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Vienna: Gateway to Freedom? The *Bricha* and the Rothschild Hospital

Christine Oertel

FOR THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN VIENNA, the first months after the end of the war were characterized by the basic political and material conditions that resulted from the city's sole occupation by the Soviets. Vienna was liberated by Soviet troops on April 13, 1945, and declared a Soviet zone.¹ Since the Allies were in disagreement about various organizational questions, such as Vienna's division into four sectors, it took until the end of August 1945 before Western occupation troops could open their headquarters in Vienna.²

Vienna in the Immediate Postwar Period

In addition to some two thousand Viennese Jews,³ thousands of Jews who were deported from other countries had also experienced the end of the war in Vienna and its environs. They included some 16,000 Jews originally from Hungary who had been deported to Vienna in 1944 as forced labor,⁴ and between 20,000 and 30,000 Jews⁵ who had been liberated from the concentration camps in Upper Austria.⁶ At the time, some 1,650,000 foreigners were present in Austria. The Allies' goal was to repatriate all of these homeless people as quickly as possible.⁷ The Allied armed forces took care of those Jewish survivors in Austria who immediately after their liberation were unable for health reasons to start their homeward trip. Especially Jews from Hungary tried to return home as soon as they were in a position to do so;

1 Donald R. Withnash and Edgar L. Erickson, *The American Occupation of Austria — Planning and Early Years*, Connecticut, 1985, p. 102.

2 Ibid., p. 150.

3 Ruth Beckermann, *Unzugehörig. Österreicher und Juden nach 1945*, Vienna, 1989, p. 99.

4 Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939–1945*, Detroit, 1981, pp. 449 ff.

5 Thomas Albrich, *Exodus durch Österreich. Die jüdischen Flüchtlinge 1945–1948 (Innsbrucker Forschungen zur Zeitgeschichte 1)*, Innsbruck, 1987, p. 12.

6 Cf. also the contribution by Michael John in this volume.

7 Bundesministerium für Inneres, Bericht des Bundesministers für Inneres Franz Olah an den Nationalrat über die Flüchtlingssituation in den Jahren 1945–1961 und über die Auflösung der Altflüchtlingslager in Österreich, Vienna, 25.5.1964, ÖStA/AdR, BMfI, Beilage zur Aktenzahl (enclosure with file no.): 159.004-12A/64.

however, the majority of the Polish Jews who had been liberated in Austria refused to go back to Poland.⁸

For those Jews wishing to go back, Vienna became a first intermediate stop on their journey home to Eastern Europe. National committees had been set up to help their compatriots with arrangements for their return. Many of those who originally returned to Eastern Europe, however, soon left their native countries again: anti-Semitism and the political and economic postwar situation made it impossible for them to make a fresh start. On their way back to the West they passed through Austria one more time. And once again Vienna became the first stop — this time on their way to a new home.

The Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Vienna offered the newcomers shelter and subsistence for the time being. However, not everyone wanted to live in camps. Many preferred life outside the camps, even if this meant a deterioration in subsistence levels. This group of Jewish DPs preferred Vienna to other Austrian cities because the metropolis offered the anonymity which enabled Holocaust survivors to feel safe in Austria.⁹

Immediately after liberation, there was no organized help for the Jewish survivors. The *Bricha* (flight and rescue) movement did not yet have a base in Vienna, and foreign aid organizations had not yet been authorized to operate. Those organizational structures, which developed slowly during this initial period, were important in the long run for the situation in Vienna and the activities of the *Bricha*. In contrast to the situation in the Austrian provinces, in Vienna the *Bricha* was not so obviously involved in the internal affairs of the DP camps, although they provided the location of the *Bricha* headquarters and commanders responsible for the whole of Austria. In addition, the headquarters of all the important relief organizations were also situated in Vienna. This concentration of Allied occupation authorities, the head offices of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), and the International Committee for Transient Jewish Ex-internees and Refugees (known as the International Committee) made it possible for the Jewish refugees living in Vienna to apply for help from the various relief committees. In addition to the city's geographical location, this infrastructure turned Vienna into one of the major bases of illegal aid to Jews escaping from the East.

