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## *Reflections*

# Operation Keelhaul

## *Forced Repatriation after World War II*

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JEFFREY ROGERS HUMMEL

**A**t 5:00 a.m. on Sunday, the sleeping prisoners of war were surprised by the glare from searchlights mounted on tanks surrounding their compound. Soldiers barged into the barracks, and the prisoners were dragged outside, lined up, searched, and eventually loaded onto waiting trucks. Well-armed guards beat prisoners who resisted. The trucks drove to the nearby railhead, where the prisoners were unloaded into cattle cars. The empty trucks returned and picked up load after load. When all 1,590 prisoners had been stuffed aboard the train, it carted them off for eventual transfer to slave-labor camps or to be executed. The date was February 24, 1946. The location was near Plattling, a town in Bavaria, Germany. The prisoners were Russian, but the soldiers were not German. They were Americans of the US Third Army, who were engaging in an action that had become commonplace in Europe at the close of World War II. For the Russian prisoners were refugees from Joseph Stalin's dictatorship, remnants of the Second KONR Division of Andrei Vlasov's anti-Communist army. They were being repatriated, by force, to the Soviet Union.

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I use the term “Russian” throughout this essay the way it was used at the time and in nearly all sources to encompass both Ukrainians and Belorussians. What are today exclusively designated as Russians were then referred to as “Great Russians.” During the war, around 5.2 million Soviet nationals, including all ethnicities, survived being held in German occupied territory, either as POWs, forced laborers, or simply refugees fleeing to the West from the successful advance of the Red armies. An estimated two million of these soldiers and civilians were located in the zones seized and controlled by the Western powers. Most were ultimately collected and repatriated, either voluntarily or forcibly, into the anxious arms of the Soviets as part of one of the most massive and yet still relatively little-known operations of the Allies during and after World War II. Of the many phases of this policy, only a later one got the official label “Operation Keelhaul,” after one of the most severe forms of torture used aboard sailing ships. But until most of the official records were declassified in 1967, it was the code name that became known as a fitting term for the entire policy.<sup>1</sup>

Like the prisoners at Plattling, some of those forcibly repatriated had fought in German uniforms. When the German armies had first invaded the Soviet Union, some Soviet subjects considered the event an opportunity for overthrowing Stalin. Even after being disillusioned by Adolf Hitler’s merciless and murderous occupation policies, there were still a few who felt that German oppression was the lesser of two evils. Furthermore, many German officers disagreed with Hitler’s policies, and it wasn’t long before they were silently tolerating the employment of Russian deserters and prisoners of war, first as support troops, in which capacity they became known as *Hilfsfreiwillige*, and later as combat troops, who were called *Osttruppen*.

In July 1942, the Germans captured General Andrei A. Vlasov, a Soviet war hero who had been awarded the Order of the Red Banner for his successful defense of Moscow from the initial German onslaught. By the time of his capture, however, Vlasov had become so disenchanted with Stalin’s rule that he proposed to the Germans that they help him recruit and lead a *Russkaya Osvoboditel'naya Armia* (ROA), Russian Army of Liberation. Vlasov’s proposal did succeed in gaining a few concessions: the *Osttruppen* were given official sanction, recruited until they totaled nearly one million men, and even issued ROA insignia. However, the ROA was never allowed to organize above the battalion level and, for the most part, was subordinated and submerged within larger German units. Vlasov was given no real authority; instead, he was subjected to unceasing but mostly unsuccessful attempts to use him for propaganda purposes and to get him to glorify Hitler. Finally, most of the ROA units were transferred to the Western Front, where many never wanted to fight in the first place.

By 1944, however, the Germans had become desperate, and they were prepared to give Vlasov freer rein. A *Komitet Osvobozhdenia Narodov Rossii* (Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia) was formed, and three KONR divisions

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1. General works on World War II forced repatriation are Epstein 1973, Bethell 1974, Tolstoy 1977, Elliott 1982, Dismukes 1996, and Moore 2000.

totaling fifty thousand troops were organized. They saw some action against Stalin's armies, but not before Germany was in the final stages of collapse. Vlasov, to save his men from annihilation, concentrated them toward Austria in order to surrender to the Americans. Admittedly not all of those serving in the ROA and KONR had been eager and courageous political defectors. Most were Russian soldiers who had been captured by the Germans. Given that the alternative they faced was being held in POW camps that implemented Hitler's policy of deliberate starvation of Russian prisoners, their decision to join German ranks was frequently motivated by dire expediency. And if they needed any further incentive, should they survive the POW camps, Soviet military doctrine branded any soldier captured alive as a traitor.<sup>2</sup>

The position the Allies should have taken toward Vlasov's men and the ROA generally was made clear by Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew in a note to the Soviet Attaché in Washington just before the Yalta Conference opened on February 4, 1945:

In regard to the status of the Soviet nationals under discussion, I feel I must in all sincerity remind you that they were not captured by American forces while they were detained in German prisoners of war camps but were serving Germany in German military formations in German uniform. . . .

Grew argued that to repatriate these people would be a violation of the Geneva Convention:

The clear intention of the Convention is that prisoners of war shall be treated on the basis of the uniforms they are wearing when captured and that the detaining power shall not look behind the uniforms to determine ultimate questions of citizenship or nationality. . . .

There are numerous aliens in the United States Army, including citizens of enemy countries. The United States Government has taken the position that these persons are entitled to the full protection of the Geneva Convention and has informed the German Government over a year ago that all prisoners of war entitled to repatriation under the convention should be returned to the custody of the United States regardless of nationality. . . . (Grew 1945)<sup>3</sup>

But the British had already begun forcible repatriation of Russians captured in German uniforms in October 1944, four months after D-Day, and they pressured the Americans to follow suit. Although other American leaders shared Grew's initial objections, Secretary of State Edward Stettinius Jr., as a member of the US delegation at the Yalta Conference, ultimately caved in to the British. One of the rationales was that about 25,000 British and 30,000 American POWs were confined in camps

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2. For accounts of Vlasov and the ROA, see Fischer 1952, Steenberg 1970, Strik-Strikfeldt 1973, and Andreyev 1987.

