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REHABILITATION THROUGH LABOR WELFARE OR CONTROL OF REFUGEES IN POSTWAR UPPER AUSTRIA AND SALZBURG

Military governors and camp administrators strongly encouraged the employment of refugees who flooded into Upper Austria and Salzburg at the end of the Second World War. In the US zone, forced labor for interned non-repatriables was not official policy. Moreover, the US government specifically exempted Jewish survivors from the local requirement that able-bodied displaced persons accept employment. Nevertheless, officers and relief workers viewed work as an essential part of the refugees' rehabilitation. They also had clear-cut ideas on what constituted employment. Physical labor such as tree-cutting and car mechanics for men and making ladies' dresses and millinery for women qualified as labor. Trade and commerce entered the category of "black-market activities" and were prohibited. UNRRA advocated that the higher the level of employment in appropriate work, the happier the residents. In the Bad Gastein camp, UNRRA set up workshops "to adjust workmen to disciplined, high quality work and honest shop conduct." In order to attain a high rate of employment, the welfare organization stipulated that only workers would receive increased food rations. This policy did not recognize the fact that many Jewish survivors had been engaged in forced labor in the war either in the Vernichtung durch Arbeit program or in Soviet exile. In his review of refugees and individuals without documents, Gérard Noiriel states that assistance is simultaneously an instrument of control over beneficiaries. The object of this paper is to examine the connection between assistance and control of camp internees through employment.

Rachel Blumenthal researches the repercussions of the Second World War. She was awarded a Ph.D. degree by the Hebrew University in 2017 for her thesis on "The Claims Conference, the State of Israel and the Diaspora: 1951-1964." In the framework of postdoctoral studies, she is now exploring life in camps for displaced persons in postwar Austria.