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### **Waiting to emigrate: Jews in Germany after the Second World War**

The number of displaced persons (DPs) liberated by the Allied armies in Germany – 6.5 to 7 million – suggests the dimensions of the problems faced by the liberating troops. Yet, in spite of all the difficulties involved in transporting and providing for this mass of humanity in war-ravaged Europe, the military managed to repatriate 4.2 million DPs by the end of July 1945 and nearly 6 million by September 1945. However terrible the fate of the non-Jewish Displaced Persons may have been, it does not compare to the tragedy of the Jews. Millions of non-Jewish slave labourers and POWs at least had the option of returning to their homes and families, whereas the 50,000 to 75,000 Jewish DPs the allied troops had found in Germany were completely cut off from their roots and had nowhere to go.

Accommodations had to be found for the nonrepatriable DPs who remained in Germany, Austria, and Italy. The U.S. Army set up camps that were technically known as assembly centers. They varied in size from sites with fifty people to camps housing over 7000 persons. They comprised barracks, former POW and slave labor camps, industrial workers' housing, tent cities, hotels, apartment buildings, garages, stables, monasteries, hospitals, sanitariums, schools, and so forth.

Within a few days of the liberation, the Jewish survivors – the “surviving remnant”, the She'erit Hapletah as they called themselves - formed national interest groups in the DP camps to protect their interests. The new installed DP-camps turned into living centers where the She'erit Hapletah cultivated their ancient traditions, spoke Yiddish, and turned the camps of various size into cultural centers where religious life flourished and Zionism became not only the main aim to overcome the trauma of Nazi persecution but also helped to create the State of Israel. Jewish relief organizations furnished the survivors not only with financial support, medical aid, and food but with urgently needed psychological support as well. But for the vast majority of survivors, the stay in Germany was only an intermediate stop, required by external circumstances, on the way to Eretz-Israel. Settling in Germany for a longer period did not come into question under any circumstances.

The Jewish DPs were amazingly energetic in the cultural sphere. Regardless of nationality, they all wished to become engaged to a greater or lesser degree in the cultural activities that were so important for their spiritual rehabilitation. Besides enthusiasm for such cultural

events, Holocaust survivors were passionate in their desire to establish their own Jewish press, which was actually quite astonishing given the conditions prevailing at the time: paper was rationed, and typewriters and other equipment were almost impossible to come by. Nevertheless, practically every Jewish DP camp and many political parties published their own newspapers.

By 1951, when most of the Jewish DP camps had been closed, the so called ‘hard-core-cases’, the last ‘remaining remnants’ – elderly and ill people - found themselves in the one still operative Jewish DP camp, Föhrenwald, near Munich. Only when this camp, too, was dissolved in February of 1957, did camp life definitively come to a close for the She’erit Hapletah. Closing with it, was an important phase of Yiddish life in Germany, though one that had taken place, entirely independently of the German population, in the ‘ghettos’ of the DP camps.