3. The Grew note, although referred to in a footnote in the official Yalta papers, was suppressed until Julius Epstein got US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to declassify it in 1955. Epstein first published the contents in *The Brooklyn Tablet* for May 28, 1955.

in eastern Germany, Poland, and the Balkans, areas falling into the hands of Red armies. If the US refused the Soviet demand for forcible repatriation, it might provoke Stalin to delay and obstruct the return of British and American soldiers in those camps, a task that Soviet officials were already not being very helpful about.

British authorities had earlier committed themselves to forced repatriation partly because of economic and logistical concerns. Although the Minister for Economic Warfare, Lord Selborne, had protested, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden replied, “[I]f these men do not go back to Russia, where can they go? We don’t want them here.” He wrote to Prime Minister Winston Churchill that “we cannot afford to be sentimental about this” (Tolstoy 1977, 8–9). Churchill and the British cabinet backed up Eden. They also wished to lock down a written agreement with Stalin, who was dragging his feet about formally promising the reciprocal return of British POWs. Even though the United Kingdom and the United States got such an agreement at Yalta, the chaos on the Eastern Front as German POW camps were liberated resulted in very little active Soviet assistance. In a few limited cases, liberated Allied personnel reported being stripped of their watches, wallets, and other personal effects by their Russian liberators. Most after release had to fend for themselves, finding their own way to Poland, to Odessa, for return by ship, or later to British and American lines, because even after Yalta, Western repatriation officials sent to the Soviet zone faced severe restrictions on their activities, in sharp contrast to the near free rein in Western zones given their Soviet counterparts.

The Second KONR Division, which surrendered to the Americans at Landau in Bavaria, was forcibly repatriated from Plattling in the manner described above *after* they had been repeatedly assured by Colonel Thomas Gillies, camp commandant, that such would not be their fate. Meanwhile, the First KONR Division had side-stepped into Czechoslovakia, turned on their German allies, and liberated Prague. They had done so in answer to the pleas that the Czech underground had addressed to the American forces under General George Patton but which the Americans were unable to answer because they were being held back on orders from General Dwight Eisenhower. With Soviet forces close behind, however, the KONR troops quickly marched off to Schlusselfurg, Austria. Here they made contact with the American forces, who disarmed them and then left them at the mercy of the advancing Red Army, refusing to let the division flee through American lines. The unit disintegrated as its members tried to escape as best they could with the Soviet commandos hunting them down. Vlasov himself was being transferred by an American convoy when a Red Army detachment intercepted the convoy and, facing no resistance, removed Vlasov and his staff. One year later, *Izvestia* announced that Vlasov and all his major subordinates had been hanged.

The victims of forced repatriation included not only soldiers wearing German uniforms, but also civilians, as chillingly illustrated by the fate of the Cossacks. The German high command took a more enthusiastic attitude toward enlisting the support of those USSR nationalities that it did not consider Slavic and, therefore, not

*Untermenschen*. Among these were Georgians, Turkmens, and other ethnic groups in the Caucasus, but the primary beneficiaries were the Cossacks. Some 250,000 Cossacks joined the German armies, including 80,000 organized into the XV Cavalry Corps. When German forces were slowly pushed out of Russia, not only did the Cossack troops withdraw, but also large numbers of civilian Cossacks went with them.<sup>4</sup>

The trek was long and arduous, but at the end of the war at least 25,000 Cossacks—families, with many women, children, and old men—had put themselves under the protection of the 11th British Armored Division near Lienz, Austria. They had been joined by many old Cossack émigrés who had left Russia during the Civil Wars from 1917 to 1920 and had since lived in Yugoslavia or Germany. Most of the troops of the XV Cossack Cavalry Corps had already been repatriated at Judenburg, but the Cossacks at Lienz did not know this when, on May 28, 1945, the British ordered all the Cossack officers, military officials, and physicians to attend a special conference with higher British officials. Over two thousand Cossacks, including the very aged Peter Krasnov, who had led the White armies allied with the British during the Civil War but had not been in Russia since, boarded a convoy. They were then taken, not as they had been told, to a conference but to the waiting Soviets at Judenburg. Even their new captors were surprised to see among their prisoners General Krasnov and so many old émigrés. Krasnov and his associates were subsequently hanged.

Back at Lienz, word of the fate of their officers and of the XV Corps had filtered back to the large number of remaining Cossack troops and civilians, who organized a passive resistance in which the soldiers and cadets would link arms and form a protective chain around the older men, women, and children. They did this at dawn on June 1, when the camps were surrounded by British troops. At a signal, the troops advanced into the crowds and began clubbing the Cossacks with rifle butts and batons. The victims were thrown onto a convoy of waiting trucks, which took them to the nearby railroad siding. Many tried to commit suicide along the banks of the Drava River. One woman, who was dragged out downstream and revived, turned out to be a doctor who had earlier killed her daughter and mother with overdoses of morphine rather than let them suffer repatriation. Her second attempt at suicide succeeded. Two Cossack men approached a British officer and addressed him in Russian. As the officer asked his interpreter for a translation, both men slit their own throats and slumped to the ground, twitching and dying. “Our blood is on you and your children” was the translation of their statement (Huxley-Blythe 1964, 156–57, 165).

All day long the trucks drove between the camps and the railroad, and load after load was locked into the train. Yet still more Cossacks remained in the camps, and the British decided to cease efforts for a day. But on June 3, the repatriations commenced again. By the end of June 4, the entire valley had been cleared of refugees; the repatriations were complete. There was a slight change of policy as the

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4. A somewhat sanitized history of the Cossacks during World War II is given in Huxley-Blythe 1964.

