

Hungarians in Limerick, 1956 – 1958



At the end of the second World War, Russian-backed governments occupied most of Eastern Europe. In March 1953 the Russian dictator, Joseph Stalin, died. In February 1956 the new Russian leader, Nikita Krushchev, denounced Stalin and the crimes he had committed, and the people of Eastern Europe thought that a new era was dawning. Their hopes were soon shattered when Russian troops put down a revolt by the Hungarian people.

In July 1956, the Stalinist prime minister of Hungary, Mátyás Rákosi, was replaced by a more liberal leader, Imre Nagy. Rákosi, working behind the scenes, had Nagy ousted, but after widespread rioting against the government and the Russian occupation forces in October, Nagy was returned to power as prime minister. As Russian forces withdrew from the capital, Budapest, Nagy promised free elections and threatened to pull out of the Warsaw Pact, the military alliance of communist countries. On 4 November Russian tanks rolled back into Budapest, and in the ten days fighting that followed, and estimated 20,000 people died, while 200,000 more fled westward. As France and England were preparing to attack Egypt over nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the response from the western countries, including Ireland, was to send humanitarian aid to the beleaguered Hungarians.

In Limerick on Wednesday, 7 November, the city chemists made a presentation of a case containing 720,000,000 units of penicillin to the Mayor at the town hall in Rutland Street. The Mayor had already made arrangements with Seaboard and Western Airlines to have the penicillin flown to Zurich later that day.

On the following Friday night, representatives from the various ambulance societies and other organisations met under the auspices of the local branch of the Red Cross to finalise arrangements for a church-gate collection throughout the city and county the following Sunday in aid of the Hungarians. Those involved included the Knights of Malta, St. John's Ambulance Brigade, the Irish Countrywomen's Association, Muintir na Tire and the Knights of St. Columbanus. The collection amounted to £2,658.00, but within a few days it went over the £4,000 mark. The Red Cross also appealed for blankets, clothing and tinned food. That Sunday six members of staff of the Provincial Bank gave up their afternoon to make sure the money was properly checked and safely lodged.

by Des Ryan

Meanwhile, the Russians were blocking humanitarian aid to the Hungarians and insisting that all aid be channeled through its satellite, Czechoslovakia. In Dublin, dockers refused to handle any goods of Russian origin. Pope Pius XII issued a statement on Vatican Radio on the Hungarian crisis which was immediately translated and broadcast on Radio Eireann.

There had been many offers from people in Limerick and nationwide to take in Hungarian refugees, and in mid-November the government decided to admit them. People who were willing to accommodate refugees had to apply to the Red Cross at 25 Westland Row, Dublin.

Golden Vale Creamery at Charleville donated four tons of cheese. Smaller creameries in the county gave tinned milk, butter and eggs. On Saturday night, 20th November, young boys from the secondary schools in the city marched through the streets in protest at the Russian action, carrying an effigy of the Russian premier, Marshal Bulganin. When they reached Sarsfield Bridge, they threw the effigy over the nearest railing. A garda on duty retrieved it and, followed by the cheering boys, took it to William Street Garda Station. A spokesman for the boys said that the parade had been arranged to express their admiration for the bravery of the Hungarian people.

The Department of Defence, working in close co-operation with the Department of Health and the Red Cross, agreed to make the old army camp at Knockalisheen available to house the refugees. The Red Cross also arranged to have all supplies, medical and otherwise, purchased in Limerick. The refugees, 35 families, arrived on Sunday, 25 November, and were brought to the camp at Knockalisheen. Two days later, some of the women refugees began helping the army cooks by giving the food a Hungarian touch. Outside, the men were helping to unload ten tons of coal. Another refugee with a suspected case of TB had been taken to hospital. The refugees were quarantined for two weeks before they were allowed to make their way into the city. A Red Cross official stated that they expected to provide each refugee with two sets of clothing. A survey of the professions of the refugees showed that the community contained a lawyer, soldier, miner, weaver, shoemaker, engine-driver, mechanic, confectioner, a

junior international football player, a boxer, ballet dancer and three chauffeurs. The largest family in the camp were a husband and wife and their four children; the youngest refugee was a month-old baby. There were thirty-three children of school-going age. Although there was a Hungarian lady school teacher in the camp, some of the children would, later, attend St. Munchin's Girls School in Ballynanty. On Wednesday, 28 November, a further 39 refugees arrived, bringing the total number of refugees to 233.

