Board's economies were false economies.⁵⁷ The Board, as noted before,⁵⁸ had all but taken over control of the WRC's badly-run Clothing Department. The Managing Committee drew a sharp line between itself and the Board when it received the first report of the official in charge of the depot in

⁵⁶T 128/1, Heath to LGB, 30 December 1915.

⁵⁷Cf. Lady Lyttelton to Gladstone after one government proposal to lay off staff at Aldwych: "It is not good economy to cut down investigation staffs." GP 46046/208-09, n.d. (December 1915) .

⁵⁸See 330-31 above.

December 1915: "The Balance Sheet given in the Report would have shown satisfactory working if it had emanated from a business house, but from a Samaritan Institution it was highly unsatisfactory."⁵⁹ The problem was that the WRC and the LGB had each compromised itself by participating in the strange charade of the Screen. Observers were unanimous that the Screen led to "a dual control of a temporary character, the very nature of which necessitated a certain looseness of arrangements." That looseness worked very much to the advantage of the WRC and increasingly to the disadvantage of the Board.

The Commissioner of Belgian Refugees

These considerations eventually convinced Long that the Screen had outlived its usefulness. Carson Roberts smashed the Committee's lovingly constructed bogey in his audit report in July 1916.⁶⁰ Both he and the Norfolk Committee emphasised the defects of indirect control:

⁵⁹ MH 8/18/192, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 14 October 1915.

⁶⁰ BEL 1/7, Carson Roberts audit report, 11-15. He pointed out that, far from increasing, the number of assisted committees had declined in 1916, that the figure of three thousand local committees ready to throw themselves at any time on the mercy of the government was vastly exaggerated, that many committees had gone out of business because their refugees had become self-supporting, that much of the work of local committees consisted in giving assistance in kind, and that most refugees needing financial help were already being paid for by the government. BEL 1/7, Carson Roberts audit report, 11-13.

There have been many agencies, vaguely connected with one another or altogether independent, and many overlapping. . . . These parallel, disconnected and practically independent efforts are not conducive to a proper control of the whole refugee movement.⁶¹

And both pointed out that the Screen was now redundant because the extent of government involvement in relief work was now widely known.⁶²

The Screen had been conceived in the interests of economy. It was torn down in the name of two principles as dear to the Poor Law branch of the LGB as they were detested by the WRC: uniformity and retrenchment. In August 1916 the pendulum swung from loose government control of a still diffused relief movement towards centralised control. The Norfolk Committee had recommended the appointment of an overlord of refugee relief, a "Chief Commissioner" who would coordinate the work of the many bodies dealing with the refugees. Long liked the proposal. He had only half-heartedly subscribed to the Screen and decided now that he wanted "a sort of Parliamentary Secretary" for refugees.⁶³ The WRC offered cogent objections--above all, that a suitable man would be hard to find, would take months to learn his business, and would be able to suggest few changes to the

⁶¹MH 8/7/98/101, Norfolk Report, 5-6.

⁶²BEL 1/7, Carson Roberts audit report, 14; Norfolk Report, 5.

⁶³MH 8/24/86, Long to Gladstone, 16 August 1916.

tried and tested policies of experienced organisations.⁶⁴ But Long went ahead and chose no other than Basil Peto, the man who had probably drafted the proposal for a Commissioner.⁶⁵

Responses to Peto's appointment varied. Belgian reactions were favourable. L'Independance Belge, the Belgian equivalent of The Times which had transferred its staff to London on the fall of Antwerp, was enthusiastic, considering that the efforts of private organisations had been "admirables, mais souvent trop dispersés."⁶⁶ The WRC was sullen. Nor could Long, though he did his best to soothe the Managing Committee, conceal the facts that the government had "come out into the open" in order to discipline the relief movement and that Peto was displacing the Managing Committee from its preeminence in directing refugee relief.⁶⁷ The LGB gave no overt indication of its attitude, but there could be no doubt that the new order promised to be more to its liking. Peto, theoretically, was another independent agent. But, as a member of the Norfolk Committee, his views had conformed with LGB attitudes and he was more likely to be influenced by

⁶⁴BEL 1/8, Gladstone to Long, 24 July 1916.

⁶⁵The Duke of Norfolk was ailing at the time and died in February 1917.

⁶⁶MH 8/24/11, cutting from L'Independance Belge, 14 September 1916.

⁶⁷MH 8/23/132a, Long to Gladstone, 12 July 1916; /24/37, Gladstone to Long, 1 August 1916.

the Board than by the Committee, especially as his appointment was supplemented by a reorganisation of the WRC which materially strengthened the Board's presence at Aldwych.

Long sent a new LGB officer, Tudor Owen, to Aldwych and strengthened the powers of Leggett and Carson Roberts. At the same time he deliberately weakened the position of Maudslay, the dominant figure in the WRC after the unassailable Gladstone, by ordering the secretaryship of the WRC to be placed in commission. His responsibilities were shared by four "chief officers," of whom he was one with Campbell of the Transport Department and Leggett and Tudor Owen of the Board. Financial matters were allotted to the two government officials. And, shortly afterwards, Maudslay lost more autonomy when Long forced him to become a paid official of the Board. He and the other three chief officers were to meet regularly to coordinate relief policy with Peto. Thus, Long had created a second source of authority in direct rivalry to the Managing Committee. Had it been allowed to get started, it would have reduced the Managing Committee to the status of a cipher, responsible for the deployment of its own miniscule budget and impotent to shape relief policy. But the Managing Committee was quick to voice its indignation and Long, who does not seem to have thought out the implications of his proposal, scrapped the plan. Instead, Peto, Leggett, Tudor Owen and Campbell joined the Managing Committee, whose

autonomy was now merely diluted rather than destroyed.⁶⁸

And in the outcome, the new regime did not endure. Peto's experience was very like that of Sir Ernest Hatch. Like Hatch, he was a political lightweight who came to relief work as a tyro among seasoned workers. Like Hatch, he lacked tact and suffered from poorly defined responsibilities. And, like Hatch, he was trounced by the vested interests of the relief movement. The WRC watched and waited at first. But Peto alienated it by taking decisions without properly consulting it and by a series of unfortunately expressed letters to other organisations.⁶⁹ He was safe while Long was at the Board. But Long went to the Colonial Office on the formation of the Lloyd George coalition government in December 1916, and the WRC began a determined offensive which led Lord Rhondda, the new President of the Board, to ask Peto to resign in March 1917.

Peto went partly because he had challenged the supremacy of the Managing Committee. But the WRC saw its fight for power as a fight for principle. W. H. Dickinson

⁶⁸MH 8/24/52-53, 85-88. Gladstone to Long, 11 August; Long to Gladstone, 16 August; Gladstone to Long, 17 and 18 August 1916; WRC I, 50-51.

⁶⁹GP 46013/227-29, Maudslay "Notes for Lord Gladstone", 16 February 1917, contains a list of the WRC's complaints against Peto. Cf. GP 46083/65-66, Gladstone to Rhondda, n.d. (early February 1917); MH 8/27/161, Peto to [PRF], February 1917, re cutting off financial support to Belgian nuns. Peto's worst faux pas was a tactless letter telling the Fulham COS its services were no longer needed. The letter greatly annoyed the COS and embarrassed the WRC.

was one who saw a deeper, sinister design behind Long's administrative changes. "I think it will be well for you," he wrote to Gladstone in February 1917, "to have it out with Rhondda and let him decide which method he desires--Committee-ship or Dictatorship." The latter, he added darkly, "seems to be 'a la mode' nowadays."⁷⁰ His was typical of the response of old Liberals and Radicals appalled at the drift towards ruthless, autocratic executive action, the spirit of Lloyd George and his businessmen/administrators. For many Liberals like Dickinson, the conduct of the war had led to appalling compromises of traditional Liberal doctrine and practice. Standing for the supremacy of Parliament, they saw the role of Parliament inexorably diminished and its authority wielded instead by tight cliques within ruling circles: within the Cabinet, by the smaller War Cabinet; within the Ministry, by Ministers some of whom were not even members of Parliament; and within the bureaucracy by the Cabinet Secretariat, Lloyd George's team of specially recruited advisers, known unaffectionately as the "Garden Suburb." Like the anti-aliens and spymongers, the old Liberals had their own conspiracy theory, the "Prussianising"

⁷⁰GP 46083/64, Dickinson to Gladstone, 16 February 1917.

of English life.⁷¹ Relief work was seen as another cockpit for the fight between the "Prussians"--the advocates of efficiency at all costs--and libertarians.

Other members of the WRC were inclined to view the Peto era in a longer perspective. The LGB's attempt at direct rule provoked fierce restatements of the old philanthropic hostility to the "Poor Law Mind." Peto and the newly-powerful Board officials at Aldwych were charged with manifold sins. First, they did not listen to advice. Here, Dickinson's diagnosis intersected with the more general theory: "Peto's views are clearly those of the Government Official, viz: that he has no need of advice or assistance from any committee in the world."⁷² Second, the bureaucrats were out of touch with the real human situations affected by their decisions. Peto was appointed partly as a sop to Belgian feeling yet, Gladstone told Rhondda in February 1917, "there is a growing gap between administration & the Refugee & more generally, Belgian sentiment." Peto, Tudor Owen and Leggett rarely interviewed refugees and Peto's knowledge in particular was "entirely second hand." Driving home an old

⁷¹For the reactions of substantial portions of the Liberal Party to what they discerned as a drift from Liberal principles by both the wartime coalition governments, see Trevor Wilson, The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914-1935 (London, 1966), 65-66. For the hostility of the civil service to the Cabinet Secretariat, see P. Rowland, Lloyd George, 381-82.

⁷²GP 46083/64, Dickinson to Gladstone, 16 February 1917.

WRC moral, Gladstone went on, "close touch with the Refugees was & is the basis of efficiency."⁷³ Men live by catchphrases. And "efficiency" and "economy" were catchphrases of the day, though the older word "economy" was losing its ring while the newer word had been growing in currency. But "efficiency" meant very different things to the Board and the Committee.

Thirdly, because Peto and his aides worked remote from the refugees, their approach to problems became "stereotyped."⁷⁴ Rigid uniformity was the mark of "official" attitudes, and the uniformity was always in the direction of the stern rather than the understanding. The two words "official" and "hard" were Pavlovian partners in WRC jargon. Dickinson prophesied that, if the new oligarchs had their way, the Belgians would "suffer under what must be a cast-iron administration."⁷⁵ Gladstone spoke of the officials' "absence of personal knowledge. . . bringing in harder more official methods" and threatened that the WRC would disclaim responsibility for future policies instituted by Peto 'if the tendency of past months is hardened into a permanent

⁷³GP 46083/61-62, Gladstone to Rhondda, 14 February 1917.

⁷⁴GP 46083/65-66, Gladstone to Rhondda, February 1917.

⁷⁵GP 46083/64, Dickinson to Gladstone, 16 February 1917.

practice."⁷⁶ And Maudslay made the same juxtaposition in an attack on Tudor Owen and Carson Roberts in December 1917:

The two LGB officials at Aldwych are both excellent up to a point--conscientious, anxious to save the Government funds--but they have no breadth of vision--nor do they understand the larger issues at stake. Our work is of national importance & if it is allowed to sink into a glorified form of Poor Law Administration the result of our labours will not be satisfactory. . . . This great work must not be controlled by junior officialdom. There has been no such situation since the Huguenots & we must carry on the work in the same spirit in which it was begun.⁷⁷

Nothing could have better illustrated the contempt for the Poor Law felt not only by the George Lansburys and Sidney Webbs but also by sections of society who have often been depicted as supporters of a parsimonious, stern Poor Law. It was not that men like Maudslay and Gladstone disapproved in blanket fashion of sternness towards all applicants for relief from the government or charity.⁷⁸ But

⁷⁶ GP 46083/65-66, Gladstone to Rhondda, February 1917.

⁷⁷ GP 46013/249-52, Maudslay to Gladstone, 27 December 1917. It is not clear which two officials he was referring to. Leggett was more important than Carson Roberts, but the context seems to indicate Carson Roberts.

⁷⁸ Gladstone was an advocate of penal colonies for vagrants, one of Belgium's contributions to English thinking on social policy. GP 46079/21-22, Gladstone to A. J. Buckenham, 6 November 1914; R. Vorspan, "Vagrancy and the New Poor Law", 78. Vorspan, 81, rightly observes:

"It is plausible that had the Liberal government not been preoccupied with more pressing matters in the years before World War I, or had the war itself not reduced the vagrancy problem to insignificance, early twentieth-century England might have witnessed not only labour exchanges, old age pensions, and unemployment insurance for the 'respectable' working class, but also penal labour colonies for the 'undeserving'."

they believed that the men who administered the Poor Law, and who were therefore largely responsible for the actual running of much of the nation's welfare policies, had become infected with attitudes appropriate when dealing with the dregs of society but totally inapplicable to the honest poor. Hide-bound by past experience and by fear of the Treasury, officials were unable to respond with sympathy and imagination to an unprecedented calamity like that which brought the Belgians to England.

