

British Columbia's Anti-Nazi Germans: The Tupper Creek Refugees

JONATHAN F. WAGNER

"I believe it is peace in our time" were the words Neville Chamberlain used to predict the effects of the political settlement he and the French leader Daladier worked out with Hitler at Munich in the final days of September 1938. That agreement, which transferred the so-called Sudetenland portion of the Czechoslovak Republic to Hitler's Germany did not, of course, ensure peace. Among the first to comprehend the real meaning of Munich were the anti-Nazi Germans living in the Sudetenland. Many of these people chose to flee their homeland to avoid certain suffering at the hands of the occupying Nazi forces and their local supporters. In the next few months a number of these "last free Germans from the heart of Europe"¹ made their way to Canada. Nearly half of the refugees settled in British Columbia.

These refugees came from many different districts of the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland; they fled from both the small towns and larger cities in the predominantly German portions of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. Most did not know each other before 1939. What bound them together was a common fear of Nazi persecution for their past association with the Sudeten German Social Democratic Party (the DSAP). Indeed, nearly all of the adult refugees, both men and women, had been prominent figures in the DSAP.

Following Hitler's take-over of Austria in March 1938, the Sudeten German pro-Nazi forces stepped up their campaign of agitation in the Sudetenland. From this time the situation of the German socialists in Czechoslovakia worsened dramatically. The Sudeten German Socialist Party represented the most successful of the democratic parties which had "worked for a solution of the German problem within the framework of the Czechoslovak constitution."² The Nazis considered this DSAP willing-

¹ "Von der Moldau zum Peace River," *Sudeten Freiheit* (Oslo), 1 July 1939.

² Memorandum on the Problem of the Sudeten German Refugees, 9 Nov. 1938; Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 617, file 916207, pt. 3. Subsequent references to the materials in the Public Archives of Canada will be

ness to co-operate with the "national enemies," the Czechs, disgraceful. They branded the socialists "enemies of their own German flesh and blood."³ Such "traitors" deserved the concentration camp or worse.

Until the Sudetenland had been detached from Czechoslovakia, the Nazis could not eliminate their socialist opponents entirely. Thus while they waited for Hitler, they were forced to restrain their desire for revenge. Nevertheless, the pro-Nazis did conduct a campaign of aggression against the DSAP in a host of different ways. The cases of Joseph Kreuzinger of Schoenbach and Karl Burdak of Marienbad, two DSAP members who later settled in British Columbia, are illustrative of such Nazi violence and intimidation. On the night of 14 September 1938, returning home from a sitting of the city council, Representative Kreuzinger, a DSAP party treasurer, received serious head wounds from a beating administered by a gang of Nazi thugs.⁴ At about the same time, Karl Burdak was kidnapped in Marienbad by pro-Nazis and along with several other prominent local DSAP people held prisoner for several days in a hunting cabin outside town. To effect the release of Burdak and the others, the Czech government had to send in an armoured car and military personnel.⁵

Although such stepped-up Nazi pressure caused some membership decline, the Sudeten German Social Democratic Party apparatus and leadership remained intact throughout the pre-Munich period. As the Nazi terror increased, the party leadership steeled its resolve to resist Hitler's supporters. If civil war resulted, they were determined to "go down fighting."⁶ Before September 1938 the party functionaries did not consider the possibility of flight seriously.⁷ Among other things, it was decided that a discussion of flight would only weaken the morale of the rank and file.⁸

When the Sudetenland was abruptly handed over to Hitler on 1 October 1938, the Sudeten German Social Democratic leaders were totally

designated by the abbreviation "PAC" and the specific part number, as these items share the designation of Immigration Branch, RG76, vol. 616 or 617, file 916207.

³ "Sudetendeutsche in Canada wehren sich gegen Nazi Agenten," *Deutsche Zeitung für Canada*, 12 July 1939.

⁴ "In Memoriam Josef Kreuzinger," *Sudeten-Bote* [SB], Mai-Juni 1969, p. 22.

⁵ Author's interview with Karl Burdak in Dawson Creek, B.C., 14 May 1978.

⁶ *Menschen im Exil: eine Dokumentation der sudetendeutschen sozialdemokratischen Emigranten von 1938 bis 1945* (Stuttgart, 1974), p. 22.

⁷ "Der Weg in die Fremde," *Sudetan-Jahrbuch der Selinger Gemeinde*, 1978, p. 36. Martin Backstein, *Wenzel Jaksch und die sudetendeutsche Sozialdemokratie* (Munich, 1974), chap. 10.