The huts were bare and unfurnished when the refugees arrived due to the authorities at Sarsfield Barracks being given only two days notice of the arrival of the Hungarians. The camp had been unused and neglected for at least ten years, so everyone got stuck into the work that had to be done. Army personnel laid lino in some of the huts, making the place more liveable, while the male refugees helped to clear the road into the camp. An electrician fitted a loudspeaker to the main dining area so that the refugees would be able to hear the news from their homeland.

Two further events to raise money for the Hungarian relief fund were the Mayor's dance at the Stella Ballroom on 5 December and a fashion show on 7 December. The following day, Saturday, saw three weddings at the camp, Lazlo Demeter to Maria Vorgan, Josef Toth to Johanna Bordes and Andreas Biro to Kathleen Baranji. Rev. G. Kiss, the Hungarian chaplain, performed the ceremonies.

One note of alarm was sounded by a journalist on the *Limerick Chronicle*. He wondered if, with so many people out of work, the government had made the right choice in admitting the Hungarians.

By the end of the month there were at least 526 refugees in the camp. Disillusionment with their new surroundings soon set in. Early in January 1957, some local newspaper reporters went to Knockalisheen to investigate complaints about the huts being cold and the roof leaking. The camp authorities intervened and put a stop to the refugees being interviewed.¹ Not long afterwards some of the Hungarians could be seen scouring the city shops looking for lemons and oranges and top quality English-made suits. The idea was to send them back to Hungary where they would fetch high prices on the black market. One refugee was heard to remark that oranges would fetch £1 and lemons even more, and as for the suits, they could get up to £300 for one. Meanwhile letters from Hungary

were arriving at the camp uncensored by the Hungarian authorities, and parcels sent to relatives in Hungary were getting through without being opened.²

By the end of January, over 100 Hungarians had left the camp, many of them getting jobs in other parts of the country. The remainder were hoping to travel to Canada, or possibly Australia, which had offered to take refugees providing they could pay their own fares. In the meantime, a committee of five Hungarians was set up to deal with any problems or difficulties that might arise in the camp.³ Mrs Eva Kovary, a Hungarian living in Charleville, was appointed as the camp interpreter.⁴

A gift of food for the refugees was presented to the Irish Red Cross in Dublin by the Retail Grocers and Allied Trades Association. It was expected to last about two weeks.⁵ Ranks Ireland Ltd. gave the use of a house in Henry Street for use as a club. Some workers from Ranks and some of the refugees carried out any repairs that were necessary. In order to make the place more comfortable a public appeal was made for tables, chairs, floor covering and other items, including a radio.⁶

Friday 15 March was a Hungarian national holiday at the camp, and because it was the Lenten season, they were given special dispensation to cook and eat meat on a fast day, i.e. a day on which Catholics had to abstain from meat products. The day started with a mass at the camp which was attended by the Catholic Bishops of Limerick and the Diocese of Killaloe. There was also a service provided for those of other denominations. Celebrations at the camp went on throughout the day.⁷

A month later there was some trouble at the camp. A rumour that a short wave radio transmitter had been set up by the refugees was denied by Red Cross officials, but they did say that some of the Hungarians had been tapping into the electric cables and Electricity Supply Board meter boxes and this was overriding the time switches that had been installed in the huts and was giving them more electricity. This problem arose because the camp lights, with the exception of the authorities', had to be put out by midnight.⁸