Repatriation

The WRC won the battle against Peto, and the Board did not again try so openly to assert its control. But the WRC lived out the war in an atmosphere of increasing constraints and a steadily icier relationship with LGB officials. And the government had its revenge when the time came for the Belgians to leave England and return to their liberated homeland. In October 1918, as Germany crumbled and Belgian, British and French armies pushed into Belgium, Basil Peto resurfaced as the nominal-head of a subcommittee which the government had established in October 1916 to draw up plans for repatriation. Significantly, the committee had included representatives of the LGB and the Belgian government and later of the Home Office, Board of Trade and Ministry of Labour. Campbell of the WRC was only belatedly coopted. This was a slap in the face to the WRC, which had

from the beginning seen itself as the linchpin of any repatriation scheme. Samuel had encouraged it in this belief but he had long ceased to matter. When the subcommittee reported in July 1917, the LGB decided to control repatriation itself, retaining the subcommittee in an advisory role. Peto was appointed Repatriation Commissioner (unpaid) and was to direct repatriation in conjunction with LGB officials. There was also a vague intention of using "the existing staff at General Buildings" as well.⁷⁹

But the WRC was denied even this modest role in 1918. Peto issued a press notice to refugees on 30 October without consulting Aldwych and on 18 November Gladstone wrote to Maudslay: "Here are Willis' replies to my rejoinder. . . . It is quite clear that the little man wishes to [run?] repatriation exclusively. That being so it wd be bad policy to continue our existence & seek for crumbs of work."⁸⁰ The Committee therefore preferred to disband itself quickly rather than be humiliated. On 31 December the War Refugees Committee ceased to exist. That evening a dispirited Maudslay captured

⁷⁹ 1920 Report, 36-37; HO 45/10882/344019/ 1, "Repatriation Committee: Minutes of Appointment", Walter Long, 3 October 1916; Leggett to Moylan, 31 August 1917; WRC I, 39-40.

⁸⁰ HO 45/10882/344019/5, W. Hayes Fisher and Basil E. Peto, "Notice to Belgian Refugees in Great Britain and Ireland", 30 October 1918; GP 46013/287, Gladstone to Maudslay, 18 November 1918. Cf. GP 46084/61, Willis to Gladstone, 15 November; /63 and 69, Gladstone to Willis, 18 November 1918 and n.d. (November 1918) .

the mood of deflation and confusion which the end of the war brought to many, whether soldiers or civilians, when he sent Gladstone the LGB's acknowledgement of his resignation:

It is not a wonderful document after four and a half years, but I am afraid it is what one must expect. . . . It is now 5.30 and no arrangements have been made on behalf of the Board to take over from me, nor have I seen. . . anybody connected with the Local Government Board. It is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs and everyone seems at sixes and sevens about the future administration of the staff.⁸¹

The Board paid for its cavalier dismissal of the WRC. With the death of the parent body, local committees began to disintegrate rapidly, leaving a vacuum at the local level which the authorities had to fill as best they could. This meant more work for the police.⁸² Furthermore, the original plans, which included an elaborate scheme for classifying the refugees according to skills needed for the reconstruction of Belgium, had to be scrapped, like the equally elaborate scheme drawn up by the Ministry of Labour for the demobilisation of the British armies, in which priority was given to men with skills. Instead priority was given to

⁸¹GP 46013/304, Maudslay to Gladstone, 31 December 1918.

⁸²HO 45/10882/344019/24, minute by Harold Scott (?), 25 February 1919. On the other hand, the LGB claimed in its 1920 Report, 38, that it had been pleasantly surprised at the number of committees which were willing to organise repatriation procedures. But the Board discouraged or angered many committees by failing to send them clear information soon enough and often enough. GP 46013/288, Maudslay to Gladstone, 25 November 1918; BEL 6/38, Cambridgeshire County Committee, Mrs. Easden, "Cambridge Belgian Relief Committees: General Report," 1919, 6-7.

people from the Antwerp district, the only Belgian port open before January 1919, and to refugees living in certain crowded districts where the cessation of munitions work had thrown many out of employment.⁸³ Refugees from Letchworth and Birtley were among the first to return. The fear of anti-Belgian feeling among demobilised soldiers and unemployed English workers spurred the government to try to get the refugees home as quickly as possible, but the LGB had to importune the Ministry of Shipping on behalf of the refugees, who had to compete with the need to demobilise the armies as swiftly as possible. Moreover, a dock strike in London held up repatriation.⁸⁴ The refugees themselves did not help matters. Many were very anxious to get home but failed to answer requests to reregister for repatriation, the old register having been found of little use. And when the time did come to leave, refugees showed immense stubbornness and ingenuity in flouting the maximum of three

⁸³ 1920 Report, 40, 48-49; HO 45/10882/344019/7, minute by Moylan, 18 November 1918. Getting unemployed refugees home was the more acute for the Board because they were declared ineligible for the unemployment allowance or "dole" which the government made available to returning soldiers and then to unemployed civilians at the end of the war. The WRC protested unavailingly to Lloyd George about this. MH 8/7/98, Maudslay to LGB, 6 December 1918. For the original and revised demobilisation schemes, see A. Taylor, English History, 138-39; Robert Blake, ed. The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919 (London, 1952), 350-359.

⁸⁴ 1920 Report, 49-51; HO 45/10882/344019/7, Willis to Baror. Moncheur, 13 November 1918.

hundred pounds of luggage allowed by the authorities.⁸⁵ By early May 1919, the great bulk of the estimated 140,000 Belgian refugees in England at the Armistice had been shipped home, most at the expense of the British government, a quarter at their own expense.⁸⁶ But the WRC was not there to see them off.

The relationship between the LGB and refugee relief organisations had rarely been warm and was often antagonistic. Disputes over power explain much of the ill-feeling. As we shall see, the WRC was very willing to adopt an attitude to subsidiary relief bodies little different from that adopted towards it by the Board. That, and the special circumstances surrounding Belgian refugee relief--particularly the argument that the refugees were a "national responsibility"--and the fact that the voice of the WRC was in reality the voice of Gladstone, Maudslay and occasionally one or two other important relief workers, deter easy generalisations from the history of Belgian relief to the general history of philanthropy during the Great War.

However, if the attitudes of Gladstone, Maudslay and their colleagues are typical, they lead to some interesting

⁸⁵1920 Report, 50-51.

⁸⁶HO 45/10882/344019/24, Leggett to (?) Streatfield, 20 February 1919. According to the Board's figures, ninety thousand refugees had left by 6 May 1919. 1920 Report, 50. But the Home Office in 1921 gave the figure of 6,834 male Belgians in the United Kingdom in 1919. The LGB figure would therefore appear to have been greatly understated. HO 45/11522/287235/156, census of aliens in the United Kingdom, 30 May 1921.

speculations about the state of opinion in the "philanthropic community." The old view that the state should be seen and heard as little as possible in the treatment of most social problems was still strong. Voluntary helpers, not bureaucrats, were deemed best fitted to deal with suffering humanity. To this extent the attitudes of the philanthropists were conservative, against the extension of measures of state welfare, and were aligned with the world-view of the COS. But, more than has often been recognised, the philanthropists were prepared to countenance state intervention, or rather, state funding, where private efforts had proved inadequate. The source of the money was immaterial and there were strong arguments for spreading the burden of welfare over the entire community. The method whereby help was dispensed was, however, very important, for it was fraught with moral consequences for giver and receiver. The philanthropists stood for face-to-face contact between the two parties, for a true gift relationship. In one sense theirs was the response of an old elite faced with a threat to its status and authority, for charitable activity was a badge of class. Whether the threat came from the political working classes or socialists or the Liberal and Tory proponents of efficiency and state paternalism, the enemy was the same: the growth of impersonal bureaucratic techniques of social welfare. Far from emerging from the war chastened by its failure to cope with the massive social problems which the

war created and willing to countenance massive state intervention in social welfare, the philanthropic community was unrepentant and still eager for new tasks. "Give us the money and we will do the job" was the plea of the charitable. Lady Lyttelton was determined that the WRC should go down in 1918 with all colours flying: "It seems to me that in our report we might thank the Local Government solemnly for having come to our assistance! I am all for our going down with every due formality."⁸⁷ Her attitude explains the continued vitality of voluntary organisations, the dynamic mixture of statutory and voluntary agencies and the growth of the social work profession in Britain after the war. The WRC began as a collection of philanthropists and ended as a body of social workers.

⁸⁷GP 46046/230, Lyttelton to Gladstone, 4 December 1918.

CHAPTER XII

THE CONTROL OF WAR CHARITIES

'Caveat Contributor'

Because it produced new social problems, exacerbated old ones and diminished others, the war wrought changes in the philanthropic community. Above all, the mushroom growth of new war charities threw into sharp relief three problems which had always been endemic to philanthropy: overlapping effort, extravagance and fraud. By 1916 there was widespread agreement that some controls had to be established to eliminate waste and to protect deserving charities. Prominent in the movement for control were several of the leading Belgian relief organisations, backed and prodded by various newspapers. In August 1916 their efforts were crowned with success when the government passed the War Charities Act, after which the problem of control swiftly receded.

Uncontrolled Charity

The range and extent of philanthropic activities during the war were enormous. When the Subject Index of War Charities registered under the 1916 Act was completed in 1919, it contained seventy headings beginning at "Air Raids" and ending at "Y.M.C.A." As those two headings indicate, the Index mixed the names of individual organisations together

with general categories of charity. But at least nine main areas of charitable activity may be distinguished, each containing sub-areas: enemy aliens, refugees, war-devastated regions, prisoners of war, convalescent soldiers, the Red Cross, soldiers on leave, comforts for soldiers and civilian distress in England.¹ The category for refugees alone covered Armenian, Belgian, French, Italian, Polish and Serbian refugees, and within each category there might be one, several, or many organisations. Dozens of organisations dealt with comforts for soldiers and between them raised vast sums for their work. By the end of 1915, estimates of the amount of money raised by war charities ranged between £20 and £30 million.² The British Red Cross was by far the largest war charity and raised £21 million during the course of the entire war. The National Relief Fund was the second largest, with £6 million. The nation invested heavily in charity.³

Within this scheme of things, Belgian relief loomed

¹PP, Sixty-Seventh Report of the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales, 1920, Cmd. 621, 8-9.

²MH 8/21/148, anonymous, "Deputation to the Home Secretary at 12 O'Clock on Friday March 3rd, 1916 at the Home Office", n.d.; M. H. Mason, "War Charities Scandals", English Review, 22 April 1916, 321; MEPOL 2/1675, Inspector J. Curry, "Street Collections", 18 November 1915.

³J. A. Spender, Sir Robert Hudson (London, 1930), 136; PP, Final Report on the Administration of the National Relief Fund up to the 1st March, 1921, 1921, Cmd. 1272, 3. Because so little of the Fund was expended during the war, it drew interest of £752,608, taking its total to nearly £7 million.

very large. In February 1916 Robert Donald, editor of the Daily Chronicle, was able to list sixty-nine Belgian relief charities. At least twenty-four others were then still in existence or had enjoyed a brief life in 1914 and 1915. Not all dealt with refugees in England. There were six organisations dealing with relief in occupied Belgium; ten looked after wounded and convalescent Belgian soldiers, both in England and at the Front; nineteen dealt with clothing, food, rest and recreation for Belgian soldiers at the Front or on leave in England. At least twenty-six organisations dealt with refugees. Apart from the WRC, there were the National Food Fund, Belgian Refugee Food Fund, Women's Emergency Corps, Catholic Women's League, Belgian Lawyers' Aid Society, Belgian Journalists' Emergency Fund, Belgian Doctors and Pharmacists Relief Fund, Belgian Orphans Fund, Anglo-Belgian Lace Depot, Exiled Gentlewomen's Outfitting Association, Belgian Cooks Society and the Belgian Repatriation Fund.⁴ All these dealt only with refugees in England. Other organisations provided for Belgians in Holland, unoccupied Belgium and France. The refugee community itself provided its share of organisations, ranging

⁴HO 45/10804/308566/32, War Charities Commission, Minutes and Memoranda submitted by Witnesses, memorandum submitted by Robert Donald. The estimates of other organisations are based on various sources, e.g.: PC/CHA/3/5, War Charities Act, 1916, Register of Charities Approved; BEL 8 and 9, various unnumbered files; 1920 Report; Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth, Northcliffe (London, 1959), 466.

from succinctly-named bodies like Belgica, a middle-class self-help organisation, through l'Appui de la Jeune Fille for unmarried mothers, to the Comité de Secours aux Artistes Réfugiés (Artistes Lyriques, Dramatiques et Musiques).⁵

All these organisations called on the British public for financial support. The National Committee for Relief in Belgium, the British fundraising arm of Herbert Hoover's International Commission for Relief in Belgium (which itself had offices in London), raised £2½ millions in its twenty-five months of existence between April 1915 and May 1917. This made it the third largest British war charity, as its secretary William Goode was fond of reciting. But in fact 73.4 percent of the NCRB's funds were subscribed from abroad, especially from the white Dominions, and its claim was based solely on its fundraising.⁶ The refugee relief movement was far more important in the British context. Although the WRC raised funds which were puny in comparison, it was the head of an enormous body of local committees and

⁵Information on the Belgian organisations may be found especially in: A. Varlez, Les Belges en Exil; 1920 Report; WRC, Information of Interest for Belgian Refugees; PC/CHA/3/5, register of charities approved.

