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THE CASE OF THE REFUGEES

A FINAL SOLUTION NEEDED

NEW SETTLEMENTS

By Sir Arthur Salter, M.P.

We are all of us overwhelmed with the individual tragedies of refugees and with the difficulties of securing them admission and shelter. There is a danger that we shall be diverted from the question of main strategy in attacking what is now becoming a formidable world problem. It is certain, however, that measures for temporary shelter and for definite settlement must be pressed on simultaneously; for neither is possible on any adequate scale without the other. The great obstacle to a freer temporary admission of refugees in peril is the fear of the British Government, as of others, that if large numbers are once admitted they will be on their hands for an indefinite period. If good progress were once made with schemes of definite settlement in colonial areas or elsewhere it would be easy to make temporary arrangements, in special camps or otherwise, for the reception of greatly increased numbers. And selection and training during this period of temporary shelter would improve the prospects of successful settlement elsewhere.

Some proposals are now being considered for migration to colonial or other areas. The British Government have made certain offers, the most important of which relates to British Guiana. It does not seem likely, however, that the schemes as at present conceived will do more than touch the fringe of the problem.

LOOKING FAR AHEAD

We must start by realizing the scale of the transfer of population involved. About 200,000 Jews by religion have already left Germany and Austria. There are probably another 1,000,000, with 500,000 "non-Aryans," who are subject to serious persecution in Greater Germany. In addition, there are Aryan political and religious refugees, and some thousands of Italian Jews now under notice to leave. The total to be dealt with in the near future may amount to almost a million—that is, five times the number already out.

The prospect for the further future, of the next few years, is still more serious. There are 3,000,000 Jews in Poland and nearly 2,000,000 in Hungary, Rumania, Czecho-Slovakia, and Lithuania. A large proportion of these are likely to be forced out. For, apart from the spread of Nazi doctrine and stimulated anti-Semitism, longer-term forces are in operation. In the 10 years before the War the United States, which has since reduced the inflow to a mere trickle, received some 10,000,000 migrants. The European economy became dependent upon this safety valve and has suffered greatly ever since it ceased to be available. Therefore it may well be that in the next few years the total of refugees will have amounted to between 3,000,000 and 5,000,000.

The real question is what should be the principal method of dealing with this exodus. Shall it be by absorption through a process of infiltration? Or shall it be by the establishment of new communities—i.e., by group settlement? For small numbers, the first method is the natural, whether the infiltration is into industrialized countries or into colonies by the ordinary form of colonial migration. No great constructive effort is needed, and the new entrants become absorbed into existing communities. This is what has happened hitherto, and there is no clear sign that the proposals for migration to colonies are being conceived as different in kind. The possibilities of absorption in this way are, however, very limited indeed, except in so rare a case as that of a rapidly expanding and developing country like the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the present time political and economic conditions make the difficulties of absorption very great, and they are exaggerated in the minds of the Governments which determine the numbers to be allowed entry. We are already acutely conscious of these difficulties in Great Britain and France. And the possibilities of absorption in colonial areas by the ordinary process of successive families emigrating and fitting themselves into an existing community are equally limited. It is enough to recall that all the Germans in the German colonial empire of 1914 amounted to only about 20,000, and that after over half a century the total of Europeans in colonial tropical Africa (i.e., excluding South Africa and the Mediterranean coast) does not exceed 300,000.

THE GREEK PARALLEL

Clearly no solution lies this way. But when we turn from absorption into existing communities to the establishment of new communities the whole problem becomes of manageable dimensions, if several colonial Powers contribute and if the right line of action is taken. The Greek experience is decisive. After the fall of Smyrna well over a million Greeks fled from Asia Minor into Greece, a number equal to a quarter of the total population of the country. Most of them were settled on the land in new homogeneous refugee settlements. Over 500,000 were settled in the mere strip of Macedonia. The result has been that this vast addition to a small population, so far from being an impossible drain upon the country, has actually added to its economic strength and resources. The method adopted was that the League of Nations made a scheme of settlement, officially recommended but not financially guaranteed by the Governments of League States, established a Commission to carry it out, and thus enabled a loan to be raised for the capital expenditure required. It is true that since the general financial crisis of 1931, and solely as the result of that crisis and the consequent disturbances, there has been a default in the interest due to the lenders. But the experience remains valid as showing first that large numbers of refugees can be quickly settled in new communities, and secondly that the official authority of Governments is essential if this kind of settlement is to be successfully arranged.

Voluntary enterprise and effort can hardly ever by itself carry through such a scheme. Large communal services, the construction of means of communication, economic development needing large capital are all essential and are all beyond the scope of voluntary associations, unless they have not only "facilities for acquiring land" but official authority to enable the necessary capital to be raised. If, indeed, Palestine could have been made available as a whole, it is likely that Jewish voluntary effort could have developed the whole country with no assistance from the British Government except the maintenance of law and order and of the general framework of the State. The sentiment associated with the Jews' historic home would have brought a concentration of effort that cannot be expected elsewhere. Much more will be needed from the Government if Jewish communities are to be established in regions

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Take British Guiana, for example. The Government state that 10,000 square miles, and perhaps more, can be made available there. If the climatic and other conditions are as

favourable as the British Foreign Office handbook suggests, there is obviously an opportunity of establishing a large and prosperous new community. The handbook quotes, for example, the opinion of a "competent authority" that the colony could support 50 times its population of 300,000; and offers other evidence to similar effect. When every discount is made the possibilities are clearly immense. But if the Government merely offer facilities for voluntary associations to make a scheme, the result at best will almost certainly be limited to assisting a few hundreds of families to migrate; and the contribution to the general refugee problem will be very small.

I suggest that the Government should make a reality of its offer by undertaking a scheme of large-scale group settlement. For this purpose the first necessity is to appoint someone with the status and qualifications of, say, Lord Harlech (Mr. Ormsby-Gore) or Lord Samuel. With such assistance as he required and utilizing information from those surveying on the spot, he would make a scheme comparable with the League scheme for Greece. This, once accepted and approved by the Government, would afford a basis for a loan, since it would give an assurance, as no scheme of a purely voluntary body could do, that the plan had been adequately prepared and would be carried through.

A NEW DOMINION?

The plan for a particular area need not be international. League action was required for Greece because the refugees were then coming to a weak sovereign State. It is quite unnecessary where settlement is to be in the colony of a great Power. Much the best form of international action is that each of several countries should contribute schemes of settlement in its own territory and should itself see those schemes through to success. A settlement in British Guiana, for example, could well be accompanied by similar settlements in French and Dutch Guiana carried out by direct action of the French and Dutch Governments.

Along these lines the whole refugee problem is quite manageable if several countries contribute. It may be that other areas will prove more suitable than the Guianas, but in any case the principle and the method remain the same. There would be much advantage in Great Britain taking the lead. She is the chief colonial Power. She has special experience at her disposal. She has a very strong interest in helping the world to find a solution of the refugee problem. Success would also bring prestige both in the United States and elsewhere; and in a few years the result might well be the addition of both political and economic strength to the British Commonwealth of Nations by the accession of a new and prosperous Dominion.

HOCKEY

LANCASHIRE WIN

Lancashire and Cheshire were able to play their annual Boxing Day hockey match at Brooklands, near Manchester, yesterday. The ground was bare of snow, but the pitch was rather hard and during the match a thin drizzle of rain fell steadily. Lancashire won

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