⁸ *Menschen im Exil*, pp. 29-36.

unprepared for the consequences. They could not fight, for there was no hope of success (the Henlein or pro-Nazi supporters outnumbered them in most regions of the Sudetenland by four or five to one); they could not stay, because to remain would subject them to the unrestricted vengeance of the Nazis. The only option was flight. In the few hours provided them to leave their homes and to move eastward into the unoccupied areas of Czechoslovakia, they managed to salvage only those belongings they could carry with them.⁹ When they arrived in the hastily constructed refugee camps in the interior of Czechoslovakia, their plight did not greatly improve: they were resented by the Czechs as possible pretexts for future demands from Hitler.¹⁰

Ironically, the solution to this untenable situation came from Great Britain. In early October 1938 prominent private English citizens and members of the Labour Party began a movement to save the Sudeten German socialists.¹¹ The publicity of this crusade plus the continuing tragedy of the refugees (the Czechs had begun sending German socialists back into the Nazi-occupied Sudetenland) finally prompted the British government to act. It was decided not only to grant temporary asylum for refugees in Great Britain but also to provide the financial means to enable the victims of Munich to emigrate overseas. In January 1939, with French assistance, the British government provided a gift to the Czechoslovak Republic of £4 million. This sum was specifically designated for the solution of the refugee problem through emigration.¹²

Several months before the British-French gift was made the Canadian High Commissioner in London had proposed that Canada receive some of the refugees.¹³ In the first week of November 1938, F. C. Blair, the Director of the Immigration Branch in the Department of Mines and Resources, acted on the Commissioner's proposal by sending officials of

⁹ The appeals filed for property compensation with the Federal Republic of Germany's *Wiedergutmachungsamt* after the war by some of the refugees indicate how much was lost. For example, Peter Schmidt, a Sudeten refugee who settled at Bright Sand, Saskatchewan, claimed to have lost 30,000 kronen for his home, furniture, library and personal belongings and 112,000 kronen in savings. See the *Antrag des Herrn Peter Schmidt . . . nach dem Bundesergänzungsgesetz für der Opfer des national-sozialistischen Verfolgung/BEG*. Document in possession of author.

¹⁰ Blair memorandum to Crerar, 3 Dec. 1938; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 3.

¹¹ *Menschen im Exil*, p. 19.

¹² See "Der Weg in die Fremde," pp. 42-43; and Treaty Series no. 9, Agreements Between His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, the Government of the French Republic, and the Government of the Czecho-Slovak Republic regarding Financial Assistance to Czecho-Slovakia; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 4.

¹³ Blair memorandum, 8 Mar. 1940; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 6.

the Canadian National Railway's and Canadian Pacific Railway's colonization departments to Europe to "ascertain what number of fully experienced and partly experienced farmers and gardeners were available"¹⁴ among the refugees. These officials reported back that, although some of the Sudetens had had agricultural experience, the overwhelming majority were from industrial backgrounds.¹⁵ While this was taking place, representatives of the refugees sailed to Canada to present their case directly to Ottawa. Their delegation¹⁶ convinced the Canadian government that despite the refugees' industrial background the Sudetens "would be suitable for settlement on the land here."¹⁷ Ottawa agreed to accept 3,500 refugees. The only outstanding issue remaining was the problem of how to finance the immigration.

After some hard reckoning, the immigration department officials, together with the representatives of the railways, which were charged with the task of transporting and settling the Sudetens, worked out a mutually satisfactory financial arrangement. By the end of December 1938, it had been decided that the total cost of the immigration would be borne by the Czechoslovak Republic, utilizing those funds about to be provided by the British government. More specifically, a sum of \$1,500 plus transportation costs was allotted for each family. A limited number of single men were to receive £200 or \$886. Furthermore, it was agreed that the "individual families may not claim all or any part of the \$1,500. . . . The control of the money will therefore remain with the Dominion government and it is proposed to handle it through the Comptroller of the Treasury and will be made available to the Railways on our requisition."¹⁸ Only on acceptance of this latter condition — that the railroads would have absolute control over how the \$1,500 for each family would be spent — did the CPR and CNR agree to take charge of the settlement of the refugees.¹⁹

The first transports carrying Sudetens to Canada left England at the beginning of April 1939. Over the next four months more than a thousand

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Memorandum to Crerar, 3 Dec. 1938; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 3.

¹⁶ The delegation was composed of Franz Rehwald, an editor of a trade-union newspaper and secretary to Wenzel Jaksch, the leader of the Sudeten Social Democrats; Dr. Kamil Slapak, Czech Minister of Social Welfare, and Father Emanuel Reichenberger, spokesman for the Catholics among the refugees. See Blair memorandum, 20 Dec. 1938; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 3.

¹⁷ Memorandum to Morisset, 24 Mar. 1939; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 4.

¹⁸ Memorandum to Blair, 8 Mar. 1940; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

refugees in groups of ten to twenty families on seventeen different ships made their way to safety in this country. (Because the Nazis occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the additional 2,500 persons the immigration department had intended to take in could not be rescued.) The two railways divided the refugees nearly equally, with the CNR taking charge of 148 families and thirty-four single men and the CPR 152 families and thirty-seven unmarried men. To make supervision more efficient, the railways chose to settle the Sudetens as close together as possible. The CNR located their charges in and around St. Walburg, Saskatchewan; the CPR established their families in British Columbia's Peace River district near Tupper.

