

THE ESTONIAN REFUGEES IN SWEDEN.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Among the persons displaced from their homelands as a consequence of the recent war, there are about 100,000 Estonians. They are now living in several European countries and even overseas. The largest number of Estonian refugees is to be found in the Allied zones in Germany, Sweden taking second place as a country of refuge. A considerable number of Estonian refugees has lately gone to England and smaller groups of them are residing in Denmark, Belgium, France, and elsewhere.

An adequate resolution of the refugee problem, on an international as well as on national scales, has presented certain difficulties. The following is a survey of the way in which Sweden has tackled this problem and of the results which, in our opinion, are satisfactory to both parts, the country of refuge and the refugees.

The mass escape of the Estonians from their homeland is by no means to be confused with the usual migration abroad of a certain percentage of a country's population in quest of better living conditions. This escape also differs fundamentally from the equally usual flight abroad of certain citizens because they have come into conflict with the lawful authorities in their country in one way or another and must seek asylum against persecution.

The circumstances with regard to Estonia are entirely different. Soviet Russian troops occupied the country in 1940, dismissed the lawful Government, incorporated Estonia in the Soviet Union against the will of the nation and introduced the Soviet regime in the country. Under this regime all the political and civil freedoms were abolished, all property became state-owned by nationalisation, the hitherto prevailing social order was annihilated and all connections with the civilized world severed.

The Estonians are an essentially democratic nation and have always adhered to democratic principles. The dictatorial regime of the Soviets, strictly opposed to every individual self-expression, is absolutely unacceptable to the Estonian people. Hence the Estonians will never agree to the establishment of the Soviet regime in their homeland, never recognise the forcible and unwarranted occupation of their country by the Soviet Union, as it has not been recognised by a large part of the civilized world, headed by the USA.

Another consideration that must be remembered is that in Soviet Estonia no citizen enjoys any personal security. Under the regime established in Estonia by the USSR, every citizen may, either by warrant from a privy court of law or at the arbitrary decision of the police authorities, be arrested, kept in prison, sent to death, or forcibly deported. The laws of the USSR afford unlimited pretexts for the arbitrary indictment of any citizen with political, or, as Soviet terminology has it, counter-revolutionary crimes entailing heavy penalties not only for the accused himself but also for his family, relatives and friends. The Soviet political police /GPU, NKVD, now MVD/ make ample use of these opportunities to persecute patriotically minded Estonians in the hope of quelling every resistance to the Soviet order by fear. During a year's occupation of the country in 1940/41 well over sixty thousand people were deported or murdered. There is no direct data on the number of the deported and arrested during the recent years.

but, judging from indirect information, this number is considerable.

Hence the Estonian refugees in Europe and elsewhere are victims of the Soviet dictatorial regime who have left their country for political reasons and are unable and unwilling to return to it as long as it is under the authority of a foreign power, which prevents the self-government of the Estonian nation in accordance with democratic principles.

II THE REFUGEES IN SWEDEN.

1. Their number. Escape from Estonia set in during the first Soviet Russian occupation in the winter of 1940/41. The number of the fugitives under this period was about 200, mainly young men who could brave the hardships of flight across the frozen Finnish Gulf. During the German occupation, which followed on the heels of the Russian one, until August 1944, about 7,000 persons escaped from Estonia to Finland and about 3,000 persons to Sweden. These escapes were mainly undertaken in small fishing boats. With the threatening approach of the second Soviet occupation a mass escape to Sweden started in August, 1944. Roughly 15,000 people escaped across the sea in the course of three months and the Estonians in Finland also fled to Sweden during the same period of time. Every imaginable kind of watercraft was used: rowing boats, motorboats, sailing boats and small coasters. The latest Estonian refugees in Sweden are fugitives from the British and American zones in Germany and from Denmark.

According to official Swedish statistics the number of Estonian refugees in the country in the beginning of 1945 was 25,200. In course of time this figure has slowly but steadily decreased, a number of families having left Sweden to settle down overseas. Official data maintain that at present the number of Estonian refugees in Sweden is 22,455.

Essentially even the 6,500 Estonian Swedes who got official permission to repatriate to their country of origin during the German occupation under an agreement between the Swedish and German Governments, should be classed as Estonian refugees. Juridically, however, they are not regarded as refugees and a large proportion of them has already been granted Swedish citizenship.