Two weeks later, on Monday 27 April, a more serious problem arose when 271 adult refugees went on hunger strike in protest against being left 'sit and rust' at the camp. Spokesmen for the hunger strikers made it clear that they would fast to the finish unless the Irish government honoured promises made to the refugees in Austria before they came to Ireland. According to one Hungarian, notices on their huts in Austria said that Ireland would only be a transit centre for them, and that in a short time Canada, the United States, Australia and Argentina would be open to them, places where they had relatives and where they would have no difficulty in getting employment. They were not blaming the Red Cross, who had done everything possible for them. It was the government's fault. They were also

annoyed that the government had not replied to a letter requesting that a government representative be sent to Knockalisheen to hear their grievances. The senior Red Cross official at the camp confirmed that he had sent a letter on behalf of the refugees to the Red Cross headquarters in Dublin asking that influence be used to have a government representative visit the camp. A member of the strike committee said that they appreciated the government's help, but they had no wish to go on accepting indefinitely the hospitality of a country that was not blessed with riches. The Irish government had made a mistake and it was up to them to rectify it. Asked if they would stay in Ireland if they were placed in jobs, they said no - they were waiting to go to relatives and employment overseas. Although there was no news from the government there and then, it was understood that Irish representatives were in negotiations with the Americans and the Canadians.⁹

A short article in the *Limerick Chronicle* titled 'Current Review' admitted that the government had been hasty in rushing into what they considered a work of mercy which had now turned out to be a headache, but also criticised the Hungarians for their ingratitude. It pointed out that the people of the country had subscribed almost £200,000 to help the refugees, and observed that it was a pity that nobody had yet asked them if they wanted to return to their own country - the answer would be of considerable interest.¹⁰ By the third day of the hunger strike, two people had been taken to Barrington's Hospital and another ten were reported to be quite weak.

On the afternoon of Thursday, 2 May, after the Hungarians had made an appeal to the Taoiseach, Mr. De Valera, two government officials, one from the Department of Justice and one from External Affairs, arrived at the camp. The Bishop of Limerick, Dr. O'Neill, and Mrs. Barry, Chairman of the Irish Red Cross, were also present. After a meeting which lasted almost two and a half hours, the Hungarians called off their strike. For a few moments there was a hitch in the talks when members of the Hungarian committee rushed out of the room after hearing shouting from their womenfolk. On investigation, they found that a photographer had taken a photograph of one of the refugees being taken to the camp hospital on a stretcher. When the meeting ended, the Hungarians gave great praise to the bishop for bringing about a settlement of their grievances.¹¹ The camp doctor, Captain J.A. McCann, treated the hunger strikers with special concentrated powdered food and glucose until they were ready to eat normal meals.¹²

Those Hungarians who had gone to Canada were finding it no bed of roses. In early May, the *Toronto Daily Star* devoted a great deal of space to the Hungarian problem. It quoted the director of the Toronto Diocese of Catholic Immigration, who described the unemployment

situation as 'desperate'. Eighteen Hungarians had already left Canada to return home. Most said they were unhappy because they could not bring their families to join them. Housing was also a problem. Hungarians who had been living there for some time were providing space in their homes for the refugees. Many houses were 'so crowded that they were bursting at the seams.'¹³

On 13 June the refugees at Knockalisheen sent a memo to the U.S. Congress complaining about conditions at the camp: 'We are being kept in unheatable wooden huts, on unhealthy food and without the possibility of schooling', the message read.¹⁴ By mid-July, a number of families had already flown to Canada under the private sponsorship scheme by which relatives living there could secure their admission. Another 17 had emigrated to Argentina, while more had gone to Britain and Switzerland, and a few had returned to Hungary.¹⁵ When an Australian embassy official called to Knockalisheen on Monday, 15 July, he interviewed eight families who had applied to go to that country. He told reporters that 15,000 Hungarians had already been admitted direct from Austria into his country. When refugees wanted to leave one country for another 'We have to treat them as migrants; that is to say, we treat them exactly as Irishmen who wish to emigrate to Australia.'¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Hungarians were upset by reports that Knockalisheen was going to be closed and that they would be moved to another area. An army medical officer had said that Knockalisheen was unsuitable and exposed the children to 'undoubted hazard' in the winter months.¹⁷ During the previous winter, a large number of children at the camp had suffered from bronchitis.¹⁸