Apart from Jewish relief organizations, it was above all the UNRRA which assumed limited responsibility for the foreign Jews living outside the DP camps in the US sector. This responsibility covered welfare, assistance with repatriation, and the distribution of clothing and daily necessities.¹⁰

8 Albrich, *Exodus*, pp. 18–26.

9 Leon Zelman, *Ein Leben nach dem Überleben*, Vienna, 1995, p. 129.

10 John C. L. Andreasson, "History of UNRRA-Team 350 - US Zone." UNA, RG 3.0.1.0.2.2, Box 2.

The UNRRA, which had been launched in 1943 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, had been set up in order to cope with the looming postwar refugee problem. The agreement to establish it was signed by 44 countries. UNRRA's headquarters were in Washington, D.C., while its European headquarters were based in London with regional subdivisions and bureaus throughout Europe, including Vienna.¹¹

The International Committee

During the immediate postwar months a vital role was played by the International Committee, which fought for the Jewish refugees' interests even before the *Bricha* had a base in Vienna. The International Committee was set up in August 1945, with the authorization of the Austrian federal government and the endorsement of the Allied military authorities, as an "independent and non-partisan relief organization and at the same time an umbrella organization of all Jewish relief committees."¹² The key figure on this committee was Bronislaw Teichholz, who had previously established central committees in Hungary and Romania and had been sent to Vienna by the International Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency to set up a committee there too.

The founding of a central, joint association had become necessary for practical reasons, although immediately upon its establishment disagreements arose about the division of areas of responsibility and the issue of influence on Vienna's Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (Jewish Community). Thus, for example, the Jewish Community saw the International Committee as something of a rival organization. Although it agreed to its establishment, the assent was conditional on the Committee's refraining from interfering in the Community's affairs, and limiting their activities so as not to present any impediment for Austrian Jews.¹³ At the constituent meeting on August 21, 1945, the following individuals were elected to the board: Akim Lewit from the Vienna Jewish Community as first chairman, Bronislaw Teichholz as second chairman, David Brill, also from the Jewish Community, as its representative, Viktor Schwarz as representative of the "National Welfare Committee for Hungarian Deportees," and Engineer Welt as delegate of the Romanian Red Cross. In addition, an eleven-member advisory board was

11 Yvonne von Stedingk, *Die Organisation des Flüchtlingswesens in Österreich seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (Abhandlungen zu Flüchtlingsfragen 6)*, Vienna, 1970, pp. 8, 43.

12 Report "Internationales Komitee für jüdische KZ-ler und Flüchtlinge," 10.10.1946. YIVO, RG 294.4, Microfilm roll 3, frame 591.

13 Minutes of a meeting to set up a Central Committee for transient Jewish Ex-internees and refugees, 21.8.1945. AJA, WJCP, H 42/Austria 194, pp. 3-4.

elected, chaired by the Deputy Mayor of Vienna, Karl Steinhardt. The Secretary General was Wilhelm Krell of the Vienna Jewish Community.¹⁴

The International Committee occupied a special position, since it was able on the one hand to support the *Bricha* in its work, while on the other hand its official status allowed it to associate with the Allied authorities, the Austrian authorities, UNRRA, and foreign consulates — a state of affairs which was of decisive importance for obtaining passports or visas. The International Committee was also able to intervene in day-to-day situations. For example, it was able to obtain the release of *Bricha* workers who had been arrested for crossing borders illegally.