British finally decided to segregate those who had been Soviet citizens on September 1, 1939, from the old émigrés and repatriate only the former. To be sure, Cossack units fighting for Germany had a well-deserved reputation for brutality, especially when operating in Yugoslavia, and undoubtedly committed war crimes. But the guilty could have been tried in Allied courts without wholesale repatriation, and any such crimes certainly did not justify turning over civilians, particularly those who had been living outside the Soviet Union before the war.

The largest number of repatriates, however, consisted of either Soviet soldiers still alive after remaining in German POW camps or Soviet citizens the Germans had kidnapped and deported to coercive labor in industry and agriculture throughout Nazi-controlled territory. Although many of these returned willingly, many had to be forced. The laborers, known as *Ostarbeiter*, had become the mainstay of the Germany economy toward the end of the war. Indeed, the first *Ostarbeiter* fell into British hands during the North Africa campaigns of 1942–1943 and were transferred to Russia through Egypt, Iran, and Iraq prior to the repatriation of any soldiers. It was almost entirely Russian civilian workers who were repatriated from the displaced persons (DP) camp at Dachau in January 1946, in a particularly gruesome episode. According to a report carried in the US Army newspaper, *The Stars and Stripes*, two prisoners tried to disembowel themselves with broken glass. Another struck his head straight through a pane of glass, then shook it from side to side pressing his neck down against the jagged edges. “It just wasn’t human,” one guard said. “The G.I.’s quickly cut down those who hanged themselves from rafters. Those who were still conscious were screaming in Russian, pointing first at the guns of the guards and then at themselves, begging to be shot.”<sup>5</sup>

Citizens of eastern European countries coming under Communist rule could also be victims of forced repatriation. The anti-Communist Croatian soldiers and civilians, fleeing from Josip Tito’s partisans, were turned over to the Yugoslav dictator.<sup>6</sup> The Americans and British, despite Soviet protests, at least officially refused to repatriate civilians from the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and from eastern Poland, western Ukraine, and western Byelorussia, because they did not yet recognize Soviet wartime annexation of those areas. But this exemption did not necessarily apply to the nearly 150,000 Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians who had fought for the Germans. The bulk of the first division of the Latvian Legion, which largely consisted of conscripts who through no choice of their own comprised a unit within the *Waffen SS*, disobeyed German orders toward the end of war and surrendered to the Americans in Austria. Transferred as POWs to the British zone, they waited in limbo until the end of 1945, when they learned from the British commander that they were slated for repatriation. Within a month, helped by civilian

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5. “Red Traitors’ Dachau Suicide Described as ‘Inhuman Orgy,’” *The Stars and Stripes* (Darmstadt, Germany), January 23, 1946, as quoted in Bethell 1974, 190.

6. The fate of the Croats, especially after they had been repatriated, is described in Hecimovic 1962.

Balts in a nearby DP camp to acquire civilian clothes and papers, nearly all had disappeared into the DP camps or the town population, while the British apparently looked the other way.

But not all Balts who had fought against the Soviets were as lucky. One noteworthy case involved 149 members of the Latvian Legion who, along with seven Estonian and eleven Lithuanian soldiers, had fled by boat to neutral Sweden. The Soviets requested their forcible repatriation, and after a long delay, the Swedish government complied, despite a hunger strike that landed most Legionnaires temporarily in the hospital, as well as two successful suicides and several other attempted suicides. At one point the Allies considered forcibly repatriating only Baltic POWs who had volunteered to fight for the Germans, exempting those who had been conscripted. But this was obviously unworkable, and ultimately the United States Commission on Displaced Persons in November 1950 ruled that all Baltic nationals, whether soldiers or civilians, were entitled to asylum.<sup>7</sup>

Forced repatriations even reached the United States. Many Soviet nationals taken in German uniforms were brought as prisoners of war to camps chiefly in Idaho. At the end of the war, they were all boarded on Soviet ships at Seattle and Portland except for about 150 who had put up the most resistance and were instead moved to Fort Dix, New Jersey. There, another attempt was made to repatriate them in which the MPs used tear-gas. The three who committed suicide are buried in a national cemetery near Fort Mott State Park, New Jersey. The remainder, when being forced aboard a waiting vessel, rioted. So the prisoners were returned to Fort Dix. Finally, the American authorities made a third attempt at repatriation by, according to one report, surreptitiously mixing barbiturates into the prisoners' coffee and loading them on the ship while they were unconscious. The third attempt succeeded.

News about these incidents was by this time leaking out to the public and causing indignation. Already the troops and some commanders carrying out the repatriations, disgusted with their orders, began to resist or evade them. General Patton as early as June 1945 openly disobeyed orders and simply released five thousand Russian POWs. The British officer who wrote the after-action report for one of the last forced repatriations lamented, "No amount of arguing will erase the feeling of humiliation in having had to participate in an operation of this sort."<sup>8</sup> The US military ended up resorting to green, inexperienced recruits who were kept in the dark about their mission until the last minute. As a result of these increasing complaints, in the fall of 1945, General Eisenhower and Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery both ordered a temporary halt to using force until they got a clarification from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The resulting McNarney-Clark Directive made only one exception to individuals being repatriated "without regard to their wishes and by force

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7. For a poignant, fairly accurate historical novel on the Swedish case see Enquist 1973.

8. Julius Epstein's *Operation Keelhaul* holdings, Hoover Institute—Report by 218 Sub Area, Riccione, 15 May 47, as quoted in Dismukes 1996, p. 110.

if necessary”: nonsoldiers who were not “charged by the Soviet Union with having voluntarily rendered aid and comfort to the enemy” (Tolstoy 1977, 353; Dismukes 1996, 95). British authorities, however, balked at even this concession.

