

THE REFUGEEISM

When in 1915 the central army counter-attack took place in May the front under Gorlice in the south was broken off, and in July after the second Battle of Przasnysz in northern Mazovia. These events resulted not only in the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Kingdom of Poland, but also in a massive exodus of civilians.

A crowd of fugitives, estimated at between 3 and even 5 million people, moved eastwards. They abandoned their estates and risked death on the way by order of the tsarist authorities or as a result of a panic. This massive movement is called the refugeeism, which from Russian means exile.

REASON
The Kingdom of Poland, which is the western border of the Russian Empire, was **strategically unfavourable**. It was surrounded from the north and west by the German Empire and from the south by Austria-Hungary.

The Russian plans therefore envisaged abandoning these areas with resources and people being taken away. As during the war with Napoleon in 1812, it was intended to use the tactics of **the burnt ground** again.



160 kg

PACKING

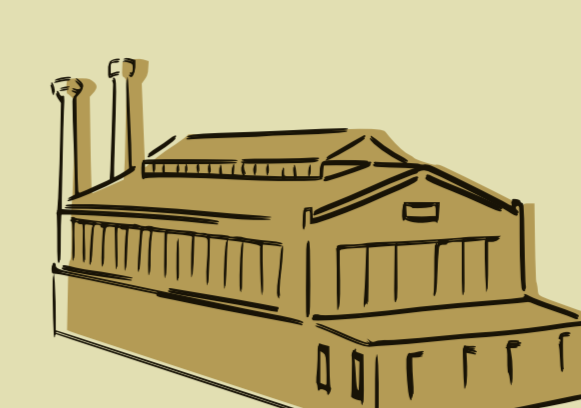
Before evacuation, the clerk wrote down the property taken and left on a **special form**, and then issued a receipt for which compensation was due.

Each family could take up to 160 kg of luggage with them.

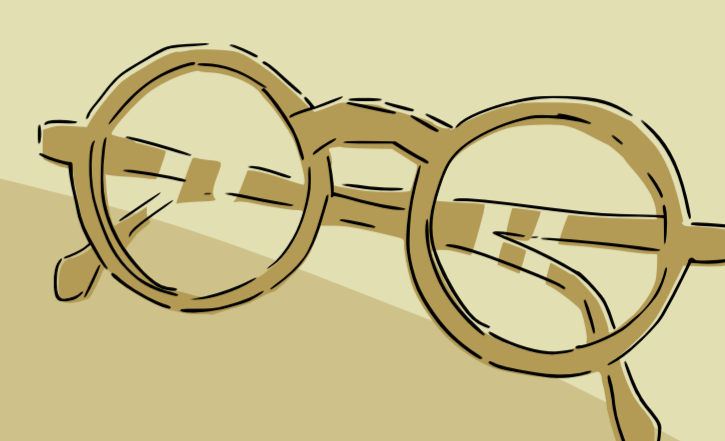


COMMAND

Originally, the plans of the Russian military **did not provide** for the displacement of the entire population of the Kingdom of Poland to the east. Only **men capable of military service** were to escape. Factories, universities and other state institutions were also



90 million gold francs
so much the property was worth exported until 1916 from 273 Polish land enterprises



PANIC

However, the panic did its job. To speed up evacuation the administration and the army has dissolved rumours of **German barbarism**. Children were to be drowned, women were to have their breasts cut off and men were to be killed.

Moreover, **the Cossacks** intentionally set fire to crops and villages. The sight of fire has increased people's fear. There has been a massive panic.



In addition, **Orthodox clerics** encouraged the escape while priests and rabbis tried to keep their faithful at home. In case of Polish people, the idea was to enable the inhabitants to join in a possible fight for independence.

3 200 000

the runners

513 434

Polish people (16,3%)

