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MASS TRANSFER OF MINORITIES

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THIS article on the proposed mass transfer of minorities after the war is based on one principal assumption, namely, that members of the labour movement in this country have put their whole weight into the war against Nazism in the belief that the victory of Germany under the control of the Nazi régime would have meant the total extinction of those human rights and liberties without which, for them, existence would have had no value. And having made great sacrifices for victory in such a cause they will not willingly allow those rights to be extinguished elsewhere without a struggle.

It need not be recalled in great detail that one of the most odious features of the Nazi occupation of Europe was the mass deportation of racial minorities and foreign workers. This took place, not for reasons of military necessity alone, but as the logical conclusion from Hitler's racial theories as expressed, particularly, at Cologne, on October 6th, 1939, after the conquest of Poland:

"... the whole of East and South-east Europe is interspersed with untenable splinters of the German nation. In this lies a reason for continued disturbances between States. *In this age of the nationality principle and the racial idea* it is utopian to believe that the members of a superior race can simply be assimilated. It is therefore one of the tasks of a far-seeing regulation of European life to carry out resettlements in order thus to remove at least part of the causes of conflict in Europe."

But quite apart from the fact that the Nazi method provided no solution to the causes of conflict between nations—the minorities problem was grossly exaggerated by Hitler, but if there had been no grievance at all, he would easily have invented one—it was the callous disregard of human rights involved in such transfers that shocked the world. This right of the ordinary, peaceful, law-abiding citizen to remain, if he wishes, in the surroundings he prefers, the neighbourhood in which he was born, among the friends of his choice, is so simple, so fundamental, so obvious that socialists have never needed in the past to incorporate it in their manifestos or to struggle to defend it. It is evidence of the decay of all standards that it was necessary for a non-Socialist, Mr. Churchill, to include, in his statement of the principles of a democratic society, this right of

"... the ordinary peasant and workman earning a living by daily toil and striving to bring up a family, free from the fear that some grim police organisation under the control of a single party... will tap him on the shoulder and pack him off without fair and open trial to bondage and ill-treatment."



The Greco-Turkish Precedent.

Some confusion of thought has been created by the argument that such mass transfers as have been proposed can be made by non-Nazi methods, involving very little hardship or ill-treatment, and the exchange of Greek and Turkish minorities after the last war is quoted as a case in point. The actual facts of the case, however, show the contrary. Most of the Greeks from Asia Minor involved in the transaction left their homes in headlong flight, leaving behind their immovable and, to a great extent, also their movable property. Later this migration was "legalised" by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. The Greek Government was allowed to deport to Turkey its Moslem population by way of "exchange." Thus, panic flight was transformed into "Exchange of Population," stigmatized, at that very conference, by Lord Curzon as "a thoroughly bad and vicious solution." In the words of Sir John Hope-Simpson, one of the greatest experts in migration problems, the population transfer between Turkey and Greece "involved an appalling amount of misery and hardship."

Even Hitler was not able to arrange a complete transfer of minority populations. Approximately 900,000 Germans from the Baltic countries, from the Russian-Polish borderlands, from the Balkans and South Tyrol were forcibly brought *Heim ins Reich*. Though the transfer was personally supervised by the Gestapo chief, Himmler, the results remained far behind expectation. Many peasants from the South Tyrol refused to go. Similarly, a great number of Polish peasants in the so-called Warthegau could not, for economic reasons, be removed. In other words, should this "transfer" be attempted as a part of a planned peace settlement, even more drastic methods than Himmler's would be required to make it effective.

But supposing that the transfer *were* effective, at whatever cost, the results would be fatal to all chances of a peaceful settlement of Europe. First of all, régimes which have once been allowed to solve minority problems in this drastic manner, have a terrible precedent to hand for the solution of further problems. When certain reactionaries in America seized on the idea of the solving of the Negro problem by mass deportations to Africa, Mrs. Roosevelt was quick to point out that this could never be a permanent solution

"... because if we decide to move one minority group and settle it in some other part of the world, why shouldn't we decide to do the same thing with another group with which we find it difficult to get along at some time or another?"

(*Columbus Citizen*, May 15th, 1944).

Why not, then, the Jews, and having removed the Jews then, say, the Catholics, the Freemasons and all others, until one reaches the fantastic picture of a racially pure, politically uniform state, hermetically sealed against all foreign migration, all foreign travel, and, in logical conclusion, against that most dangerous of traffics, all foreign thought?

Political and Economic Objections.