In addition, the International Committee assumed something of an intermediary role between UNRRA, the AJDC, and the *Bricha*,¹⁵ and cooperated with the Jewish Community and foreign relief organizations, such as the “World Jewish Congress,” the “Polish World Federation,” and others.¹⁶ One of the International Committee’s major achievements was getting the Americans to take into their DP camps all Jewish refugees who came to the camp gates before April 21, 1947. This success was also a result of the persistence of the *Bricha* which, ignoring the ban, constantly smuggled Jewish refugees out of Vienna into the US zone, to Upper Austria and Salzburg.¹⁷

April 21, 1947, was a turning point in American DP policy. After the “Polish exodus” of 1946 was over, the Americans feared that with the arrival of Romanian Jews, a situation similar to the previous year would occur in their zone. In order to obviate this, after the qualifying day of April 21, 1947, they closed their DP camps to newly arrived refugees. For the Romanian Jews this meant that their flight temporarily came to an end in Vienna.¹⁸

Although the work of the International Committee was extremely successful, cooperation with the various authorities and agencies was not always smooth, since each of these organizations was pursuing its own goals.

The AJDC in Vienna

The AJDC, the world’s major Jewish relief organization, had come into being as early as 1914 and had been actively helping Europe’s Jews threatened by

14 Presentation on the “Internationales Komitee für durchreisende jüdische KZ-ler und Flüchtlinge” to Dr. Schwartz, Director-General of the AJDC, 8.11.1945. UNA, RG 3.0.1.5.2., Box 15, “Letters and Inwards Requisitions, Camp Alserbachstrasse,” p. 1.

15 Ephraim Dekel, *B’riha: Flight to the Homeland*, New York, 1973, p. 133.

16 Report “Internationales Komitee für jüdische KZ-ler und Flüchtlinge,” 10.10.1946. YIVO, RG 294.4, Microfilm roll 3, frame 593.

17 Dekel, *B’riha*, p. 138.

18 Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry*, Oxford, 1989, p. 234.

National Socialism since the 1930s. Together with some 2,000 Jewish organizations in the United States, the AJDC managed to provide varied help for Europe's threatened Jews. These structures proved their usefulness after the war too. Although the AJDC was active in a number of European countries, Austria's importance as a transit country for Jewish refugees made it one of the most important locations for the work of the AJDC.

After liberation, the organization took on an important task. Its personnel were among the first volunteers to enter the DP camps in Europe. They were social workers, child care workers, and medically trained personnel. Their work primarily involved distributing food and clothing, setting up kindergartens, schools, vocational training facilities, religious institutions, and infirmaries, and ensuring the supply needed in order to operate. They helped the survivors in their quest for relatives in other DP camps and in emigrating. Although the AJDC was not associated with Zionism, it supported the idea of emigration to Palestine. Between 1945 and 1950, the AJDC's relief measures for Europe amounted to a financial expenditure of some 200 million dollars at the value of the time.¹⁹

The first AJDC envoy arrived in Austria as early as May 1945 to check out the situation.²⁰ The first permanent representative was James D. Rice, who assumed control of operations for the whole of Austria on September 5, 1945.²¹ While AJDC activities had already started in Austria's western zones, operations in Vienna were still in their initial stages. In the fall and winter of 1945, only an initial inspection of the situation in Vienna was carried out. It was only possible to distribute some money and various goods, and make contacts with representatives of the Vienna Jewish Community.²²

The Jewish Community faced the ruins of a once-flourishing community that was suffering from an aging population, and its coffers were bare. The few Jews living in Vienna were not capable of re-organizing community life themselves: instead, they were dependent on hand-outs. In addition to financial problems, there were doubts as to whether it was at all desirable to rebuild and remain in Austria. Independent of these considerations, there was a need for a functioning Jewish organization in Vienna to which the survivors could turn for assistance.²³

19 Michael N. Dobkowski, *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations*, Connecticut, 1986, pp. 52–59.

20 Report by Reuben B. Resnik to Joseph Schwartz, 20.7.1945. AJDCA, RG 35G/195.

21 James D. Rice, AJDC Austria, to AJDC, New York, "Six-month report of AJDC activities in the American zone of Austria from September 1, 1945 to February 28, 1945" (Report No. 323), 15.3.1946. YIVO, RG 294.4, Microfilm roll 1, frames 509–520.