As the dust settled on defeated Germany, the Allied forces began herding together all prisoners of war and other refugees and sorting them by ethnicity into DP camps, under the operation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). This enormous logistical task involved not just Russian nationals, but also refugees from eastern Europe and concentration camp survivors. Special repatriation teams that included Soviet members went through the camps repeatedly questioning and screening in order to sort out all who might have been residents of the Soviet Union. Those subject to possible repatriation were sent to special camps that were policed by British and American troops under the guidance of Soviet officials, who could offer the detainees false promises or threaten their relations back home. At the behest of the Soviets, the western Allies had given priority to repatriating Soviet nationals. By the end of 1945, when the US formally ceased repatriating Russian civilians by force, the bulk of them had already been handed over, willingly or not.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from nearly three million Jews, the two largest remaining groups in DP camps were 1.2 million Poles, and well over 200,000 Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. The Poles mostly had been forced laborers in wartime Germany, whereas the Balts had mainly fled west from the Soviet advance. As noted above, civilians from the Baltic nations had generally not been subject to forcible repatriation. The Polish refugees were in a unique category, because the Polish government in exile in Britain was officially one of the Allied powers, providing soldiers fighting with Allied armies. Indeed, even the limited number of Poles who fought for the Germans do not appear to have been repatriated. Instead some were actually incorporated into Polish units fighting for the Allies. Later during the winter of 1945–1946, the Americans began to recruit Polish DPs to replace demobilized soldiers (and even enlisted some Baltic and Yugoslav veterans who had fought for the Germans).

Yet life in the DP camps for these two groups was hardly easy. They faced resource constraints, work requirements, and frequent transfers between camps. Moreover, Herbert Lehman, head of UNRRA, and Fiorello La Guardia, who replaced him in March 1946, were left-leaning American politicians openly hostile to those refusing repatriation. The UNRRA leadership became quite heavy-handed in its efforts to “persuade” DPs to repatriate. It flooded the camps with pro-repatriation propaganda, lectures, and events, whereas anti-repatriation publications were suppressed, supplemented by attempts to isolate those most vocally opposed. As with the Russian DPs, the Baltic nationals had to endure repeated screening and questioning by special

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9. A recent work that covers UNRRA’s handling of displaced persons is Nasaw 2020. An older work that more broadly also treats the forced population movements of Germans and other east European populations resulting from the new boundaries imposed by the Yalta agreement is Proudfoot 1956.



repatriation teams including Soviet officials. Paul Edwards, UNRRA director of the American zone, denounced those who were “anti-repatriation” as “not the product of democratic process but are rather the remnants of pre-war regimes that reflect Nazi and fascist concepts” (qtd. in Clark 1947; Elliott 1982, 47).

Initially over 200,000 Polish DPs voluntarily returned to Poland. But by 1946, when it became clear that the pro-Soviet government would supplant the Polish government in exile, many regretted their decision. The Communist government had not fully tightened its control, so some Poles managed to return to the British zone but then were denied re-admittance to the DP campus.<sup>10</sup> Both Poles and Balts were transferred from camp to camp up through early 1946, allegedly to reduce overcrowding. But camp residents often suspected it was to get them to repatriate. One particularly brutal case involved 1,376 Poles moved from a camp in Murnau to another in Augsburg, both within the American zone in Bavaria. The transfer was executed forcibly in below-freezing weather, with the residents being denied food and medical attention after they resisted. The camp contained over two hundred children under the age of fourteen, three of whom died during the removal, along with one woman.

Other attempts to induce repatriation included La Guardia’s “Operation Carrot,” which promised new clothes and a two-month supply of canned goods to those agreeing to return home. The notorious Administrative Order No. 199 of November 1946 urged the use of “emotional devices” at “the propitious time” to bring about “acceptance of repatriation” (Elliott 1982, 156). Eventually UNRRA came under fire back in the US, as “an instrument of coercion and a political weapon, employed by Soviet Russia to force repatriation on Displaced Persons,” in the words of the president of the Polish American Congress (qtd. in Nasaw 2020, 265). Some charges were exaggerated or baseless, but there is no denying that UNRRA’s policies could be harsh. Yet the Polish and Baltic DPs, to their credit, largely withstood this carrot-and-stick approach.

To be fair, UNRRA and the military faced severe supply, transportation, and manpower problems. UNRRA was originally intended as a temporary agency, slated to close its camps as early as January 1946. It threatened some DPs with suspension of all assistance as of that date but had to relent. US President Harry Truman was facing pressure from Congress and the military to close down these costly operations. Recall that UNRRA was also in charge of Jewish DP camps, which further strained resources and brought controversies between Britain and the US over resettlement of Jews in Palestine. It was not until 1948 that the International Relief Organization took over from UNRRA, by which time efforts were underway to resettle remaining DPs in the US, the UK, Australia, and other countries, as those nations finally began to relax immigration restrictions.

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10. Knapton 2020 focuses on the treatment of Poles in the DP camps.

But incidents at the DP camps in Rimini and Pisa in Italy holding Russians who had fought for the Germans indicate that forced repatriations still took place as late as 1947. All the displaced Soviet nationals stranded in the Soviet zone of occupation obviously had no options. Out of the grand total of five million souls repatriated to the Soviet Union from all areas, including the Soviet zone, nearly half went to prisons or forced labor camps, over one-fifth were conscripted into the Soviet military, and only one-quarter were permitted to return home or to exile. Some 300,000 were executed. Among all the Soviet ethnicities suffering repatriation, Ukrainians were the most numerous. Somewhat over a half million nonreturners that the USSR claimed as citizens are estimated to have avoided repatriation in one way or another, with Baltic nationals constituting almost half that number.

For years afterward, American officials denied that the US government had forcibly repatriated any Soviet subjects. But when the USSR released some survivors of forced repatriation in 1955—after ten years in the Siberian Gulag—a Russian newspaper carried the following:

We have let “them” out [referring to the old Cossack émigrés] and we have forgiven “our own” [referring to the Vlasov soldiers]. Whether they were Vlasov men or prisoners of war who did not want to return to the motherland does not matter now. All their sins have been forgiven. But the English and American bayonets, truncheons, machine guns and tanks used against them will never be forgotten. No Russian will ever forget Lienz, Dachau, Plattling, Toronto, and other places of extradition, including New York. And they must never be forgotten. It is a lesson all Russians must learn well. For it shows that you cannot trust the capitalist states in the future. (Epstein 1973, 91)

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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◆ **The Man Who Understood Democracy: The Life of Alexis de Tocqueville**

By Olivier Zunz

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For those who care about freedom, these are difficult times. Whether it has been the extension of state power courtesy of COVID or the sense that economic liberty is under siege across the globe, those who genuinely care about the growth and maintenance of free societies seem to be a small tribe indeed. These days, collectivists of the left and right abound.