2. The Refugees Classified According to Vocations.

Unfortunately no precise statistical data are available on the classification of the Estonian refugees according to their original vocations. From data collected by the Estonian Committee /published by the Baltic Humanitarian Association in a pamphlet "The Baltic Refugees", Stockholm, 1946/ it may be gathered that the following original vocations are represented:

Farmers and Farm Labourers -	approximately	1200
whereof agronomists 55		
Farmer-Fishermen	"	4300
Professional Fishermen	"	3000
Seamen	"	700
Workers in Forestry	"	110
whereof Forestry Inspectors 31		
Factory Workers	"	800
Engineers, Technicians, Skilled Workers	"	550
Civil Servants	"	680
Economists, businessmen, co-operators	"	1100
Educators	"	600
whereof schoolteachers 500		
clergymen 40		

Public Health Workers		approximately	470
whereof physicians	108		
dentists	40		
veterinary surgeons	15		
pharmacutists	50		
University Teachers		"	110
Students		"	400
Artists, writers, journalists, musicians		"	115
Household workers		"	5500
Children		"	3500
whereof schoolchildren	2900		
Former profession unknown		"	2070
			<hr/>
			25,200

It may be concluded from the above data that the Estonian refugees in Sweden present an adequate cross-sector of the population of the Republic of Estonia. Only the group of fishermen and seamen is disproportionately large since they all had access to boats, which made their escape relatively easy, while the rest of the population had no such facilities.

III THE REFUGEES IN SWEDEN'S ECONOMY.

1. Public Aid to Refugees. The Swedish authorities and the whole nation, who had given asylum to numerous Norwegians and Danes whom they were fugitives under Nazism during the war, had adequate experience in dealing with refugees when they were confronted with the mass escape of the Baltic nationals from the East in 1944. The proper authorities were efficiently assisted by various philanthropic and charitable organisations, the Women's Home Guard /Lottakåren/, the Red Cross, The Homemakers' Society, etc.

On arrival the refugees were placed in quarantine which lasted from two to four weeks. During this period they were registered and subjected to a thorough medical examination. The sick - their number was small - were transferred to hospitals and sanitoria. Those in need were provided with clothing and footwear.

After quarantine the refugees were installed in camps until work could be found for them. In looking for jobs the refugees were restricted to no particular field - they were free to take any work they were able to get and the camp administration tendered them every assistance in looking for suitable employment. The refugees who knew neither the language of, nor the conditions in, the country received most valuable aid from the Swedish State Employment Bureau. These Bureaux opened special departments for foreigners with officials who, for the most part, could speak foreign languages. The task of these foreigners' Bureaux was to give the refugees information on vacancies in their vocational field, and to mediate between the refugees and their future employers. The Employment Bureaux made every effort to place the refugees in work which they had hitherto done; only in cases where this proved impossible other suitable employment was suggested. Regardless of the reigning shortage of labour in various fields, e.g. the timber industry, no refugees were compelled to take employment just in these fields, their freedom of choice was never violated and no term was set to their sojourn in the camps. Neither was this necessary, for the overwhelming majority of the refugees were only too anxious to begin an independent life. Those who had found work were started on their way by the fare to their place of work and a sum of money sufficient for food and lodging until they would be in receipt of their first wages. Those who possessed no working clothes received the necessary equipment. Those who took unfurnished flats could on application receive a small loan to buy the indispensable furniture and household utensils.

Owing to this adequate aid the camps emptied very quickly.

2. The Refugees in Swedish Economy. Once out of the camps, the refugees were entirely at liberty to look for work wherever they pleased or to leave the employment found for them by the Employment Bureaux for another. While fluctuation was rather more pronounced in the beginning, it has now sunk to normal, the refugees having learnt some new trade and persevering at it. According to data from the Swedish Labour Exchange, the number of Estonian wage-earners in Sweden is at present 15,900, i.e. 71 per cent of the entire number /22,500/ of Estonian refugees in the country. From this percentage it may be gauged how useful the refugees are to the economic life of the country which gave them asylum.

No official statistics are available on the number of Estonians working in the various economic fields. The Estonian Committee has investigated the matter privately and obtained the following approximate data:

Textile and Clothing Industry	4000
Engineering	4000
Timber Industry	1000
Leather and Rubber Industry	1000
Other Industries	1000
Agriculture	1000
Shipping	1200
Clerical work	1000
Domestic Servants	500
Shops and Warehouses	500
Miscellaneous	700

The greatest difficulties in finding their place in the Swedish community are experienced by the intellectuals. A large proportion of them have resorted to physical work and learnt some new profession. A certain number of refugees with a university education were for a time given so-called state archive work /a species of relief for unemployed intellectuals/ by the Swedish authorities. About 800 Estonian refugees have been thus employed. In the course of three years, however, the majority of them, having learnt the language of the country, have voluntarily renounced this relief and found employment in the free market. Hitherto quite a considerable number of veterinary surgeons, dentists, pharmacutists, physicians, engineers, foresters and agronomists have found work in their professional field. People with a humanitarian education have had fewer opportunities for exercising their former profession and therefore most of them have availed themselves of the chance to learn a new vocation offered by re-education courses arranged by the Swedish authorities for archive-workers.