11 059

from the governorate of Plock

3 942

from the county of Przasnysz

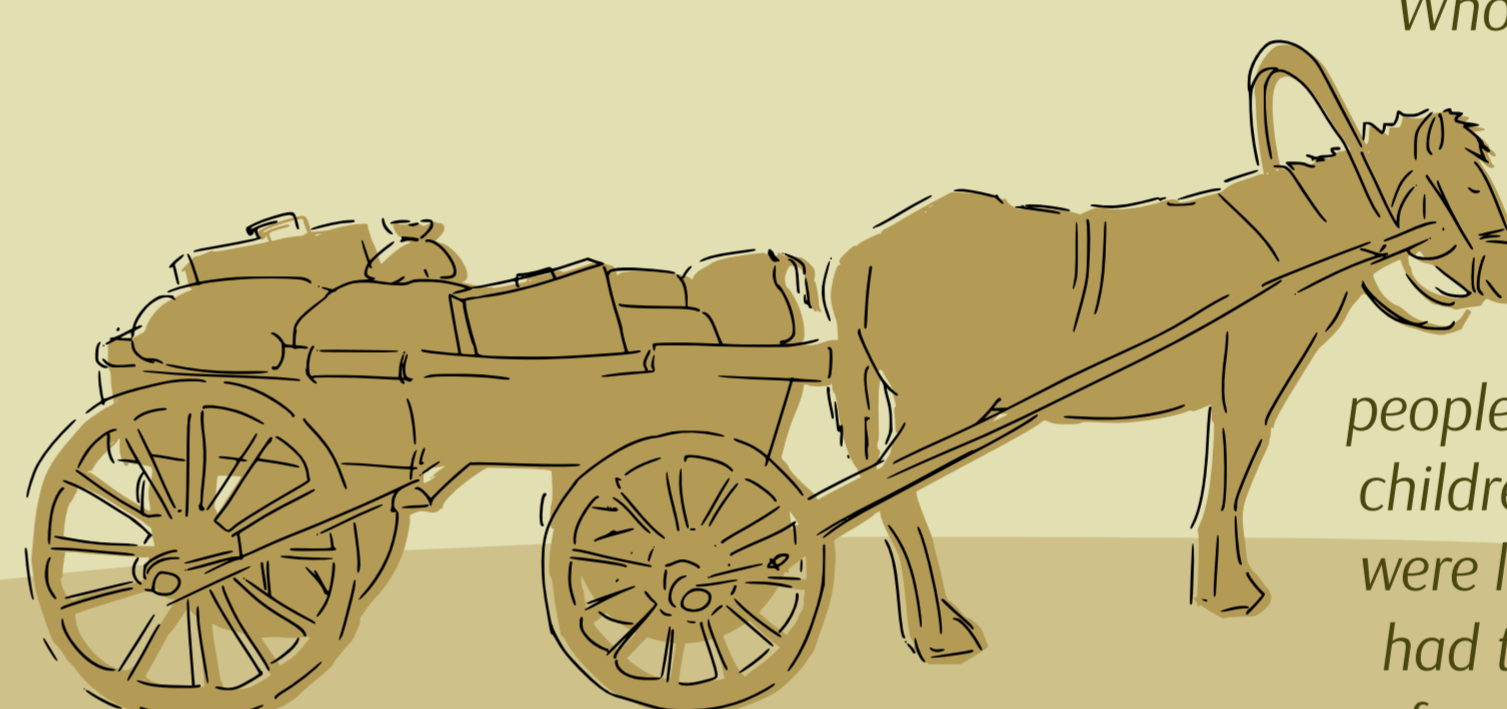
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from the city of Przasnysz

EVACUATED

Women and children dominated among those who were escaping (**73%** in 1916). The latter represented around **45%** of all runners. The runners were mainly orthodox.

"Whoever had a horse would attached it to the cart, hitched the cows at the back, put the children and what is more useful on the cart and leave the village quickly. But people who did not have horses took small children in their arms, and the larger ones were led by hand (...) and even those who had their own horses took their children from the house barefoot and forgot to take shoes for them".



maximum **1** cart for **5** people

DIFFICULTIES OF THE ESCAPE

The journey was accompanied by **hunger, thirst, typhus, dysentery and typhoid fever**. The military disaster caused a breakdown in the logistics of the Russian state. The lack of systemic care for refugees has meant that many of them have not survived the journey.

"Three months on the road. I do not know if it was a dream that I once had a home, or have I gone mad. The house is burned down, wife died on the way and two children went with her; they lie under crosses".



6 families = **50** persons

DESTINATION

The runners have been sent to almost all the governorates of the Russian Empire.

CARE

Newly arrived refugees were registered at railway stations, they received food vouchers and temporary shelter for 5-10 days before being sent out between the surrounding villages and towns. The runners were entitled to a monthly allowance, which was paid out by aid organisations from state funds. **The Duchess of Tatiana's Committee** was best known.

Polish activists helped the runners through the **Central Citizens' Committee of the Kingdom of Poland in Russia**.

Spiritual support was also important. It was given to the Catholic population by **Father Mieczysław Kłobukowski**, a native of Mazovia, who acted as chaplain to Polish refugees.

After his return to Poland he became rector of the Bernardine church in Przasnysz.



RETURNS

Although World War I ended in 1918, the Bolshevik Revolution, the civil war in Russia and the Polish-Soviet conflict prevented the runners from returning to their homelands.

Only after signing the **Treaty of Riga** in 1921 to Poland came back approx. **1.1 million people**, only some of whom were fugitives from 1915.

COMMUNITY OF EXPERIENCE

Refugees from Polish lands from 1915 were not the only ones who at the beginning of the 20th century had to leave their homes for fear of their lives.

"Albanian Golgotha" - at the turn of 1915 and 1916, after losing to the Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian troops at the front, Serbian soldiers began to retreat through the Montenegrin mountains to Albania. In extremely difficult mountainous winter conditions, **400 000 people** were running. Approximately **160 000 civilians** froze to death along the way (including 36 000 young boys over 12 years old evacuated with a view to being drafted into the army).

Pontic Greeks - the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922 in Anatolia abounded in ethnic cleansing and pogroms. However, it has resulted in a population exchange between the two countries, in which around **1.5 million Greeks** were resettled.



Armenian genocide - one of the methods to exterminate the Armenian people used by Turkish people in 1915 was a resettlement of Armenians. More than a million of them have been driven out of their homes and rushed into the Syrian Desert. Most of the exiles did not survive the journey, dying of exhaustion, hunger, thirst, illness or a bayonet blow.