The CPR transported its Sudetens by train to British Columbia in several groups during the months April to August 1939. Once the would-be settlers had reached Tupper the railway officials were faced with the more difficult part of their assignment. The settlement directors had three major tasks to perform: first, they had to create farmland from bush; second, they had to teach the Sudetens how to make proper use of their new farms; finally, they had to provide for the Sudetens while these two problems were being solved.

The land the CPR first purchased for its Sudetens consisted of a block of 20,356 acres situated along the Northern Alberta Railway near its northernmost end. In 1939 this land, which comprised most of the old Gundy Ranch holdings, contained only 650 cleared acres. Heavy bush and swampland covered the remainder. For this undeveloped land the CPR paid an average of \$1.65 an acre. In the first two years of the settlement, the CPR found it necessary to purchase additional land so that by 1941 the total available to the Sudetens would be nearly 24,000 acres.²⁰

In the original stages, the CPR organized the settlement on what it believed to be a co-operative basis. In general, this co-operative plan called for the housing of the settlers at central points and the provisioning of the individual families from common stores. This scheme was to be followed until enough new land had been broken to provide each settler family with its own quarter section (160 acres) upon which a minimum of twenty-five acres would have been cleared. With the land made ready, each family would move out onto its allotted farm and proceed to conduct its affairs on a largely independent basis.²¹

²⁰ Report on the Tupper Creek, B.C., Sudeten Settlement Scheme, 11 Sept. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*

More specifically, the co-operative plan divided the settlement into what became known as the Riverside, Parkdale, West End and Central groups. Established at separate locations, each of the groupings contained houses for the individual families and barns that "could be used jointly for cattle until further progress was made." In addition, the central group, the largest of the four, which was set up near the former ranch buildings, contained a blacksmith shop, garage, machine shop, store and storehouse, administrative building to house the settlement's supervisor, and several small houses for the settlers. After the first year of settlement further groups were established. Eventually there would be eight such centres.²²

The CPR distributed or provided several types of provisions to its Sudetens: farm machinery, livestock, household wares and food, and for the first year a small monthly cash allowance of \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children. The CPR officials controlled the settlement's machinery from a central pool as community property. The settlers had no jurisdiction over how the machinery was used. In fact, the railway administrators often used non-settlers to run the tractors or breaking-ploughs. Only after a large enough portion of the settlement land had been cleared did the CPR begin to provide machinery for the individual farmers.

Livestock was managed in a similar way. "Central breeding yards for pig and chicken raising,"²³ for example, were set up under a CPR supervisor. When a settler was deemed ready he was supplied with a pig, a cow and a few chickens. Although less complicated a procedure, personal provisioning was also controlled by the CPR through the settlement's storehouse. A reporter for the *Edmonton Journal* described the first hand-outs, which included "rolled oats, rice, potatoes, lemons, butter, eggs, eight blankets, pillow cases, washtub, pail, teakettle, coffee pot . . . , soap, matches, kitchen range."²⁴ Tools were less individualized; for example, "every second man received a hammer, every eighth man a saw. . . ."²⁵

Because time was so crucial in the summer of 1939 (the bitterly cold Peace River country winter was fast approaching), activity at Tupper took on a frenetic quality from the beginning. The dusty, hot, back-breaking work of clearing the land went on day and night. The three

²² Macalester to Blair, 7 Mar. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

²³ Report on Tupper Creek, B.C., Sudeten Settlement Scheme, 11 Sept. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

²⁴ Gordon McCallum, "Former Prague Physician Now Tupper Farm Worker," *Edmonton Journal*, 22 Aug. 1939.

²⁵ Willi Schoen, "Viel Steine Gab's und Wenig Brot," *Vorwärts*, Oct. 1969, no. 10, p. 17.

CCA (Canadian Colonization Association branch of the CPR) tractors "were stopped just long enough to be fueled and greased."²⁶ Carpenters constructed settler homes in the same hurried fashion. At first, these "14' by 18' shanties" left much to be desired. According to one settler, there were so many cracks between the boards you could "see the countryside from within and the mice would come and go as freely as they liked."²⁷ By fall, however, they had been insulated against the cold. By then enough land had been cleared to allow for a sizeable planting in the spring. In short, the settlement had made considerable progress when 1940 arrived.