Such circumstances, however, are not new. Those whom the French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville called “true friends of liberty” are never numerous. There have always been libertines (those who separate freedom from a concern for moral truth) as well as those anxious to radically curtail freedom in the name of authority or an ever-leveling equality. Few are those who have held fast to Lord Acton’s dictum: “Liberty [is] not ... the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought.”

Preserving liberty in this sense is difficult at the best of times, but perhaps especially complicated in conditions of modern democracy. That at least is how Tocqueville understood the problem, or so Olivier Zunz, author of a new biography, *The Man Who Understood Democracy: The Life of Alexis de Tocqueville*, argues.

A distinguished Tocqueville scholar, whose work includes editing the Library of America edition of *Democracy in America*, Zunz has made his book very much a work of biography. Some of the most important Tocqueville biographies penned in more recent decades, such as André Jardin’s *Tocqueville: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux 1988), Hugh Brogan’s *Alexis de Tocqueville: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2007), and Jean-Louis Benoît’s *Tocqueville* (Paris: Tempus Perrin 2013), have made Tocqueville’s ideas their centerpiece. With Zunz, the balance shifts toward Tocqueville as a person.

Ideas—especially ideas about democracy—were central to Tocqueville’s life. But although Zunz pays attention to Tocqueville’s major works in which this theme is discussed, he generally explores Tocqueville’s reflections on democracy and its meaning for liberty and liberal politics through the type of lens more typical of classical biographies: family life, interactions with friends and foes, correspondence, and so forth. The effect is to bring out the many tensions inside and surrounding Tocqueville and the ways that he sought, not always successfully, to resolve them in his life, thought, and writings.

The other axis around which Zunz’s account revolves is his conviction that America remained a central focus for Tocqueville’s reflection on modern democracy long after he penned *Democracy in America*. This functions as a corrective to those scholars who have long argued that France and its problems were the priority for Tocqueville and that his reflections about America should be read through that lens. By contrast, Zunz maintains that Tocqueville’s interest in American democracy never took second place to his worries about and ambitions for his native land. To an extent greater than previous biographers, Zunz shows how Tocqueville followed the ups and downs of American politics far more closely than most scholars hitherto realized.

Another theme stressed by Zunz is Tocqueville’s effort to overcome the deep nineteenth-century chasm between liberalism and religion, specifically Christianity and even more particularly Roman Catholicism. Tocqueville’s attention to this subject is well-known, not least because of the attention that *Democracy in America* gave to the role played by religion in moderating and countering the egalitarian currents associated with democracy. Zunz, however, points to significant places that illustrate just how high a priority Tocqueville accorded to such a reconciliation. “What Tocqueville most wanted,” Zunz writes, “to accomplish in his political life, he told his friend Corcelle and his brother Edouard on several occasions, was to ‘reconcile the liberal spirit with that of religion, the new society, and the church’” (p. 208).

Tocqueville was acutely aware that one of the French Revolution’s most lasting impacts was to create “two Frances.” The first was associated with the Revolution itself. A distinct anticlericalism became part of its identity, something reinforced by the outright persecution of the Church during the Revolution’s early years. The second was Catholic France: one that tended to look back nostalgically to the *ancien régime*, associated itself with the cause of Bourbon legitimacy, and was inclined to regard the Revolution and all its works as the creation of godless *philosophes*.

In his person, Zunz demonstrates, Tocqueville embodied all the strains associated with this division. Though he came from an aristocratic Catholic family of legitimists from whom he drew most of his friends, Tocqueville did not waver in his embrace of the ideals of the Revolution. And although plagued by religious doubts that never quite left him, Tocqueville continued to practice his religion. Above all, Tocqueville’s dream was of religion in France assuming the various roles that he believed it played in mid-nineteenth-century American democracy: underpinning,

for instance, the habit of association that he considered essential for limiting tendencies to centralization, or encouraging the virtues and *moeurs* that Tocqueville regarded as indispensable supports for liberty and democracy.

The gaps were possibly too large among the French, and the memories of wounds received during the Revolution still too fresh, for Tocqueville's ambitions to be realized in the area. The reflexive anticlericalism of most of the republican left and the growing Ultramontanism of many on the Catholic right left Tocqueville in a party of almost-one, in which his only company were Catholic liberals like Charles de Montalembert. But the sheer number of problems assailing France in the 1840s and 1850s, accompanied by ongoing realignments across the political spectrum, was always going to make realizing such a goal difficult, if not impossible.

In the end, Tocqueville's desire to bolster democracy's advance into the future took him into the past: more specifically, a determination to comprehend the roots of the French Revolution, which had ushered in a new era of freedom and yet also gone badly wrong in so many ways. The most immediate fruit of that inquiry was Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Its central point was that the trend to centralization of power in France was well underway long before 1789.

Tocqueville, Zunz stresses, read many commentators on the Revolution before immersing himself in this topic. That included some of the Revolution's harshest critics like Joseph de Maistre. All that is well-known, but Zunz brings to light Edmund Burke's influence on Tocqueville's understanding of the Revolution. As everyone knows, Burke's view of the Revolution was decidedly negative. Zunz shows, however, that Tocqueville absorbed a number of Burke's specific insights into some of the Revolution's features that helped explain the trajectory leading up to and following 1789.

Tocqueville believed that Burke had missed the Revolution's universal implications, and even thought that Burke remained "buried in an ancient world." For Tocqueville, the Revolution's repression of the remnants of feudalism and the accompanying uplifting of liberty and formal equality before the law were real achievements.

