The Perils of Displacement: The Soviet Evacuee between Refugee and Deportee

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Abstract

In the wake of the German invasion of June 1941, sixteen and a half million Soviet citizens were evacuated to the country's interior. Unlike the archetypal European refugee, the Soviet evacuee was displaced but not stateless. This article, based on previously unexamined sources from archives in Russia and Uzbekistan, examines the status of the displaced in a state in which rights were grounded in territory and the lack of fixed residence could have dire implications. More specifically, it focuses on the way in which the evacuee was conceived in relation to the 'refugee' and the 'deportee'.

In the wake of the German invasion in June 1941, as many as sixteen and a half million Soviet citizens were evacuated to the country's interior in an operation of unprecedented proportions.[1] Unlike the archetypal European refugee, the Soviet evacuee was displaced but not stateless. The journey into evacuation, although often long and almost inevitably arduous, traversed no international boundary. Soviet evacuees remained Soviet citizens in a Soviet state. Their plight was not that of the stateless, so eloquently described by Hannah Arendt and others, but that of the uprooted in a state in which rights were grounded in territory and in which lack of fixed residence could have dire implications.[2]

This article examines the status of the Soviet evacuee. In particular, it focuses on the way in which the evacuee was envisaged in relation to two other visions of the

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[1] The estimate of sixteen and a half million is taken from Mark Harrison, *Soviet Planning in Peace and War, 1938–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 72. While the most significant wave of evacuations took place in the months following the invasion, there was a second wave in summer and autumn 1942.

[2] See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new edn with added prefaces (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973), 267–302. See also Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

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displaced population, encapsulated respectively by the terms 'refugee' and 'deportee'.[3] Of the three, 'evacuee' was by far the least familiar on the eve of the Second World War. Indeed, the very term 'evacuation' appeared as something of a novelty in 1941. It was, as one memoirist put it, 'a terrible and unaccustomed word'. To this last, a young boy at the time of the German invasion, the word seemed to have 'suddenly tumbled down from somewhere'.[4] Another memoirist similarly recalled that 'until the war we didn't know the word [evacuation]. In historical novels and films only the word 'refugee' was used.'[5] 'Refugee' was a familiar term in the Soviet Union of the interwar years. The 'refugee' populated not only 'historical novels and films', but living memory. The First World War in the Russian Empire had been accompanied by large-scale population displacement, and what contemporaries referred to as the 'refugee' had become a common figure.[6] With the outbreak of the Second World War, however, the term was largely eclipsed. The change in terminology is neatly summed up in the memoirs of A.V. Sorokina, who, reflecting on her experiences in both wars, noted, 'then they called us "refugees", and now we are – "evacuees"'.[7]

From the perspective of the state authorities who oversaw and organised the operation, the change in terminology was not simply a matter of semantics. It was meant to signify a radical reorientation with regard to wartime population displacement. Explicitly rejecting the notion of 'voluntary refugeedom', authorities elaborated an alternative vision whereby civilians would be designated by the state for displacement and transferred in an organised fashion to the rear, where they would become productive participants in the war effort. A destitute population of self-selected refugees would be avoided by creating a mobilised population of state-selected evacuees. The realignment from refugee to evacuee thus recast the role of the state. In the process, the evacuation came to resemble another form of population displacement with which Soviet authorities were increasingly well acquainted, namely deportation. In the decade preceding the German invasion, the Soviet state had organised the deportation of millions of people, including 'dekulakised' peasants and their families, 'enemy nations' and, most recently, 'class enemies' and refugees from the newly annexed territories.[8] Whereas the notion of the evacuee was formulated as a rejection of the refugee, it was decisively informed by the model of the deportee.

[3] Unlike the terms evacuee and deportee, the term refugee (*bezhenets*) was not a formal, administrative category during the war. While the status of deportee was a highly differentiated one, encompassing a range of groups each of which was subject to somewhat different regulations, for the purposes of this article I have used the term 'deportee' to refer mainly to the so-called special settlers (*spetsposelentsy*), who constituted a clear majority among deportees during the war. On this category see V. N. Zemskov, 'Spetsposelentsy (po dokumentam NKVD-MVD SSSR)', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 11 (1990), 3–17.

[4] Mikhail German, *Slozhnoe proshedshee* (Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo SPb, 2000), 83. All translations of quotations from untranslated sources are by the author.

[5] V. Peterson, 'Iz blokady – na bol'shuiu zemliu', *Neva* 9 (2002), 151–2.

[6] See Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

[7] A.V. Sorokina, unpublished manuscript in Narodnyi Arkhiv (NA), f. 18, op. 1, d. 21, l. 13.

[8] For a general overview of deportations in the pre-war period see Pavel Polian, *Ne po svoei vole: istoriia i geografiia prinuditel'nykh migratsii v SSSR* (Moscow: O.G.I.-Memorial, 2001). On dekulakisation, see Lynne Viola, 'The Other Archipelago: Kulak Deportations to the North in 1930', *Slavic Review*, 60, 4

In practice, the evacuee existed somewhere between the two, neither refugee nor deportee, but bearing elements of each.