As the settlement entered its second year, the provision of household needs and the control of livestock became increasingly an individual matter for the settlers. Nevertheless, the management of the assets of the settlement still remained under the auspices of the railway. The Tate Creek Development Company, the holding company which controlled the land, buildings and the major machinery, did not have a refugee on its board of directors. The harvests for the first several years were pooled and managed strictly by the supervisors to ensure that the results of the first plantings were equitably shared and that sufficient provision was made for seed grain for the next year's crop.²⁸ The CPR's agents continued to administer the settlement fund.

Although the CPR and government officials believed that their cooperative plan seemed "compatible with the social democratic principles of these people,"²⁹ difficulties which threatened the existence of the project soon arose. Serious problems existed due to two basic factors: the nature of the settlers themselves (their attitudes and their skills or lack thereof) and the way in which the CPR representatives conducted the settlement.³⁰

To understand the responses of the Sudetens in their new country, one must first know more about them. To begin with, the great majority of settlers were youthful. Of the 189 single men and heads of families who formed the core of the Tupper settlement, 75 percent (142) were under forty years of age. Some 40 percent (seventy-seven) of the 189 were aged between twenty-six and thirty-six years. Only 11 percent (twenty-one)

²⁶ McCallum, "Former Prague Physician."

²⁷ Schoen, "Viel Steine Gab's."

²⁸ See F. B. McConnell's *The Sudeten Settlement, Report of Second Year's Operations*; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8, or H. J. Siemens' *The Sudeten Settlement, Report of Third Year's Operations*; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

²⁹ Report on the Tupper Creek, B.C., *Sudeten Settlement Scheme*, 11 Sept. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

³⁰ Schoen, "Viel Steine Gab's," p. 16.

were over the age of forty-six.³¹ The element of youth would impart to the group not only strength and vitality but also adaptability. It would enable them to overcome physical and other difficulties which older persons might have found insurmountable. Inevitably, this youthfulness also meant that impatience would find its way into their dealings.

Unlike the overwhelming majority of German-speaking immigrants who had settled in Canada's west in the late nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century, the Sudetens had not been peasants or agricultural workers in their European homeland. As mentioned above, they were almost exclusively urban dwellers with industrial or trade backgrounds. Just how urban the settlers were can be seen, for example, in the Immigration department's occupational figures for St. Walburg's Sudetens. In Saskatchewan's settlements sixty-six different occupations were represented. Of the 186 employable male refugees there were only sixteen described as either farmers (fourteen) or gardeners (two).³² The same occupational pattern appeared among British Columbia's Sudetens. Of the Tupper refugees who responded to a 1969 questionnaire which, among other things, requested information about their occupations in the Sudetenland, only two out of the eighty-seven respondents listed themselves as agriculturalists (one farmer and one gardener). The eighty-five others overwhelmingly described themselves as artisans (shoemakers, tailors, masons, bakers, blacksmiths, etc.) or workers in glass, metal or textile factories. In addition, there were a few white-collar workers such as clerks or bookkeepers among the group.³³ Obviously these people were not prepared for the harsh reality of pioneer life in British Columbia's north. To survive, they had to exhibit great flexibility in radically reorienting their lives; they had to learn a great amount that was confusing and new in a very short time. Both tasks were difficult, and created strain and anxiety.

As well as youth and the urban-industrial characteristic, political traditions greatly affected the attitudes and posture of British Columbia's Sudetens. As noted briefly above, the refugees were by no means typical DSAP members. The ranks of Tupper's settlers were composed of important socialist union officials, contributors to the party newspapers, Social Democratic Youth leaders, chairwomen of the party's women's organiza-

³¹ See the Complete Lists of Families which Sailed to Canada in the Period April-July 1939, Canadian Pacific Railway Settlement, Tupper Creek, B.C.; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 5.

³² German-Czechs-St. Walburg Occupational List; PAC . . . , vol. 616 . . . , pt. 5.

³³ The questionnaires from 1969 are in the possession of the author.

tions, secretaries in the local and regional DSAP offices, advisors to the party's national governing council, and prominent functionaries in the *Republikanische Wehr* (RW), the DSAP's militant defence organization.³⁴ This high level of active involvement shows clearly that the group possessed many strong-willed and civic-minded members. Moreover, the prominence of so many secretaries and local leaders suggests a high level of self-reliance and decision-making capacity. Finally, their political past familiarized them with organizational procedures and with the condition of being a part of an organization in which they were valued as important if not equal participants. DSAP membership had always involved them deeply in democratic procedures.