It must be stated that the Swedes have shown great consideration for the scholars and scientists who sought refuge in their country. Many of them have been awarded scholarships enabling them to continue their scientific work.

The combined yearly earnings of the Estonian refugees now in Sweden are 60 million Swedish kronas whereof they pay 7.5 million kronas to the State in taxes.

IV THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF THE REFUGEES.

1. Application of the Right to Asylum. The Swedish Government and the administrative authorities have recognized that the Estonian refugees have fled their country for political reasons and have accordingly granted them asylum. Swedish legislation on political refugees strictly adheres to this principle.

Even when there are lawful reasons for extraditing a political refugee, the Swedish law demands that he should not be sent back to his country which he has fled for political reasons, nor to any other country where he has reasons to fear that he may be sent back to the homeland he has fled. Should a refugee, for one reason or another, be unable to support himself, the Swedish authorities provide for his sustenance. The Baltic refugees in Sweden are not under the obligation to apply for a working permit, as is the rule in the case of foreigners: they enjoy equal rights with Swedish citizens in looking for work or changing their jobs.

In addition to the above privileges the political refugees in Sweden hold all the rights and freedoms of the citizens of the country and are subject to all the duties and obligations of these same citizens, barring such exceptions as the law makes in the case of foreigners.

Thus the refugees and foreigners in Sweden possess the right of coalition together with the right of full membership in any Swedish association, including the political parties, freedom on speech, freedom of the Press, freedom of conscience, etc.

Freedom to choose his place of residence is guaranteed to every refugee, excepting three of the largest towns /Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö/, a special permit being required to settle in them. This restriction has been made imperative by the housing crisis prevailing in these cities. The refugees must also secure a special permit when wishing to settle in territories closed to foreigners on account of fortifications erected there.

On the whole the refugees are free to engage in most economic and professional pursuits. They are, however, subject to some restrictions of a nature which is the rule in most countries. Foreigners must apply for special authorisation from the Government when wishing to acquire real estate, found industrial or commercial undertakings or engage in certain professions which are reserved to citizens of the country /physicians, lawyers, etc./. The Government has not refused such authorisations whenever circumstances have permitted and the above-mentioned professions have also been open to the refugees, subject to some limitations.

2. Labour Protection and Social Regulations. In the fields bound by collective contracts - which apply to every kind of physical work - the refugees receive equal wages with the Swedish workers. There is, however, a certain tendency among the Swedish employers to pay the refugees who have attained responsible positions /e.g. engineers/ a slightly lower salary than would be received by a Swedish subject occupying the same position. These instances have not been numerous and have occurred in the fields where the question of remuneration is not regulated by collective contract.

The refugees are obligatorily insured against accidents and vocational maladies on a par with Swedish wage-earners. They are entitled to membership in sickness funds and unemployment relief funds /both these kinds of social insurance are voluntary in Sweden/. Over 50 per cent. of the refugees have by now become members of these funds.

The Children's Benefit that will be paid by the State as from January 1st, 1948, to Swedish subjects will also be paid to the refugees. The only kind of social insurance not applicable to refugees is the old age and disability insurance /old age pension/.

The refugees have the right - not the obligation - to join Swedish trade unions. Hitherto 60 per cent. of the Estonian refugees working in Sweden have joined a trade union, this percentage being

larger for those working in industry and smaller for agriculture. The Swedish trade unions defend the rights of the refugees just as they defend those of members of their own nationality.

V EDUCATIONAL, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL LIFE OF THE REFUGEES.

The refugee policy of the Swedish Government and the freedoms granted to the refugees as well as the economic basis they have acquired by their own work, coupled with the benevolent attitude of the Swedish authorities and the Swedish public to the refugees in general and to their national undertakings in particular, have created the pre-requisites for a flourishing educational and cultural life of the refugees, and the Estonians in Sweden have had many opportunities to promote their vigorous and manifold cultural traditions.

