

Reluctant Internationalists

The Reluctant Internationalists project inspects the history of international collaboration and ambitions of medical professionals, politicians, generals, diplomats and policy-makers in twentieth century Europe. This four-year project, funded by Jessica Reinisch's Wellcome Trust Investigator Award, examines the origins of such policies, consequences and lasting legacies.

Throughout the century, concerns about public health crises (real or imagined) were primary catalysts for international solutions, structures and mechanisms, which spurred or forced policy-makers at local and national levels into international action, often reluctantly.

Visit the web site: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/research/>

Research

Research themes

'Internationalisms'

When studied through the prism of public health, 'internationalism' can refer to a number of very different ideas: the search for intergovernmental agreements and conventions; the practice of international assembly; the projection of national agendas across the globe; the transfer of ideas, resources or people across national boundaries; or even "doctor diplomacy". These different models of internationalism were shaped by different constellations of foreign policy objectives, economic policies, humanitarian concerns, medical

principles, and the priorities of self-governing professions. The Reluctant Internationalists takes a broad view to make sense of internationalism in its various guises over the century, including such phenomena as Communist internationalism, Axis internationalism and Cold War internationalism.

Agents of internationalism

The project case studies identify different stakeholders and participants in debates about internationalism, going beyond the elite circles of self-declared liberal internationalists, and focusing instead on those who were rather reluctant advocates of international solutions. They ask why, when and with what results these reluctant internationalists argued that some form of internationalism was in their interests, and what role arguments on national interests played in calls for international collaboration. They also bring into focus both continuities and disjunctures in ideas of internationalism and take stock of the causes, effects and legacies of apparent ‘internationalist moments’ in the twentieth century.



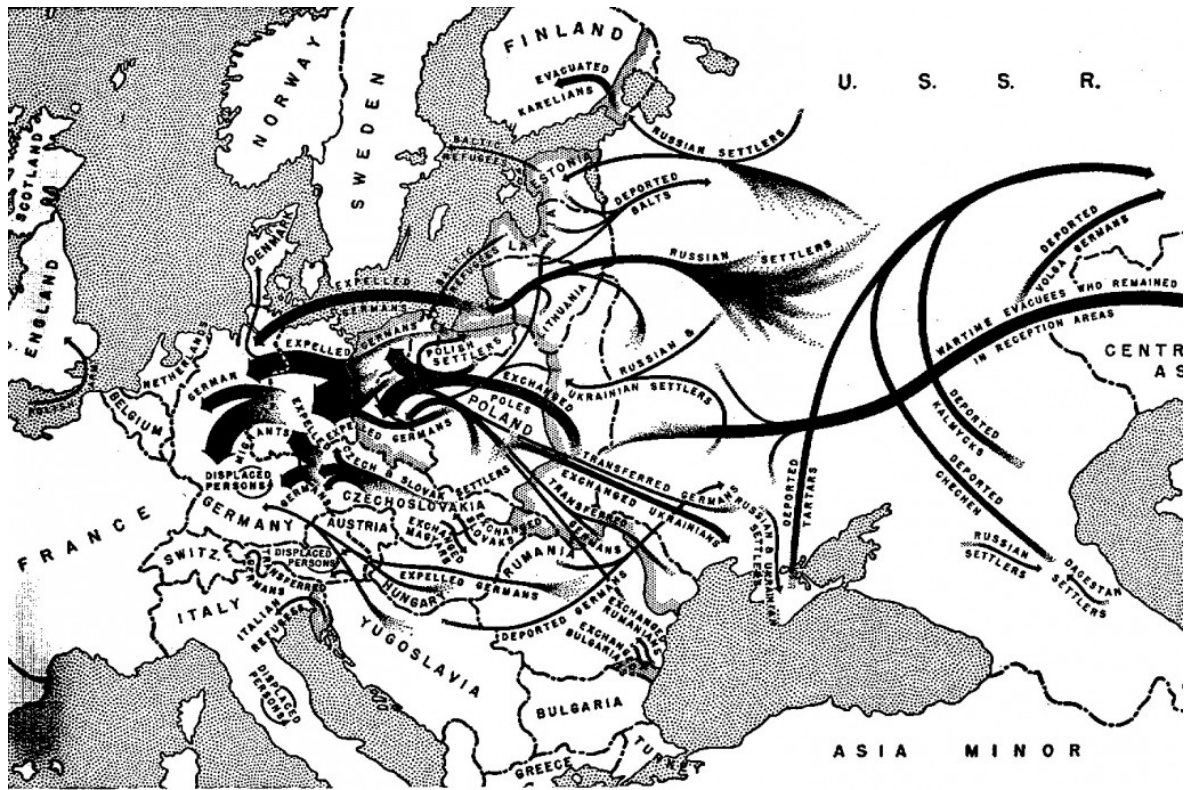
Dr H.Holle (Chief of UNRRA Medical Services) & Dr Franciszek Litwin (Minister of Health), Poland [1946]
(Credit: UNRRA/ 4593, UNited Nations Archives and Records Management.)

Public Health

A central question of *The Reluctant Internationalists* concerns the roles played by debates about public health and (real or imagined) crises in the formation of international structures, mechanisms and organisations in twentieth century Europe. Concerns about health provided major incentives for international collaboration throughout the century. But how, why, by whom, and with what consequences, were potential or actual health crises (such as the post-war epidemics, the spectre of mass starvation, the rising rates of venereal diseases, the movements of millions of refugees and disease vectors, and consequent psychological traumatisation on an unheard of scale) used to design, justify and implement international responses, even where they clashed with national or local priorities? More fundamentally, how has the organisation of the global community of nations changed in the course of the century, and how has the problem of public health shaped the way this organisation has been conceptualised?

Europe

We are all European historians, concerned with internationalism in Europe and its place in the world. Existing research on internationalism overwhelmingly addresses only its global frame and institutions. By contrast, we consider it as important to understand the tensions between European and global views of internationalism, and to assess the legacies for European nations and regions of the efforts to integrate non-Europeans into a comprehensive concept of world health. We are particularly interested in how international cooperation in the field of health has evolved within Europe, and how concepts have differed within different parts of Europe (focusing particularly on Eastern Europe and European peripheries).



Population Movements in the Interwar Period (Credit: Eugen Kulischer, *Europe on the Move* (Columbia University Press, 1948))