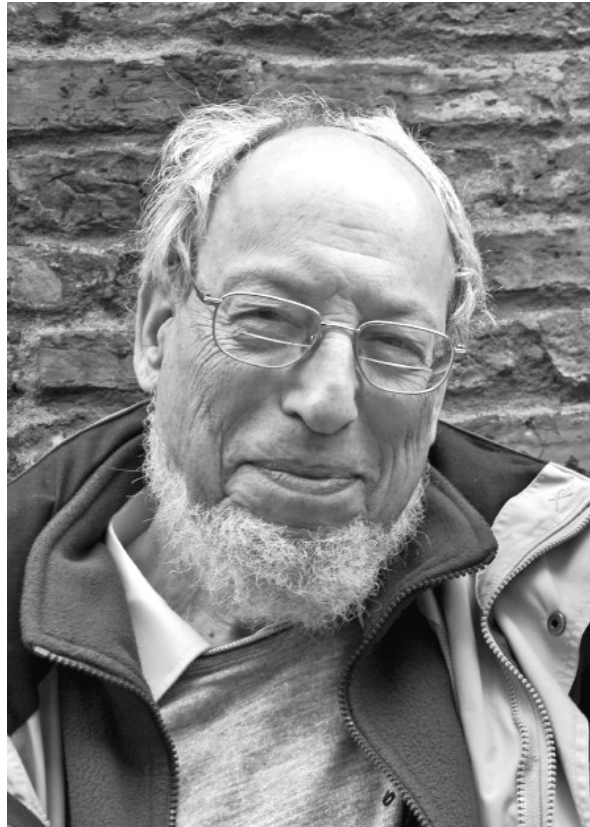


Reflections of a Survivor – A Postscript to Kathleen Hertzberg's Report¹

Kurt Strauss

In a report of her stay in Germany between April 1938 and January 1939, Kathleen Hertzberg (née Brookhouse) writes of a visit she paid to Stuttgart a few weeks after the horrors of 'Kristallnacht', the Night of the Broken Glass.² "I remember walking down ... with a Jewish friend who had just been released from Concentration Camp that day. Stuttgart looked like a fairyland," she wrote in her report, "with the lights all twinkling. He was very calm, and as he looked at Stuttgart where he had lived all his life, he said: 'Isn't Stuttgart lovely, and what a good time we have had here, and now we must say goodbye.'"

In all probability that friend was my father. The view that Kathleen describes is one that I remember well from my childhood. Our house³ was in a pleasant residential suburb on one of the hills overlooking the town. It stood in a small garden, with a tiny summer house in one corner and a garage and short drive in the other. I attended the local primary school, and have happy memories of playing with the kids in the neighbourhood, excursions in the



Kurt Strauss. Photo by Simon Palmour.

country, winter sledging and other pleasant occupations. At our school, the whole class stood up to say 'Heil Hitler' whenever a teacher came into the classroom. We raised our right arm in the Nazi salute as we did so. First thing in the morning we assembled in a hollow square on the school playground and saluted the swastika flag as it was hauled up the flagpole. On special occasions we used to sing the 'Horst Wessel' song, which by then had become a national anthem for the Nazi

Party.

Elsewhere in her report, Kathleen wrote about her visit to a Jewish family in Berlin with a five-year-old son. "The Aryan children were not allowed to play with him" she wrote, and further on "we heard the children talking over the fence again. Freddy was saying 'I can't play with you 'cause you're a Jew.'"

I myself must have been about seven when my friends stopped playing with me, first in the school playground, then in the street, and finally in the whole neighbourhood. It wasn't long before my parents took me away from this

school. I was sent instead to a Jewish school in the town centre, which meant taking the rack-and-pinion tramcar down the hill. It was there that I began to learn the Jewish alphabet and other things about Judaism which my parents had never had much time for, though we did mark the major festivals like Hanukah and Sukkoth.