1. Refugee Schools. Recognising the importance of education in the mother tongue, the Swedish authorities have not impeded the Estonian Committee in creating a number of educational establishments with Estonian as the language of instruction. Estonian elementary schools have been founded in Stockholm and Helsingborg and 28 supplemental schools opened in as many other towns with altogether 1200 pupils and 71 teachers. Along with the organisation of elementary education in the mother tongue, adequate steps have been taken to enable young people whose secondary education in Estonia was interrupted by emigration to complete their studies in Sweden. An Estonian college worked in Sigtuna from 1945 to 1947 and at present there is an Estonian Evening College and an Estonian Correspondence Institute in Stockholm, teaching approximately 900 pupils. The college in Sigtuna was financed by the Swedish State but all the other schools are supported by the refugees themselves. For this purpose they have contributed 100,821 kronas during the scholastic year of 1946/47. The organization of schools devolves on the Estonian Committee which is working in intimate contact with Sweden's Ministry for Education.

2. Religious Life. Among the Estonian refugees who settled down in Sweden there are 28 Lutheran clergymen, 6 Orthodox priests and several ministers of the Free Churches. All of them began preaching the Gospel to their countrymen already in the refugee camps, the first stage of emigration. Sweden's State Church and the local Free congregations gave their wholehearted support to religious work among the refugees. At first the Swedish Church was even able to give the Estonian Church in exile some pecuniary aid. These grants having now ceased, the Estonian congregations have to content themselves with their own resources but they still enjoy the patronage and support of the Swedish Church.

In the summer of 1947 the representatives of the Lutheran Churches of Estonia and Latvia now in exile in Sweden and Germany participated in the Lutheran World Assembly at Lund, Sweden. Likewise, the representatives of the Baptist Church of Estonia in exile attended the Baptist World Congress in Copenhagen in July-August, 1947.

3. Cultural Life of the Refugees. As regards literature the roughly 25,000 Estonian refugees in Sweden have not only produced all the books they needed but have also been the real champions of Estonia's literary traditions. The refugee literature in Sweden is at present the only true Estonian literature since the literary production of occupied Estonia lags far behind as compared to that in Sweden. Whereas occupied Estonia has produced only two novels and 2-3 books of verses, the refugee authors in Sweden have published 11 novels, three volumes of short stories, nine volumes of poetry, several vo-

lumes of memoirs, many schoolbooks and children's books. In the course of three years 120 Estonian books on various subjects with a combined edition of 300,000 copies have been published for a reading public of 25,000, not counting several magazines and three newspapers, one of them a daily. The freedom of the Press obtaining in Sweden applies in full also to the refugee books and periodicals.

As regards music, several Estonian composers and performers have attained a nation-wide renown in Sweden and even made an international name for themselves. Choral song, ever a national tradition of the Estonians, is being assiduously practised. There are two large choirs in Stockholm, both of which have repeatedly given successful concerts in the largest concert-halls of the capital and in the provinces. Even the smaller towns, where a larger number of refugees happens to have settled, have choirs of their own.

As regards theatrical art, the Estonian refugee actors and actresses have organised a refugee theatre producing plays, musical comedies and even opera. This company has given many performances to packed houses in Stockholm and also toured the provinces.

Estonian art is represented in Sweden by a number of distinguished Estonian artists who have sought asylum in the country. They have been very productive, and the first Estonian art exhibition in Sweden took place as early as in 1945 in Karlstad. In 1946 an exhibition of the works of Estonian and Latvian artists in Swedish exile was arranged in one of the largest art galleries of Stockholm. Several artists have, moreover, had one-man exhibitions in the capital and in various provincial centres. These achievements are all the more noteworthy for the reason that only a very few of these artists are able to devote themselves exclusively to their art, the majority having to earn their livelihood by other means.

As regards science, many Estonian refugee scholars and scientists were enabled to continue their researches as so-called archive workers. According to the statistics compiled by the Swedish Labour Exchange Commissions, they have until January, 1947, published 85 independent scientific works. The Swedish authorities and distinguished Swedish scholars have repeatedly emphasised the value of these contributions to Swedish and international scientific research. Many Estonian scholars and scientists are already working on the staff of various scientific and research institutions and the assimilation of the rest by similar establishments is only a question of time.

In the field of sport the Estonian refugees have particularly distinguished themselves by their female gymnasts and by their riflemen. These latter put up a team for the World Championship in Shooting on August 1-10, 1947 in Stockholm, and competed victoriously in all the branches that were open to them.

VI REFUGEE ORGANISATIONS

1. The Estonian Committee in Sweden. The Estonian Committee in Stockholm is the central organ of the Estonian refugees in Sweden and their official representative on occasions calling for such representation. It is elected on democratic principles by all the refugees in the country.