A report submitted by Willi Wanka,³⁵ the elected head of the settlers' committee, to the CPR in October 1940 briefly and accurately summed up the grievances most keenly felt by the Sudetens at the end of the first year of the settlement.³⁶ In his report Wanka, an articulate and intelligent man who despite his mere thirty years had had considerable administrative experience both as a representative for the Sudeten immigrants in London and as a close associate of the DSAP leadership in Prague, criticized the railway for the way it controlled the common crops, the land and the settlement fund. In addition, he objected to the supervisor's treatment of the settlers.³⁷

More specifically, with regard to the land and the crops, Wanka demanded the placing of more responsibility on the shoulders of the settlers. He did not dispute the ideal of a common or pooled harvest, for he recognized this procedure as necessary given the nature of the land when the settlers arrived. What he and the others objected to was the railway's arbitrary insistence on complete control of how the crop was utilized or divided up. In his memorandum Wanka insisted upon a separate accounting (with separate books) for the crop returns distinct

³⁴ A sample reading of the obituary notices or birthday greetings in the *Sudeten-Bote* (Pouce Coupé), the official publication of the Western Canadian Sudeten German Society, indicates how active the immigrants had been in the Sudeten German socialist movement. See for example "Zum 60. Geburtstag Willi Wanka," *SB*, Mai-Juni 1970, pp. I-IV; "Anton Schindler zum Gedächtnis," *SB*, März-April 1969, p. 8; "Jubilaeumsjahr im Hause Tamm," *SB*, Jan-Feb 1977, pt. 23; and "In Memoriam Josef Kreuzinger," *SB*, Mai-Juni 1969, p. 22.

³⁵ For a brief description of Wanka's career see "Zum 60. Geburtstag Willi Wanka," *SB*, Mai-Juni 1970, pp. I-IV.

³⁶ For typical expressions of settler discontent see the letter of Franz Reilich to his brother Gustav in Brooklyn, N.Y., dated 26 January 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9; or Schoen, "Viel Steine Gab's," pp. 15-18.

³⁷ Willi Wanka, Memorandum about the Sudeten Settlement at Tupper, B.C., 22 Oct. 1940; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

from the general settlement fund. Moreover, he called for settler control of the crop. "The crop resulted out of the labour of the settlers themselves," he pointed out, "and it would mean a denial of all the principles on which the business transactions in every orderly state are built up if the CCA would deny the settlers the possibility to administer the wealth which they themselves created through their own work." Reflecting the impatience felt by the settlers, Wanka urged the railway to speed up the process of individualizing the land. He called for the CCA to transfer titles of land ownership to the Sudetens; he requested that the railway grant the settlers a voice in the directorate of the Tate Creek Development Company since "after more than one year the settlers have not even received the first representation and they have not the least knowledge about the present extent and operation of the Company."³⁸

Just as much a matter of concern to Wanka and the settlers was the railway's administration of the general sum provided by the British government to settle the Sudetens in Canada. Wanka's report specifically complained that the CCA had not kept proper records of how the monies were being spent. For example, the \$1,500 allotted for each family had not been handled correctly as "the charging of the individual families has been given little consideration in the expenditures made or in the general equipment of the ranch." Moreover, financial confusion had resulted "because the settlers arrived at different times at Tupper Creek and have therefore been charged under the heading of sustenance in a diverse manner." Wanka demanded that order be restored by permitting the settlers to participate in determining how the funds were allocated and spent. He suggested a specific plan for dividing the sum equitably among the settlers. This plan would assure that "the individual settler would have the liberty to decide whether the balance remaining to his account should be used more for the sustenance of his family or more for the actual fitting out of his farm."³⁹

Finally, Wanka's October 1940 memorandum bitterly criticized the settlement's supervisor, F. B. McConnell. In his report Wanka described the ex-military man McConnell as abrasive, petty, vindictive and overly jealous of his authority. In his role as supervisor McConnell constantly acted as if he were "dealing with internees rather than settlers." His arrogant, often "defaming" treatment of the Sudetens, Wanka asserted, "was responsible at least for 50% of the difficulties in the settlement. . . ."

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Wanka called for McConnell's immediate replacement. He concluded his indictment with these pathetic yet eloquent words:

The Sudeten settlers are of the opinion that they do not need to be further exposed to the treatment of Mr. McConnell since they did not leave their old homes because of any crimes or misdeeds, but solely and alone for the reason that at home they fought for the same ideals against the Nazis, the same difficulties for which the British Empire is at present involved in a life and death struggle with Nazi Germany.⁴⁰

The answer to Wanka's memorandum was straightforward. In one settler's words, "the demands . . . were refused point-blank."⁴¹ But this was not all. T. C. F. Herzer, the General Manager of the CCA, who responded officially to the Wanka critique, attacked the mechanism by which the settlers had registered their protest. "The whole idea of a committee, as at present organized representing the settlers over against the management," he announced, "is wrong and can only lead to conflicts. It originates from party or labour organizations in the Old Country."⁴² Herzer's summary response brought about the resignation in protest of Wanka and all members of the settlement committee.

News of the settlement's difficulties soon leaked out. Despite the fact that movement out of the settlement was strongly discouraged by both the railway officials and by authorities in the Immigration department (the settlers were informed in no uncertain terms that abandonment of the land would result in termination of their support from or claims upon the settlement fund⁴³), some of those who found the pioneer work too difficult or the control of the CCA too rigid did manage to leave Tupper to try their fortunes elsewhere. Several of these people ended up in or passed through Edmonton, where they made public their criticisms of the settlement.⁴⁴ There they found particular sympathy among that city's Refugee Committee.