My mother was born in Prague – then a part of the Austrian empire but which later became the capital of Czechoslovakia – and only took on German citizenship after she married my father. Her parents had a summer residence in south west Bohemia, just on the Czech side of the German border, and every summer they left their large flat in Prague to spend the summer there. Members of their large family could also stay there for a couple of weeks, and every year our turn would come round. In the summer of 1938 we joined my grandparents as usual, but instead of returning to Stuttgart with my father at the end of the school holidays, my mother and I went on to Prague with her parents. Their flat was big enough for all four of us, and I started attending a local Czech school. My father meanwhile went back to look after his mother, but was arrested by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp.

Kathleen mentions Dachau in her report, and I'm pretty sure that that was where my father had been sent. But how did she find him, and indeed why did she seek him out from amongst the many hundreds, if not thousands, of Jewish citizens trying desperately to get out of Stuttgart?

As I understood it much later, my brother had been sent to Dunnow Hall,⁴ an English 'Approved School' in 1936 or 1937 by my parents to get him out of harm's way, not knowing that an 'Approved School' was one for difficult children.⁵ However, one of the governors, a Quaker, was also a governor of Sidcot, a co-educational Quaker boarding school in Somerset. He realised that Dunnow Hall was no place for my brother, and arranged

for him to be transferred to Sidcot. When my father realised that he might be arrested by the Nazis, he had written to tell my brother not to worry if he didn't hear from him for a while. My brother, however, was worried enough to take the letter to the Headmaster, who contacted Friends House in London. Whether it was the Germany Emergency Committee or a similar organisation with Quaker workers in Germany I don't know, but at all events Kathleen was asked to look into the matter. She found my father, and helped to make arrangements for him to leave the country and travel to England in the spring of 1939. I have found letters written in the weeks before he left, in which he enquires anxiously whether his visa has come through yet, and she does her best to reassure him that his case is being dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Meanwhile back in Prague, my mother and, I suppose, all the Czech side of our family, were hoping that they would not suffer the persecution visited on their German cousins, and indeed that appeared to be the case – until the 16th March 1939, when the German army invaded Czechoslovakia. I don't remember how long it was before the Nazi flags were hoisted in the streets of Prague, but I do remember seeing the victorious Germans marching up the main thoroughfare. I also remember that my mother went out to buy some large suitcases, clearly with the intention of moving once again. I have to say at this point that I had no idea why any of this was happening. Not until I was in my teens did I begin to absorb the fact that the Jews were being first persecuted, then imprisoned, and finally exterminated. Thanks to British Quakers in general, and Kathleen in particular, my parents and I narrowly avoided the fate of the rest of our family, almost all of whom died in the holocaust.

How did my mother and I get out? It was on one of the 'Kindertransport' trains, she posing as a carer and I 'posing' as one of the

Kinder. I don't remember much of the journey except that we stopped somewhere in Holland where everyone got off the train and we were given a meal and some bedding in what could have been a village or church hall by some church or social workers. The next morning we set off again for the Hook of Holland, and once aboard and settled in a cabin, my mother pulled out of her bag a teach-yourself-book she had bought in Prague called 'Laugh and Learn,' and we both began our first English lesson. The rest of our journey was quite straightforward – disembarking at Harwich and then boarding another train to Liverpool Street Station in London. There's a sculpture on the concourse there now, depicting children arriving with rucksacks and small suitcases, to recall the thousands who passed through that station and found sanctuary in Britain in 1938 and 1939. My mother and I were doubly lucky; not only had we escaped from the Nazis but my father was waiting at the station to meet us.

So my parents and I started a new life in West London, Paddington to be exact, in a large house which had been taken over by the Quakers and was now run as hostel for German refugees. Before long my father became co-warden of the hostel together with a Quaker lady, Gladys Vickerman, and in due course my mother, became the head cook and housekeeper. I myself, after several further upheavals and more changes of school, arrived at Sidcot, the school which had taken my brother in aged fourteen, and was now taking me in at the age of eleven. It was only many years later that I discovered the Quakers had paid for all my board, lodging and education, from the time I arrived there until my father got a job and was able to make a small contribution to the fees once again.