The ambiguity in the status of the evacuee, and its resemblance to both the refugee and the deportee, is reflected in the way in which Soviet citizens perceived the operation. Official pronouncements notwithstanding, many saw themselves as refugees. 'We have found ourselves in the position of refugees', noted one Soviet evacuee in the first diary entry of her journey east.[9] For this woman, and many others like her, 'refugee' was a freighted term, associated with the horrors of the First World War, with destitution, hunger and homelessness. Saul Borovoi later recalled how a fellow Jew from Odessa advised him, 'Don't go anywhere – under the Germans it will be very, very bad for us, we will live in degradation, suffering, and so forth. But we will have a chance of surviving. To become a refugee – this means certain death.'[10] The association of the evacuation with the perceived perils of refugeedom was informed not only by memories of the First World War, but also by a profound suspicion of the Soviet state and its promise to provide for the displaced population. The authorities' reassurances notwithstanding, few people believed that they would in fact be properly cared for in the rear. As one Leningrad resident noted in her diary in August 1941, 'in general people leave unwillingly. Everyone is afraid of the possibility of getting laid off somewhere far away in an unknown city – finding themselves without living space or a salary while food prices are rising sharply'.[11] According to party reports, some refused outright to leave, proclaiming that 'we're not going to go to a hungry death'.[12]

While some worried that they would be reduced to the condition of refugees, others saw evacuation as a form of expulsion. In one district of Leningrad, for example, a group of elderly people announced, 'We're not going anywhere, we have nowhere to go. Our children are in the army, we have worked our whole lives, can it really be that all we have earned is to be expelled from Leningrad?'[13] The perception that evacuation was tantamount to expulsion was particularly incendiary when children were concerned. Party reports contain numerous examples of confrontations between state authorities and parents, most notably mothers, over the evacuation of their children. According to one party report in Leningrad, 'in the shops of the factory "Svetlana", female workers appealed to the leadership in tears requesting permission to go home, or else "they will take away our kids without us, and you won't know where they took them"'.[14] Rumours spread that the children 'will be fastened [*prikrepliat'*] to families on collective farms'.[15] Reflecting on the evacuation in his diary, Nikolai Punin compared the war to the terror: 'Why didn't they evacuate anybody during the "Ezhov days"?

(winter 2001): 730–55. On the deportation of enemy peoples see Terry Martin, 'The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing', *Journal of Modern History*, 70 (December 1998): 813–61.

[9] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskusstv (RGALI), f. 2057, op. 2, d. 29, l. 86.

[10] S. Ia. Borovoi, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Evreiskii universitet v Moskve, 1993), 240.

[11] Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka, f. 368, op. 1, d. 1, l., 45.

[12] Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga (TsGAIPD SPb), f. 25, op. 5, d. 181, l. 30.

[13] Ibid., d. 188, l. 51.

[14] Ibid., d. 180, l. 51.

[15] Ibid., l. 52.

After all, it was equally terrible'.[16] Punin's comment points to the ambiguities of the evacuation as perceived by members of the intelligentsia. The same state that stigmatised and arrested them in 1937–8 now proclaimed its desire to protect them. For the population at large, moreover, for whom expulsions had become a routine dimension of urban life, evacuation was easily assimilated to deportation. Not only did people worry about the forced nature of the operation, but there were persistent fears that it was seen not as a temporary measure, but as a permanent transfer. In a state in which residence rights were strictly controlled, return to the country's major cities could easily be denied by the state. Evacuation thus presented special risks.

None of these fears were completely without foundation. In evacuation, the displaced became objects of suspicion. While technically distinct from the mass of deportees, they were nonetheless subject to some of the same constraints, such as restrictions on their movement. Moreover, while they were, at least in theory, entitled to the benefits of the Soviet welfare state, their access to these benefits was often compromised by the simple fact of their displacement. In practice, therefore, many of them indeed found themselves 'in the position of refugees'. In what follows, I shall analyse official perceptions of evacuees and the regulation of their movement in order to demonstrate the implications of being uprooted in a state in which roots were a crucial determinant of both juridical status and survival. I use the term uprooted deliberately. While on some level such terminology may indeed, as some scholars have claimed, reflect our own society's sedentarist manner of thinking, it also reflects the highly territorialised and sedentarist practices of the Soviet state.[17] For Soviet citizens displaced from their homes, moreover, the metaphor was apt. At stake was not simply a metaphysical attachment to a place that was considered one's own (*rodnoi*), but one's status within Soviet society.

Official perceptions of evacuees

Evacuees occupied an uncertain position in Soviet wartime society. On the one hand, they were considered the privileged elite. The lists of those subject to evacuation included the most venerated members of Soviet society – scientists and specialised workers, artists, writers and party members. Moreover, those subject to evacuation, with the notable exception of children, were transferred to the rear because of their presumed utility. As the film director Sergei Eisenshtein wrote of his evacuation to Alma Alta, 'we are soldiers of art, going to assume our assigned positions'.[18]

[16] N. Punin, *Mir svetel liuboviu: dnevniki, pis'ma*, ed. L. A. Zykov (Moscow: 'Artist. Rezhissior. Teatr', 2000), 344.

[17] For an interesting critique of the use of arboreal metaphors in scholarship on population displacement, see Liisa Malkki, 'National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7, 1 (1992), 24–44. Ultimately, my own position more closely resembles that of Gaim Kibreab, who has underscored the importance of rights (in his case citizenship rights) in shaping people's attitudes towards and experience of displacement. See Gaim Kibreab, 'Revisiting the Debate on People, Place, Identity and Displacement', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 12, 4 (1999): 384–410.

[18] Sergei Eisenshtein in K. I. Bukov, M. M. Gorinov, and A. N. Ponomarev, *Moskva voennaia, 1941–1945. Memuary i arkhivnye dokumenty* (Moscow: Izd-vo ob edineniia Mosgorarkhiv, 1995), 156.