Nonetheless, Tocqueville thought that Burke was on to something when he stated that the French were "not fit for liberty" (meaning that they had been too accustomed for too long to too strong a hand). He also agreed with Burke's condemnation of the Revolution's confiscation of church property. That, plus the 1790 *Constitution Civile du Clergé* that had magnified the state's control of the Church, had turned many Catholics against the Revolution. More generally, Burke's observation that the prerevolutionary continental *philosophes'* tendency to abstraction and their detachment from the everyday realities of politics inclined them to top-down utopian schemes of reconstructing society made a deep impression on Tocqueville. It resulted, Zunz suggests, in an entire chapter of *The Old Regime* being focused on this point.

Tocqueville never wrote the projected follow-up volumes to *The Old Regime*. One was to be devoted to the Revolution itself while the other concerned the rise

of Napoleon's regime. His death from tuberculosis in 1859 put an end to these ambitions. This meant that Tocqueville did not see the end of Louis-Napoleon's authoritarian Second Empire in 1870 or, Zunz stresses, the American Civil War that almost destroyed the America that he saw as a harbinger of a democratic future. In some respects, Tocqueville's life ended with the consolations of family and religion, but also profound political disappointments.

For all his many successes, Tocqueville's life, as presented by Zunz, comes across as one marked by considerable personal discontent and political frustration. The two were deeply intertwined, and the anxieties and doubts that never left Tocqueville no doubt made the burden even greater. For Zunz, however, these facets of Tocqueville's life served a creative purpose insofar as they caused him to inquire ever more deeply and with persistent rigor into the phenomenon of democracy. As a consequence, Zunz concludes, Tocqueville "understood America so well that his work has helped Americans make sense of their democratic experiment" (p. 350). That perhaps is what made Tocqueville such a friend of liberty in his time and an indispensable guide for protecting and promoting freedom in ours.

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♦ **Mont Pèlerin 1947: Transcripts of the Founding Meeting of the Mont Pèlerin Society**

Edited by Bruce Caldwell

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In the late 1930s, during the worldwide Great Depression and as the totalitarian threat loomed *large*, a group of scholars gathered in Paris to discuss the fate of liberalism in a world seemingly going mad. The Lippmann Colloquium was to be the start of an ongoing effort, in which F. A. Hayek and Lionel Robbins (who did not attend but also provided extensive comments on Walter Lippmann's manuscript) would play a significant role along with the now elder statesmen of the liberal cause such as Ludwig von Mises and Frank Knight (who was not there, but who—along with Henry Simons—had provided Lippmann with comments on his manuscript). However, these efforts never got off the ground due to World War II. The fate of liberalism and Western civilization weighed in the balance.

After the allies emerged victorious, the fate of liberalism still was unclear. Much work needed to be done to emerge from the ruins of the Great Depression and World War II, but now attention also needed to be paid to the Cold War and the Soviet superpower. In this context, F. A. Hayek hoped to get the band back together again. The attendees of the Lippmann Colloquium included the following: Raymond Aron,

a French philosopher, sociologist, journalist, and political scientist; Auguste Detœuf, a French economist; Friedrich Hayek, an Austrian and British economist and philosopher; Walter Lippmann, an American writer, reporter, and political commentator; Étienne Mantoux, a French economist; Robert Marjolin, a French economist and politician; Louis Marlio, a French economist; Ernest Mercier, a French industrialist; Ludwig von Mises, an Austro-Hungarian-born economist; Michael Polanyi, a Hungarian-British polymath; Stefan Thomas Possony, an Austro-Hungarian-born economist and military strategist; Wilhelm Röpke, a German economist; Louis Rougier, a French philosopher; Jacques Rueff, a French economist; and Alexander Rüstow, a German sociologist and economist. Walter Eucken, a German economist, was invited but could not attend.

The group, which originally met in 1938, was divided between those interested in a full-throated defense of Manchester Liberalism or *laissez-faire*, and those who thought a middle ground could be steered between the “wooden” conception of *laissez-faire* and totalitarian control of the economic and political life, a more social market economy perspective. This division, as the transcripts reveal, picked up in 1947 where it left off in 1938.

After World War II, Hayek began efforts to reconvene the ongoing conversation that began in Paris—a conversation that he believed was essential both to the world of ideas and the world of practical affairs. Hayek, it is important to remember, had already written to friends such as Fritz Machlup that his greatest contribution to science, scholarship, and society was his “Abuse of Reason” project, which he started working on during the wartime 1940s. *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) emerged from that project, but so too did *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (1952). To say the fate of liberalism was on Hayek’s mind would be an extreme understatement. Hayek was concerned that the thirty years of World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II had destroyed the intellectual argument for liberalism among academics and intellectuals. Thus, the fate of liberalism, Hayek believed, turned on cultivating a constructive and creative conversation among the leading minds in the social sciences and humanities. It is important to stress that Hayek’s original proposal was for this new society to be modeled on the British Academy, where only the elite of the elite were brought together to explore ideas through rigorous and unfettered discussion. Hayek’s original list of invitees included only academics and writers, except for the Swiss organizer Albert Hunold. And although all invitees were of the liberal persuasion broadly understood, they were not by any means doctrinaire liberals in the nineteenth-century sense of that term.

As Hayek set to work on his proposal for the meeting and the founding of this new intellectual society, he circulated his proposal among his friends. Mises’s reaction to this proposal is intriguing. In a memo dated December 31, 1946, and entitled “Observations on Professor Hayek’s Plans,” which was included with his direct response letter objecting to particular participants as committed “interventionists,” Mises concluded: “The weak point in Professor Hayek’s plan is that it relies upon the



cooperation of many men who are known for their endorsement of interventionism. It is necessary to clarify this point before the meeting starts. As I understand the plan, it is not the task of this meeting to discuss anew whether or not a government decree or a union dictate has the power to raise the standard of living of the masses. If somebody wants to discuss these problems, there is no need for him to make a pilgrimage to the Mount Pèlerin. He can find in his neighborhood ample opportunity to do so” (found in the Ludwig von Mises Collection, Grove City College library in folder containing Mises’s correspondence with F. A. Hayek. Archives accessed July 2015.)

