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Justice not Expediency for Aliens

**By Rt. Hon. J. C. WEDGWOOD,
D.S.O., M.P.**

JUSTICE NOT EXPEDIENCY FOR ALIENS

OUR POLICY of interning all refugees of German and Austrian origin was a disgrace to our inherited tradition of personal freedom and liberty. To restore the honour of our country as well as British prestige we need an immediate re-orientation in our attitude towards these people so as to right a wrong that has been committed and to wipe out completely the injustice that has been created.

Instead of internment being the rule and release the exception, we should demand the release of every individual internee whose innocence has been established.

Why they were interned

Six months have passed since the fatal decision was taken to "intern the lot". The following were the chief reasons advanced by Mr Peake, on behalf of the Home Office, as a justification of that decision:

- (1) "Greatly increased unemployment amongst aliens of all kinds", increasing the burden on the refugee organizations, and thus indirectly on the Government itself.
- (2) The fear of mob-violence. "In the event of serious air raids on this country many of these people would be in personal danger."
- (3) The alleged discoverers of cases of Jewish refugees being actively engaged in espionage work.
- (4) The fact that this "policy was strongly advocated by the military authorities".

What are the actual facts?

- (1) The cost of maintaining the refugees has not been decreased but rather increased as a result of the Government's policy since the entire expenditure of the various camps is being borne by the Government.
- (2) After nearly ten weeks of intensive bombing, not one single case of unkindness against such refugees as are free has been reported.
- (3) Mr Peake himself confirmed that he could not "recall any case since the beginning of the war which could be described as a hostile act having been proved in a court of law to be attributable to either of the classes of aliens (i.e. Austrian and German refugees from Nazi oppression)". It has been said that there may be some who are secretly dangerous, and yet one of the categories of the White Paper orders the release of key-men!

This obviously is the last place you would put a man whom you thought might be dangerous.

- (4) As an *emergency* measure, and of a *temporary* nature, the decision to intern all refugees might be understandable as long as the danger of invasion was acute. But that danger now has passed, and this justification, therefore, no longer holds good. Nor does it justify the "detention" of the refugees in Canada and Australia where there is no danger of Hitler invading.

Experience has proved during the last few months that this policy has resulted in an intolerable state of inequity arising in our midst while engaged in fighting to restore human rights and human liberties in Europe. This policy has caused greater harm to us, especially in America, than could ever have been the danger from these people whom Hitler had driven out of their own country. People at home and abroad have come to question the meaning of freedom and began to doubt our sincerity in our struggle. It is the reputation of Britain that is involved. It is with this end in view that we must radically change our policy.

The only way to do this lies in ordering the release of every interned refugee from Nazi oppression who is not in any way suspect; and to order their release immediately and without delay.

The new policy

Such a decision alone would show the great democratic nature of our constitution. Mistakes are liable to be made in any state; but it would be wholly inadmissible if the Government were not to try and remedy them once their attention has been drawn to the errors of their policy. The world would realise our true conception of the meaning of freedom. It lies in the hands of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to rally round us all people, whether free or oppressed, in our fight against the common enemy.

Two major problems

The release of all internees, with the exception of those whose loyalty to this country is to be doubted, creates two major problems which must be solved so as not to leave the measures adopted in an unfinished state. The first question concerns the *Legal Status of the Refugees*.

Legal position

The refugees no longer enjoy the protective power of their former country, nor have we been willing to assume that responsibility. But this war is vastly different from all other wars. We do not fight for

our own aggrandisement. We fight for the restoration of liberty in Europe. And every individual who shares our outlook, and whose reliability has been proved, is our ally, irrespective of nationality or creed. This is the only distinction we must draw.

Therefore it is our duty to assist all those who are willing to support us in our fight. All those must be treated with the same respect with which British subjects are being treated; and they must be invested with the same rights enjoyed by our own nationals.

England was one of the signatories of the Convention of Refugees in 1938, and the British Government then declared its willingness and desire

"that refugees shall be ensured the enjoyment of civil rights, free and ready access to the courts, security and stability as regards establishment and work, facilities in the exercise of the professions, of industry and commerce, and in regard to the movement of persons, admission to schools and universities."