22 Report by Ralph Segalman (Report No. 373) 15.8.1946. AJDCA, RG 35G/195.

23 Helga Embacher, *Neubeginn ohne Illusionen. Juden in Österreich nach 1945*, Vienna, 1995, p. 29.

The newly founded Jewish Community was intended to be a provisional arrangement only until the Austrian Jews living in Vienna could emigrate. Since the Austrian authorities refused to make financial support available, the AJDC assumed most of the budget.²⁴ These monthly payments had not only to provide support for old and sick people who could not work and therefore received minimal rations, but also to pay for the missing-persons tracing service and the restoration of the Jewish cemeteries vandalized by the Nazis.²⁵

The Bricha in Vienna

The *Bricha* itself was able to set up a group in Vienna several months after liberation with the help of Bronislaw Teichholz, before Asher Ben-Natan took over control of the *Bricha* on November 1, 1945. In these first months after the end of the war, the *Bricha*'s work was particularly difficult, for a number of reasons. Besides its activities of safely smuggling refugees from the east to Vienna and then on to the American zone, one of its tasks was to find foodstuffs in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and get them to Vienna, the food situation in these countries being better at this time than in Austria. Besides, the AJDC's relief actions in Austria had not yet started, and food and other relief items had to be obtained via the AJDC representatives in Italy.²⁶

The first *Bricha* headquarters were located at the Westminster Hotel, in 5 Harmoniegasse, in Vienna's ninth district. Later they moved to 2 Frankgasse, in the same district. Officially, an American DP camp was accommodated in the building at No. 2 Frankgasse, but in actual fact the "camp," consisting of two apartments, served in its entirety until its closure in 1949 as the *Bricha* headquarters responsible for the whole of Austria.²⁷ Asher Ben-Natan headed the *Bricha* in Austria from November 1945 until his return to Palestine in mid-July 1947. He was not only in charge of the heads of the various local *Bricha* points in the Austrian provinces, but also had under his command his Vienna staff, consisting on average of between 15 and 20 individuals. His successor, until August 1948, was Amos Rabel.²⁸ The *Bricha* managed to gain the Americans' sympathy and practical help, mainly through personal contacts with those responsible for the American occupying power. Nevertheless, the *Bricha* still needed organizations such as the International Committee or the AJDC, which in official matters could

²⁴ Beckermann, *Unzugehörig*, p. 98.

²⁵ Report by Ralph Segalman (Report No. 373) 15.8.1946. AJDCA, RG 35G/197.

²⁶ Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 132.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Asher Ben-Natan, Interview in Vienna, 13.4.1997.

function as mediators with the authorities. In the AJDC's view, the *Bricha* proved to be too independent but at the same time too powerful to be ignored.²⁹

The Vienna DP Camps

Vienna was not only the location of a series of DP camps, of which 13 were for Jewish DPs only, but also of the UNRRA headquarters, as well as from October 25, 1945, the UNRRA-Team 350 responsible for Vienna, which was attached to the Vienna Area Command of the US Army. The DP camp administration was initially under the control of the DP Division of the Vienna Area Command of the US Army. Gradually administrative responsibility was handed over to UNRRA-Team 350.³⁰

On May 15, 1946, UNRRA assumed responsibility for the administration of the Jewish camps of Rothschildspital, Alserbachstrasse, Frankgasse, Rupertusplatz, Strudelhofgasse, and Seegasse. The UNRRA team now organized such things as the procurement of supplies, subsistence for incoming refugees, regular inspection of sanitary facilities, medical care and registration of newcomers, and distribution of clothing, and had overall responsibility for creating tolerable living conditions in the camps.

A further area of UNRRA activities was creating vocational training possibilities for the DPs. To this end workshops were set up and provided with the requisite material for operations. In addition, special service installations, such as mail services and the exchange of information, were set up. All of this also helped to improve discipline within the camps. For its part, UNRRA handed over responsibility for the camps' internal affairs to the DP camp leadership, which was on the whole democratically elected. This transferred greater autonomy to the camps, so that by the end of 1946 all camps were largely administratively independent. They had their own camp leaders and welfare committees, their own DP doctors and nurses, and their own staff, who looked after meal preparation, stores, and keeping the camp clean.³¹

This transfer of authority to the DPs themselves enabled the *Bricha*, by arrangement with the International Committee, to bring influence to bear on the internal administration by trying to put its own people in decisive

29 James D. Rice, "The Brichah or Aiyah Bet" (sic), 1.3.1946. AJDCA, RG 35G/195.

30 Frederick T. Sillett, Director of UNRRA-Team 350 to Helen R. Jeter of UNRRA CHQ, Vienna; "History of UNRRA-Team 350," 14.1.1947. UNA, RG 3.0.1.0.2.2, Box 2, "History of UNRRA-Team 350-US Zone."