The Estonian Committee keeps in constant contact with the proper Swedish institutions attending to the legal, economic, social and cultural problems of the refugees.

The Estonian Committee has been instrumental in the integration of the Estonian refugees in Sweden's national economy. The Committee

has adhered to the viewpoint that the abilities of the refugees would be most productively utilised, if the refugees were employed in the same fields where they had worked previously, where they had, in many cases, won considerable experience and, in case of scientific workers, even international renown.

To eliminate possible conflicts at places of work, the Estonian Committee has advocated, both by written advice and through its delegates, that the Estonian industrial workers join trade unions, sickness and unemployment funds. Advice has also been furnished on problems arising out of Swedish social policy, labour law and social insurance.

The Committee gives the refugees legal advice, attends to their business in Government institutions and defends their interests in courts of law. The Committee employs a physician who gives the refugees medical advice by letter. Per agreement with the Swedish authorities a voucher of the Estonian Committee is regarded as a sufficient guarantee for payment of taxes in the case of refugees wishing to found industrial or commercial enterprises.

The Committee also acts as an intermediary and a connecting link between the many Estonians scattered all over the world, forwarding and re-directing approximately 2000 letters per month and helping the writers to find their relatives and friends.

The Estonian Committee translates and certifies various documents, its certifications being recognised by all Swedish institutions.

In addition to these duties pertaining to the organisation of the life of the refugees, the Committee has rendered social relief to the needy members of the refugee community. Thereto should be added the extensive relief action which the Estonian Committee inaugurated in collaboration with other Estonian organisations in Sweden for the benefit of Estonian children in the DP camps of Germany in the winter of 1946, when these children suffered from cold and severe undernourishment.

2. Estonian Relief Federation.

On initiative of the Estonian Committee an organisation for co-ordinating Estonian relief activities named the Estonian Relief Federation /Estoniska Hjälpcentralen/ was called into life in the beginning of 1947. It has its headquarters in Stockholm. The Chairman of the Federation is the Estonian archbishop Johan Köpp. In Sweden it has 44 offices, and a number of Relief Committees are active in DP camps in Germany and Austria. The functions of the Federation are divided between the following committees: Relief Committee, Foreign Aid Committee, Save the Children Committee, Invalid Relief Committee, Auditorial Committee and Secretariate. It is represented in New-York, London, Paris, Bruxelles, Sydney, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. During the year 1947 Estonian children adolescent in Germany have been succoured with consignments of victuals and clothing, purchased in Sweden with amounts endowed by Estonian refugees in this country. The Federation has developed a considerable activity on all fields of action of the Red Cross. A lively co-operation with such Swedish humanitarian societies and organisations as the Swedish Red Cross and Save the Children /Rädda Barnen/ has been attained, and with the International Red Cross.

At present a relief action for Estonian children, adolescents and sick people is being inaugurated on a broad basis. In Germany and Austria in the Allied Zones there are 35,000 Estonian Displaced Persons. Of these approximately 7000 are children and adolescents.

As practically all of these most necessarily need help, the economical situation of the Estonian refugees in Sweden is not sufficiently strong for succouring such a great number of people in distress.

In the summer of 1947 the Save the Children Committee organised in Sweden 8 holiday homes for children where 700 children spent their vacations. The staff of these homes totalled 47 persons.

3. Other Organisations. The Baltic Humanitarian Association, a common organisation of the three Baltic peoples, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, has its headquarters in Stockholm. The Baltic Humanitarian Association was originated for the defence of the rights of political refugees, it maintains intercourse with various international organisations and publishes literature on the refugee problem.

The Estonian YMCA in Sweden has become an assembling centre for 1100 boys and girls.

There are at present 700 Estonian boy scouts and 400 girl guides in Sweden. They are members of the international boy scout organisation. A delegation of Estonian scouts attended the World Jamboree in France in the summer of 1947.

In every larger centre an Estonian Society may be found. Their number in the country is now over 30. Their purpose is the organisation of the social life of the refugees, the arrangement of concerts, social gatherings, various courses, etc.

Alongside with these regional organisations the refugees have a number of professional organisations, such as the Estonian Scientific Society, the Estonian Students' Association, the Estonian Seamen's Association, the Society of Estonian Medical Men, the Association of Estonian University Women and various societies of jurists, economists, agronomists, writers, artists and women.

Several funds for particular purposes, such as the Estonian National Fund, the Estonian School Fund, etc. are also organised and administered as independent organisations.