This did not, however, prevent the mass of evacuees from being regarded with suspicion. For, in reality, the evacuation bore little resemblance to the organised and orderly procedure that officials had intended. Far from all of those who boarded the trains heading east had in fact been singled out by the state as warranting evacuation. Not only were the territories subject to evacuation much vaster than anything that pre-war planning had envisaged, but the process itself was significantly more disorderly. On the ground, officials distinguished between genuine evacuees and what some referred to as 'spontaneous self-evacuees', or, in some cases, 'refugees', thus denoting the fact that they had not been designated for displacement, but had upped and left on their own initiative. These people were not, it stood to reason, 'going to assume [their] assigned position'. Their chaotic retreat into the Soviet interior raised the spectre of mass disorder and enemy infiltration.

Only several years after the state had introduced a new passport regime designed to fix the population in space, the evacuation opened the floodgates. Masses of people were on the move, travelling without documents and in conditions in which it proved difficult to corroborate their identity. Opportunities were accordingly ripe for deception. Indeed, in the eyes of the authorities, the evacuation had provided new cover for enemy agents, spies and saboteurs.[19] As the head of the political division of the Southern Railway line reported in late July 1941,

> Nobody checks the population of the evacuation trains, which creates the possibility for spies and saboteurs to reach the rear. In the course of only a superficial verification of a few of the echelons with evacuees by the organs of the NKVD on the Southern Railway line many suspicious people were detained and hundreds of different sorts of weapons were confiscated.[20]

The official in question called for 'the organisation of serious control over the evacuated population on the part of the organs of the NKVD'.[21] His proposal elicited an immediate response. The head of the division for the evacuation of the population wrote to the chairman of the Evacuation Council stating that 'the NKVD should be instructed to strengthen its control over the echelons of evacuees, not permitting a single echelon to enter the rear of the country without a careful check of both those travelling and the things they are carrying with them'.[22]

Officials also worried that the evacuation provided cover for deserters. The same official quoted above noted that 'among evacuees there are many men of serving age. Some of them are attempting to penetrate far into the hinterland and to avoid appearing at the local military commissariats – essentially, they are deserting from service in the Red Army.'[23] The presence of 'men of serving age' among the evacuated population was noted routinely by officials on the ground.[24] It served to reinforce, moreover, the tendency to view evacuees as cowards, not only dodging service on

[19] See, for example, a fairly typical report by an official in the Mariiskii ASSR in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 6822, op. 1, d. 422, l. 10.
[20] Ibid., l. 53.
[21] Ibid., l. 55.
[22] Ibid., l. 66. The request was subsequently forwarded to the NKVD. See ibid., l. 67.
[23] Ibid., l. 53.
[24] Ibid., l. 9.

the front lines, but neglecting their patriotic duty to remain steadfast in the face of the enemy.[25]

Evacuees were further seen as a source of contamination, both epidemiological and ideological. One of the dominant concerns with the notion of 'voluntary refugeedom' from the late 1920s had been its role in the spread of infectious diseases. Now, with millions en route and facilities sorely strained, the spectre of infectious disease reared its head once again. Numerous steps were taken to monitor the evacuee population, to filter out those who were already infected, and to quarantine them, but the effective application of such measures was hampered by the sheer number of people.

As much a concern as the spread of infectious disease was the spread of 'infectious ideas'. Many of those travelling east came from parts of the country that had only recently been annexed. Hailing from regions that were not yet fully Sovietised, in which nationalists and other armed groups were still active and in which 'anti-Soviet' sentiments were thought to be rife, people from these territories were regarded with heightened suspicion. Indeed, the populations from these regions were routinely singled out in NKVD directives. Thus a directive issued by the Cheliabinsk UNKVD instructed agents to 'carry out a careful check of all people who have arrived and are arriving from territories where there is fighting and the regions bordering the front, paying particular attention to refugees from the western oblasts of the USSR, BSSR, and the Baltic republics'.[26] Not infrequently, they were further stigmatised for their national background, which served as another marker of their suspicious status. Thus one official accused evacuees from Latvia of 'unhealthy attitudes'.[27]

Evacuees from the recently annexed territories were suspect by virtue not only of their place of origin, but also of their social background, for these regions had not yet been fully cleansed of 'bourgeois' and 'anti-Soviet' elements. According to one official, there were among the evacuees from these regions 'small shopkeepers' and 'affluent artisans' who travelled with 'large sums of money' and whom the official in question referred to as 'refugees' only in quotation marks.[28] These people, it stood to reason, were not legitimate evacuees, and were seen as vectors of corruption. In a similar vein, another official referred to the displaced population as evacuees only ironically: 'There are cases when these "evacuees" are travelling with poods of sugar, rice, and other products. Some of them are travelling with large amounts of money.'[29] These people had not been evacuated, but had, in the terminology of officialdom, simply 'fled'.[30]

[25] See, for example, GARF, f. 6822, op. 1, d. 52, l. 42.

[26] V. P. Iampol'skii et al., eds., *Organy Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine*, vol. 2, bk. 2 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Rus', 2000), 31.

[27] GARF, f. 6822, op. 1, d. 422, l. 11. Suspicion seems to have been particularly strong with regard to the Baltic populations. For other examples see *Izvestiia TsK*, 7 (1990), 204 and Iampol'skii et al., *Organy,* vol. 2, bk. 1, 526.

[28] GARF, f. 259, op. 40, d. 3024, l. 137.

[29] GARF, f. 6822, op. 1, d. 422, l. 54. A pood is equivalent to 16.38 kilograms.