Under the direction of Dr. D. E. Cameron of the University of Alberta, the Edmonton Refugee Committee acted on behalf of the Sudetens. In a series of letters to railway and governmental officials Cameron described

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Franz Reilich to Gustav Reilich, 26 Jan. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁴² Herzer Memorandum to the Settlers at Tupper Creek, 20 Nov. 1940; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁴³ See Devlin to Blair (21 June 1941), Blair to Devlin (24 June 1941), and McGowan to Blair (8 Feb. 1941); PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁴⁴ Adolf Sternshein, a former Prague academic, represents a settler who moved to Edmonton after finding the conditions at Tupper impossible. See the documents dealing with Sternshein's case in PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

the general "sourness" he perceived in the settlers.⁴⁵ Among other things, the committee urged that "an adequate accounting be given to each family of its standing and its rights."⁴⁶ The committee warned the CPR and Ottawa that, unless adequate steps were taken to improve conditions at Tupper, "the demand for a public investigation cannot be long delayed."⁴⁷

The advice of the committee was not received kindly. F. C. Blair's response for the government was typical. Deeply resenting the meddling of "outsiders" in Sudeten affairs, the deputy minister simply wrote off the committee and the other critics as "not much better fitted to know what settlement means than were the leaders of the colony."⁴⁸ In rejecting their advice, he countered with a warning of his own: "I would suggest that the Edmonton Committee exercise every care to avoid erecting in the minds of these people that they are being unfairly treated or that they are entitled to further financial assistance, which in the very nature of the case, must come out of the Canadian taxpayer. . . ."⁴⁹

In addition, the protests emanating from Tupper reached beyond Edmonton and Ottawa to London and the office of Wenzel Jaksch, the exiled leader of the DSAP. When Jaksch heard of Wanka's and the committee's sudden resignation, he immediately began making plans for a personal visit to the Sudeten settlements in Canada.⁵⁰ To this end, the distressed Jaksch wrote Vincent Massey, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, outlining the reasons for his intended visit and requesting the Canadian government's assistance to facilitate his journey. Jaksch's letter was tactful but firm. Admitting that he had expected some difficulties in the establishment of the settlements, he nevertheless registered dismay at the problems which seemed to be developing. The split between settlers and railway he attributed generally to the fact that "the settlers have a feeling of being mere objects with no rights whatever against the CPR. . . ." More specifically, he objected that "money raised from public funds [with] which the government of the United Kingdom wished to honor the moral obligation they owed to the victims of Munich" should

⁴⁵ See Cameron to Macalester (8 Jan. 1941), Cameron to Mackenzie King (2 Nov. 1940), and The Edmonton Refugee Committee, January 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁴⁶ Blair memorandum (Feb. or March 1941?); PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁴⁷ Edmonton Refugee Committee, Jan. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁴⁸ Blair to Little, 19 May 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁴⁹ Blair to Cameron, 4 Feb. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁵⁰ Blair memorandum for file, 29 Jan. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

be exclusively controlled by the CPR. As Wanka had, he urged that "in accordance with democratic principles a certain amount of influence . . . be conceded to the elected settlers' committees and that the colonization funds would be controlled by an administrative body composed of representatives of the Federal Government, of the Railways Companies, and of the settlers."⁵¹

Like Wanka and the Edmonton committee, the DSAP leader met with non-compliance and hostility. The railway officials and the immigration authorities agreed that no "circumstances in the settlement at Tupper . . . would justify a visit by Mr. Jaksch."⁵² In F. C. Blair's words, it was "too late in the day"⁵³ to reorganize the settlement along the lines demanded by Jaksch. By stalling and by insisting that there was no ship space for Jaksch, the authorities did all they could to prevent the intended visit.⁵⁴ In the end Jaksch abandoned his plan.

The Sudetens and their spokesmen met with such resistance because, generally speaking, the authorities harboured low opinions of them. The negative attitude of the officials cannot be explained solely by the fact that the Sudetens were Germans and Canada was at war with Nazi Germany. Racial, cultural and socio-economic prejudices entered in as well. Thus in the reports, letters, and memoranda filed by field supervisors, railway officials, and government bureaucrats the Sudetens were repeatedly described as deficient in character, morals, and political consciousness.