31 Report by John C. L. Andreasson, UNA, RG 3.0.1.0.2.2, Box 2, "History of UNRRA-Team 350 - US Zone."

positions — something which came about more in the US occupation zone than in Vienna, however.³² The differences between the Jewish DP camps in Vienna were a result of their absorption capacity, as well as the variability of the groups accommodated and the length of time that these camps operated.

The Rothschildspital (Rothschild Hospital)

The biggest and most important Jewish DP camp was in the former Rothschild Hospital on the Waehringerguertel Ring Road in the 18th district in the US sector. Until its closure in October 1942, the Rothschild Hospital had been a Jewish hospital.³³ As early as the summer of 1945, the Americans made the complex of buildings available to the Jewish DPs as a transit and nursing camp,³⁴ but it did not open officially until October 11, 1945.³⁵ The fact that this building was able to be used for DPs after the war was the outcome of negotiations with the American occupation authorities conducted by Bronislaw Teichholz, who would later become the camp's head. Just after the war ended, Nazis under arrest and their guards were accommodated in the well-preserved central section, while only those parts damaged in the war were available to the refugees.³⁶

Other reports indicate that Dr. Emil Tuchmann played a major role in the return of the Rothschild Hospital to the Vienna Jewish Community. Tuchmann was one of the most controversial figures of the postwar Jewish community. Because of his prewar position in the Vienna Congregation, during the Nazi period he had been appointed medical director of the Jewish hospital at the suggestion of the Jewish Community and with the approval of the Gestapo. In the light of this "career" criticism was therefore voiced when he became the first AJDC representative in Vienna right after the war.³⁷ In view of this delicate situation, Tuchmann was replaced by Dr. J. Benson Saks as the new AJDC representative in Vienna.³⁸

32 Frederick T. Sillett, Director of UNRRA-Team 350 to Helen R. Jeter of UNRRA CHQ, Vienna, "History of UNRRA-Team 350," 14.1.1947. UNA, RG 3.0.1.0.2.2, Box 2, "History of UNRRA-Team 350 - US Zone."

33 Maria König in: *Jüdische Schicksale. Berichte von Verfolgten*, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, Vienna, 1992, pp. 243–251.

34 Bronislaw Teichholz, Interview with David C. Berliner, New York, 9.11.1974. Archives of the American Jewish Committee, New York, Cassette 2, p. 80.

35 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 134.

36 Presentation on the "Internationales Komitee für durchreisende jüdische KZ-ler und Flüchtlinge" to Dr. Schwartz, 8.11.1945. UNA, RG 3.0.1.5.2, Box 15, "Letters and Inwards Requisitions, Camp Alserbachstrasse," p. 2.

37 Embacher, *Neubeginn*, pp. 35ff.

38 Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 101.

The condition of the camps in Vienna varied, but on the whole it was desperate. When the Rothschild Hospital was taken over by the Americans, only the barest minimum renovations had been carried out. Many other camps were in a similarly bad state. In addition, there was a shortage of personnel, together with inadequate supplies of rations and daily necessities. The Rothschild Hospital, with a capacity of 600, had inadequate sanitary facilities, no hot water, no heating, and no dining room. Windows were missing, the roof leaked,³⁹ and, as soon became obvious, its absorption capacity was far from adequate, particularly during the period of first the Polish and later the Romanian exodus. Thus at peak times more than 8,000 people had to be accommodated on a short-term basis, by far exceeding the camp's facilities and capacity.