My parents tried to keep in touch with as many of their – of our – Quaker helpers as they could, and Kathleen's name was often mentioned in our household, particularly at Christmas time when letters and greetings cards

were exchanged. Thus it was that after my parents died, I kept up the correspondence. Many years later, when I was on holiday with a first cousin in Toronto, whose parents had had the foresight to leave Germany in 1933, I was able to visit Kathleen and her husband Fritz in their lovely home in Pickering which is not far away. I had by then been accepted into membership of the Religious Society of Friends, so I was happy to be able to join them for worship in Toronto Meeting before going home with them for lunch. Fritz was no longer alive by the time of my second visit, this time accompanied by my wife. Our third and most recent encounter with Kathleen was when she came to England, and we were delighted that she found time to visit us in our home in south-west London.



Reading the report in the Journal of her time in Germany, I was particularly struck by two things. One was the number of German Quakers whose names were familiar to me on account of travels I had myself undertaken, particularly amongst Friends in East Germany during the days of the Cold War and before the Iron Curtain was lifted, but also subsequently after Germany was reunited. Some of the Friends she mentions I had met myself, others were children of the Quakers she wrote about, and of my own age. The other thing that struck me leads on from this. It was not easy to bear a Quaker witness under Communism after the war, but it was infinitely harder under the Nazis before and during the war. One cannot but admire the courage of those who remained true to their faith. Kathleen named some of them, but there were many others who stood firm in their belief. Many of those who resisted paid with their lives, and not only the Quakers. While reading Kathleen's account, the words of a hymn we learnt at Sidcot came into my mind:

Once to every man and nation,
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with false-hood,
For the good or evil side;

Some great cause, some great decision,
Offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever,
'Twixt that darkness and that light.

Then to side with truth is noble,
When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
And 'tis prosperous to be just;

Then it is the brave man chooses,
While the coward stands aside,
Till the multitude make virtue,
Of the faith they had denied.

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet the truth alone is strong:
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong,

Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above his own.

It was written by James Russell Lowell in 1845, but there was another verse we sang which went: “By the light of burning martyrs, Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track, Toiling up new Calv’ries ever with the cross that turns not back; New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth, They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth.”

Reflecting on what I know of Kathleen’s life, one aspect of which I’m pretty sure is that: ‘onward’ and ‘upward’ have always been among her watchwords. She has just celebrated her ninety-fifth birthday, and I look forward to

reading the autobiography on which she’s working. Perhaps extracts will be found in a future edition of the *Canadian Quaker History Journal*; the full story should certainly be consulted when the time comes to write a testimony to the Grace of God as shown in her life.

Footnotes:

1. Editors’ note: Kurt Strauss sent this postscript in response to Kathleen Hertzberg’s “Report on a Visit to Germany, 14 April 1938 – 18 January 1939,” reproduced in the *Canadian Quaker History Journal*, 74 (2009): 1 – 32. We are grateful for the time Kurt took to share his own memories of Kathleen and the work of Friends with our readers.
2. During the night of the 9th – 10th November 1938, Jewish homes were ransacked, as were shops, towns and villages. SA Stormtroopers and civilians destroyed buildings with sledgehammers, leaving the streets covered in pieces of smashed windows—the origin of the name. According to Wikipedia, ninety-one Jews were killed, and 30,000 Jewish men—a quarter of all Jewish men in Germany—were taken to concentration camps, where they were tortured for months, with over 1,000 of them dying. Around 1,670 synagogues were ransacked, and 267 set on fire. In Vienna alone 95 synagogues or houses of prayer were destroyed.
3. After my father fled, the house and its contents were requisitioned, and in due course sold on. When I met the new occupier many years later, he assured me that he was the legal owner ... as was invariably said of looted art works.
4. In later years the school moved to new premises near Thirsk, North Yorkshire. Breckenbrough School, as it is now called, is under the governance of Quaker trustees appointed by Yorkshire General Meeting (‘Quakers in Yorkshire’).
5. A term formerly used in the United Kingdom to mean a particular kind of residential institution to which young people could be sent by a Court, usually for committing offences but sometimes because they were deemed to be beyond parental control. In the United States, the term ‘reform school’ is used.