The character deficiencies which the authorities claimed to discern in the Sudetens were fundamental. To begin with, they were described as primitive. For example, J. N. P. Macalester, the Chief Commissioner of the CPR, confided to F. C. Blair that "because they had been accustomed to a subsistence living . . . very few, if any, will ever become prosperous. . . ."⁵⁵ This primitiveness related closely to the group's alleged low level of intelligence. M. J. Scobie, a trusted advisor of Blair, put it crudely when he asserted that "stupidity . . . seems to dominate their lives."⁵⁶ Due to this "unintelligence," the settlers consistently exhibited an "inability to grasp the Canadian way of doing things. . . ."⁵⁷ Inefficiency, not in experi-

⁵¹ Wenzel Jaksch to Vincent Massey, 6 Mar. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁵² Macalester memorandum for Cresswell, 6 Jan. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁵³ Blair to Little, 19 May 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁵⁴ Little to Vincent Massey, 24 Mar. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁵⁵ Macalester to Blair, 17 June 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁵⁶ Scobie report on the Tupper Creek Sudeten Settlement, 11 Sept. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁵⁷ Macalester to Blair, 11 June 1942; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 10.

ence, McConnell insisted, was the fundamental reason why the "supervisory staff consistently [had to] reckon Sudeten labour on the basis of 20% of Canadian efficiency. . . ." ⁵⁸

Stupidity and its companion inefficiency might have been excused by the overseers if the Sudetens had not been seen to suffer even more serious moral flaws. According to the authorities, they all too often manifested "an unwillingness to make any contribution to the general good. . . ." ⁵⁹ In McConnell's words, "the responsibility felt by the average settler for anything beyond his own personal equipment is almost negligible." ⁶⁰ To the supervisor, H. J. Siemens, they suffered from a "low output psychology." ⁶¹ To make matters worse, the settlers were "whiners" who always found "plenty of causes and opportunity for making objections." ⁶² In their lack of co-operation they exhibited "cunning"; in their complaining they showed jealousy of one another. ⁶³ Such vices, Siemens asserted, were compounded by a "natural shiftiness." ⁶⁴ Finally, the Sudetens were condemned for their lack of religion. With disgust, F. C. Blair relayed to Superintendent Bavin of the RCMP how "very much incensed" a Roman Catholic priest of the Tupper District was "at the religious attitude of some of the settlers." ⁶⁵ The Mennonite Siemens reported in 1941 that "the religious life of the settlement is at a low ebb." Because of this, he added, "one does not receive a favourable impression of these people." ⁶⁶

A similar lack of sympathy and understanding characterized the critical attitudes of the officials toward the Sudetens' politics. For his efforts at organizing the settlement, Wanka was described by Blair as seeking to become "a little Hitler amongst his people." ⁶⁷ With obtuseness and near total ignorance, McConnell denied that the Sudetens had really been the victims of Hitler's aggression: "Only a relatively small number may be classed as genuine political refugees; the others used their association with

⁵⁸ McConnell Report on Second Year of Operations 1940; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁵⁹ Blair to N. A. Robertson, 20 Nov. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁶⁰ McConnell Report on Second Year of Operations 1940.

⁶¹ Siemens Report on Third Year's Operations, 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁶² Blair to Macalester, 29 Dec. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁶³ Scobie Report of the Tupper Creek Settlement, 11 Sept. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁶⁴ Siemens Report of Third Year's Operations, 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁶⁵ Blair to Bavin, 5 Sept. 1940; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 7.

⁶⁶ Siemens Report of Third Year's Operations 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁶⁷ Blair memorandum for file, 17 Oct. 1939; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

the Social Democratic Party as an opportunity of coming to Canada where they believed that they would be relatively well-to-do with the funds allotted them by the British government."⁶⁸ Moreover, the Sudetens were condemned for their "left wing labour union mentality" and for their "distrust of capitalism";⁶⁹ they were chided for not having "left their European politics in Europe along with the money and other effects they were compelled to abandon when they came here. . . ."⁷⁰

Limited by inadequate innate capacities, crippled by moral laxity, deluded by false political doctrines, the Sudetens were bound not to be able to measure up. Compared to Canadians, the Sudetens were miles behind. Again Blair's friend Scobie put it best. If Canadian settlers, Scobie announced, "had had half the chance which the Sudetens enjoyed they could have cleared more land in one year with the aid of the breaking machine than they [the Sudetens] could do with their present equipment in ten years."⁷¹ Thus if the Sudetens failed to survive, it could not possibly be due to poor land, inadequate provisioning, or inept guidance by the CPR or Ottawa. According to this logic, the foreigners had only themselves to blame.

The Sudeten settlement did not fail; the contrary occurred.⁷² Indeed, by 1945, the once unhappy and much maligned Willi Wanka could claim that "the Sudeten settlers at Tupper Creek have made remarkable progress . . . and their settlement on the land has been a full success. . . ."⁷³ There were several reasons for this success. To begin with, a significant number of the most dissatisfied or unqualified left the settlement in the first few years. They migrated to cities in the east or west seeking employment more appropriate for their skills; a number of the younger men joined the armed forces. In his year-end report for 1941 Siemens noted that the original 152 families and thirty-seven single men (518 persons) had declined in the first three years of the settlement to ninety-seven families and twelve single men (358 persons).⁷⁴ The significance of this 31 percent drop was clear. From the beginning, discerning members of

⁶⁸ McConnell, Report of Second Year's Operations; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 8.