[30] Ibid.

Regulating the evacuee

Given the prevalent perception of evacuees and the fears surrounding uncontrolled movement, it is hardly surprising that concerted efforts were made to control the process of evacuee resettlement. Although evacuees were travelling within the boundaries of their own state, resettlement policies imposed sharp constraints upon their freedom. Such constraints were informed both by the concerns about evacuees discussed above and by a tendency to assimilate the evacuee to the status of other 'rootless' groups, most notably 'socially marginal elements' and deportees. They were crucially mediated, moreover, by the spatial and social hierarchies that structured Soviet society more broadly.

Central directives issued in the first several months of the war effectively established a system of differential access for evacuees to the country's major cities. A State Defence Committee decree prohibited the registration of 'refugees and evacuees from the front line regions who arrive in an unorganised manner' in areas under martial law or in thirty-five designated cities.[31] Thus only those who had been earmarked for evacuation by the state and subsequently dispatched to a specific place were to be permitted to resettle in the country's most desirable cities. Evacuees were differentiated not only on the basis of how they arrived (organised or disorganised), but also on the basis of where they came from. As in the evacuation itself, Muscovites and Leningraders were privileged; residents of these two cities, even if they travelled individually, were granted permission by the NKVD to settle in any city in which they had relatives or friends (provided the latter could furnish them with living space), with the exception of the front line regions and so-called regime cities of the first category, cities of particular importance from which unwanted categories of citizens were routinely evicted.[32] In addition, in one of the first decrees issued by the Evacuation Council – the body responsible for overseeing the operation – explicit permission was granted to the families of party and Soviet leaders as well as the families of officers of the Red Army, the navy and NKVD troops to 'choose according to their wish their place of residence, with the exception of Moscow and the front line regions'.[33] Reports on the number of registered evacuees in Tashkent provide a revealing glimpse of official thinking. The newcomers were divided into five categories: 'the families of rank and file and command personnel of the Red Army, the navy and the battalions of the NKVD', 'the families of employees of the NKVD', 'executive members of the party and soviet apparatuses as well as specialists', 'citizens who have direct relatives in Tashkent, including (a) from Moscow; (b) from Leningrad; (c) from other places' and 'workers, who have arrived in organised fashion'.[34]

[31] Rossisskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 644, op. 1, d. 80, l. 95.
[32] GARF, f. A-259, op. 40, d. 3041, l. 8.
[33] Ibid., d. 3022, l. 40. The Evacuation Council was established on June 24, 1941. The Council had twelve members, the most active of whom included N. Shvernik, L. Kaganovich, A. Kosygin and A. Mikoian.
[34] Interestingly, the 'workers' category was added several days after the initial categories were drawn up. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv goroda Tashkenta (GAGT), f. 10, op. 17, d. 14, ll. 58, 59.

Access to Tashkent and other major cities was made even more restrictive in subsequent months. In November 1941, the Council of People's Commissars of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued a decree restricting settlement in Tashkent to 'the families of the workers, employees, engineers and technical workers of evacuated enterprises, as well as individual scientists, cultural figures, and others with the personal authorisation of the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan and the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars'.[35] The categories used to count the number of registered evacuees changed accordingly. A report in January 1942 listed the registered evacuee population by the number of 'workers and employees who arrived in organised fashion with factories, enterprises and organisations', 'those enlisted to work in factories, enterprises and organisations', and those who were admitted to the city 'by the decision of the Evacuation Division of the Uzbek Council of People's Commissars'.[36] In neighbouring Alma Ata, Republican authorities chastised local officials for their failure to restrict settlement effectively to the 'organised' population and established a special committee to oversee the granting of individual registration permits, all in the name of curtailing illicit settlement.[37]

The increasingly restrictive regulations were accompanied by a series of measures intended to enforce the new registration regime. Traditional police measures designed to weed out 'socially harmful' and other undesirable elements were adopted and adapted. The November 1941 decree on the resettlement of evacuees cited above stipulated that 'evacuated citizens who have in one way or another registered in Tashkent, but who do not have the right to do so', be evicted from the city and resettled in the provinces and on collective farms.[38] Verifications and evictions, targeting illegal evacuees as well as the usual suspects, such as 'socially undesirable elements', henceforth became routine.[39] Raids were carried out 'at markets, in the theatres, parks and other places with an accumulation of people'.[40] In addition, *troiki* (committees of three) were established to verify the urban population by residence, building by building. Police were instructed to identify 'persons without a defined occupation, the criminal element and violators of the passport regime'. Within a month, 'all those identified for expulsion on the basis of the verification' were to be 'removed' and provided with work outside the city of Tashkent.[41] Similar measures were called for in Alma Ata.[42]

Measures designed to cleanse the city of economic and social 'impurities' (speculators, the unemployed, suspect elements) were complemented and reinforced by prophylactic policies of a different sort. As suggested above, the mass and uncontrolled influx of people was seen as a harbinger not only of disorder and social

[35] GARF, f. A-259, op. 40, d. 3067, l. 136.
[36] GAGT, f. 10, op. 17, d. 10, l. 4.
[37] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 22, d. 767, ll. 108–9.
[38] GARF, f. A-259, op. 40, d. 3067, l. 136. Those who did not comply were to be evicted forcibly.
[39] A verification of some 1,655 buildings, conducted in late September 1941, turned up ninety-eight people living without registration, of whom seventy-one were evacuees. GAGT, f. 10, op. 17, d. 14, l. 65.
[40] GAGT, f. 10, op. 17, d. 51, l. 211.
[41] Ibid. Note that homeless and neglected children were also targeted. They were to be rounded up and put in children's homes.
[42] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 22, d. 767, ll. 108–9.