⁶MH 8/29, unnumbered, National Committee for Relief in Belgium, Second Annual Report of the National Committee for Relief in Belgium, May 1917, 1-2. The Committee ceased operations when the United States government assumed financial responsibility for the relief of Belgium for the next six months in May 1917, just after the American declaration of war on Germany. Hoover's organisation continued to arrange the supply of food, but the Dutch and Spanish were now to carry out the task of negotiating with the German military government. Ibid., 4-5.

affiliated organisations which continued to rely more heavily on local benevolence than on government aid. It is impossible to draw up an accurate balance sheet for the relief movement, given that so much of its support came from gifts in kind and that the WRC and the LGB were never able to collect accurate information from local committees. But even small committees commonly raised £300 and substantial sums were raised by cities like Bristol, Manchester and Glasgow. Over and above subscriptions to committees must be counted the even greater outlay of money by individual hosts. Unlike work for prisoners of war, overseas relief, comforts for soldiers and most other philanthropic activity, refugee relief could not be computed so neatly.

Belgian relief was a big, ramshackle business in which the only control on unrestrained growth at first was the limit of public generosity. First, there were too many organisations pursuing the same ends. Thus, for a time there were two funds dealing with Belgian orphans and two food funds survived for most of the war. The root cause of this duplication was undoubtedly the fixed determination of ambitious and strong-willed individuals to captain their own crews. Cynicism about the motives of the charitable was not new: contemporaries were well aware of the "charity-mongers" who started their own organisations in order to satisfy a

craving for publicity and a desire to rise in the social scale.⁷

Overlapping and waste went hand in hand. Much more money had to be spent on printed stationery and lots of small societies spent large proportions of their income on lavish advertising campaigns, a propensity especially of

. . . the type of promoter who. . . is quite as anxious to keep his name before the public as to alleviate distress, and therefore is quite willing to spend a large proportion of his receipts in 'administrative expenses.'⁸

Office expenses were duplicated and running costs were high in relation to subscriptions.

From here inefficiency shaded insensibly into fraud. There were many ways for unscrupulous characters to batten on the charitable public. First, the maze of uncoordinated charity was the happy hunting-ground of that protean figure of charitable folklore, the "professional mendicant."⁹

Refugees who shuttled between various charities taking from them all or wheedling help from less exacting charities after

⁷Truth, 15 March 1916. For the same cluster of themes as is discussed in this chapter, see Brian Harrison's discussion of mid-Victorian charity, "Philanthropy and the Victorians", Victorian Studies, 9 (June 1966): 353-74. In this speculative and suggestive article, Harrison unsympathetically intuits the motives of Victorian philanthropists, emphasising snobbery, boredom and hypocrisy. For a more sympathetic view, see C. G. Hanson, "Welfare before the Welfare State", in the Institute of Economic Affairs, The Long Debate on Poverty (London, 1972), 113-39.

⁸HO 45/10804/308566/11, memorandum by "A.J.E.", March 1916; Truth, 1 March 1916.

⁹MEPOL 2/1675, Curry report.

being refused help elsewhere immensely perturbed the WRC and explained its desire to see the two food funds amalgamated.¹⁰ On the other side of the charitable fence, the most subtle form of fraud involved promoters of genuine charities who took large "honoraria" for themselves. As the secretary of the Edinburgh COS pointed out to a committee of inquiry in 1916, of the more than forty war funds in that city, many had supposedly "honorary" officials who were in fact being paid "substantial gratuities."¹¹ Then there were dishonest workers for respectable charities. Finally, there were the sharks of the philanthropic world, the confidence tricksters who began bogus organisations which spent little or none of their receipts on their avowed purposes.

The Belgian relief movement had its share of all these problems. Indeed, several of the most successful swindles involved Belgian relief organisations or operations which benefited from the general sympathy for Belgian refugees. If philanthropy was a business, the swindlers formed something like an interlocking directorate of shady businessmen. The National Relief Fund, eminently respectable body that it was, owed its foundation to the most indefatigable of wartime swindlers, Miss Sophie Carey. Daughter of a Lincolnshire clergyman, Carey joined the Women's Emergency

¹⁰MH 8/7/33, Maudslay to Rhodes, 22 March 1916.

¹¹HO 45/10804/308566/13, War Charities Committee, minutes, memorandum by Isaac Cowie, May 1916.

Corps in 1914 and organised the collection of food for refugees which, largely because of her remarkable flair for raising money, became a separate operation as the NFF. She gained the cooperation of highly respected people like Sir William and Lady Chance, Lady Emmott and Miss M. H. Mason. The last of these had not long retired from her post as the second woman inspector and first senior woman inspector ever appointed by the LGB, in which posts she had won herself a reputation for forthrightness and determination.¹² Carey, whether or not she had dishonest intentions, had chosen her colleagues not wisely but too well. Lady Chance and Mason both rapidly became dissatisfied with aspects of the Fund's affairs, especially when a member of the committee discovered an article in an old copy of Truth magazine exposing a company which Carey had run as a front for a dubious American company promoter. A full investigation of the Fund's affairs was then carried out and uncovered "every sign of gross mismanagement," though no sign of outright dishonesty. Workers were engaged without references and behaved irresponsibly. On one occasion, some of Carey's protégés used motor cars lent to the Fund and went for a "beano" to the Newbury Races, taking leaflets with them and bringing back £27, which might or might not have been all they had collected. At a drumhead

¹²For details of Miss Mason's career and personality, see Hilda Martindale, Women Servants of the State (London, 1938), 32-33, 180-82, and Ronald G. Walton, Women in Social Work (London, 1975), 37-38.

court-martial on 22 October, Carey and three of her associates were thrown out, one bodily.¹³

Nothing daunted, they began afresh. Two--Lady Matilda Williams and Mark Judge--went off to found the Belgian Refugee Food Fund.¹⁴ The BRFF itself was never accused of anything more unsavoury than duplicating the work of the NFF and exercising insufficient vigilance as to whom it fed. But from there Judge went off to join the French Relief Fund, begun by an "undischarged bankrupt" named J. H. Dickinson.¹⁵ This Fund claimed to be raising money for relieving the devastated districts of France and bringing French refugees to Britain. Despite the fact that the French government, not to mention His Majesty's Government, were strongly against French citizens going to England to seek British charity, the FRF advertised widely in French newspapers for destitute refugees: an example of trade following the flag-sellers. When French refugees began to arrive, they turned out to include a remarkable preponderance of young women and Gladstone was not alone in suspecting that the Fund was a cover for a white slave gang. A police visit to the Fund's offices seems to have soon stopped the importation of

¹³HO 45/10804/308566/32, file by Mr. Perris for Miss Mason, n.d.

¹⁴Mason alleged that Lady Williams was "not all there" and that she had been found to be in debt to book-makers. Ibid.

¹⁵HO 45/10804/308566/5, memorandum by M. H. Mason, 28 February 1916.

refugees.¹⁶ But the FRF enjoyed such success that Dickinson had to invite "influential people" to join the committee. Nonetheless, he remained as "honorary" treasurer while his accomplice became "honorary" secretary. Thereafter the FRF was run on regular lines and there was no hint of embezzlement of funds. But there were other ways of making money. The Fund bought large quantities of goods for its relief activities in France. The agent for the sale of one consignment was the Treasurer's son, who pocketed £1,200 as commission.¹⁷ Dickinson, his wife and aide seem to have hastily departed the country early in 1916, leaving the affairs of the Fund in a tangle which the authorities were still trying to unravel in 1919.¹⁸

Miss Carey meanwhile followed a parallel route. Working with her company promoter, who kept in the background once again, she started the Belgian Soldiers Fund and conducted it without benefit of an executive committee. Like most other fraudulent or poorly organised charities, hers relied on lavish and emotive publicity: so emotive that she

¹⁶ Ibid.: GP 46013/21, Gladstone to C. S. Loch, 14 November 1914; GP 46079/183-84, Gladstone to secretary, Manchester Wholesale Cooperative Society, 4 December 1914.

¹⁷ HO 45/10804/308566/19, memorandum by Inspector J. Curry, early 1916.

¹⁸ HO 45/10804/308566/6, minute, anonymous, 7 March 1916; "Mr D. is to receive the Legion d'Honneur for his services!" PP, Sixty-Sixth Report of the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales, 1919, Cmd. 82, 9; Cmd. 621, Sixty-Seventh Report, 10.

incurred the wrath of the Belgian army for painting so stark a picture of the plight of Belgian soldiers "as to injure the prestige of our army."¹⁹ Carey's techniques followed those of the FRF. Rather than pilfer from the coffers of her highly successful operation, which had netted £32,000 by August 1915, she used the device of the agent-accomplice who took a hefty commission on goods sold to the Fund:

Miss Carey is merely a conduit by which the stream of gold flows through an unincorporate company of anonymous persons to the tradesmen who supply the goods, and in whose hands substantial balances are allowed to remain under the surveillance of an American citizen whose methods of finance are a bewildering puzzle.²⁰

Like Dickinson, she and her mentor ceased their activities early in 1916, seeing the writing on the wall when new regulations for controlling charities were announced. They were perhaps the most successful of the crooked philanthropists. The needs of charity drew to it more than one kind of "man of business" in 1914.

The WRC was itself the victim of fraud. In October 1914, Mrs. Margaret Robertson, wife of a commercial traveller in Bootle, Lancashire, left her husband because he was unable to support her in the manner to which she would have liked to become accustomed and came to London. Taking cheap

¹⁹MEPOL 2/1675, Belgian Legation to Sir Edward Henry, 18 November 1915, quoted in Curry report.

²⁰HO 45/10804/308566/32, War Charities Committee, minutes, memorandum by Curry, 1916; Truth, 1 December 1915.

lodgings in Bloomsbury, she presented herself to Lady Emmott at the Clothing Department as the Honorable Mrs. Robertson, with estates in Connemara, Worcester, Russia and France. She was accepted at face value, as the depot was badly understaffed, and proved an eager and efficient helper. Gradually she was entrusted with more jobs, including assignments to buy clothing and shoes. At the same time, her lifestyle began to change. She shifted to the Walford Hotel and racked up immense taxi fares to places like Brighton, Bognor Regis and Newmarket. When she was arrested in November 1915, it was found that she had robbed the WRC of £988 by altering dockets for goods bought or forging dockets for mythical purchases. She was arrested actually on another count: beginning an appeal called the Italian X-Ray Motor Ambulance Fund which had netted her over £1000. The WRC was desperately anxious to keep the matter out of the press--a common reason why predators were often let go scot-free--and the police did their best to be cooperative. But the lady was tried on both counts and the newspapers reported the remark of the Recorder of the Guildhall that "there had been a lot of misappropriation of money subscribed by the charitable public in this war."²¹ The Committee got back none of its stolen

²¹MH 8/19/254 and /20/5, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 4 and 18 November; GP 46082/71-73, Lady Emmott to Gladstone, 17 November 1915; GP 46013/157, Maudslay to Gladstone, 17 November 1915; Daily Mail, 21 December 1915; MH 8/21/39, press cuttings from Globe, 19 January, and Daily Telegraph, 21 January 1916.

money and gained some adverse publicity.