⁶⁹ Herzer memorandum for Macalester, 5 Jan. 1941; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁷⁰ Blair to Bavin, 5 Sept. 1940; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 7.

⁷¹ Scobie Report on Tupper Creek Sudeten Settlement; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁷² For a good summation of the settlement's economic success see the CCA publication form 1955 "Report of the Sudeten Settlement Tupper, B.C.: Sixteen Years of Progress" (no date, no place of publication). Copy in author's possession.

⁷³ Wanka, Economic Progress of the Sudeten Settlement.

⁷⁴ Siemens Report of Third Year's Operations; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

the community realized that the CPR had not purchased enough land to provide adequately for all the settlers. One settler even complained that it had been downright "irresponsible" of the railway to have brought "so many people here since one knew exactly that they would not be able to exist."⁷⁵ The abandonment of the settlement by some thus enabled others who remained to secure enough land to survive.

The rapid conclusion of the individualization program was the second major reason for the settlers' success. By 1941 most of the remaining settlers had been moved out of the centres onto their own farms. This transferral allowed the settlers to exhibit independently their newly acquired talents for farming. On their own farms the Sudetens showed that they had learned quickly and well from their condescending or disapproving supervisors. For example, they followed livestock supervisor McArton's advice in utilizing superior breeding stock. Because of transportation costs, they concentrated on livestock production rather than growing grain for the market. Moreover, independence from the CPR solved the motivational problems about which the officials had complained so bitterly at the beginning. Likewise, individualization freed members of the group to engage in supplementary work to their farming. A significant number of Sudetens found jobs in construction on the Alaska Highway project which began in 1942. According to one settler, the building of the highway "brought the necessary additional finances which saved many from going under."⁷⁶

Finally, the third major factor contributing to settlement success was the skilful co-operation and unity exhibited by the settlers in the taking over and directing of their own community affairs. In February 1942 the railway finally agreed to one of Wanka's long-standing demands. The CPR accepted two settlers (Wanka and Alois Mollik) to represent the settlers on the Board of Directors of the Tate Creek Development Company.⁷⁷ Within a year the remaining CPR representatives had resigned and the settlers assumed complete control of the TCDC. Less than two years later, the settlers could report that "the entire indebtedness of the Tate Creek Development Company . . . for the purchase of lands of the Sudeten Settlement has now been paid off."⁷⁸ Similarly, the Tate Creek

⁷⁵ Franz Reilich, "30 Jahre Sudeten Klub Hamilton — Im Geist der Hilfsarbeitschaft und Freundschaft," *Vorwärts*, 19 Oct. 1971, pt. 15.

⁷⁶ Schoen, "Viel Steine Gab's," p. 12.

⁷⁷ Macalester to Blair, 18 Feb. 1942; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 9.

⁷⁸ Macalester to Jolliffe, 2 Dec. 1944, and F. C. Blair Memorandum of 29 Dec. 1942; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 10.

Co-operative Society under exclusive settler management flourished in the new environment of independence. In 1942 Wanka reported proudly to Siemens about the success of the 101 member Co-op:

The [Alaska] highway has now developed a new market for the settlement. We are supplying milk for one of the contractors at 40 cents per gallon. We ship around 150 gallons a day at present but hope to raise this figure soon to 250 gallons per day. In a few days we shall also start to ship eggs to the same contractor at 29 cents per dozen. This new line of marketing is also organized through the Co-op. The settlers bring their milk and eggs to the Co-op and from there the contractors take them away by truck.⁷⁹

In the end, the Sudetens forced those who had considered them so inefficient, unintelligent or unco-operative to reverse their judgments.⁸⁰ With what unconscious irony Siemens reported in August 1944 that “we received the impression that the crops in the Tupper Creek Settlement promised better returns” than any others in “all the Peace River area.” This was, he went on, “no doubt partly due to the new land but [was] also assisted by good field work.”⁸¹ Indeed, the tough, resilient refugees at Tupper Creek had accomplished in a remarkably short time what Wenzel Jaksch rightly described as one of the most difficult tasks of modern life — “the return of the industrial worker to the soil.”⁸² British Columbia and Canada have benefited from their success.

⁷⁹ Wanka to Siemens, 25 May 1943; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 10.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Macalester to Jolliffe, 15 Mar. 1944; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 10.

⁸¹ Siemens' Report Re: Tupper Settlement, 14 Aug. 1944; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 10.

⁸² Jaksch, *The Honest (Reliable) Pioneers of Tupper Creek*; PAC . . . , vol. 617 . . . , pt. 10.