Words Spoken to Germans¹

Speech Read at the Canadian Friends Service
Committee (CFSC) Annual Meeting,
October 1945

We are indebted to Elizabeth Fox Howard for the translated text of a broadcast she made to Germany in December last.

There must be some in Germany who still remember the red and black Quaker star which was known in many countries in Europe after the last war, and which brought hope and healing to starving and desperate people, including many in your own country. The Quaker child-feeding is not quite forgotten, because it was not only a piece of material help, but also a gesture of friendship and reconciliation. The Quaker star is once more being worn by men and women who are eager to bring help to those who have suffered so cruelly in various places, even as far afield as India and China. We look forward to a day when it will be possible to wear that star of hope in Germany also.

I venture to speak to you as one who has been much in Germany, and who knows and loves your country and its people. I believe there are many Germans who long to take their place once more among the free peoples of the world.

I and my fellow Quakers have never felt any enmity towards men and women of another race or creed. We have never faltered in our conviction that war, with all that it entails, is an evil thing. The destruction which it brings with it, especially on the helpless and innocent, whatever the original causes and responsibilities of war between nations, must shock all right-thinking people. But even worse than the physical suffering in the world today is the growth and hatred and bitterness, which will make it hard indeed to bring us all together again in a family of nations.

We know that you have suffered and are suffering today. In the midst of the horrors directly caused by the war, horrors which we have all shared, do you realise what has been done in your name in the countries which you have occupied! These deeds have built round you a wall of hatred which it may take years to break down. The Quakers and many of their fellow Christians in Britain are striving, even now while the war is still raging, to lessen this hatred. It is not easy, for our people too have suffered, though no enemy has actually set foot on our soil. Our countrymen find it hard to believe in that truer, nobler Germany which has been hidden from the world for nearly twelve years. They say that few voices have been raised in protest against the things done in your name, whether to your own fellow countrymen in concentration camps in Germany itself, or to the people in the occupied countries. Nevertheless, we are thankful that some, especially among your religious leaders, have had the courage to speak out. We know that many Germans have dared the all-prevailing might of the Gestapo, and faced imprisonment and death, rather than betray their inner freedom.

Field Marshall Smuts, in a broadcast in September, 1943, said:

The Germans are a great people, and have for centuries taken a leading part in most of the lines of the European advance Deep in the heart of that great people, there slumbers something which is very precious to our race. What has happened inside Germany, what has been done to innocent neighbouring peoples, has sunk deeply, scorchingly, into millions of German minds. There is another and a better Germany, which must have passed through hell in witnessing this brutal and lawless inhumanity by their people.

So spoke that great-hearted statesman, Field-Marshal Smuts. And let me remind you of the words of President Roosevelt in his great speech on foreign policy, as recently as October 21st:

I should flase [sic] to the very foundations of my religious and political convictions if I should ever relinquish the faith that in all peoples, without exception, there lives some instinct for truth, some attraction towards justice, some passion for peace, buried as they may be in the German case, under a brutal regime. ... The German people are not going to be enslaved, because the United Nations do not traffic in human slavery. They will earn their way back into the fellowship of peace-loving and law-abiding nations.

We Quakers acknowledge that our own people also need forgiveness for our national mistakes and the wrongs we have committed. In the sight of God, none of us is guiltless. In the building of a better world and of a lasting peace, we shall all need one another. This difficult task will require the best that both our great nations have to give – understanding of and patience with one another’s differences, unselfish devotion to the common good, an unshakable faith in the power of goodwill, and a readiness, if need be, to suffer together in the hard time that lies before us all. It is not yet too late to build on the ruins of the past. If we, the Society of Friends, should ever be able to take our small part once again in bringing the star of hope to your people, we shall rejoice with all heart.

But this new and better world will not come without your help. We wait for you to wake up, to cast away apathy and fear, to repudiate the evil deeds done in your name.