Self-Policing

Fraudulent and inefficient charities were a grave embarrassment to the philanthropic community, which did its best to eradicate them in order to maintain public confidence. Overlapping, extravagance and fraud were not in themselves regarded with surprise, the COS having sought to warn the public about them since Victorian times. That it had failed to arouse the public to the desired level of perpetual vigilance was made patently clear during the war. On the other hand, the attacks on war charities scandals were couched in language almost identical with that of the COS's earlier assaults. The big difference was that the obsessive concern of earlier commentators with the demoralising effects of uncoordinated charity on its recipients was missing. Perhaps the main reason was that most war charities were not geared to the English traditional poor but dealt with categories which it would be impolitic to criticise: prisoners of war, refugees and soldiers. Otherwise, the language was much as it had always been. The COS was unpopular in 1914, but it had managed to disseminate many of its concepts as well as its techniques among the educated middle classes. It was a curious record of mixed success and failure. But at least police and philanthropists expected cases of charitable fraud and mismanagement in August 1914.

Moves for the control and better organisation of war

charities began at once. The short lived attempt of the WRC has already been mentioned.²² The COS, not surprisingly, pushed strongly for "the Mutual Registration of Assistance" between charities and closer cooperation between central and local government agencies and voluntary bodies.²³ In July 1915 its Administrative Committee considered a proposal to publish a war charities supplement to the Annual Charities Register, but decided to cooperate with the Duty and Discipline Movement which was to publish a leaflet on war charities later that year.²⁴ The COS attempt to organise self-regulation failed, though some local efforts at self-regulation were made, as in the case of Belgian relief

²²Anxiety about overlapping was a hardy perennial in philanthropic and voluntary circles. In June 1911, at a conference of the Victoria League, the secretary deplored the overlapping of societies with fairly similar aims and urged the need for an "Imperial Organization Society" on the model of the COS. Victoria League Monthly Notes, June 1911, "Report of the Victoria League Conference". Information kindly supplied by Dr. James Greenlee.

²³COS/Report/J, Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Charity Organisation Society, 1915, 60-61.

²⁴COS/Propaganda/2/32 and 36, COS, Finance and Propaganda Sub-Committee, minutes, 12 and 20 July 1915. The Duty and Discipline Movement was, as its name suggests, one of those organisations founded after the Boer War to revitalise the decadent national spirit of Britain and to combat German "peaceful penetration": which meant an insidious plot to make Britain pacifist and anti-authoritarian, undutiful and undisciplined, while Germany prepared for war. See Dyce Duckworth, "The Duty and Discipline Movement", Fortnightly Review 101 (February 1917):332-35. Its tenor was definitely illiberal.

organisations in Manchester.²⁵ But in lieu of formal coordination, powerful pressure could be exerted by established philanthropies to ensure that fly-by-night organisations and swindlers were kept in check.

The philanthropic community had its own bush telegraph. As soon as someone scented anything suspicious, he passed the word. Thus, the WRC energetically spread warnings against the French Relief Fund and received warnings from the COS about the Cosmopolitan Homes for Chronic Invalids and Invalidated Belgian Refugees.²⁶ The intermeshing of parts in the philanthropic world aided the spread of information. The committees of most charities had members who were involved in other organisations. Lady Emmott was a member of the WRC, the NFF, the Needleworkers' War Aid Association and the Comrades Club for Men and Women, as well as sitting on the executive of the Women's National Liberal Federation.²⁷ Percy Alden was a member of the WRC and the NCRB and was affiliated with the war relief activities of the Society of Friends.²⁸ Even the efficient Henry Campbell

²⁵BEL 6/163, Belgian Funds Committee, Manchester and District, Report and Accounts, June 1917.

²⁶GP 46079/157, Gladstone to Town Clerk of Manchester, 30 November 1914; GP 46081/37, E. C. Price to Gladstone, 12 March 1915.

²⁷PC/CHA/3/5/231 and 628, applications of Needleworkers' War Aid Association and Comrades Club for Men and Women.

²⁸MH 8/29, Second Report of NCRB, 7.

added to his daily work in the Transport Department a passionate interest in the British Club for Belgian Soldiers and the Working Men's Belgian Club.²⁹ Overlapping sometimes possessed distinct advantages.

One of the main functions of the grapevine was to warn eminent people who may have innocently allowed their names to be blazoned as patrons of shoddy charities. Critics of wartime charity relentlessly singled out irresponsible patronage as a root cause of most evils. "A name," Miss Mason declared in 1916, "is a trust quite as much as any other kind of property or possession, and should be given and used with the same conscientiousness and care."³⁰ An embarrassed Hugh Cecil was hauled over the coals by Gladstone for allowing his name to be entered for the executive--members of executive committees were often no more actively involved in their organisations than patrons--of the Belgian Repatriation Fund. The Fund was set up in mid-September 1914 to the profound disgust of the WRC, which saw it as useless and likely to drain needed donations from the immediate work of aiding refugees. Cecil, who admitted that it was a "foolish body," had been cajoled into joining

²⁹H. Campbell, Belgian Soldiers at Home, 92.

³⁰M. Mason, "War Charities Scandals", 361.

by his exuberant sister Maud, Countess of Selborne.³¹ Many other public figures allowed funds large and small, obscure and well-known, to claim them as patrons, often simply because they were friends of the bustling organisers or because they agreed in principle with what the organisations planned to do. Bishops, politicians, lords and ambassadors were favourite targets for patronage-seekers. Few charities were launched without benefit of clergy.

The patron of course lent his name and therefore his "influence" to a charity. In a world where government welfare measures were modest and its regulatory powers weak, the list of patrons and the list of the executive committee were all that many would-be subscribers and supporters had to assure them that a charity was worthy of support. As executive committees more often consisted of active members who were not necessarily well-known outside their own small circle--Maudslay was one of these--the patrons' list was the only useful sign. Patrons who unthinkingly gave their names endangered the whole system, based as it was on trust and the prestige of the great. When the system worked well, bad risks were always betokened by the absence of important

³¹Hatfield House, Quickswood Papers, 18/137, Countess of Selborne to Cecil, 11 December 1914; GP 46079/261, Cecil to Gladstone, 18 December 1914. See also /186, Gladstone to Bishop of Manchester, 4 December 1914; /209, Bishop of Manchester to Gladstone, 7 December 1914; /246-51, Gladstone to Senator Coullier de Mulder, 16 December 1914 re the Working and Help War Refugees Committee, a dubious Belgian-run organisation trading on the similarity of its name to that of the WRC.

patrons. Thus, the chairman of the Bristol Belgian Relief Committee, writing to Lytton about a Belgian Exhibition being organised by a local man to raise funds for refugees, simply remarked: "This gentleman is well known here and when your Lordship will see from the enclosed that there are not any Local Patrons you will be able to draw your own conclusions."³² Unimportant though he was in running organisations, the patron was the linchpin of the whole system.

If the filtration process of the patronage system failed, vigilantes had recourse to the press. Sometimes angry "patrons" wrote to newspapers denying that they had ever given their names to a charity.³³ The world of charity was ideal for investigative reporters and two journals, the Daily Chronicle and Truth, diligently researched war charities scandals. Both gave publicity to trials involving swindlers and ran campaigns early in 1916 which were instrumental in the passing of the War Charities Act.³⁴ But publicity in the press was a two-edged sword for

³²GP 46079/61, Canon W. Lee to Lytton, 15 November 1914. Like most frauds, the man in question dealt in the debased coinage of heart-tugging rhetoric. His letterhead read: "Our Raison d'être: For the Cause which needs assistance for Wrongs which need resistance For the future in the distance And the good which we can do." Fusing two popular images of the Kaiser into unhappy partnership, he fulminated against "the barbaric Vandalism of the Modern Nero." Respectable philanthropists were often guilty of bathos. But the swindlers outshone them all.

³³GP 46079/249, draft of letter from Cecil and Gladstone to newspapers, 11 (?) December 1914.

³⁴See 487-88 below.

established philanthropies. They were involved to a certain extent in the ruin of any small organisation, insofar as public confidence in charity in general plummeted, and they occasionally suffered from misreporting and from the parading of their own skeletons in clothing cupboards, as the WRC discovered.³⁵ In general, however, the press reserved its worst barbs for the smaller charities and carefully distinguished between worthy and unworthy organisations. Relations between some editors and some organisations were warm and cooperative.³⁶

As much as possible the philanthropic community preferred to organise and police itself. There was no great cry for charity control in the early days of the war and the COS plea for mutual registration fell flat. One or two cities such as Glasgow and Manchester organised local schemes for certifying and regulating war charities.³⁷ Other than that, the main attempts at control generally involved larger charities trying to bring small organisations

³⁵ See, for example, Daily Sketch, 18 January 1916, report of two refugees shopping extravagantly and charging to the "Belgian Refugee Fund", and retraction, 31 January 1916. The WRC suffered persistently from the confusion of the public over the names of relief organisations.

³⁶ GP 46080/294-95, Robert Donald to Gladstone, 16 February 1915, regarding the standing of the Comité Officiel de Secours aux Victimes Belges de la Guerre; and /297, Gladstone's reply, damning with faint praise.

³⁷ HO 45/10804/308566/32, War Charities Committee, minutes, evidence of J. S. Samuel, official secretary to Lord Provost of Glasgow. For Manchester, see 465 above.

to heel. The WRC was typical in this respect.

The War Refugees Committee

The Committee was somewhat janus-headed. When it looked towards the government, it spoke of the need for flexibility, which meant allowing the men on the spot (the WRC) to make decisions about spending, and which therefore implied the greatest independence for charities (especially itself) from government interference. But when it looked towards the teeming world of voluntary relief, it spoke in tones remarkably like those of the sometimes imaginary "government officials" with whom it carried on a running dialogue. Its approach to the smaller charitable fry was definitely superior, even haughty. First, as government funds became important in keeping afloat the relief movement, the WRC became increasingly concerned with how these funds were used. A note of concern about irresponsible accounting entered its discussions and communications. This partly reflected an awareness that the Treasury in all its "rather 'red-tapey'" ways was keeping an unfriendly watch on the WRC. The Committee cooperated in the extension of efficient accounting procedures within the relief movement as a political necessity.³⁸ Its own poverty encouraged it to be

³⁸MH 8/1/82/119, Maudslay to Mrs. L. Samuel, 11 January 1916; T 128/1 and 2, Heath to secretary, LGB, 30 December 1915 and 3 March 1917.

frugal.³⁹ A genuine sense of responsibility for the prudent use of public money also motivated Gladstone, who was his father's son, and Maudslay. Both were acutely conscious that Aldwych had "to have definite machinery where Government money [was] concerned."⁴⁰ Consciousness of public disapproval of wasteful methods also put the Committee on its mettle. High administrative costs were used as a litmus test of the poorly organised or crooked charity almost as much as the absence of patrons and the WRC was nervous about public reaction to its own high expenditure on administration. The Managing Committee saw fit to have a passage inserted in the WRC's first annual report explaining that the Committee was the administrative centre of the whole huge relief movement and thus had to spend most of its funds on administration.⁴¹ Though each extension of government financial liability meant a corresponding decline in the WRC's autonomy, the Committee bowed to the inevitable the more gracefully because, as when the Board decided to pay the rent for General Buildings in 1917, its own embarrassingly high expenses were cut.⁴²

³⁹Mallet, Gladstone, 270.

⁴⁰GP 46046/197-99, Gladstone to Lyttelton, 15 February 1915.

⁴¹MH 8/19/153, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 30 September 1916.

⁴²GP 46013/232, Maudslay to Gladstone, 27 February 1917.

Finally, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that an element of sheer imperialism pervaded the Committee's relations with smaller relief organisations. Small bodies determinedly duplicated work, multiplied the expense of relief, and went their own self-important way heedless of where lay the most pressing needs. In diverting money and energy into a myriad small, poorly connected causes, they hampered larger organisations which, so the latter felt, could see the whole picture, and could therefore direct and redirect their energies and money when and as they were needed. Gladstone was frankly impatient: "These hundreds of little organizations--without any effort at coordination by the G [overnmen]t--think every one knows about their particular work."⁴³ Reduced to absurdity, the argument for decentralisation--flexibility through diversity--became its opposite, the inflexibility of fragmentation.

Accordingly, the WRC saw benefits in its closer dependence on the LGB. Government aid meant government control, but government control also implied government recognition of the Committee as the official refugee relief organisation. This was especially so after the demise of the Hatch Commission in July 1915 and the Committee's grudging agreement to take Bowerman and Elliott on to the Managing Committee. The WRC immediately established an Intelligence

⁴³Deiniol, Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 3 August 1917.