Until August 1946, the camp housed Jewish refugees spending an extended period in Vienna; after that, it served as a transit camp. In the summer and autumn of 1945 some 100 refugees a day came to the Rothschild Hospital, but with the beginning of the flight of Polish Jews, numbers swelled, peaking in the summer of 1946 after the Kielce pogroms, when some 52,000 individuals passed through this camp.⁴⁰

In order to keep the increasing overcrowding under control, between March and August 1946 the Alserbachstrasse, Rupertusplatz and, last, the Arzbergerstrasse camps were opened. These now assumed the role of permanent camps for the longer-term housing of DPs. The Rothschild Hospital was turned into a transit camp for mainly Polish-Jewish DPs.⁴¹ This solution would somewhat alleviate the situation in Vienna, without definitively solving the problems.

The Rothschild Hospital was not only a DP camp, however. The building also housed the UNRRA head offices and the office of the Vienna UNRRA-Team 350.⁴² Part of the complex was used as a hospital again, where all the DPs in Vienna received medical care or at least initial treatment—reportedly close to 300,000 in 1946 and 1947 alone. Most of the personnel responsible for this care were sent to Vienna by the AJDC or recruited from among the DPs.⁴³ The medical facilities consisted of a dental clinic, a hospital and an outpatient clinic where all the Jewish DPs housed in the Vienna camps were treated by the camp doctor or an UNRRA medical officer.⁴⁴

39 Frederick T. Sillett to Helen R. Jeter, Vienna, "History of UNRRA-Team 350," 14.1.1947. UNA, RG 3.0.1.0.2.2, Box 2, "History of UNRRA-Team 350 - US Zone."

40 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 135.

41 Alma Pollak, Report "Team 350," 12.10.1946. UNA, RG 3.0.1.5.2, Box 14, "Miscellaneous."

42 Ibid.

43 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 135.

44 Report of UNRRA-Team 350, 21.4.1947. UNA, RG 3.0.1.5.2, Box 16, "Narrative Reports," p. 4.

In addition, at the recommendation of UNRRA, a number of workshops were set up in the camp — for tailors, shoemakers, hairdressers and sewing machine repairs.⁴⁵ This provided an opportunity for the DPs to learn a skill or be retrained. The idea was that their new qualifications would be useful for them later when establishing a new life for themselves. At the same time this training enabled them to use their skills on transfer to a DP camp in Upper Austria or Salzburg in the workshops there.⁴⁶

The main route used by the *Bricha* to bring refugees to Vienna in 1945/46 was from Poland via Czechoslovakia to Austria. From Bratislava, which until mid-1946 was one of the major transit points on the way to the west, the refugees were taken over the March River by means of a nearby bridge. This route was not without its dangers, since frequent high water made the wooden bridge impassable. The few boats available to the *Bricha* were of little help. This adversity notwithstanding, at least 130,000 reached Austria by this route in the 1945–1949 period.⁴⁷

Vienna in 1947 and the Romanian Exodus

From the spring of 1947 the escape route led from Romania via Hungary. The itinerary passed via Budapest on to Loipersdorf, a border location situated south of Vienna,⁴⁸ or via Rechnitz, which was even further to the south near the Hungarian border. The Romanian Jews assembled at the Austrian border in groups of between 30 and 200. There they were provided with emergency rations and clothing, and then taken to the Rothschild Hospital in Vienna.⁴⁹ Generally they reached the camp around midnight and were kept in isolation, as far as possible, until they could be medically examined the following morning. It was hoped that this procedure would avoid the spread of diseases. In practice, however, this was not always practicable.⁵⁰

The *Bricha* was involved at all stages of the route from Budapest to Vienna. Some of its members took the refugees to the border, while others handled the border crossing; on arriving in Austria, they were received by yet more helpers and brought to Vienna. When it was possible, the DPs were transported to Vienna by train; when this could not be arranged, they were

45 Alma Pollak, Report "Team 350," 12.10.1946. UNA, RG 3.0.1.5.2, Box 14, "Miscellaneous."

46 Report "Internationales Komitee für jüdische KZ-ler und Flüchtlinge," 10.10.1946. YIVO, RG 294.4, Microfilm roll 3, frame 593.