The plan to move the refugees indicated that the government was giving up hope of getting the refugees to other countries before winter. Red Cross officials made no secret of their fear that there might be trouble at the camp if the Hungarians were still there in the winter, and avoidance of trouble was the main reason behind the proposed move. It was said that if they were moved, they might be put under army control and have less freedom of movement.¹⁹ While the Hungarians had not been informed officially about their being moved, everyone seemed to know, including the newspapers, that the old British Army barracks at Templemore, Co. Tipperary, was to be their new home. One refugee told a reporter that it was considerate of the government to think of moving them to a warmer part of the country, but if they were to be in Ireland for another winter, they would prefer to weather it out in the Clare Hills. The real objection, the journalist learned, was that some of the refugees were gifted at handicrafts and other forms of commerce and had built up a trade in Limerick city, and this would not be possible in a smaller town such as Templemore.²⁰



Mayor Ted Russell greeting the refugees at Shannon Airport.

According to the journalist, who wrote the 'Current Review' column in the *Limerick Chronicle*, some caustic remarks were made at a meeting of Templemore Urban Council to the effect that Templemore did not want the refugees. This was retracted later on after a deputation from the council met with the Minister of Defence, and the government had issued an official statement that the Hungarians were to be moved to Templemore. On Monday, 29 July, after a delegation of refugees had made an inspection tour of the barracks at Templemore, they turned down the government and Red Cross recommendation that they be moved. They outlined their reasons in a letter to the government signed by the heads of ninety families. The main points made in the letter were that they had made many friends amongst the Limerick people, who had lent them radios, bicycles and other accessories which would have to be returned if they were moved; many of them had part-time employment putting catalogues into envelopes for the overseas department of the mail order shop at Shannon Airport; about twenty refugees were also employed in the city and at Shannon. The letter concluded by saying that "the actual accommodation in the camp had improved since the huts had been partitioned and paths laid out. The psychological effect of moving to a more remote area would be detrimental." Limerick traders were also opposed to the move, as it was estimated that business from the camp brought £1,500 into the city.²¹

The cutting off of electricity from 4.00 am to 9.00 pm on 1 August resulted in another protest and a meeting between the Hungarians and the camp administrator, Mr. Edward Murphy, from which newspaper reporters were excluded. In a statement issued later that day, the reason given for the cutting off was that the use of electricity had doubled in two weeks. The wiring of some of the

huts with bare copper wire by the refugees also constituted a grave danger. The Hungarians made complaints about the food that they were getting, saying that the bread was soggy, the eggs stale, and that they needed more food for expectant mothers.²² Referring to the proposed transfer, they made it clear that they "would refuse to leave Knockalisheen."

Mrs Barry, Chairman of the Red Cross, issued a statement addressing some of the matters the Hungarians had raised. She said that Bord na Mona were looking for men and that there were a number of bogs in the Templemore area. Regarding handicrafts, they could still work and sell all over Ireland. On medical facilities, she said that part of the barracks at Templemore, to be known as McCann barrack, could be used for medical treatment, with a qualified nurse who could call in a dispensary doctor when necessary. In reference to the memo which the Hungarians had sent to the U.S. Congress, she said "It now suits them to say that the huts are wonderful when the government is trying to move them."²³ On a visit to the camp, a journalist was struck by the sight of little Hungarian children with sturdy bodies in the blazing sunshine and all of them the picture of good health, which seemed to contradict the complaints of unsuitable and inadequate food.²⁴ A concerned citizen, in a letter to the *Limerick Chronicle*, appealed to the local politicians to put a stop to the proposed transfer of the refugees. He pointed out that with so many places closing in Limerick, Spillane's tobacco factory and the County Hospital in Mulgrave Street, the loss of revenue from the Hungarians would be a blow to Limerick and the surrounding area.²⁵ Six young Hungarians were so homesick and tired of the camp that they applied to the Hungarian ambassador in London for permission to return to Hungary. They had already received a letter from a

former occupant of the camp warning them that if they returned they would be liable to a years imprisonment. The six young men did not care about the prison sentence – when it was over they would be free and able to get work in their own country.²⁶

In mid-August there were 350 refugees in the camp. With no prospect of getting to the US or Canada, many of the families made arrangements to have their children educated at local schools, such as the Sisters of Mercy at Ballynanty and the Christian Brothers at Sexton Street. They requested the government to provide school transport for the children during the coming winter months.²⁷ One lady told me that she remembered the Hungarian girls coming down to the school at Ballynanty, at which she was a pupil, on men's bicycles, which most of the girls thought unusual. They got on well with them, but when they fell out they taunted them with this rhyme:

"Me Hungarian
Me refugee,
Me no money,
Me get bus free."

