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AFTER INTERNMENT JEWISH REFUGEES IN CANADA AND THEIR INTEGRATION INTO THE CANADIAN SOCIETY

After the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, refugees from Nazism, who initially had found refuge in Great Britain, became "enemy aliens". In July 1940 approximately 6,750 prisoners of war, merchant seamen and civilian internees were deported from the Churchill government as aliens to Canada; among them about 2,000 refugees from Nazism and a few from Fascist Italy, almost all Jewish. This was the biggest group of refugees that arrived in Canada, but they came as "enemy aliens" and were interned alongside POWs, Nazi sympathizers and Italian Fascists in remote internment camps located in Eastern Canada for up to three years. Several scholars (e.g. Gillman, Draper, Farges, Susemihl, Banauch) already studied the historical and political background of the deportation of innocent refugees to Canada, and partly also their internment experiences. With a few exceptions, however, our knowledge about these refugees and especially about their subsequent lives in Canada is still fragmentary.

My paper aims to contribute to that research desideratum. Out of an ongoing research,¹ the group composition of "interned refugees" in Canada (e.g. of age, nationality, last residence, education, social background) and the release process from internment between 1941 and 1943 will be sketched. The years of internment in Canada have been a unique and defining phase of forced waiting, liminality and transition in the lives of the mostly young refugees (about the half was under 25), wherefore the main focus of the paper is on the analysis of their subsequent lives in Canada. Using the example of several case studies, it will be discussed what changes and opportunities these refugees had to start a new life in Canada after the release from internment. What problems occurred during the integration process (e.g. anti-Semitism, career breaks especially for older refugees)? In which way did former "interned refugees" contribute e.g. to culture, academia and other professional fields in their new home? Also post war migration movements and the possibility of a family reunification in Canada will be addressed as several interned refugees helped surviving parents and siblings to move to Canada after the war. The presentation is based on written sources, oral histories and autobiographical texts that also allow an insight in individual ways of coming to terms with expulsion, uprooting and internment.

Andrea Strutz is key researcher and head of the program line "Migration" at the LBI for Consequences of the War and a lecturer at the University of Graz. She is especially interested in migrations studies including Jewish displacement and exile, biographical studies, and oral history. She is chair and speaker of the History Section of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-speaking Countries (GKS) and network chair of the Oral History and Life History Network for the European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC).

¹ Research Project: "Flight, Deportation, Internment: Tracing Austrian Refugees from Nazism in Canada" (Zukunftsfonds der Republik Österreich und Land Niederösterreich, 9/2019-2/2021, project head Andrea Strutz).