47 Dekel, *B'riha*, pp. 122 and 209ff.

48 Albrich, *Exodus*, p. 148.

49 Raphael Levy, "Crisis in Vienna." AJDCA, RG 35G/197.

50 Jacob H. Landes, "Medical and Public Health Survey AJDC Austria," 1.9.1947. AJDCA, RG 35G/172, p. 21.

taken by truck, army vehicles, or any other vehicle available. Once they reached Vienna, they were first taken to the Rothschild Hospital, where they were looked after and then either transported to the US Zone or allocated to other camps in Vienna's US sector.⁵¹

At the end of April 1947, the Americans closed their camps in Vienna to all newcomers. This coincided with the period when the first Romanian refugees were reaching Vienna. Since the situation in Vienna was assuming catastrophic proportions, the Americans closed the Rothschild Hospital without further ado in the hope that this would prevent the arrival of new refugees. It turned out, however, that instead of alleviating the situation, this step actually made the problem more acute. The Americans therefore had no option other than to hand the Rothschild Hospital back to Bronislaw Teichholz. The AJDC bore the brunt of providing the Jewish newcomers with provisions and subsistence,⁵² since the International Refugee Organization (IRO) — UNRRA's successor as the UN refugee organization since July 1946 — refused responsibility for the Romanian refugees because of its regulations.

Despite the Americans' decision that they would not look after refugees who arrived after April 21, 1947, more than 500 Romanian Jews had come to Vienna by the end of April 1947. In May the numbers rose by 650 every week, and by the second week of June their numbers swelled to 2,400. At the end of June the number of refugees in Vienna had reached 3,000 and thus the Soviets stopped recognizing the DPs' interzone passports and prevented them from traveling on further to the US zone. By August the Americans too, in turn, prohibited any transfer from Vienna to their zone. Despite this, some 100 Jewish refugees every day turned up in Vienna. By the end of July their total number reached 7,000 and by the end of August, around 10,000. Although the *Bricha* had not organized this wave of refugees, it took over their transfer to the US zone in Upper Austria as of the end of August 1947, since by this time the accommodation and subsistence situation in Vienna had already reached catastrophic levels. None of the official agencies seemed to feel responsible for the refugees' subsistence. The Americans refused to make any help available, and initially the Austrians had no intention of concerning themselves with the Romanian Jews.⁵³ The refugees were therefore accommodated in the first place in the Rothschild Hospital. In order to reduce the camp's overcrowding, the newcomers were also sent to the Alserbachstrasse, Arzbergerstrasse and Roetzergergasse camps, which were all run by the International Committee.⁵⁴

51 Dr. Anton Winter, Interview, Vienna, 23.5.1997.

52 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 234.

53 Albrich, *Exodus*, pp. 146–154.

54 Jacob H. Landes, "Medical and Public Health Survey AJDC Austria," 1.9.1947. AJDCA, RG 35G/172, p. 21.

As the refugees continued their illegal journeys to Western Austria and the number of new arrivals diminished, the situation in Vienna gradually eased from the autumn of 1947 onwards. At the beginning of 1948, the number of newcomers plunged dramatically as a result of Romania's closing its border with Hungary and making it a criminal offense to leave the country. In April 1948, there were just 3,000 Romanian Jews left in Vienna.⁵⁵ However, the hope that this would be the definitive end to the DP problem in Vienna proved deceptive. The last wave of refugees of the 1940s — the "Hungarian exodus" of 1949 — turned Vienna into a main transit point once again. This refugee movement also came to an end in 1949, after Hungary and Czechoslovakia had closed their borders, bringing to an end the postwar waves of East European refugees.⁵⁶

Taking Stock

What made Vienna special was its location. For the western aid organizations, Vienna was the easternmost base; for the refugees from the east, it was their first refuge, the first safe shelter on their route to the west. From 1945 until its closure in 1954, the Rothschild Hospital was a focus of the movement of Jewish refugees and the initial refuge of all Jewish refugees reaching Vienna.