pollution, but of actual infection. Thus 'a compulsory procedure for the verification of documents of citizens arriving at the station with the goal of not admitting people who do not have the right to reside in Tashkent within the limits of the city' was championed in the name of 'controlling the spread of infectious diseases' in one decree and of 'combating crime and infringements of the law' in another.[43] The latter decree further extended the scope of the proposed operation from the Tashkent station to the railway line more generally. Authorities at stations en route were instructed to redirect evacuees to other destinations and 'make the corresponding changes in their evacuation documents'. In addition, the decree stipulated that destinations should be inscribed in individual passports.[44]

Taken as a whole, the range of policies proposed and adopted raises troubling questions about the status of evacuees. These measures were not simply inspired by a concern with disease and fears of saboteurs, shopkeepers and spies. Evacuees occupied a precarious position in Soviet wartime society simply by virtue of the fact that they had been displaced. As people lacking a fixed residence, they could easily be assimilated to a range of suspect categories, namely that of the homeless, the unemployed and even the administratively exiled. To be sure, top Uzbek officials were sharply critical of the tendency among party and state authorities to view all evacuees as 'speculators, dark people and spies'.[45] In a decree on caring for evacuees, the Uzbek Council of People's Commissars insisted that the evacuee population was 'overwhelmingly composed of honest Soviet citizens who have temporarily fallen on hard times':[46]

> The vast majority of evacuees consists of workers, employees, engineers, and technical workers, among whom there are many of our country's distinguished figures, who were compelled to be temporarily evacuated and who strive while in evacuation to give of their labour, knowledge and ability to reinforce the rear and the front.[47]

Local authorities, however, could hardly be faulted for their mistake. For there was little precedent either in their pre-war experience or in current government policy, which barred the majority of evacuees from the country's major cities, for treating the displaced and the dispossessed as 'honest Soviet citizens'.

Since the early 1930s and the introduction of the passport regime, residence and work had become the twin requirements for full inclusion in the Soviet polity. Without these, individuals found themselves not only destitute and unemployed, but also deprived of the right to reside in an ever-expanding list of cities and regions. People who lacked a 'fixed residence' and who were not engaged in 'socially useful

[43] The citation is from a decree by the Government Commission for Controlling the Spread of Infectious Diseases, GAGT, f. 10, op. 17, d. 51, ll. 9–10. The other decree, issued by the Uzbek Sovnarkom, can be found in GAGT, f. 10, op. 17, d. 51, l. 212. Other, similar, decrees, drawn up by the NKVD and designed to 'prohibit the entrance into Tashkent of people who do not have the right or the permission to reside in Tashkent', instructed railway authorities to establish a round-the-clock checkpoint at the exits from the station. Only those with a *propiska* (registration stamp) in their passports for Tashkent were to be permitted to leave the station. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv respubliki Uzbekistana (TsGARUz), f. 314, op. 1, d. 37, l. 11.

[44] GAGT, f. 10, op. 17, d. 51, l. 212.

[45] GARF, f. A-259, op. 40, d. 3067, l. 149.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

labour' were routinely targeted in 'cleansing' operations designed to clear major cities of 'socially undesirable elements'.[48] In fact, evacuees were technically distinct from the habitually homeless and unemployed, and those who were evacuated in organised fashion had papers to prove it. Nonetheless, in the absence of clear and coherent signals from the centre regarding the status of evacuees, it was all too easy for authorities at all levels to treat them as marginals.

This tendency was perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Azerbaijan, where the Republican NKVD, with the approval of the Council of People's Commissars, listed evacuees among the categories of people to be expelled from the capital city in a routine police cleansing operation. More specifically, the decree targeted two groups for resettlement: 'people without a defined occupation and not engaged in socially useful labour' and 'all citizens who have arrived since the beginning of the war from territory temporarily occupied by the enemy, front line regions and regions adjacent to the front lines'.[49] Both groups, moreover, were to have notes inserted into their passports restricting them to the region of resettlement. While the decree was quickly denounced by the Evacuation Council as an 'incorrect' and 'indiscriminate approach to the problem of wartime displacement',[50] it in fact reflected tendencies manifest at the highest levels of authority in Moscow.

First, it reflected a tendency to view evacuees as socially unproductive and undeserving members of the polity. An official in the Commissariat of Justice, noting the 'accumulation' of evacuees in 'several places (Tashkent, Alma Ata, Stalinabad, and others)', complained in a report to Andrei Vyshinskii, the chief prosecutor, that 'a great number of these citizens are not engaged in any form of socially useful labour'. He presented evacuees as akin to deserters from both the labour and the military fronts. 'Many', he wrote, 'move from one place to another, avoiding military service'. 'Meanwhile', he continued, 'in enterprises and on collective farms there is a

[48] The 'categories of individuals' who were 'refused passports in "regime" cities' are described by Paul Hagenloh as 'residents', 'not connected with industry or education or not carrying out socially useful labor', kulaks fleeing from the countryside, individuals who had arrived in cities after January 1, 1931 without an invitation to work or who, although they were presently employed, were 'obvious labor shirkers [*letuny*] or have been fired in the past for disorganization of production, and *lishentsy* [disenfranchised persons]'. Paul M. Hagenloh, '"Socially Harmful Elements" and the Terror', in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 295. On the passport system more generally see Gijs Kessler, 'The Passport System and State Control over Population Flows in the Soviet Union, 1932–1940', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 42, 2–3–4 (2001), 477–503; Nathalie Moine, 'Passportisation, statistique des migrations et contrôle de l'identité sociale', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 38, 4 (1997), 587–600; David R. Shearer, 'Elements Near and Alien: Passportization, Policing, and Identity in the Stalinist State, 1932–1952', *Journal of Modern History*, 76, 4 (2004): 835–81; and V. P. Popov, 'Pasportnaia sistema v SSSR', *Sotsiologicheskoe issledovanie*, 9 (1995): 3–13.