One man remembered the Hungarian boys who went to the CBS as being tough and carrying sling-shots.

On 22 August at a further meeting with government officials and the Red Cross, the Hungarians again rejected the offer to move them to Templemore. They suggested that it would be better to invest money at Knockalisheen rather than spend it on renovating the barracks at Templemore. It was agreed at the meeting that the Red Cross would supply the transport to take the children to school.²⁸ Eventually the children, 116 in all, were taken to school by two CIE buses.²⁹

Another problem which arose at the camp was the number of Hungarians who were taking the boat to England. Although it was technically illegal to do so, a British Home Office statement on 16 September said that the refugees were welcome without visas.³⁰ Red Cross officials were afraid that some of the women at the camp would be deserted if the rush continued. It was estimated that 60 men had left, many of them getting employment with a British gas company. At the time of the rush to leave Knockalisheen, things were 'never better' at the camp.³¹ A big mystery at the time was where the Hungarians were getting the money to go to Britain. It was suggested that the souvenir makers were paying the fares, but this was denied by the refugees.³² The 'Current Review' column said that the exodus of Hungarians to England was undoubtedly a matter of relief for the government and the Red Cross. It went on to say that the refugees had been unhappy with the makeshift quarters provided for them and their history at the camp had been one of almost continual complaint. It added that the Hungarians had come to Ireland in the belief that it would be a transit area for entry to the USA or Canada.³³

Meanwhile, two families at the camp were being allowed to go to Australia under the private sponsorship scheme. Other refugees were receiving letters advising them where to go if they were coming to England. One Hungarian, when interviewed, was surprised that the government had not sent someone to the camp to investigate the 'exodus'. "It appears to me," he said, "that nobody now seems to care whether the refugees go or stay."³⁴ Two refugees returned to the camp when they failed to find work in England.³⁵

In early October a flu epidemic, which originally had been confined to the Ballynanty area,³⁶ spread to the camp at Knockalisheen, where twenty people, including administrative staff, were said to be ill. At that time, there were still over 200 refugees out of the original 540 at the camp.³⁷

In a special feature on Knockalisheen in the *Irish Times* on 10 October, Major-General J.A. Sweeney, general secretary of the Irish Red Cross, answered some of the criticisms levelled at the Red Cross on the handling of the refugees. He said that the Hungarians were told in Austria that they would be resettled in Ireland and that he had six Hungarian witnesses to prove it. He alleged that about 200 Hungarians out of the original 540 at the camp were communist sympathisers. As evidence of this he said: "There always seemed to be a pervasive influence working in the camp. People who found employment outside the camp frequently got mysterious instructions to return within a fortnight – and they did so."³⁸ "Our official terms from the Irish government" he went on to say, "were to receive, care and maintain the refugees, and never at any time was the Irish Red Cross Society expected to find them employment." Maj-Gen. Sweeney did admit that they should have brought someone over from Austria or Switzerland who had experience in handling large numbers of refugees, and that a study should have been made of the Hungarians eating habits, as apparently they were not used to getting meat twice a day, for instance, rasher and eggs for breakfast and meat at dinner.³⁹

The accusation of so many communists being in the camp was denied by Josef Kukk, the Hungarian camp leader. "I am sure," he said, "that there were some amongst us, but there could only be a few." He made the point that before they came to Ireland, they had all been



Hungarian child and his mother getting water at Knockalisheen.