Mises’s liberalism was an uncompromising *laissez-faire*, but those who could be enlisted to the general liberal cause in the aftermath of World War II, Hayek understood, must represent a much broader spectrum—similar to those divisions in 1938 between Manchester liberalism and social market economy liberalism. Mises argued to Hayek that the liberal cause was lost because of compromise, not because of strict adherence to principle. At one point in the transcripts Mises is quoted as saying: “If it is true as has been suggested, that I am defending orthodoxy of the 18th century, then it is true that I am defending it against the orthodoxy of 17th century” (p. 100). In other words, the liberalism of Hume and Smith against the mercantilist doctrine that guided public policy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The flexibility among liberals to compromise with interventionists was their undoing, according to Mises.

Mises’s strident opposition to interventionism is on full display in these transcripts, especially with respect to the competitive order and the rules and regulations necessary to sustain it. As Bruce Caldwell points out in his wonderful introduction to this volume, Hayek also received criticism of his plan from Karl Popper, who was the diametric opposite of Mises. Any meeting that would be useful, Popper insisted, must also have participants who were closer to the socialist position. Hayek stuck to his plan and both Mises and Popper attended, despite their reservations.

They would be joined by the following in attendance: Maurice Allais, Carlo Antoni, Hans Barth, Karl Brandt, Herbert Cornuelle, John Davenport, Stanley Dennison, Aaron Director, Walter Eucken, Erich Eyck, Milton Friedman, Harry Gideonse, Frank Graham, F. A. Harper, Henry Hazlitt, Trygve Hoff, Albert Hunold, Carl Iversen, John Jewkes, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Frank Knight, Henri de Lovinfosse, Fritz Machlup, Loren Miller, Felix Morley, Michael Polanyi, William Rappard, Leonard Read, George Revay, Lionel Robbins, Wilhelm Röpke, George Stigler, Herbert Tingsten, Francois Trevoux, Orval Watts, and Veronica Wedgwood. Dorothy Hahn, who worked with Hayek at the LSE, kept the transcript of the meeting from which this book draws. In his opening remarks Hayek also lists those who expressed sympathy with the aims of the conference and who wished they could have attended the meeting but were unable, and these include academics such as Howard Ellis, Eli Heckscher, Friedrich Lutz, Arnold Plant, and Alexander Rüstow, and writers such as William Henry Chamberlin and Walter Lippmann.

Hayek wanted to accomplish more than merely forming a community of like-minded scholars and intellectuals throughout the world. He hoped that through their intense discussion—if it could be prevented from degenerating into fractiousness—they could jointly explore the difficult questions and finer points of the argument that would lead to an improved understanding of, and restatement of, the liberal principles of political economy and justice that would meet the challenges of the postwar world. This was no small task, but it could be achieved only if the discussion between the leading liberal thinkers could get started. This meeting, and the society that would be formed from it, would hopefully provide that.

“The basic conviction which has guided me in my efforts,” Hayek stated in his opening remarks, “is that if the ideals ... which I believe unite us, and for which, in spite of abuse of the word, there is still no better name than liberal, are to have any chance of revival, a great intellectual task is in the first instance required before we can successfully meet the errors which govern the world today. This task involves both purging traditional liberal theory of certain accidental accretions which have become attached to it in the course of time, and facing up to certain real problems which an over-simplified liberalism has shirked or which have become apparent only since it had become a somewhat stationary and rigid creed” (p. 55).

Readers will be fascinated by the discussion that follows concerning monopoly and antimonopoly policy, monetary theory and policy, taxation and redistribution, trade, migration, and foreign policy. The debates are surprisingly (or frustratingly) fresh when related to the current discourse of practical affairs of our age. We are debating many of the same issues seventy-five years later without perhaps much more clarity than was on display then. One of my favorite lines in the transcript comes not from Hayek, but from Lionel Robbins when he stated: “We agree with Professor Mises that most of the interventions of the state in regard to the working of the market mechanism have been bad. I hope we should agree with Professor Mises also that one of our main tasks is to re-educate the world to understand the functions performed by the market and by free enterprise” (p. 101). What followed, however, was an effort among the participants to push Mises to articulate the limits of his principle. He was unwilling to play their game. His adversaries, however, portrayed Mises’s position in a way that wasn’t actually his. Mises was assumed to be arguing for simultaneously an idealized perfect market economy and the absence of any rules of governance other than the profit motive. “Perfect freedom exists in the jungle,” Frank Graham interjected. “There is no law there,” he continued, and if we listen to Mises, Graham suggests, “we shall be in the jungle.” Rather than fall into this trap, we must, Graham insisted, “find the middle road between the jungle and the jail” (p. 102).

Mises’s response to this was simple and straightforward. “Should society be based on public ownership, or private?” (p. 103). Mises made it clear to all that he favored private enterprise, but obviously implicit in that endorsement was an institutional framework of private property, freedom of contract, and the rule of law.

That none of his critics were willing to engage Mises at this level is telling. He did not oppose the critical idea of the necessity of an institutional framework, but his criticisms were of the *content* of that framework being proposed by various parties to this conversation. The content offered by the Ordo liberals and the policy pragmatists was a reflection, in Mises's mind, of those "accidental accretions" that had attached themselves to liberal doctrine. A young Milton Friedman intervened in the discussion, objecting to Mises's hardline stance, and stated the following: "We are all opposed to the government-created monopolies. Those things are only passed over because we are all opposed to them. However, where we differ: 1. in finding out the truth 2. in the best way of presenting the matter to the public" (p. 102).