[49] Exempted from the resettlement were state pensioners and invalids. GARF, f. A-259, op. 40, d. 3067, l. 156.

[50] The Evacuation Council's critique of the Azerbaijani plan contained the following spirited defence of evacuees: 'In addition to the planned distribution of evacuees in your Republic in accordance with the decisions of the Evacuation Council, the family members of the party and Soviet *aktiv*, the families of workers and employees who have been taken in by their relatives or acquaintances, etc., may (and evidently have) come to your Republic from the frontline regions, and there are no grounds to expel or resettle them.' Ibid., l. 158.

large shortage of labour power'. He proposed that the Commissariat of Justice 'grant the Council of People's Commissars the right to compel evacuated citizens to work in enterprises, organisations, and on collective farms'.[51] Shortly thereafter Vyshinskii gave his backing to the draft decree.[52]

While obligatory labour assignments were clearly not commensurate with the expulsion proposed by Azerbaijani authorities, both decisions were based upon a conception of evacuees as non-contributing members of society, and both saw them as essentially movable resources. The Evacuation Council, although it in some ways shared the latter view, was nonetheless critical of the decree's exceedingly narrow conception of 'socially useful labour'. Pamfilov, the head of the division responsible for the care of the evacuated population, noted that 'for some reason, in the draft, people engaged in socially useful labour consist only of those who work in organisations and enterprises'. This definition, he pointed out, excluded housekeepers as well as 'a category of citizens who certainly fulfil socially useful functions, but who do not work for a set wage, such as, for instance, artists, writers, handicraftsmen, etc'. These people, he countered, 'should be left to continue their main activity'. More importantly, perhaps, Pamfilov objected to the ease with which evacuees were being recategorised as unemployed. Surely those displaced from their homes should not de facto be classified among the jobless? 'Clearly', he concluded his critique, 'after arrival in an unknown place we must provide a time frame within which the arrivee is given the opportunity to find himself a job. Only after the expiration of this period . . . should the arrivee be regarded as non-working.'[53]

Pamfilov's reservations notwithstanding, the perception that evacuees were not 'useful' members of society seems to have been widespread. 'People from the front line regions', reported one regional official in a fairly typical complaint, 'refuse to work.'[54] While authorities in another region claimed that most evacuees 'go to work with pleasure', they nonetheless noted that there were some who 'lodge big complaints, abandon their work, and go from one organisation to another'.[55] In the Kalinin district officials drew attention to the case of one evacuee who left her job after one day, stating, 'why should I work for 250 roubles and receive 500 grams of bread when I can not work and receive 300 grams?'[56] Such people, reasoned Pamfilov, should be given a week's worth of bread and told that they will be given no more thereafter.[57] The tendency among some evacuees to refuse work (many on the grounds that they would soon be returning to their homes) was seen as deeply problematic by officials on the ground and in Moscow. Evacuees were accused by

[51] GARF, f. A-259, op. 40, d. 3017, l. 4. The memo also stated that 'the Commissariat of Justice considers it necessary to establish that the distribution of tickets for railway transportation and transportation by ship take place only with the permission of the organs of the police'.
[52] Ibid., l. 5.
[53] Ibid., l. 7.
[54] GARF, f. 6822, op. 1, d. 422, l. 14.
[55] Ibid., l. 43.
[56] GARF, f. A-327, op. 2, d. 366, l. 50.
[57] Ibid., l. 52.

evacuation authorities of displaying a 'suitcase mood',[58] of never really settling into their new abodes and becoming productive members of society.

The second tendency evident in both the Azerbaijani decree and in directives issued from Moscow was that of regarding evacuees as deportees. This was particularly pronounced in a draft of the first decree on the registration of evacuees, prepared by none other than the Evacuation Council. Point 3 of the decree, as it was initially drawn up, stipulated that in the process of registration police insert the following 'note' into evacuee passports: '[X] has the right to live only within the confines of ____ (city, settlement [*poselok*], village)'. It further called for the removal of the previous registration permitting residence in the evacuee's city of origin.[59] In this case the criticism came from Vyshinskii. His response was unequivocal: 'It is necessary to change the draft decree, excluding point 3 and correspondingly changing the form, for if we leave point 3 in this form then all evacuees will find themselves in the position of deportees [*ssylnykh*], which, it stands to reason, would be entirely unacceptable.'[60]

While the clause was removed, ambiguities surrounding the status of evacuees and their relationship to deportees nevertheless remained. Carried out within overlapping spaces and modelled on a similar operational procedure, evacuation and deportation had become imbricated in the official mind. Indeed, the very first wartime deportation of ethnic Germans was carried out by the NKVD on the orders of the Evacuation Council, which issued a decree ordering the 'evacuation' of some 60,000 Soviet citizens of German nationality from the Crimea in mid-August 1941.[61] This evacuation is one of only two known occasions on which the Evacuation Council targeted a specific ethnic group. The origins of this evacuation order, however, remain obscure. Issued less than two weeks after Stalin instructed Beriia, in an order scrawled on a report about the behaviour of the German population in the front line regions, to 'kick them all out', the evacuation of Crimean Germans would appear to have been a response to fears about 'untrustworthy elements' in regions threatened by the enemy.[62] In mid-August, when the order was issued, the Crimea was considered part of the 'front line regions' and was subjected to a more general evacuation only a few days after the evacuation of Germans had begun. It was a measure of the operation's ambiguity that the evacuated Germans were initially resettled in neighbouring regions and were included in statistics on the evacuated population. It was only in early September, when a more general deportation of the

[58] Ibid., l. 52; d. 68, l. 11.