But there are other practical objections, both political and economic, to mass transfers. Politically speaking, it would provide potential reactionaries in post-war Germany with a legitimate grievance in the form of millions of dispossessed workers and landless peasants, a problem which the democratic forces of a new Germany, probably operating within a considerably reduced area, may find it impossible to solve. It would make the question of frontiers all-important, once frontiers are allowed to determine the fate of populations, instead of frontiers being determined, in the words of the Atlantic Charter, in accordance "with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned." All progressive forces would agree with the principle implied in the statement of the Labour Party Executive on post-war policy that frontiers should become

"... less and less important as economic and cultural barriers, less barriers than bridges between nations."

We should not, therefore, start by erecting cultural barriers as our first step towards the peace settlement.

From the economic point of view it is doubtful whether the deporting countries might not suffer very considerably from these transfers. In the case of the Turkish-Greek transfer, to quote Winston Churchill, *The Aftermath*:—

"Turkey lost a great mass of citizens, who had for centuries played a vital part in the economic life of every Turkish village and township."

To take the case of the highly concentrated, highly industrialised Sudeten German areas of Czechoslovakia, which contributed 40 per cent. of that country's export trade before the war, the vacuum caused by the expulsion of this industrial potential might become impossible to fill.

To those who argue that this cost must be faced, as such minorities are essentially disloyal and have co-operated before and during the war with the Nazis, there is one simple answer. Those who have behaved as Nazis must be treated as Nazis, Quislings as Quislings, irrespective of race or nationality; for all races and all nationalities, except Poland, have produced them. The Sudeten German population in Czechoslovakia had, until 1935, a majority of 80 per cent. in favour of a peaceful solution of the Czech-Sudeten problem, and from 1935 to the occupation of Austria in 1938, the democratic Sudeten parties still represented one-third of the Sudeten electorate, though economic distress, Nazi terrorism and lack of support at home and abroad worked against them. The sole "disloyalty," for instance, of the Sudeten Social Democratic Party was that it worked, as it has done since 1899, for the solution of the nationalities problem in Central Europe by the application of "cantonal" or federal principles, along the lines now being worked out in Yugoslavia, with the approval of the Allies.

It must be remembered that many of these national minorities have lived for centuries in the countries from which it is proposed to uproot them. The first German craftsmen were invited to Bohemia under the protection of its rulers, early in the twelfth century, to help in the

opening up of certain industries. They can more legitimately claim Czechoslovakia as their homeland than, for instance, many Ulstermen, whose ancestors were settled there at the point of the sword, can claim Northern Ireland as theirs. But English people would not accept a solution of the Irish problem by the mass transfer of 1,279,000 Ulstermen to the lands their ancestors came from some hundreds of years ago.

Our objections can briefly be summed up as follows:—

1. The attempt to create "nationally homogeneous" States runs counter to the trend of European history. The existence of racially mixed zones is the outcome of supra-national forces in Europe's development. Just as the Thirty Years' War did not, in spite of endless massacres, establish clear-cut religious demarcation, no modern war can create permanent racial frontiers on the Continent. To-day, as then, the answer to dividing principles can only be tolerance, not exclusiveness.

2. The proposed transfer can only be effected if the victorious Powers are resolved to disregard human rights. It would have to be carried out by sheer force. The squaring of accounts with the Fascists of all nations would be jeopardised by being superseded by a continuation of racial persecution.

3. It is impossible to speak of an "organised" transfer of populations in a more or less chaotic period of transition. The repatriation of displaced populations will in itself constitute a major problem of transition. An additional transfer of minorities would be incompatible with the tasks of rehabilitation in large parts of the Continent.

4. It is based on a philosophy of the National State which is rapidly becoming obsolete. It disregards the increasing interdependence of Europe and, indeed, the world. It overlooks the incipient growth of a European community.

True democracy does not know the notion of permanent minorities, and lasting solutions can only be based on the principle of equality. In holding this view we are not alone. It goes back to the great Socialist authorities on nationality questions, like Karl Renner and Otto Bauer. It is borne out by the firmness of Soviet Russia's supra-national structure. It has recently been stressed, among other progressive thinkers, by Sir Walter Layton, when he said:

"If Europe returns to its pre-war régime, there is also no satisfactory solution of the minority problem even by the harsh device of large-scale transfer of populations. This plan, which sharpens up, instead of minimising, national differences, is quite contrary to the tendencies of a shrinking world. The problem can only be eased by giving to every citizen *definite rights as a European* in addition to his national rights."

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