The first Quaker, George Fox – who also lived in a time of war and much suffering –

once wrote these words: “I saw there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness, and in this also I saw the infinite love of God.” This infinite love of God embraces us all, Germans and English alike. Let us all, at this Christmas time, remember those well-known and holy words: “Peace on earth, goodwill towards men.”

There is no need to despair. Have faith in God! Have faith in yourselves! And in the power of goodwill! Wake up, and look full of hope and courage towards the dawn of a better, happier day.

(From “The Star” – the organ of Friends’ War Relief Service, London, England.)

Footnotes:

1. This document is part of the Canadian Friends Service Committee Records at the Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives (CYMA), Newmarket, Ontario, 1988-01/01(15). It seems to be an appropriate accompaniment to Fiona Reid’s article “Nowhere to go for Christmas.”



Nowhere to go for Christmas

Fiona Reid

Millions of men, women and children across Europe spent Christmas 1946 in a Displaced Person camp – far from the homes they had been forced to leave during the Second World War. Fiona Reid relates how Quaker relief workers in the camps hatched a plan for a spiritual celebration to unite refugees of all nationalities.

It was Christmas 1946 and the congregation had filled the old *Marktkirche* in Goslar, south-east of Hannover. As the bells began to peal,

50 small children waited anxiously in the transept. When the bells stopped, the lights were dimmed, the organ music began and the children started to sing the German carol *Es ist ein Ros Entsprungen* (*A Rose has Blossomed*). Behind them there were three tall angels, looking for Bethlehem. “Here is the place where the sign shall be raised,” announced the first angel, in Ukrainian. “Here is the place where the sign shall be raised,” repeated the second, in Polish. “Here is the place where the sign shall be raised, repeated the third angel, this time in German. The Quaker nativity play had begun.

Why were the Quakers staging a multilingual nativity play in the British zone of Germany, well over a year after the war had ended? Quite simply, it was because the Displaced Persons’ (DP) camps were still full. In May 1945 there were about seven million displaced people in Europe. Among them were forced labourers from the occupied territories, concentration camp survivors, ‘racially pure’ children who had been kidnapped as breeding material and women who had been brought in to work in German brothels. There were also the Volksdeutsche – German-speaking peoples from eastern Europe who had initially been welcomed into the Reich – plus Cossacks, Ukrainians, and Balts, some of whom had been so oppressed by Stalin that they had chosen to serve under Hitler. By the spring of 1945 it was clear that they had made the wrong choice.

‘Displaced Person’ was a newly coined phrase. It implied that the displaced just had to be replaced – that is, returned to their country of origin, and then all would be well. Yet it was not so simple. A large number of people did want to go home and did so rapidly. Others did not. Citizens from the Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia refused to return to countries now controlled by the Soviet Union. Ukrainians felt much the same. Poles were initially keen to go home but their enthusiasm waned rapidly as rumours of Soviet

oppression began to reach the camps. Yugoslavs loyal to the king were similarly reluctant to go back to Tito’s socialist Yugoslavia.

Many surviving Jews thought that Europe was completely unsafe and could never again be considered as home. According to the Yalta accords, those who had been Soviet citizens in September 1939 could be forced to return to the USSR but others could not. These ‘others’ remained in DP camps. Some hoped for political change in their home countries; others aspired to new lives in faraway countries like the USA, Canada, Palestine or Australia. Yet moving to a new country was difficult. Governments across the world were reluctant to take in immigrants, and they only wanted those who were young and fit. By 1946 people had started talking about the ‘hard core’ of DPs: those who were ill, or who were too old or too young, or had too many dependants. They could not move because no governments wanted them. In *Punch’s* words, the DPS were now ‘Displeased People’.

It had all seemed so hopeful in 1945. After previous wars displaced civilians had been left to fend for themselves or had relied on a patchwork of private charities. This time it was to be different, and in 1943 the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was established to ensure swift, well-coordinated aid to the distressed civilians of the postwar world. Smaller voluntary organisations played an important role too. Quaker-organised groups – the Friends’ Relief Service (FRS) and the American Friends’ Service Committee – were especially significant because of their universal approach. UNRRA had been formed to help exclusively “the victims of German and Japanese aggression” but Friends were committed to helping all in distress, believing that this was the only way to promote peace.