strangers at home. He stressed how hard it was for them to find employment, and those who did get work were paid a wage lower than that paid to native workers. Mr. Kukk asked the critics of the refugees to try and understand the plight that they were in. They had no fatherland, no homes, and were separated by thousands of miles from their loved ones. He asked those who would condemn them for seeking work and better conditions to cooperate with them as there were only a few left at the camp.⁴⁰

At a special sitting of the Labour Court in Limerick the following day, Limerick Motor Works Ltd. and the Irish Transport and General Workers Union were in conflict over the case of a man from outside the city and not a union member being employed as a labourer at the garage, and also the case of a young Hungarian boy who was taken on as an apprentice panel beater. In both cases the union maintained that city people should have got the jobs.

Finally, on 16 October, the Hungarians were granted their wish to remain in the camp when the Red Cross issued a statement to the effect that the refugees would not be transferred to Templemore.⁴¹

As the Christmas season approached, thousands of cards from Hungarian refugees scattered around the world

arrived at the camp. Some of the refugees who were working in other parts of the country returned "home" for the Christmas festivities.⁴² On Christmas eve, most of the refugees attended midnight mass, which was celebrated by Fr. Gabriel Kiss, the former camp chaplain, who had returned from Dublin for the occasion. On Christmas day there was carol singing, and the Hungarian children put on a special concert which included a nativity play. Local musicians and singers from Limerick and Ennis also took part in the entertainment.

After a year at Knockalisheen, the Hungarians were still anxious to get away. Red Cross officials were hoping that countries like the USA and Canada would lift their quota restrictions on immigrants. At the time, there were 55 men, 56 women and 99 children at the camp. The Red Cross was also paying for the education of two boys at Mountmellary College, two at Mount St. Joseph Abbey, Roscrea, and two at Multifarnham Agricultural College.⁴³

In early February, it was reported that Knockalisheen Camp was about

to get a facelift. Army engineers were going to reconstruct part of the camp, improving the standard of accommodation by making "family units" instead of the makeshift partitioned sections occupied by some families.⁴⁴ A group of business people from Ballina, Co. Mayo, visited the camp in search of technically qualified personnel. They employed only one person, a plumber.⁴⁵ The Bishop of Limerick confirmed 40 children at the camp, and as a tribute to him, many of the children took the confirmation name of Edmund.⁴⁶ A few days later, on Wednesday, 26 March, the bishop, Dr. O'Neill, died.⁴⁷ Towards the end of April, there were rumours that the camp would be closed. Of the remaining 205 refugees, seven were leaving for Argentina, thirteen were going to Australia and 80% of the 185 that were left, it was hoped, would be admitted to Canada. The remainder, it was felt, would be absorbed in Ireland.⁴⁸

On Sunday, 3 May, Mrs. Eva Kovary, the interpreter for the Hungarians, left Shannon Airport with her family for the United States. The Kovarys had come to Ireland in 1947 after their country became communist. Mrs. Kovary was a qualified teacher and spoke perfect English. She was unable to get a teaching post because of her limited knowledge of the Irish language. A large crowd turned up at the

airport to see them off.⁴⁹ The new inter-preter was Mrs. Dorrit O'Shaughnessy, from Glin, Co. Limerick.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, arrangements were being made for the departure to Canada of 162 of the 187 Hungarians still at the camp.⁵¹ When the arrangements were finalised, it was discovered that some of them did not wish to go. Having heard reports of conditions in Canada, they were having second thoughts about moving. Others, after getting over the initial difficulties, were settling down quite happily.⁵²

The Red Cross was hoping to have Knockalisheen closed by early November. In anticipation of this, a farewell concert was held at the camp.⁵³ By Monday, 15 September, 142 refugees had left Shannon Airport for Canada.⁵⁴ A letter to the camp two weeks later reported that only one Hungarian had found employment and the writer went on to say that "it is only now that I realise what a wonderful place Ireland is."⁵⁵