[59] GARF, f. A-259, op. 40, d. 3041, l. 15.

[60] Ibid., l. 16.

[61] The decree is mentioned in a report by the director of the NKVD's division of *spetspereselentsy* (special settlers) published in Nikolai Fedorovich Bugai, *'Mobilizovat nemtsev v rabochie kolonny– I. Stalin:' sbornik dokumentov (1940-e gody)* (Moscow: 'Gotika', 1998), 30. The Germans sent from the Crimea to the Ordzhonikidze krai were repeatedly included in the count of evacuees. The order on the evacuation of Germans preceded more general evacuation orders in the Crimea by four days. See GARF, f. 6822, op. 1, d. 43, l. 8.

[62] The report itself requests that local authorities be ordered to expel '*neblagonadezhnye elementy*'. Bukov, Gorinov and Ponomarev, *Moskva voennaia*, 77.

entire German population west of the Urals was initiated, that they were subsequently deported to 'remote regions of the Union'.[63]

A similar ambiguity surrounded the deportation of Finns and Germans from the Leningrad oblast in late August 1941. While the operation was put under the charge of the NKVD, it was nonetheless carried out under the rubric of 'evacuation'. The evacuees were all issued 'evacuation certificates' and their final destination was determined by the Evacuation Council.[64] While subsequent transfers of ethnic Germans did not involve the Evacuation Council, ethnic German deportees were routinely included in counts of the 'evacuated' population.[65] Ultimately the German 'evacuees' were classified as 'special settlers', and were forbidden to leave the regions to which they were transferred. Interestingly, despite Vyshinskii's judgement that such a practice would be 'unacceptable' if applied to evacuees, the tendency to treat evacuees in a similar manner persisted. Indeed, authorities in a variety of regions appear to have done the 'unacceptable' and confined evacuees to the regions of their resettlement.[66] This was the aim of one Uzbek official, who, noting the 'many cases of the departure of evacuees from their place of resettlement', called on all oblast authorities to 'quickly put an end to such a practice'.[67]

Aid for evacuees

The initiatives of authorities in Azerbaijan and elsewhere notwithstanding, evacuees enjoyed substantially greater freedom than deportees. In practice, it proved difficult to control the movement of evacuees from one region to another. Moreover, even

[63] Bugai, 'Mobilizovat nemtsev v rabochie kolonny– I. Stalin', 18, 30–1.

[64] N. A. Lomagin, ed., *Neizvstnaia blokada (Dokumenty, prilozheniia)*, vol. 2 (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'skii Dom 'Neva', 2002), 23–5. A similar conflation of evacuation and deportation occurred a few months later in an operation carried out in Moscow. On this occasion, the Evacuation Council ordered the 'evacuation' of 'people with no fixed occupation or place of residence, the criminal element, people who have been arrested and tried, non-registered residents, and the population that has accumulated at the city's evacuation centres'. GARF, f. 6822, op. 1, d. 482, l. 1. (Note that while the population at the city's evacuation centres was dispatched to the Gor'kii region, the other groups were sent to the Mordovskaia ASSR.) In this instance, a standard NKVD operation undertaken, in the words of the NKVD agent involved, 'in order to cleanse the city' (*v poriadke ochishchenii goroda*), was carried out under the auspices of the Evacuation Council. Ibid., ll. 1–2.

[65] See, for example, the 'inquiry into the number of evacuees from the frontline regions', in GARF, f. 6822, op. 1, d. 481, l. 151. In this case, the number of evacuees in Kazakhstan was presented with a note that there were an additional 232,000 Germans settled in the republic. The Germans were included in the tally of the number of evacuees in the Soviet Union as a whole. In the case of the Crimean Germans, cited above, the Germans were simply included in the count of the number of evacuees from the Crimea. Interestingly, complaints were lodged with the Evacuation Council regarding the uncontrolled movement of both evacuees and deportees. The special settler division of the NKVD complained to the Evacuation Council that 'taking advantage of the lack of a reliable count, German migrants [*pereselentsy*] wilfully move from collective farm to collective farm, from district to district, and even to other oblasts'. GARF, f. A-259, op. 20, d. 3032, l. 52. Similar complaints were repeatedly made about evacuees, despite the ostensibly clear refusal to impose the same restrictions on their movements. An example from Uzbekistan can be found in TsGARUz, f. 837, op. 32, d. 3519, l. 2.

[66] For example, authorities in the Rostov oblast attempted to confine evacuees to their regions of resettlement. GARF f. 6822, op. 1, d. 422, l. 23.