Department with two functions: to detect refugees who went the rounds of relief organisations, and to check the overlapping which allowed the cadgers to flourish. Maudslay wrote to the head of the new department in July 1915:

Should any body refuse to give you the information which you may require, you will kindly report each case to me in order that I may take it up on behalf of the Managing Committee. Our new powers will give us great assistance in the compilation of this record, but we do not want to enforce them unless absolutely obliged.⁴⁴

Shortly thereafter the Managing Committee agreed that no pressure could be exerted on other organisations by the Intelligence Department.⁴⁵ But this was a question of politics rather than principle. The Committee had no qualms about intervening in the financial affairs of local committees. In attacking the Treasury's decision to pay Hatch a princely £1,200 to act as inspector of refugees, Maudslay argued that several more lowly-paid but more experienced men could "do the necessary work splendidly & effect a great saving by the closer supervision of the expenditure of Local Committees."⁴⁶

The WRC's feud with Lady Lugard showed how determined it was to assert its authority. Issues of principle and

⁴⁴MH 8/1/82/3, Maudslay to Chadwick, 29 July 1915. Cf. Maudslay to Gladstone, 3 July 1915. Naturally, the COS's opinion had been sought.

⁴⁵MH 8/1/18/4, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 4 August 1915.

⁴⁶GP 46013/145-46, Maudslay to Gladstone, 19 October 1915.

disgust at Lady Lugard's preferential treatment of "her" refugees undoubtedly lay behind its campaign. But the grounds of controversy subtly shifted from specific grievances to the question of whether or not the WRC really possessed the powers it claimed. The Committee was affronted that Lugard persisted in ignoring its instructions on relief policy and going straight to the Board with requests and complaints, instead of, like all other Assisted Committees, going through Aldwych. The WRC feared that if Lugard got away with her effrontery, its authority over other committees, especially those in the London area, would be undermined.⁴⁷

At stake was whether the Board or the Committee should be deemed the source of the funds which flowed to the smaller bodies. Lugard held that the Board was the fount both of money and wisdom and that the WRC was only first among equal relief organisations. The WRC argued that all Assisted Committees were obliged to submit their procedures to its inspection. The Board was a bewildered third in the arguments which flared with increasing rancour from March 1915. Lugard enjoyed great success in her dealings with Board officials, to the Committee's chagrin, and in March 1916 it brought the matter before Long. Long delivered a Solomonic judgement. He decided that the WRC was correct but left the point of dispute--Lugard's direct dealing with

⁴⁷GP 46013/175, Maudslay to Gladstone, n.d. (mid-December 1915).

officials like Willis and Rhodes--to be decided between the disputants: a "decision" which resolved little.⁴⁸ Out of the meeting arose the special Private Relief Fund for better-class refugees, consisting of representatives of the two organisations and the Belgian Official Committee.

Intended to coordinate policy, the new arrangement merely changed the locus of the debate. The WRC considered the Fund to be one of its subcommittees, subject to the final authority of the Managing Committee. Lugard took the view that the Fund was "an independent body having no relations with, and not being subject to the jurisdiction of the War Refugees Committee."⁴⁹ The WRC tried to shelve the question of principle, hoping that no concrete problems would arise to put principles to the test. But the subcommittee split almost at once over a family named Wambach to whom a substantial grant was voted by Lugard and the BOC

⁴⁸MH 8/6, anonymous, "Interview with Mr. Walter Long, 31st March, 1916" and MH 8/21/56-57, "Note of Interview with the Rt. Hon. Walter Long at the Local Government Board, 31st March, 1916 by Mr. Dickinson". Both accounts agree that Long came down hard on Lugard regarding her spending habits and affirmed that the WRC was the only recognised body administering "public money" and that all bodies receiving grants from the WRC were subject to its control as regards how they spent their money. (They were of course allowed to spend their own money as they liked.) They differed slightly on their interpretation of Long's directive regarding the two bodies' future relationship. Dickinson's memorandum suggested that Long left the matter slightly unclear but that he was to write a letter to the WRC which would back the Committee to the hilt. The correspondence over the Lugard affair is to be found in MH 8/19/223-28, 236-36a, 199-200; MH 8/21/115-16.

⁴⁹MH 8/6, anonymous, "Memorandum relative to the subcommittee for dealing with better class refugees", n.d. (late June or July 1916), 3.

representatives against the opposition of Maudslay and Leggett. The Managing Committee declared war, but received an unhelpful reply from Willis who, like Long, upheld the Committee's view of its prerogatives but held that the exercise of those prerogatives in individual cases was inexpedient.⁵⁰ Gladstone smartly replied:

Either we must take responsibility or we must not. If we take no responsibility for these cases and others like them, we must of course, put the whole responsibility on the Local Government Board in deciding these detailed matters. If, on the other hand, the Board wishes us from our long experience to keep a general supervision, and, where necessary, to take reasonable action, it is absolutely impossible to accept the position taken by Lady Lugard. . . .⁵¹

Long was called upon to adjudicate once again. He repeated his deft trick of appeasing both sides: Lugard was brought under stricter control, but the control of the Board not the Committee. Her biographer later described the opposition Lugard had aroused because of her belief that "whatever was necessary must be done and given at once, and squared with official regulations afterwards," and went on:

But this attitude to regulations is anathema to the mind of the Civil Servant. Trained to safeguard public funds and to consider people in categories, he found Lugard's impetuosity difficult to endure. He reflected, not without reason, that her methods were too extravagant of time and energy to be practicable when there were about a quarter of a million cases to be dealt with, and he found it difficult to work

⁵⁰Ibid., 3-4.

⁵¹MH 8/23/90, Gladstone to Willis, 26 June 1916.

with anyone at once so reasonable in conversation and so indifferent to regulations.⁵²

Ironically, it was not the civil servants of the LGB but the amateurs at Aldwych, who shared some of her contempt for officials, who were her real opposition.⁵³

Lugard's successful defence showed the limits to voluntary regulation within the philanthropic community. The WRC, despite its aspirations, managed to control no organisation which had its own funds and did not need government assistance or which, needing government assistance, kept some funds of its own. If Lady Lugard's committee was an example of the latter type, the Belgian Repatriation Fund was an example of the former. It was founded in September 1914 by one of those mixed bags of Liberals and Tories so characteristic of Belgian relief charities and included at least one reregade from the WRC, Basil Williams, the original WRC representative at

⁵²E. Bell, Flora Shaw, 280-81.

⁵³The attitude of the Board's officials is curious. Given the mythology of their hidebound conservatism and parsimony, a myth popular at the time and echoed by historians, they should have sided consistently with the WRC in its drive for uniformity and economy. There may be several explanations. Lugard was a woman of rare force and personality who charmed or browbeat Willis and Rhodes. (Willis, the permanent official, was certainly more sympathetic to her than was his transient ministerial superior, Long.) Or the Board may have welcomed a challenge to the WRC's pretensions since the Committee, as the largest refugee relief agency, was in a sense dangerously autonomous. Finally--a conclusion erosive of the old mythology--the Board's officials may have shared the prevailing belief among philanthropists that the better-class should get better treatment. See MH 8/7/98, unnumbered, Maudslay to Gladstone, 23 June 1916, for an attack on Willis' weak administration.

Folkestone.⁵⁴ It was based on two assumptions: that the war would be short and that, though the state would be responsible for repatriating the refugees, charity, more flexible and imaginative and less bureaucratic than state departments, would carry out the front-line task of helping to resettle refugees who drifted back to liberated areas ahead of the official timetables for resettlement.⁵⁵

Gladstone bitterly reproached Williams after the Repatriation Fund had published an appeal in the Morning Post in January 1915. The WRC was "at its wit's end" trying to provide for refugees then and there, whereas repatriation was unlikely for months to come. Williams defended the Fund by claiming that its appeal had been prompted by the Daily News which, though it knew of the Fund's existence, had just "trumpeted forth a similar fund. . . without any such safeguards" as the Fund had laid down. In the swarming marketplace of war charities, the hierarchy of respectable traders was finely graded.

Gladstone was not pacified by Williams' answer nor by his disclaimer of any intent to compete for funds needed

⁵⁴PC/CHA/3/5/103, application for registration as a war charity by Belgian Repatriation Fund. The Countess of Selborne was Unionist, Mrs. F. D. Acland was wife of a prominent Liberal M.P., and Williams himself was a Liberal Imperialist.

⁵⁵Quickwood, 18/137, Countess of Selborne to Cecil, 11 December 1914; GP 46080/59-60, Williams to Gladstone, 7 January 1915.

by the refugee relief movement. Instead of order growing slowly out of the medley of spontaneous responses to the plight of Belgium in 1914, he said, "Duplication" was on the increase. With a nationwide network of Belgian consuls' committees raising money for the Belgian Relief Fund, with Sarolea's Everyman appeal competing with the BRF and getting £40,000 badly needed by the WRC, and with the Daily Telegraph Fund "and various other more or less successful appeals for different forms of assistance to Belgians here, in Belgium, or in Holland," it was no wonder that "the British public is absolutely confused."⁵⁶ But the Repatriation Fund refused to lie down and die. Indeed, events in 1916 found the WRC and the Fund allied against the BRF.

The Belgian Relief Fund was the WRC's worst rival for scarce funds. Not only Aldwych but local committees across the country complained that the Fund was being sent subscriptions intended--and sometimes clearly earmarked--for the relief of refugees in Britain.⁵⁷ At an important public meeting to raise funds for refugee relief in Scotland, the treasurer of the Scottish BRF stood up to explain that his fund had been making payments to the Edinburgh refugee relief committee and to complain that an

⁵⁶GP 46080/35 and 134-35, Gladstone to Williams, 6 and 13 January 1915.

⁵⁷R. H. Brazier and E. Sandford, Birmingham and the Great War 1914-1919 (Birmingham, 1920), 308-09.

appeal made by the Glasgow Corporation relief committee was having "a most detrimental effect" on the BRF. The Lord Provost coldly replied:

In common with many others I was under the belief that the funds which were being collected by the Belgian Consuls would be applied equally for the benefit of those Belgians who had sought refuge in other countries or remained in Belgium. I for my part think our first duty is to those Belgians who have sought refuge in Scotland. . . . 58

This was in March 1915, by which time the public had been alerted to the distinction between the BRF and the WRC and, as the Lord Provost himself implied, to the possibility that the BRF was not applying its funds even to the relief of Belgians in Belgium. But the damage had been done and the Belgian government, through the BRF--which eventually moved its offices to the seat of government at Le Havre--was sitting on a fat sum subscribed by many citizens who thought they were sending money to be used entirely or in part for relieving refugees in Britain. To confuse matters further, the BRF did not exclude itself from carrying on some independent relief work in Britain, as the WRC belatedly discovered in July 1915.⁵⁹

The BRF thereafter slid from the WRC's consciousness as the Committee turned to the government for financial support and gave up hoping for much help from the public.

⁵⁸BEL 6/99, Glasgow Corporation Belgian Committee, "Scotland's Debt to Belgium", 1915. (Report of a meeting, 5 March 1915.)

⁵⁹GP 46081/231, Gladstone to Hymans, 1 July 1915.

As well, the BRF was supplanted by the National Committee for Relief in Belgium after April 1915. Though the WRC was alarmed by the sophisticated and powerful efforts of the NCRB, relations between the two were tolerably good, largely because the Commission's Goode was sensible of the hostility aroused by the BRF and took care to reduce competition to a minimum.⁶⁰

But controversy flared over the BRF in the middle of 1916. The Belgian Repatriation Fund had built homes in refugee camps in Holland and decided to appeal for money to build more for interned soldiers' families. The WRC refused to support the appeal, arguing that the matter was the responsibility of the Belgian government. Early in March two British groups investigated conditions in the Dutch camps. Percy Alden went on 7 March, probably on behalf of the NCRB and the WRC, and shortly afterwards two capable Scotsmen, Alexander Walker and James Stewart, both central figures in the Glasgow relief committee as well as members of the Repatriation Fund, went on behalf of the Fund. They uncovered horrifying conditions in the Gouda camp, where 1,700 refugees were still sleeping in converted greenhouses, partitioned only by torn cardboard.⁶¹

⁶⁰GP 46081/126-29, Goode to Samuel, 30 April 1915; /130-33, Goode to Samuel, 3 May 1915. See also MH 8/18/71, Leggett to Lord Fortescue, chairman of Devon and Somerset County Committee, 3 September 1915.

⁶¹MH 8/6, draft report by Walker and Stewart, 20 March 1916, esp. 3-4; Maudslay to Gladstone, 25 March 1916.

