



Stateless in Manchester - the strange case of the "D.P. Student"

[Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Newby, A. (2018, May 29). Stateless in Manchester - the strange case of the "D.P. Student": Reading Race, Collecting Cultures - The Roving Reader Files.

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester's Takedown Procedures [<http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo>] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.



Stateless in Manchester – the strange case of the “D.P. Student”



The Roving Reader Files

Posted on **29/05/2018** (<https://aiucentre.wordpress.com/2018/05/29/stateless-in-manchester-the-strange-case-of-the-dp-student/>)

Have you ever whiled away an hour or two in the University of Manchester archive? You should try it sometime. You never know what you'll find.

I was in there one day rooting around trying to uncover the origins of international students who'd come to study in our city over the decades. Imagine my surprise when I saw the following statistic in the 1954 *Report of the Council to the Court of Governors*: "Stateless 1". What could that mean? Sixty people from India or twelve from France is understandable, but "Stateless 1"?

You've probably guessed already I was on another voyage of discovery, one which I'd like to share with you...

Don't think the mass migration of desperate refugees we've witnessed in recent years is anything new to Europe. It isn't. The "Stateless Student" I'd stumbled across turned out to be only one individual amongst the millions of unfortunate souls left displaced and destitute on mainland Europe at the end of World War II. The cataclysm of the war-torn early 1940s had wrecked economies and devastated huge swathes of the landmass, leaving governments and people with insurmountable difficulties.



Refugees in Germany moving westwards in 1945 (Image courtesy the German Federal Archives via Wikimedia Commons – Attribution: Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1985-021-09 / Unknown / CC-BY-SA 3.0 de)

I discovered that in the UK, students were painfully aware that their peer group throughout Europe was in dire straits. By the 1940s and 1950s, decades of voluntary action and coordination of national and international student associations in universities had strengthened a particular sense of student identity. Post-war reconstruction and volunteering overseas were preoccupations on campuses well into the 1950s, including here in Manchester. University of Manchester (UoM) students threw themselves into this student-for-student activity. How do I know? Because I pored over rare contemporary copies of their official Students Unions newspaper, which open up a fascinating window into their world.



University of Manchester students in the Students Unions coffee bar, 1944. (Image copyright The University of Manchester)

Just like students today, the intake of the late 1940s and the early 1950s was interested in international issues. Regular articles appeared in their newspaper reporting on and debating the lives of students in other countries. Significant national and international student organisations were active on campus. For example, IUS (International Union of Students) and ISS (International Student Service) cooperated to increase awareness of the scale of the task of 'reconstructing university life' in Europe after the war.

Everything wasn't rosy, however. With the Cold War between East and West emerging, tensions began to grow between IUS and ISS. IUS was regarded suspiciously as overly influenced by Communists, whilst ISS had its roots in the 1920s World's Student Christian Federation. Their ideas differed on the important question of how the rehabilitation of Germany should be approached. With denazification still ongoing, how should students located in Germany be viewed?

This was not a theoretical question. It had practical implications. Our UoM students were intensely interested in this topic, and their News Bulletins of 1949 reveal a running "D.P. Student Controversy" dividing the Students Unions. The core themes of this controversy were not unlike those we're familiar with in the refugee crisis today.

So what exactly was a "D.P. Student", and why the controversy? Well, "D.P. Students" were those students located in Europe and categorised as 'Displaced Persons'. From March 1949 Students Unions committees began to discuss whether to bring over to the UoM students from across Europe now stranded in the ruins of Germany. International agreements were being made on such relocations, but our committee members were not all convinced it was a good idea.



The University of Manchester Students Union on Oxford Road around 1950, since demolished (Image copyright The University of Manchester)

Firstly, it might cause antagonism on campus because post-war entrance to university was so difficult for everyone else. Secondly, what about the costs? (This objection was met by deciding to raise money among the staff and student populations.) Thirdly, ideological and political objections to accepting displaced persons were raised, pitted against a humanitarian plea for individual action to help poor souls mired in such horrendous situations.

It was this third set of debates that interested me the most. Ideological and political objections to accepting refugees exist today. In the post-war era, the student newspapers were reflecting wider contemporary controversies over whether some groups were too close to Communists, or whether closet fascists still remained on European soil.

In a Students Unions committee debate, one student representative doubted the D.P. Student Scheme was really necessary, resenting it being “pushed” by the wider press. Another suggested it was much better to invite “colonials” to the UK rather than bring people who were “probably Fascist and generally undesirable.” This was countered with arguments that “a D.P. should be allowed to benefit from experience of the British way of life and take back a conception of British democracy to less fortunate people,” backed up with the assertion that students should set “an example for the furtherance of international understanding.”



An assembly hall in the new University of Manchester Students Union on Oxford Road around 1950 (Image copyright The University of Manchester)

To cut a long story short, after a great deal of argumentation, our UoM Students Unions agreed to host a D.P. Student here in Manchester for three years. International bodies were ensuring that collaborators with the Nazis (named quislings) would be excluded. It eventually fell to the Students Unions Presidents to choose the lucky student.

So, who was this individual? I never found out! The first choice was W. Nahirnyi (a student of Polish origin), accepted by the Department of Economics & Social Studies on condition his qualifications were approved. They weren't. After a further selection process, a student of Latvian origin was recommended whose name I was unable to trace.

I'm assuming this nameless "D.P. Student" was the "Stateless" individual I'd set out to find. By October 1950 the student had arrived at the University, and in greeting, the student newspaper declared,

"the D.P. who comes here will be human, not symbolic; and it's up to this present and succeeding generation of students to see that he fits happily into this great University community and benefits from its climate and traditions."

What an optimistic conclusion to the great "D.P. Student Controversy"! Whoever the individual was, we would surely have wished him well too. What will be the fate of the refugees exercising the collective conscience of Europe today? Only time will tell...

If you'd like to learn a bit more about UK and UoM student responses to migration from Europe after the Second World War, take a look at [this article](#) on the University Histories blog. Interestingly in light of what I found out above, the UoM currently has a scholarship for one refugee per year. You can read about it [here](#).

If you're tempted to look into the historical experience of students from overseas in the UK a bit more, here's a [previous post](#) to get your teeth into.

I'm grateful to Dr James Peters of the University of Manchester Archive for his help in my efforts to find out who the "Stateless Student" was, and I can't go without thanking the ever-helpful Catherine Smith (Reader Services Assistant) for her unfailing patience in dragging from the shelves countless document boxes for me to poke my nose into.

And finally, remember that the Centre has a number of resources which shed light on the historical experience of students from overseas in the UK. Why not come in to take a look?