[67] TsGARUz, f. 837, op. 32, d. 3519, l. 2.

though evacuees often had only limited choice regarding where they ended up, they were not special settlers, subject to a special regime. This is not to say, however, that evacuees were well provided for. Uprooted from their homes and often alone, evacuees were in a particularly precarious position. Despite several high-profile articles in *Pravda* instructing authorities to 'care for evacuees', evacuees as such received little in the way of help. Money earmarked for the evacuated population was not only limited in quantity, but was directed to the 'especially needy' and was calculated as a one-time disbursement to assist in the search for a job.[68]

In 1942 the central government in Moscow issued only one decree in the entire year on the provisioning of evacuees. That decree, moreover, applied only to evacuees from Leningrad, survivors of the first blockade winter.[69] As a procuracy report on the Commissariat of Trade put it, 'evacuees are supplied from general sources'.[70] Petitions to the local Evacuation Centre thus yielded few results. In effect, 'I am an evacuee', the repeated refrain in such petitions, was simply insufficient to secure access to scarce state goods. In the absence of state funding and in the face of soaring prices, the survival of evacuees was contingent on their ability to insert themselves into the state-run system of supply. As displaced persons, this was a particularly difficult task. One needed connections, acquaintances and friends. For many it was only their connections, often tenuous, to the places they had come from that secured their survival. Roots thus remained important – they had to be reconstructed, maintained and nurtured.

Academics, writers and other cultural figures were among the fortunate few who retained the institutional connections, despite their displacement, to ensure their livelihood. Historian Militsa Nechkina, evacuated from Moscow to Tashkent, later recalled 'a conversation between two people in the film industry in the train' en route to Tashkent. 'One of them, a prominent cinematographer, almost in tears, said to the other: "I don't want to be a refugee." "You are not a 'refugee'," his friend reassured him, "You are an honorary evacuee [*pochetnyi evak*]."' Indeed, Nechkina, when referring to herself and her circles, used the term 'refugee' only in quotation marks.[71] The quotation marks stood as designators of the substantial difference between her own privileged station and the destitution faced by those lacking institutional connections and status. A similar distinction was made by Maria

[68] Ibid., d. 2894, l. 121. In autumn 1941 Tashkent municipal authorities, in conjunction with an Uzbek Sovnarkom decree, authorised 'the allocation of 50,000 roubles from the local budget for December for the provision of aid to very needy evacuees from the frontline regions'. GAGT, f. 10, op. 17, d. 14, l. 111. In February 1942, municipal authorities requested additional funds from the Uzbek Sovnarkom, also for one-off aid disbursements, on the grounds that 'at present the Executive Committee of the Tashkent City Soviet does not have funds for this purpose'. TsGARUz, f. 837, op. 32, d. 3416, l. 182.

[69] GARF, f. 8131, op. 19, d. 62, l. 16. The decree, issued on 24 May 1942, stipulated that evacuees from Leningrad be accorded supplemental rations for two months from the date of their arrival in evacuation.

[70] Ibid. According to the report, there had been an initial decree on the provisioning of evacuees from both Moscow and Leningrad, but the decree was annulled by the Commissariat of Trade in mid July 1941.

[71] M. V. Nechkina, 'V dni voiny', in Aleksandr Mikhailovich Samsonov, ed., *V gody voiny: stat'i i ocherki*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Nauka', 1985), 34.

Belkina, the wife of a writer, in a satirical sketch of her fellow evacuees she sent to her husband on the front. The wife of an evacuated dramatist is standing outside their building when a refugee approaches. The refugee ('in a listless, indifferent voice') asks for money. The woman responds, 'What do you think, dear, I'm a refugee just like you.' When the refugee repeats her request, the woman responds more insistently, 'Stop bothering me, I am telling you in Russian: I am a refugee just like you, can't you understand that?'[72] While both had been displaced by the war, their situations were clearly not commensurate. Those who were not taken care of by the state really did find themselves 'in the position of refugees'.

Conclusion

As the war drew to a close, the ambiguous position of evacuees became all the more apparent. While most evacuees were eager to return home, not all were granted the necessary papers. Re-evacuation plans were drawn up on the basis of 'the number of evacuees not occupied in industry'.[73] People employed by factories who were not scheduled to return, and those who had, in one way or another, lost their residence rights in the cities they were from, were excluded from the process. This had been precisely what some feared when they confronted the possibility of evacuation. Evacuees who attempted to depart without authorisation faced punitive measures including possible imprisonment. For those who were denied permission to return, evacuation became a form of exile. As one worker in a factory in Omsk put it, 'Workers devoted all their strength to the defeat of the enemy and wanted to return to their native regions and their families, to their own apartments, and now it turns out that they have deceived us, they transported us from Leningrad and they want to keep us in Siberia.'[74] 'The war has ended', another proclaimed, 'why do they want to forcefully keep us in Siberia?'[75] Thus did the evacuee draw ever closer to the deportee.

The Soviet state, of course, had reason to be proud of its substantial success in evacuating millions of its citizens to the presumed safety of the rear. Indeed, no other country in Europe launched a humanitarian initiative on such a scale. And in many respects, Soviet evacuees were fortunate. Having crossed no international boundary, they were spared some of the travails encountered by their stateless European brethren, confined to camps and deprived of legal rights. Citizenship in itself, however, conferred only limited benefits. The obstacles encountered by those wishing to return home underscored the precarious position of displaced people in a country in which residence rights were jealously guarded by the state and in which there was only limited freedom of movement.

[72] Quoted in N. A. Gromova, *Vse v chuzhoe gliadiat okno* (Moscow: Kollektsiia 'Sovershenno sekretno', 2002), 99.
[73] GARF, f. 259, op. 40, d. 5249, l. 14.
[74] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 117, d. 530, ll. 56–7.
[75] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 88, d. 649, l. 232.