There was real cause for celebration in the first Christmas after the war. Kathryn Hulme,

an UNRRA welfare worker described the excitement at Wildflecken DP camps as 12,000 Poles prepared to celebrated 'six Christmases rolled into one'. UNRRA staff opened thousands of Red Cross parcels and distributed chocolate to all the women and children, and cigarettes to all the men. The DPs threw parties, feasting on hoarded rations and black market supplies. Everyone was making schnapps and there were frequent cases of facial burns when people "peered into their homemade stills too early".

Celebrations were more sedate at the DP hospital in Bad Harzburg. Patients were outside enjoying the unseasonal sunshine when the Quakers arrived to give them gifts of soap, cigarettes, chocolate, hairpins, powder puffs, tooth brushes and boot polish. All were hard to find in postwar Germany even on the black market.

It was not only the DPs who were excited about the first peacetime Christmas. Elizabeth Bayley, a young FRS worker based in Schleswig, revelled in the food and the festivities. She had wine, sweet cakes, oranges, stewed apples, eggs, duck, pudding, mince pies and fruit jelly. "How piggish that sounds" she wrote, aware of strict rationing at home in England. Elizabeth Bayley also loved celebrating in Germany after all the dreadful war years: "The Germans know how to catch the spirit of Christmas. There is none of the horrid commercialism and artificiality of English preparations and yet the custom of Christmas trees etc is observed by absolutely everyone. It is simpler but more genuine."

By Christmas 1946 there were fewer parties in the camps and some Quakers seized the opportunity to restore the spiritual element to Christmas and to bind all the different nationalities together, overcoming the petty quarrels of DP life. Elizabeth Bayley had first become alarmed when she found a fairly new, beautifully illustrated book of carols.

"It was a perfect example of the best in German art for children, every page with

delightful little pictures of Christmas trees, Father Christmases, candles and gnomes. For some hours I was entranced by it. Then I began to feel something was missing. Where for example was *Stille Nacht* and *O du Frohliche?* – Gradually I realised it – it was a completely pagan book. Not a single picture of the *Christkind* or of an angel, not a single mention of the first Christmas. "Hateful book!" she concluded. Her friend and co-worker Margaret McNeil was equally committed to reinvigorating a properly Christian celebration of Christmas, and had some tussles with the DP schoolteachers over the 1946 nativity play. The little girls were excited about dressing-up and the teachers were encouraging them to think "in terms of bare arms and stars in the hair." McNeil, a Presbyterian within the FRS, was forthright with them and delivered an impassioned speech, "emphasising the profound difference between angels and fairies".

Quakers hoped that the DPs, the occupying powers and the local German population could all be united at Christmas: Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians could surely celebrate the birth of Christ together? An Orthodox priest at first protested. Orthodox Christians use the Julian calendar, and his children would be confused if they were forced to celebrate Christmas two weeks early. An FRS worker persuaded him that timing did not matter and that the Quakers would happily "celebrate Christmas on every day of the year". She had won her moral point and the Orthodox Christians joined in with the rest.

Postwar Europe was racked with all sorts of shortages in food, fuel and basic supplies. So celebrating Christmas in the DP camps really stretched all the essential skills that were needed to survive in the DP world: namely scrounging, stealing and making-do. DPS made stage curtains from British army blankets; in Goslar they borrowed musical instruments from the local mine workers' band; at

Marktkirche the Virgin Mary looked ethereal in a blue cloak only because the pastor's wife had donated her sitting-room curtains. At Mojtinny in Poland the children were dressed in a magnificent array of costumes, the result of a Quaker assault on at least a dozen different clothing bales. These improvisations were not always successful. One of the DPS initially complained that the men kitted out in surgical gowns looked more like butchers than angels. Yet they carried on undaunted, and in dreadful conditions. The winter of 1946 was severe and power cuts were common: when rehearsing for the Marktkirche nativity play, the organist had to practise in a church so cold that someone had to hold a lamp over her hands.