According to the data of the International Committee or provided by Teichholz, the Hungarian Committee — which existed prior to the founding of the International Committee — had, up to the end of June 1945, looked after some 5,200 Jewish survivors, of whom 4,400 were from Hungary, passing through on their way home. In July and August the number of those looked after was some 3,700, and then from September until the end of 1945 the International Committee recorded over 6,500 transients.⁵⁷ That would add up to some 10,000 Jewish transients between July and December 1945, and around 15,000 since the end of the war. According to other sources, in the period between July and December 1945, 50,061 Jewish refugees were officially registered in Vienna; the figure for 1946 was 85,000, with 20,000 again the following year. In the year that the State of Israel was established, the figure fell dramatically to under 3,000, rising again in 1949 in the wake

⁵⁵ Albrich, *Exodus*, p. 154.

⁵⁶ Thomas Albrich, "Zwischenstation des Exodus: Jüdische Displaced Persons und Flüchtlinge nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," in: Gernot Heiss and Oliver Rathkolb (eds.), *Asylland wider Willen. Flüchtlinge in Österreich im europäischen Kontext seit 1914* (Veröffentlichungen des Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institutes für Geschichte und Gesellschaft 25), Vienna, 1993, pp. 122–139 at 132; cf. also the contribution by Thomas Albrich ("The Zionist Option") in this volume.

⁵⁷ Bronislaw Teichholz, IK, and Ernest Stiasny, New York, 2.1.1947. AJA, WJCP, H 43/Austria 1946.

of the Hungarian exodus to more than 11,000. Thus from July 1945 to the end of 1949, more than 169,000 Jewish refugees in total were officially accommodated in the Rothschild Hospital.⁵⁸

Most of these Jewish refugees remained in Vienna only briefly: a few hours, a few days, some for longer. For two to three thousand families, Vienna became their new home. Vienna therefore did offer a number of possibilities for absorbing and taking care of DPs. This was one of the basic prerequisites for the *Bricha* to establish a base in Vienna. True, the Vienna camps were at times overcrowded and the subsistence facilities insufficient, but those who had managed to get to Vienna did not need fear being sent back. The *Bricha* knew as much, and Vienna therefore became a politically strategic location as well.⁵⁹ In this sense, Vienna was a gateway to freedom, if not yet a gate to the free world.

The Jewish DP Camps in Vienna

Alserbachstrasse:	Alserbachstrasse 23 (US Sector); March 1946 through July 1948.
Hotel Alserbach:	Pfluggasse 1 (US Sector); 1945 (operated briefly only).
Arzbergerstrasse:	Arzbergerstrasse 2 (US Sector); August 1946 through May 1951.
Frankgasse:	Frankgasse 2 (US Sector); October 1945 through 1949.
Goldschlagstrasse:	Goldschlagstrasse (French Sector).
Malzgasse:	Malzgasse 7 (Russian Sector); Jewish old-age home. Malzgasse 16 (Russian Sector); Jewish hospital.
Pezlgasse:	Pezlgasse (US Sector); 1947 through August 1948.
Rothschildspital:	Waehringerguertel 97 and 99 (US Sector); October 1945 through 1954.
Roetzergergasse:	Roetzergergasse (US Sector); August 1947 through (?).
Rupertusplatz:	Rupertusplatz (US Sector); April 1946 through August 1948.
Seegasse:	Seegasse 9-11 (US Sector); 1945 through 1952.
Strudelhofgasse:	Strudelhofgasse 10 (US Sector); 1945 through (?).
<i>Bricha</i> Office in Vienna:	Hotel Westminster, Harmoniegasse 5; from 1945 Frankgasse 2 (US Sector).

58 Frieda Wilder-Okladek, "Die jüdische Bevölkerung Wiens nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," in: *Heilige Gemeinde Wien: Judentum in Wien*, published by the Museen der Stadt Wien, Wien, 1987, pp. 87-92, at 88.

59 Dr. Anton Winter, Interview, Vienna, 23.5.1997.