To a great extent, the Government adhered in good faith to this Convention until the outbreak of war, but has since disregarded entirely the obligations accepted voluntarily. As a first step we must reaffirm our readiness to adhere to this Convention in the letter as well as in the spirit; and we must base upon this Convention a new legal status of the refugees that will grant them

- (1) the right to asylum;
- (2) to enjoy the same rights to proper trials, legal defence, and the right to appeal, as should be applicable to all British subjects;
- (3) the right of assembly to look after their interests.

These provisions to be embodied in an Act of Parliament; and if necessary a new Minister to be appointed to see that these obligations are duly carried out. Such an Act alone would be able to redress the damage done towards the refugees. It would clearly state what we are fighting for. And by granting asylum and protection to these refugees we would lend practical support to our policy.

The question of employment

The second problem arising out of a new policy would be the problem of employment and the right to work. This does not only concern refugees but the vast majority of aliens now in this country and who would be only too willing to assist us in our war effort. We cannot, of course, afford to let these people remain idle and unemployed. We need workers in the economic field and soldiers in the military field. We could use foreigners in both these capacities.

And the foreigners themselves would be only too ready to give us all the help they can.

Writing in the internment camp paper, *The Onchan Pioneer*, the editors state in an Open Letter to the Minister of Labour, "We suggest that an Alien Labour Corps should be organized on semi-military lines. . . . It should be organized to be available for urgent work of national importance, like the building of shelters, urgent building work, repair work, transport service. . ." This suggestion shows the spirit of these people who in spite of all the injustice done to them, have but one wish: to assist us in our war effort.

A new suggestion

I therefore suggest that, wherever a foreigner may be usefully employed in helping production or any other capacity, all restrictions at present applicable to his right to take up employment should be suspended automatically; and that foreigners be allowed to be employed wherever there is a shortage of labour. All these foreigners should be organized in one vast *European Legion*, a second International Brigade, to co-operate fully in our war effort and to share the fruits of our victory.

The European Legion

The European Legion would have a military and a civil section.

The military and semi-military section

The military section would include in the first place the Auxiliary Pioneer Corps, the Polish Army, the Czech, Dutch, Norwegian Forces, the French Forces directed by General de Gaulle, those parts of the Foreign Legion who are at present in this country, and if possible a further force to be added to the Foreign Legion. This further force would consist of many first class officers and soldiers who are refugee enemy aliens and who could be more usefully employed in the fighting services than in the Pioneer Corps.

The semi-military section would allow the employment of foreigners in the civil defence services as rescue workers, auxiliary firemen, stretcher-bearers, etc., particularly where there is a shortage of A.R.P. workers. These men do not mind danger, and only want to beat Hitler. Another important consideration would be the fact that they would be afraid to loot.

The civil section

The civil section of the European Legion could perhaps be subdivided as follows:—

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- (1) Doctors and dentists.
- (2) Scientists and research workers.
- (3) Persons working in industry and trade (not only those who do work in connection with the export business and munition factories, but also all those who are usefully employed, including typists, translators, etc.).
- (4) Persons working in agriculture and forestry.
- (5) All useful journalists, politicians and writers who should be organized under the Ministry of Information and could very substantially help in fermenting a revolution on the Continent.
- (6) Nurses.
- (7) Teachers.

Further sub-divisions to be discussed might be added.

The significance of the European Legion

In addition to providing friendly aliens and aliens of enemy nationality with a dignified status, the European Legion would have an inspiring effect both on its members and on their friends who still live on the Continent. It might play a historic role in putting into the foreground certain aspects of this war which have not been sufficiently realised by many people. The European Legion could help greatly in demonstrating to the world that this country is carrying on the present struggle not only as a war of Britain against Germany, but as a war of the forces of freedom everywhere against tyranny.

The alien problem must be solved because it is a British problem, and because our future and the future of all freedom loving people is at stake.