Christmas festivities were fun and they gave DPS some sense of purpose. The children rehearsing their Christmas dance in shabby surroundings at Mojtinny look lively, enthusiastic and proud. In contrast, a quick glance at their audience – largely tired, worn women and young children – gives us a glimpse into the weariness of everyday life. Even more significantly, at Christmas the roles in the camps were reversed and DPS were able to give gifts to relief workers. These were often in the form of specially prepared national dishes. Latvian DPs gave Quakers an enormous cake and numerous pairs of hand-knitted gloves. Sometimes the presents were substantial. Elizabeth Bayley and her colleague Tim Evens were touched to receive fin, handmade boots from some DPs – although they realised that the boots must have been made from black market leather.

The Christmas story is one of homelessness, fear, oppression and, ultimately, hopes. It was an ideal vehicle for the articulation of DP grief. At Marktkirche nativity play the first king was played by a Cossack. He had fought in the revolution of 1917, had left Russia during the civil war and had been wandering the world ever since. It was impossible for him to return to the Soviet Union, and when he called out,

“Alas! We are impoverished!” he did so with genuine anguish. Yet without denying the unhappiness of the DPs, Quakers wanted to stress that Christmas really was a time of hope. At the Marktkirche six children, all dressed as angels, sat around a Christmas tree and recited a speech: “I remember, before our home were destroyed, before our parents were killed or taken away, before the war made everything so unhappy – I remember that we used to have trees like this little tree and we sang and were happy.”

Each child spoke in turn so that the words were heard in Ukrainian, Polish, German, Lithuanian, Estonian and Latvian. After the last speech the Christmas tree lights were turned on, lighting up the world for the future.

Quakers wanted to use Christmas to promote international co-operation, especially between the DPs and the now-defeated Germans. Before the 1946 nativity play at Mojtinny, the German and the Polish children had never talked to each other. Similarly, at the Marktkirche, the local Germans joined in with the DPS for the first time. According to Margaret McNeil, there was no hint of unpleasantness between the different groups: “Nationalities were forgotten.”

Yet nationalities were not really forgotten. By celebrating national traditions DPs were creating a link with the lost homeland, and reinvigorating cultures that Hitler had tried to destroy. So the Polish children at Vienenburg camp celebrated St Nicholas's day on 6 December 1946, children in various national costumes sang alongside the angels at Marktkirche, and the Hungarian Bandura band put on a special Christmas performance. International rivalries did exist and were often evident. Margaret McNeil complained that the Poles would insist on singing for longer than anyone else, and the Virgin Mary had to be played by a Quaker, to avoid “the hysterical jealousy which the choice of a DP or a German would cause”.

When DPS created their own Christmas celebrations they tended to be highly nationalistic. At Christmas 1946 the Lithuanian festival featured national dances, songs and poems. Santa Claus appeared briefly but the production served mainly to mourn the collective loss. In the words of one of the children: "I'm still so little, like a lonely bird. Without my native county, without a home."

Nationalism was sometimes expressed more forcefully. In 1946, Polish DPs celebrated Christmas with the traditional coffee, cake, schnapps, and long fiery speeches. The guests – Quakers and a British officer – applauded enthusiastically along with everyone else. Only later did the interpreter confess that the speaker had exhorted the DPs to return home soon, with their weapons in their hands, to chase out the Russians. This was not a message the guests wanted to endorse.

These DP Christmas celebrations give us some insight into the postwar world. Hostilities had ended but the problems of war continued and many lives were still blighted by displacement and deprivation. They also give us a foretaste of the Cold War to come: DPs from the east were deeply hostile to the Soviet Union. Christmas gave them a brief respite from it all. In Elizabeth's Bayley's words: "Thank goodness they could have some time to be gay in, for I fear the coming year is not going to be a happy one for them."

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