Largely as a result of their report, the WRC, NCRB, Society of Friends and the Fund joined forces to try to compel the Belgian government to disgorge some of the BRF's money, widely rumoured, in the absence of published accounts, to be as much as £700,000. The British charities asked for £50,000 to be spent on the Dutch camps. The government responded by allocating some money but, as this was for the families of soldiers only, the British were not satisfied. They demanded that at least £25,000 should be spent on "Belgian refugees in Holland," pointedly noting that "no method of expending the portion of the remaining funds would be better calculated to meet the wishes of those in the British Empire who subscribe to the original Belgian Relief Fund." They also politely demanded the publication of the BRF's account, to quiet public dissatisfaction in Britain. The Belgians gave in.⁶²

Official Controls

Successes like this, however, were balanced by the general failure of powerful charities like the WRC to bring the smaller ones into line. By the end of 1915, in an atmosphere of increasing concern about scandals involving war charities, moves began for the more formal regulation of

⁶²MH 8/21/26, 43, 58-60, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 13, 20 and 27 January and 3 February 1916; MH 8/6/59/61, Mrs. Acland to Goode, and 60/53, translation of note by Baron Berryer, n.d. (both May 1916).

the charities. The established government body for the control of charities was the Central Charities Commission. From Elizabethan times, occasional commissions had been appointed to enquire into and correct abuses of charitable bequests and donations. In 1853, a Board of Charity Commissioners was set up as a permanent authority with duties which included inquiring into the administration of charitable trusts and compelling endowed charities to produce regular statements of account. The Board's powers still, in 1914, dealt mainly with bequests and endowments. But at some point in 1915, the Commissioners established a "Belgian Sub-Committee." This, however, did little to interfere in the workings of Belgian relief charities. The Central Charities Commission simply lacked the staff to deal with the investigative work required to control the swarming and ephemeral charities of the time.⁶³

The first practical steps were taken piecemeal by various government departments. In August 1915, the Metropolitan Police laid down regulations for street collections, which had come in for a lot of criticism: pedestrians were pestered by flag-sellers and other collectors, and peddlers and professional beggars could

⁶³Public Record Office, Guide to the Records of the Public Record Office, 3 vols. (London, 1963-68), 2:50. The Belgian Sub-Committee intervened, it would seem, only once in refugee affairs: to seek supplementary allowances for the wives and children of Belgian officers--in other words, to ensure better treatment for the better classes. MH 8/17/69, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 29 June 1915.

easily pass themselves off as workers for charity.⁶⁴ The regulations could also be used as a lever against dishonest charities. Thus, in November 1915, a woman who had collected money for the Belgian Soldiers Fund without a permit was brought to court in a staged attempt to publicise the regulations and to inform the public that the Belgian government and the police did not approve of the BSF.⁶⁵ At about that time, the War Office, after it had been criticised for giving its approval to various ill-advised charities, appointed Sir Edward Ward as Director-General of Voluntary Organizations, to coordinate charities dealing with such matters as comforts and first aid.⁶⁶

But the police regulations only dealt with street collections in a limited zone. The WRC steadily received reports from local committees that their work was suffering because local people were being constantly dunned for money from other Belgian relief organisations. Once again, the needs of the nation's guests clashed with the needs of "starving Belgium" and once again a Belgian committee fell

⁶⁴GP 46080/297, Donald to Gladstone, 17 February 1915; GP 46081/68, Lord Knutsford to Gladstone, 21 March 1915; The Times, 10 September 1914.

⁶⁵MEPOL 2/1675, Curry report; Daily Telegraph, 23 November; Truth, 1 December 1915. The defendant had collected funds in good faith and was ordered merely to pay the cost of her summons.

⁶⁶Daily Graphic, 9 December 1915, supplement; HO 45/10804/308566/13, memorandum by M. H. Mason, 13 March 1916.

afoul of an English committee. At the end of October 1915 the important Hull relief committee complained to Aldwych that Emile Parent, an emissary of Vandervelde's Union des Comités, had been soliciting funds for the relief of Belgium and so hurting local efforts to care for refugees in the Hull area. The WRC protested to the Belgian Official Committee, which contacted the Belgian Minister, from whom Parent had claimed accreditation. He in turn conferred with his government, which then discussed with the British government ways of jointly controlling Anglo-Belgian relief organisations working in the competing areas of Belgian relief.⁶⁷ As a result, it was decided in February 1916 that the LGB should be given the power to regulate Belgian relief charities by issuing certificates of registration to approved charities. The regulations were permissive rather than compulsory. Charities were not obliged to apply for certificates but were supposed to be at a disadvantage if they did not.⁶⁸

The regulations caused some confusion. Local committees of the WRC and other national organisations did not know whether they came under the terms of the order and

⁶⁷MH 8/19/261-62, secretary of Hull District War Refugees Committee for Belgians to WRC, 29 October 1915; /20/39, C. H. Paquet (BOC) to WRC, 24 November 1915; 1920 Report, 31-32. See also MH 8/18/76 and 110, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 2 and 16 September 1915.

⁶⁸HO 45/10804/308566/32, War Charities Committee, minutes, evidence of M. H. Mason.

Aldwych received many anxious inquiries. The WRC had to send a circular letter to local committees explaining that the new arrangements were "only intended to apply to appeals of a general nature" and not to appeals "of a purely local character made by Local Refugee Committees on behalf of Belgians for whom hospitality and assistance is being provided by such local committees." Instead, an official certificate was issued to the WRC as the central refugee relief agency in England and Wales and committees recognised by and affiliated to the Committee would be given de facto recognition by the Board.⁶⁹ The WRC also was briefly the victim of the confusion. The important Sydney Consignments Committee of the London Chamber of Commerce, which had passed on large quantities of food to relief organisations, refused to send any more food until the WRC had produced its certificate of registration.⁷⁰ The WRC tried to use the regulations to force the Belgian Refugee Food Fund to merge with the NFF but failed, once again demonstrating the weakness of permissive legislation and voluntary self-regulation where a charity, no matter how redundant, possessed money

⁶⁹ MH 8/7/98/30, Secretary, Humanity Mission, to Maudslay, 16 February; Maudslay to secretary, LGB, 18 February; Maudslay, form letter in reply to inquiries, 21 February; Rhodes to Maudslay, 23 February; /33, Maudslay to secretary, LGB, 17 April 1916.

⁷⁰ MH 8/7/98/30, secretary, Sydney Consignments Committee to Maudslay, 17 February 1916.

and the will to survive.⁷¹ The WRC's central role as the recognised central Belgian relief agency caused a brief rift with the NFF when the certificate of recognition stated that the Fund was "controlled by a Joint Committee of the Fund and the War Refugees Committee." The Fund argued that it was an independent body and put the matter in the hands of its solicitors. The certificate was changed.⁷²

The War Charities Act, 1916

No sooner had the Board's regulations become known than widespread demands were made for the system of registration to be extended to all war charities. The Daily Chronicle on 15 February welcomed the regulations but wanted to know why only Belgian charities were affected. It recognised the economic significance of charities and placed their control in the context of the government's efforts to manage a wartime economy:

The Treasury scrutinises with a jealous eye every proposal to raise fresh capital at the present time for industrial purposes. Why then should we at such a time allow free rein to the activities of anybody who wants to start a war charity?

It had made the same point a few days earlier:

⁷¹MH 8/98/30, Rhodes to Maudslay, 25 February: Maudslay to Rhodes, 29 February 1916: /33, Lady Williams to Rhodes, 14 March; note of interview between Rhodes and BRFF, n.d. (March-April); Willis to Maudslay, 14 April 1916.

⁷²MH 8/7/98/33, copy of certificate of registration of NFF, 3 May; Watkins, Bayliss and Chidson to Tudor Owen, 4 May; Maudslay to secretary, LGB, 8 May 1916.

At a time when we have to husband our financial resources prudently the British Government quite rightly exercises a rigid control over companies. But anyone can start a Belgian relief fund.⁷³

On 17 February the Managing Committee considered the Chronicle articles and decided that the issue was one for the Board and the Home Office to work out between them. The implication was already strong that the extension of control was highly likely and that the only problem was one of how to proceed. At the same time, the Committee considered a proposal from Goode that a deputation from charitable organisations should ask the Home Secretary to prohibit war charities from soliciting funds without a licence from the Home Office. Maudslay was nominated to join the delegation.⁷⁴ On the same day, war charities were brought before the attention of Parliament. Will Anderson, backed by another member, asked the prime minister whether the government planned to extend the regulations to all war charities. Long made the reply but refused to be drawn. "We have looked into the question very carefully," he said, "and it seems an almost impossible task."⁷⁵

Long spoke, of course, for the LGB. But his colleague at the Home Office, Herbert Samuel, now recalled for a time from the steppes of the Post Office before

⁷³Daily Chronicle, 12 and 15 February 1916.

⁷⁴MH 8/21/107, WRC, minutes of Managing Committee, 17 February 1916.

⁷⁵HO 45/10804/308566/[11], extract from "Official Debates", 17 February 1916.

returning to the wilderness in December 1916, was just as sceptical. He had told Goode that effective control would require an Act of Parliament rather than a purely administrative arrangement of the sort worked out by the Board.⁷⁶ Goode's deputation met him on 3 March. Samuel was flanked by a cohort of high-ranking officials, among them Henry, Troup, Blackwell and Willis. The deputation was led by the Duke of Norfolk, backed by Maudslay and Goode, and included representatives from fifteen other organisations, eight of them dealing with Belgian relief.⁷⁷ The deputation proposed a system of licences for all war charities, stressing that "the lack of regulation. . . affords an obvious and fertile field. . . to any unprincipled individuals who desire to make their living in this despicable way." The leading war charities were willing to submit to government regulation in order to stamp out the unworthy organisations, and preferred an Act of Parliament because administrative controls would lack penalties.⁷⁸ Both

⁷⁶HO 45/10804/308566/[1], note by Goode attached to letter to Samuel, 22 February 1916.

⁷⁷There would have been sixteen organisations if Dickinson of the FRF had had his way. Samuel's private secretary had vetoed his presence on the delegation. Dickinson hurried out of the country very soon afterwards. HO 45/10804/308566/6, Dickinson to Samuel, 2 March 1916; minute, S. W. Harris, 7 March 1916; MH 8/21/147, list of delegates of war relief funds at preliminary meeting, 3 March 1916, re deputation to the Home Office.

⁷⁸MH 8/21/148-49, "Deputation to the Home Secretary at 12 o'clock on Friday March 3rd, 1916 at the Home Office".

voluntarism and administrative reform had failed.

Herbert Samuel has been described as a man who "could dissect any subject to any degree, but. . . could never put it together again; so that at the end you were left in a state of bewildered depression."⁷⁹ He now treated the deputation to a dazzling display of pessimistic logic. Seizing on every ambiguity and uncertainty in the proposals, he emphasised the difficulties in bringing in a law. The government could only license charities if it had adequate investigative and auditing staff, otherwise some undesirable charities would slip through the net and would be able to claim the government's blessing. The popular analogy between charity and business was raised by one delegate: if the government authorised the formation of companies, why could it not do the same for charities? Samuel swiftly demolished the analogy. The government authorised companies only to raise capital: "The Government does not give any kind of guarantee. Heretofore we have not gone on the principle of caveat emptor, but caveat contributor in the case of charity." Was there, he asked--playing on the palpable unease of the deputation at seeking an extension of state interference--to be "a sort of censorship of charities?" He also raised the problem of distinguishing between local

⁷⁹Harold Macmillan, The Past Masters (London, 1975), 200. The account of the meeting with Samuel is based on HO 45/10804/308566/11, transcript of proceedings of deputation to the Home Secretary, 3 March 1916.

and central committees and of defining "war relief funds" and "duration of the war," a bit of wry pilfering from an old antagonist, the War Emergency Workers' National Committee in its campaign against the National Relief Fund's narrow definition of "distress due to the war."⁸⁰ And what about the distinction between established charities and those yet to be founded? Following a politician's instinct, he expressed his fear that if the Home Office were in direct control of war charities it would be embroiled in their jealous wranglings, which might then come before the attention of parliament.⁸¹ And so on. By constantly pointing out the problems, Samuel skilfully steered the deputation away from the idea of direct control and towards a suggestion by Sir Edward Henry for a semi-independent committee of control.

Despite his quibbles, Samuel appointed a committee

⁸⁰See chapter II.