The Red Cross had the task of finding housing accommodation for the 61 Hungarians who had been rejected, for various reasons, by the Canadian government. It was planned to move them to other areas of the country where they would have better prospects of finding work. They were hoping to have 25 families housed in Finglas, Dublin, six other families having already been offered houses in Dublin. When the heads of families went to Dublin to sign the necessary documents, problems arose due to language difficulties and the men returned to Limerick. Mr. Murphy, the camp administrator, informed them that they would have to go back the following day as arrangements had been made to place them and their families in the houses. They were also told that if they refused to leave the camp, their pocket money and food supply would be cut off.⁵⁶ A few days later, four families left Knockalisheen for Dublin, where they were met by Mr. Murphy and another Red Cross official. A special bus brought them from the station to their new homes, where the Red Cross had provided the essential furnishings.⁵⁷ The Society was also trying to find houses for the Hungarians who wanted to stay in Limerick. However, as there was a housing shortage in the city, their chances were limited. The only alternative was to try and find accommodation with flat-owners in the city. A three-storey house in Castleconnell was chosen as one site.⁵⁸ An appeal by the Red Cross to Limerick Corporation to provide housing was turned down by a number of councillors on the grounds that Limerick people should be housed first.⁵⁹

On Friday, 12 December, a Hungarian woman and her young daughter, who had been living in a hostel in Dublin, returned to the camp, but were refused admission. They slept the night in a house in the Ballynanty area. They were re-admitted to the camp the following day on condition that they would return to Dublin.⁶⁰ On Monday, 15 December, the refugee camp

at Knockalisheen was declared to be officially closed. That did not mean, however, that the camp was empty. There were still seven Hungarians there, a family of six and a sixteen-year-old youth.⁶¹

It was rumoured that the camp administrator, Mr. Edmund Murphy, had been invited to join the International Red Cross staff at Geneva,⁶² so it must have come as a great shock when he resigned completely from the Red Cross. He issued a statement in which he criticised the Red Cross administration in Dublin for their inept handling of the refugees and the problems that arose in the camp. He went on to say that when he was appointed to the camp as Red Cross controller in 1956 "I knew that it was the most important assignment of my life and that it would be very difficult. I was not dismayed because I knew that I could rely on the voluntary workers from Clare and Limerick. There was no organisation at all when the refugees arrived except that made by the army to feed and house them. The voluntary workers were wonderful and it is due to their great sacrifices that records were taken and some order restored. The permanent staff were recruited after some weeks and things put on a business basis.

"Trouble followed trouble with the refugees, as they were all suffering from the after-effects of the revolt in Hungary. Then came the hunger-strike, which, in my opinion, could have been avoided if only some person came from headquarters to speak and reassure the refugees as to their future.

"During this time of anxiety, I found myself alone and although I sent many appeals to headquarters, I received no assistance to end the strike. It was only when I contacted the late Bishop of Limerick that any effort was made to end this unfortunate strike.

"Other events later led me to believe that I could not remain a member of the Irish Red Cross under the present leadership. In September, 1957, I definitely decided to resign. The main reason for a lot of the happenings was the failure of our Red Cross leaders to study the problems of refugees.

"In 1958, efforts were made to re-settle, at an early date, all refugees, and the majority were accepted for Canada. They left in August and September and then came the search for accommodation for those wishing to remain in Ireland.

"Misunderstandings between the refugees and Red Cross occurred and orders and counter-orders were given which would not have reflected credit on the Society.

"The camp is now closed and I truthfully say that it would never have been a success but for the almost 100% loyalty of the staff, army, garda and Red Cross workers.

"A big debt of gratitude is due to those, and the Society should have made some effort to retain some of their services, but they were dismissed with little thanks.

"As for myself, I was informed that they did not require my services on a full

time basis after February 2. No provision was made for a holiday of any kind after two years of day and night service. Instead a small gratuity was awarded.

"I have had a very sad time, but a time I will always remember for the great help and loyalty of all my friends.

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55. *Ibid.* 4-11-1958
56. *Ibid.* 8-11-1958
57. *Ibid.* 22-11-1958
58. *Ibid.* 25-11-1958
59. *Ibid.* 18-12-1958
60. *Ibid.* 16-12-1958
61. *Ibid.* 16-12-1958
62. *Ibid.* 5-2-1959