This sort of back-and-forth among the participants accompanied the entire array of issues listed in the conference agenda and oscillated between the strident defense of liberal principles and the supposedly sophisticated presentations of liberal compromise with the prevailing state of public opinion and worldly affairs. Collective action is required, taxation must be collected for that purpose, and compromise must be part of building a new consensus for a new liberalism in the postwar world. And the institutional framework of what constitutes the social order must be central to the enterprise of spreading the ideas of liberalism. But in the seventy-five intervening years, has anyone at any of the numerous Mont Pèlerin meetings really given a persuasive answer in defining precisely what the rules of the game should be? They must be somewhere between the jungle and the jail, the demarcation spectrum as dictated by Graham. But have the subsequent decades of discussion drawn us to a good method of locating the optimal policy spot on that spectrum?

At a conference at the LSE that I was fortunate enough to participate in during the early 2000s, the economist Anne Krueger had the following reaction in response to my presentation: "No offense to my George Mason friends, but we all now know about the benefits of the market economy. What we are searching for is *reasonable regulations not capturable by interest*" (emphasis added). I weighed my options in responding, and then simply said, "What if that is a null set?" Surely the person who coined the term *rent-seeking* understood the issue I was raising. Surely someone who had studied the economy and the regulatory apparatus in such detail could provide a quick answer if one was easily to be found. There was in fact no answer forthcoming, and I guess my response was considered outrageous by those in attendance, when to my mind I was merely asking for an empirical example of those reasonable regulations that are in fact not captured by interests. The silence was broken up by a quip from Andrei Shleifer, who simply said, "Why are you so unreasonable?" and laughed. The discussion moved on to the next paper.

As a result of this, and other experiences, I sympathize with Mises's plight as I read the transcripts of the first Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) meeting, but I also understand the pushback and the give-and-take that followed. I have been a member of the Mont Pèlerin Society since the 1990s and had the great honor to serve as its president from 2016 to 2018. When I became president, I did the academic

thing and actually spent time reading through the historical documents about the founding and subsequent history of the organization to supplement my own experience. I also read the vast critical literature that has arisen in the last few decades that dives into the operation and influence of MPS on practical affairs. I came to appreciate greatly the contributions of Lionel Robbins and his defense of cosmopolitan liberalism in a world torn by war. There was something very important and symbolic in Hayek insisting on the involvement of Walter Eucken as a *German economist* in the first such gathering after World War II. In my own presentations at MPS over the years, I have attempted to represent that cosmopolitan vision of liberalism that I sincerely believe to be the guiding ideology of Mises, Hayek, and Robbins to the best of my abilities (see *The Struggle for a Better World*, Arlington, Va.: Mercatus Center 2021).

That vision of true radical liberalism is evident in the 1947 transcripts that Caldwell has edited, but so too are the positions of more traditionalist conservative thinkers as well as the more politically pragmatic. Opposition to totalitarianism and collectivism has many different factions. Economists and social scientists have different methodological and analytical points of departure among them. There was never a “position” that represents the MPS, except for a steadfast commitment to discussion. For an example, see the discussion/debate of the Statement of Aims in this book, and then look at the final adopted Statement of Aims (<https://www.montpelerin.org/statement-of-aims/>). Do note that this document ends with the following declaration: “The group does not aspire to conduct propaganda. It seeks to establish no meticulous and hampering orthodoxy. It aligns itself with no particular party. Its object is solely, by facilitating the exchange of views among minds inspired by certain ideals and broad conceptions held in common, to contribute to the preservation and improvement of the free society.”

These guiding principles for MPS were evident in 1947, and if a transcript was to be kept this fall in Oslo, it would be true in 2022. There is simply no “neo-liberal thought collective” being orchestrated, but rather a debate society among practitioners of the social sciences and humanities, intellectuals, and public policy analysts. The past seventy-five years have witnessed the ebbs and flows as the intellectual fads and fashions and practical affairs of the times have dictated. At some points in time the consensus among members was more traditionalist, pragmatist, or principled liberal, or no consensus was reached and fractious discussion followed. Caldwell’s volume has plenty of drama, but subsequent histories, such as Max Hartwell’s (*A History of the Mont Pelerin Society*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1995), demonstrate that the drama never really subsided. And I can attest that in the years since Hartwell’s book was published, MPS internal turmoil and drama continues right alongside its continuous efforts to reconstitute and reinvigorate society to meet the challenges to the liberal order in the twenty-first century. Those challenges have not been trivial, and include 9/11, the global financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bruce Caldwell, as is his habit, has produced an essential work for scholars and intellectuals interested in the life and times of F. A. Hayek, and the fate of classical liberalism in the twentieth century. His introduction is a balanced and masterful history, and the transcript itself is a fantastic resource. Caldwell arranged to also include the archived photographs from the original meeting in order to add life to the presentation. The Hoover Institution has produced a beautiful book. Readers of *The Independent Review* will greatly enjoy the content. They will be remarkably familiar with some of the material, but they also will find many surprises. They may be inspired by Mises's commitment to principle. Or they may find the more flexible stance of others more palatable, including that intervention of Milton Friedman's as he focuses on the reception of these ideas among the public. The entire conference held in 1947 is fascinating to consider. As Hayek says in his opening remarks, "I must confess that now when the moment has arrived to which I have so long looked forward, the feeling of intense gratitude to all of you is strongly mixed by an acute sense of astonishment at my own presumption and audacity in setting all this in motion ..." (p. 54). Caldwell's book invites you to become an eyewitness to history. As I hope you'll see for yourselves, it truly was an audacious act on Hayek's part to cultivate this continuous conversation about the foundations of the liberal order.

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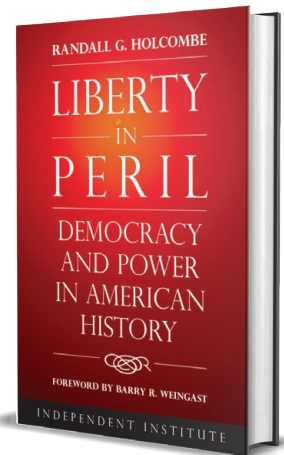
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