⁸¹This was Troup's view: HO 45/10804/308566/11, minute by Troup appended to memorandum by "A.J.E.", 14 March 1916. Samuel and Troup were echoing an old fear, perhaps best expressed in the middle of the previous century by Charles Wood:

"This is. . . the black cloud on the horizon, that we are gradually approaching the state of Continental countries where the government is responsible for everything, for whatever goes wrong the government is blamed. That which twenty years ago might have changed a parish vestry may change a ministry and the nation be involved in difficulty from some petty local grievance."

Charles Wood to Lord John Russell, 31 December 1850, quoted in D. Fraser, Evolution of Welfare State, 109. One did not have to be a sturdy "individualist" to be nervous about the possibility of central government control leading to the politicisation of every aspect of British life.

of inquiry to look into the control of war charities. Appointed on 12 April, it included Blackwell, Willis and, rather incongruously, the unlucky Lady Emmott. The committee interviewed fourteen witnesses, including Goode, Maudslay, Mason, Donald and the assistant editor of Truth. The COS was well represented. Most witnesses advocated the control of all charities but the committee acknowledged that its brief ran only to war charities, however defined. It recommended against the permissive registration system used by the LGB and for compulsion. The witnesses had divided over the advantages of a centralised system of registration as against a system of local registration. Maudslay suggested that local registration would run the risk of "great variations" between the views of different local authorities. The witness for the Glasgow Corporation, on the other hand, argued for a decentralised system on grounds of local patriotism and hostility to London control. The committee itself plumped for local registration because of the need "to make local inquiries and investigation," though local branches of national bodies would not need separate local registration. Finally, the committee suggested a central register of charities to collate the decisions of local authorities, with the Charity Commissioners in charge.⁸²

⁸²MH 8/23/unnumbered, Report of the Committee on War Charities, 19 June 1916; HO 45/10803/308566/32, War Charities Committee, minutes, evidence of Maudslay and J. S. Samuel.

The Home Office then set to work to draft legislation. One suggestion was that charity control might be subsumed efficiently under the aegis of the Defence of the Realm Act on the grounds that "bogus War Charities waste the Country's resources."⁸³ That approach was discarded and at the same time opinion swung against giving local authorities charge of registration. The chief Charity Commissioner, who had seemed to support local registration at his appearance before the committee, changed his mind and offered to carry out the whole scheme by central registration. The committee had only one reservation: "the Charity Commissioners were too old-fashioned a body to undertake this new work satisfactorily."⁸⁴ Troup had earlier made the same point: "The Charity Commission has the necessary independence--but I am afraid its methods are too legal and inelastic--and

⁸³HO 45/10804/308566/32, minute by Troup, 25 June 1916. The theme of "waste" appeared often in attacks on war charity scandals. Daily Chronicle, 12 and 15 February 1916; Truth, 1 March 1916; HO 45/10804/308566/32, War Charities Committee, minutes, evidence of E. C. Price, secretary of Inquiry Department, COS. "Waste" was the organising theme of much wartime propaganda. The national efficiency movement had banged the word at the British public and the needs of the war sanctified the idea. Everyone knew that the nation's resources were being wasted, for example through conspicuous consumption on food and clothing. "Waste" was never personified in a figure like the "Squander-bug" of the Second World War, but the word gathered rich associations as it was bandied about. It was part of the vocabulary of wartime puritanism, a mood and vocabulary common, though for different reasons, to Tories, Nonconformist Liberals, and the labour movement.

⁸⁴HO 45/10804/308566/34, H. Bowyear to Home Office, 13 June 1916; minute by Blackwell, 26 June 1916; /32, minute by Troup, 25 June 1916.

that a new Commission would have to be set up."⁸⁵

And so on 2 August 1916 a War Charities Bill was introduced into parliament. It was passed, along with a spate of other legislation, on the last day of that session, 23 August. The Board's registration scheme lapsed and the WRC and other Belgian relief organisations once more had to apply to be registered. There was less confusion for them the second time because the framers of the law had learned from the experience of the Board a few months earlier. The Charity Commissioners established a central register of war charities. The Commissioners remained the final arbiters of whether or not a charity was a war charity, but the arguments of the decentralists were met by providing for local authorities to register charities whose administrative centres were in their areas.⁸⁶ The linking of charity with business was pursued. The Charity Commissioners appointed a subsidiary body, the Central Trustees of Controlled War Charities, composed of "gentlemen of high business qualifications," working voluntarily in their spare time to supervise charities whose affairs the Commissioners deemed

⁸⁵HO 45/10804/308566/11, minute by Troup, 18 March 1916.

⁸⁶MH 8/7/98/89, copy of War Charities Act (6 and 7 Geo.5, ch.43), and Charity Commission, "Memorandum (no.2) on the War Charities Act, 1916", August 1916.

in need of reorganisation.⁸⁷

Controlled Charity

The Commission was short staffed and the work was heavy. Six thousand applications flooded in during the first year and, though the local authorities handled the bulk of them, there were many appeals and questions of interpretation to be decided.⁸⁸ When the Minister of Pensions asked the Commission in 1918 to provide him with an index of all war charities established for the benefit of discharged officers and other ranks and for the dependants of dead soldiers, the Commission was eventually able to comply only because a private individual volunteered to draw up the register.⁸⁹ Several old bugbears of the WRC, nonetheless, were stamped out, the Commissioners cracked down on flag days, and poorly-managed charities were

⁸⁷Cmd. 621, Sixty-Seventh Report of Commissioners, 10.

⁸⁸Ibid. 6:

| Year | Registered under Act | Exempted from Registration | Refused Registration |
|-------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1916 | 4,179 | 1,606 | 18 |
| 1917 | 3,369 | 2,420 | 15 |
| 1918 | 2,555 | 1,716 | 7 |
| 1919 | 918 | 615 | 1 |
| Total | 11,021 | 6,357 | 41 |

See also PC/CHA/3/5/passim; Jewish Workers' War Emergency Relief Fund, Bulletin, 3; LCC, Council and War, 59.

⁸⁹Cmd. 82, Sixty-Sixth Report of Commissioners, 9.

compulsorily reorganised.⁹⁰

How successful was the Act? On the whole, it succeeded in eliminating the worst cases of fraud and in forcing some duplicate charities to merge. The WRC and other large organisations were satisfied and the Act silenced the volume of criticism of the eighteen months before its enactment. But small organisations continued to flourish and proliferate.⁹¹ And some stalwarts lamented government interference in their affairs and the additional paper work which compliance with the Act entailed for hard-pressed private activists. That colourful rhetorician, the editor of the Bexhill Quarterly, announced in September 1916 that the Bexhill refugee relief committee had voted to dissolve itself as a gesture of principle. The War Charities Act

. . . had struck at the root principle on which the Bexhill Committee's work had been carried on. In order to avoid any taint of charity, and to spare the feelings of their guests, so many of whom were people of considerable standing in business and social life in Belgium, the Committee had purposely eliminated from their operations the rules and regulations of officialism, giving elasticity to their measures of relief, and carefully eschewing the exposure of wants and anxieties to the public gaze.⁹²

His was a voice crying in the wilderness. Though the principles he espoused were those of the refugee relief

⁹⁰Ibid., 7-8; Cmd. 621, Sixty-Seventh Report of Commissioners, 6-7.

⁹¹Cf. Gladstone's complaint to his brother, 4 August 1917. (Footnote 44.)

⁹²BEL 6/19, Bexhill committee, Bexhill Quarterly, 1917, 8.

movement and indeed of the philanthropic community as a whole, few held them with such laissez-faire fervour. "Officialism" had indeed entered the gates of philanthropy--at the request of philanthropists. The Commissioners received many requests in the last two years of the war for the War Charities Act to be extended to all charities and for charity control to become a permanent fixture.⁹³ Instead, the old order continued, mainly because the Commissioners continued to be overworked and understaffed. The savage postwar programme of government retrenchment rendered utopian any hopes of permanent and extensive control. As long as war charities remained in existence--which meant the whole of the interwar period for those dealing with veterans' problems--the Act remained on the books. But there was little work for the Trustees to do. Like many another promising growth nurtured in the war's soil, charity control in the end was remarkably unaffected by "the Deluge."⁹⁴

The experience of the philanthropic community during the war suggests above all the remarkable persistence

⁹³Cmd. 82. Sixty-Sixth Report of Commissioners, 9.

⁹⁴The Charity Commissioners are still overworked and understaffed. And the fears of the pessimists that government licensing regulations not backed by adequate investigative machinery were tantamount to giving official blessing to frauds have been justified on occasions. Ben Whitaker, The Foundations (London, 1974), 133. See also the case of the "Bent Bishop of Brixton", reported in the English press in 1975.

of old problems which merely recurred in more urgent form and were dealt with, temporarily, in traditional, informal ways. The Belgian relief organisations reflected both the dynamism and the fragmentation of the wider world of charity. They were an extremely important part of that world. Without them, it is doubtful if the need for a special regulating Act would have become or been thought to be necessary, and their role in agitating for the Act was central.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

'This Great Act of Humanity'

In May 1919, the Prime Minister of Great Britain wrote a letter of thanks to the men and women of the Belgian refugee relief movement. It was a generous tribute:

When the first refugees from Belgium reached these shores, few could have guessed what their final number would be or how long their sojourn here would last. At that time the War Refugees Committee and the Local Committees throughout the country, which came rapidly into being, took upon themselves the task of organising the great national sentiment of hospitality, and in the result the mass of refugees were received into the country, homes were found for them and their necessities relieved with singular speed and efficiency.

It will . . . be a lasting pleasure to those who have been engaged in this great act of humanity, to feel that at a time when so much of the energies of mankind has been devoted to destruction, it has been their privilege to take part in alleviating distress and in creating a new bond of fellowship between nations which will continue long after the tragic circumstances that have¹ brought it into being have passed into history.

With his usual facility Lloyd George had summed up the feelings of many Englishmen in 1919. Pride in a great

¹1920 Report, appendix 6, copy of letter issued by the Prime Minister.

humanitarian achievement fostered hope for a new world of international peace and brotherhood.

Lloyd George had paid tribute above all to the British philanthropic community, for the relief of refugees was its achievement, not the government's, as he frankly conceded. The case of the refugee relief movement suggests several things about philanthropy before and during the First World War. First, charitable activity still formed a very important part of the nation's apparatus for the relief of distress. Second, however, the philanthropic community was under stress before the war, and the war sped certain changes already taking place within that community. Third, those changes amounted to the development of a new relationship between charity and the state in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Philanthropy, often neglected completely by historians interested in tracing the rise of the welfare state, was alive and well in 1914. The sources of its strength were many. The ethos of the classes which dominated political life was not statist. There was universal agreement that social problems were national problems. Thus, the Belgian refugees were the "guests of the nation". But no one outside the labour movement, which was moved by pragmatic considerations, seriously proposed in 1914 that the refugees should be solely the

responsibility of the government. For the 'nation' meant the whole community and all its freely evolved institutions: churches, political parties, trade unions and, not least of all, charitable organisations. Traditionally, state assistance to those in distress had been a last resort after voluntary efforts had failed. State assistance supplemented charity, rather than the reverse.

Philanthropy was strong because the Edwardian state was weak. The functions, the bureaucracy and the budget of the state, though growing, were still very limited. Finance was a strait-jacket on government growth and so the state welcomed philanthropic activity as a form of self-imposed taxation offered willingly by the same people who gave unwillingly to the state. Charity, in other words, was a politically safe form of taxation. It was a political buffer for the state in one other important way. Social issues had been the subject of violent controversy during the Edwardian era. The rise of the working classes to political maturity and importance ensured that this would continue to be the case. As long as private bodies could carry out effectively the many tasks of social relief work, the safer was the government. This was all the more important because the chief organ of state welfare, the Poor Law, had fallen into widespread disrepute. It was widely agreed that the Poor Law was an inappropriate instrument for

the relief of much distress. Research into poverty since the 1880s, by showing that environment rather than defects of character lay behind most of the misery of the poor, had expanded the categories of "deserving" poor, the preserve of philanthropy, and diminished those of the "undeserving" who were normally left to the Poor Law. In this sense, philanthropy's scope was wider in 1914 than it had ever been. Furthermore, the philanthropic community had developed in response sophisticated techniques for dealing with distress.

Comparisons between voluntary and state programmes of relief were drawn to their own advantage by voluntarists. In the debate over social welfare, one principle was universally acknowledged; that the aim of relief was the moral as well as the economic regeneration of the individual. All means were acceptable as long as they gained that end. But state-administered schemes generally failed the moral test. Drawing on their experience with the Poor Law, philanthropists had built up an unflattering picture of the government official as unimaginative, inflexible and rather callous, seeing only cases to whom he applied the letter of the law. The archetypal volunteer, on the other hand, came to know intimately the people he was helping and was therefore able to assess their needs accurately. Through case work, which involved sympathy and tact, he

could help them to become self-sufficient citizens once again.

Case work was more than just the accidental creation of the philanthropic tradition. It derived from the central assumptions of prewar philanthropy, which in turn were the values of the upper and middle classes whose almost exclusive preserve charity was. Charitable activity was not only a moral duty, a form of noblesse oblige, a service performed by those with the money and leisure to work without pay. It was also a badge of class, a mark of having arrived within the upper classes, a ladder for moving higher within them, and a means of recreation. Not least, it was a means of asserting social superiority, a pedagogical device whereby the values of the philanthropic classes were inculcated in the lower orders. Social superiority and moral leadership went hand in hand. Class and morality were inextricably mixed in the concept of 'respectability', just as they were affirmed in terms such as the "better class" and "best class". Philanthropy rested on the belief in a firm, finely differentiated social and moral universe, in which the social and moral hierarchies roughly coincided. Men could only be understood and therefore helped if every aspect of their background and character were taken into account. Here, the upper-class volunteer, with his fine sense of class and his supreme

self-confidence, was an expert where the government official was an insensitive amateur, the incarnation of Mr. Bumble.

Thus the philanthropic community was still thriving in 1914. And the war in many ways confirmed its vitality. Unable to cope with the enormous and unprecedented strains which the war imposed upon its limited machinery, the state turned gratefully to voluntary organisations. Once again politicians used charity as a political and financial buffer, as their attitude to the National Relief Fund and the War Refugees Committee attests. The outpouring of voluntary effort was vast in terms of both money and manpower--probably vaster than at any time in English history. Philanthropy thrived on the wartime spirit of self-sacrifice which, at least initially, strengthened the belief that the nation was something far greater than the state, that national responsibilities should not be left to the government alone, that indeed the government lacked not only the strength but also the vision to deal with many of the social problems of the war. The war made private relief efforts all the more appropriate because the new categories of distress--soldiers' families, wounded soldiers, prisoners of war, refugees--were all manifestly "deserving".

Patriotism and philanthropy went hand in hand. War charities committees and recruiting depots were twin symbols

of a nation freely mobilising all its resources for a great crusade. Charitable work was a form of symbolic enlistment for thousands of citizens too old or of the wrong sex to be able to fight. War charities' appeals were an important form of propaganda, a platform from which the upper classes formulated their reasons for supporting England's cause and preached the word simply and vividly to the masses. War charity work reasserted the gulf between the classes which "did" philanthropy and those which were done to, between the "classes" and the "masses". It reaffirmed that the moral and social hierarchy coincided with a hierarchy of patriotism. Especially in the early days of the war, the upper classes displayed unease about the patriotism of the working classes, a fear that labour did not believe that the war was England's war but, as prewar socialist propaganda had stressed, a war of the old ruling classes.²

Charity's great strength as an expression of upper-class tribalism was its greatest weakness. Imbedded in class, philanthropy was transformed as the English class structure was transformed, was challenged as the old class order was challenged. The growing participation of the working classes in the life of the political nation had threatened the Poor Law by making its unpopularity a matter

²See the pages of The Times for August 1914 for this fear. For upper-class fears that labour's political leadership was unpatriotic, see J.O. Stubbs, "Lord Milner and patriotic labour, 1914-1918", English Historical Review, 87 (October 1971):717-54.

of political calculation. The same hostilities threatened philanthropy, the other pillar of the old paternalist system of social welfare. Charity and the Poor Law were tainted alike, and by 1914 the philanthropic community was uneasily aware that the old firm structure of authority on which its methods were based had begun to disintegrate. The war extended this process. Labour's wholehearted participation in the war effort had to be assured and this increased its political power, while the upper-class unease about working-class patriotism made for a political climate in which the War Emergency Workers' National Committee could successfully press for working-class representation on relief bodies like the National Relief Fund and the War Refugees Committee.

The war's economic effects eroded philanthropy. First, in a time of intense preoccupation with the efficient use of resources, the perennial problems of overlapping and extravagance were glaringly displayed. Nor were they solved by the War Charities Act, which established only limited control. Second, the upper classes' tradition of unpaid service was severely strained by four years of inflation and rising taxation. Third, taxation ceased to be the exclusive preserve of the philanthropic classes as rising wages brought many workers within range of direct taxation, and so one more symbol of class superiority was

weakened. A certain disillusion set in among the philanthropic classes. Gladstone's "willing horses" began to resent bearing disproportionate burdens and in this context support grew for a planned distribution of the burden of relief, such as only the state could carry out.

In the course of the four years of war, certain shifts took place in the relationship between the state and the philanthropic community. The changing relationship between the War Refugees Committee and the Local Government Board epitomised those shifts. The relief of Belgian refugees began as an instance of philanthropy at its most confident and dynamic. It ended with the state involved heavily in funding and to a lesser extent guiding the course of relief. The men and women of the WRC began as philanthropists and ended as something like social workers. Charity and the state had come together in a new relationship, the state providing funds and providing a measure of rational control impossible in the diverse and individualist philanthropic world, the philanthropists continuing their tradition of close personal investigation through case work. An older paternalist system of social welfare slowly gave way to one where voluntary bodies worked in tandem with and under guidance of statutory agencies which themselves had adopted some of the methods of charity. The trend had

already begun in the Edwardian era³ and the war powerfully reinforced those changes.

The war saw changes too in British attitudes to aliens. Did the war erode the tradition of hospitality to refugees? The great immigration of Jews had already dealt a blow to the tradition. But, even though the Aliens Act of 1905 had restricted alien immigration, its framers had carefully declared their unwavering compassion for "refugees". The word "refugee", however, was capable of many interpretations which depended on mood and circumstance. Only the fortunes of war--which must include the unusual phenomenon of full employment--and the more important fact of their transience, separated the mass of unheroic and nonpolitical Belgians who fled their country in 1914 from the mass of unheroic and nonpolitical Russian citizens who had fled their homeland several decades earlier. Both groups were refugees, but the tag "refugee" was often denied to the Jews. The Belgians were the first clear case of an influx of refugees on a large scale since the French emigres during the Revolutionary era. The Belgians were the first to put the residual humanitarianism of the Act of 1905 to the test. By that test Britain passed in 1914.

³M. Moore, "Social Service and Social Legislation in Edwardian England", 33-43.

However, between the wars many refugees from European countries were denied entry to the United Kingdom. They were excluded not under the terms of the act of 1905 but of another act of 1919, passed at the end of the war. The second act was heir to the first, in that many of its provisions were a more sophisticated version of the rudimentary controls of 1905. Furthermore, the 1919 act was shaped by fears of international Bolshevism in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Aliens control would not have been the burning issue it was in 1919 if it had not been for events in Russia and the distrust of the working classes displayed by many members of the upper and middle classes. Anarchists and Bolsheviks were mainly responsible for the way doors closed on refugees after the war. It is difficult to argue that the years 1914-17, the years when Belgians and enemy aliens were the subjects of comprehensive restrictions, were the formative years. Nevertheless, the early wartime panic about spies and saboteurs formed the necessary link between the earlier and the later panics. The shape of control rather than the intent to control aliens derived largely from wartime experience. Here the Belgians, the largest group of alien civilians to enter Britain, then or at any other time, were far more important than the long-established and stationary enemy alien community. Experience with that community, on

the other hand, provided more important experience than the control of Belgians for the administration of aliens control during the Second World War.⁴ What the story of both the Belgian refugees and the enemy aliens shows is the potency of popular beliefs, both in imposing political and prudential bounds on the freedom of expert civil servants to administer rational regulations, and in influencing the views of the experts and their political masters themselves.

Lloyd George's letter to the relief movement in May 1919 closed a chapter in English history on a note of pride and optimism. The optimism was a little misplaced. The new "bond of fellowship" between Britain and Belgium did not last long or amount to much in practical terms. By the middle of the 1930s Belgium, which had deserted its tradition of neutrality to join the League of Nations, had reverted to its neutral status.⁵ And in 1940 the events of 1914 were replayed. German armies invaded Belgium and no plans for Anglo-Belgian military cooperation existed.

⁴It is interesting, however, that the terms of the Order-in-Council of November 1939, which dealt inter alia with the employment of aliens, followed closely the recommendations made by the Hatch Committee almost exactly twenty-five years earlier. The Order is quoted in A. Evans, The Dispossessed, 165.

⁵David Owen Kieft, Belgium's Return to Neutrality (Oxford, 1972); Stephen George, "Paul-Henri Spaak and a paradox in Belgian foreign policy", British Journal of International Studies, 1(1975):254-75.

Once again Belgian citizens fled to England. Once again Englishmen wrote letters to The Times hailing them as an answer to the "servant problem," hoping that they would teach English farmers intensive cultivation, or fearing that German spies would slip into England among them.⁶ When men recall the past, they often recall the wrong things.

The ironies of history aside, the relief of the Belgian refugees deserved Lloyd George's remark that it had been a "great act of humanity." When all account is taken of the self-interested motives which influenced both private citizens and the British government to provide for almost a quarter of a million Belgian citizens between 1914 and 1919, the fact remains that thousands of men and women worked hard for several years at a task which was often thankless and unexciting and which deprived many of them of their privacy. England proved a generous island refuge for the Belgians. And the burden of the hospitality offered was carried by the "willing horses" of a still-thriving philanthropic community.

⁶The Times, J. A. R. Marriott and E. T. Wickham, to editor, 18 May, and G. L. Jessop to editor, 20 May 1940. German spies were supposed to have entered England dressed as nuns from Liège. Leonard Mosley, Backs to the Wall (New York, 1971), 74.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Archives

- APT: Greater London Record Office, Alexandra Palace Trustees files
- BEL: Imperial War Museum, Women's Work and War Refugees Collection, Belgian Refugees files
- BM: British Museum
- CAB: Public Record Office, Cabinet Papers
- CO: Public Record Office, Colonial Office files
- COS: Greater London Record Office, Charity Organisation Society files
- Deiniol: St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Clwyd, Henry Gladstone Papers
- FO: Public Record Office, Foreign Office files
- GLRO: Greater London Record Office
- GP: British Museum Additional Manuscripts, Herbert Gladstone Papers
- HO: Public Record Office, Home Office files
- HS: House of Lords Library, Herbert Samuel Papers
- LCC: Greater London Record Office, London County Council files
- MAB: Greater London Record Office, Metropolitan Asylums Board files
- MEPOL: Public Record Office, Metropolitan Police Force files
- MH: Public Record Office, Ministry of Health files
- MT: Public Record Office, Ministry of Transport files
- PC/CHA: London County Council, Public Control Committee, Charity Commission files

T: Public Record Office, Treasury files

VOL: Imperial War Museum, Women's Work and War Refugees
Collection, Voluntary Corps files

WNC: Transport House, War Emergency Workers' National
Committee files

WO: Public Record Office, War Office files

Organisations

ASE: Amalgamated Society of Engineers

BOC: Belgian Official Committee (Comité Officiel Belge)

BRC: Belgian Refugee Committee or Belgian Relief Committee

BRF: Belgian Relief Fund

BRFF: Belgian Refugee Food Fund

BSF: Belgian Soldiers Fund

COS: Charity Organisation Society

CWL: Catholic Women's League

FRF: French Relief Fund

ILP: Independent Labour Party

JWRC: Jewish War Refugees Committee

LCC: London County Council

LGB: Local Government Board

LLHC: Lady Lugard Hospitality Committee for Better Class
Belgian Refugees

MAB: Metropolitan Asylums Board

NFF: National Food Fund

NRF: National Relief Fund

NCRB: National Committee for Relief in Belgium

NUWSS: National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
 PRF: Private Relief Fund
 PSA: Personal Service Association
 UJW: Union of Jewish Women
 VAD: Voluntary Aid Detachment
 WEC: Women's Emergency Corps
 WEWNC or WNC: War Emergency Workers' National Committee
 WIRC: Women's International Relief Committee
 WRC: War Refugees Committee

Others

ARO: Aliens Restriction Order, 1914
 Lugard: Lady Flora Lugard, The Work of the War Refugees Committee
 Lyttelton: BEL 3, Dame Edith Lyttelton, recollections of work with the War Refugees Committee
 PD: Parliamentary Debates
 PP: Parliamentary Papers
 WRC I: First Report of the War Refugees Committee
 WRC II: Second Report of the War Refugees Committee
 WRC III: Third Report of the War Refugees Committee
 1920 Report: Ministry of Health, Report on Work undertaken by the British Government in the Reception and Care of the Belgian Refugees

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