

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers

102 Refugee Letters

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March 8, 1941

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My dear Mr. Kordecki:

Mrs. Roosevelt asks me to acknowledge your letter and to tell you that she has done and is doing all she can for the refugees in this country and in foreign countries. She is working with organizations established to help these people, and has tried through writing and speaking to make the people of this country conscious of the sufferings of others so that they will help all they can. If you have any definite suggestion as to anything else she might be able to do she would be glad to consider it, but she has no official authority and cannot act in any such capacity.

Very sincerely yours,

Secretary to
Mrs. Roosevelt

Mr. F. Kordecki
Plutony Polskiego Samarytanina
2019 Charleston Street
Chicago, Illinois

DD

Tel. Humboldt 0110

*Copy
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MAR 7 1941

PLUTONY POLSKIEGO SAMARYTANINA

2019 Charleston Street
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

February 25, 1941

Madam Eleanor Roosevelt
White House,
Washington, D.C.

Esteemed Madam:

Driven from their homes, robbed of their minutest possessions, fathers sundered from their families, children from mothers, suffering agony and pain, in cattle trains they are deported to the sterile, barren wastes in the depths of Siberia, where they face torture, want, exhaustion, pestilence, starvation and death.

Such is the fate of the Poles under Soviet Russia.
The satan himself could not contrive equal cruelty!

Shall we rest in peace and condemn them to die? Is there no way of extending aid to these unfortunates?

The American Democratic Government stands for humanity. In the name of this principle we appeal to you and earnestly solicit your sympathetic intercession and intervention on behalf of these misery-laden people. We appeal to you to use your good offices in behalf of these oppressed and persecuted human beings. We, the Polish Samaritan Platoons beg you, the First Lady of the Nation, to intercede for this cause.

May God bless you.

Very respectfully yours,

Frank Kordecki
F. Kordecki, President

Sonia Bryll
S. Bryll, Vice--resident

Rev. V. Grabek
Rev. V. Grabek, Fin.sec.

J. Serwinowski
J. Serwinowski, Rec.sec.

M. Machnowska
M. Machnowski, Treas.

United States Committee for the Care of European Children, Inc.

215 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

Telephone ALgonquin 4-5166

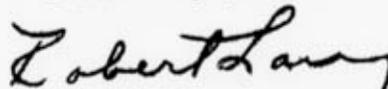
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June 20, 1941

TO: MEMBERS OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We are enclosing herewith for your information copy of a news release issued today on the arrival of the group of 111 children from unoccupied France.

There is also enclosed copy of a letter addressed to Mrs. Roosevelt by Morris C. Troper, the Lisbon representative of the Joint Distribution Committee, with reference to the arrival of the children in Lisbon, Portugal. As you know, the children are coming on the S. S. Mouzinho, which boat was chartered by the J. D. C.

Sincerely yours,



Robert Lang
Executive Director

COPY OF A LETTER FROM MR. TROPER IN LISBON
TO MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

JUN 21 1941 June 7, 1941.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Knowing of your deep interest in the work of the United States Committee for Children and how greatly our present success in rescuing one hundred and eleven children, many from internment camps in unoccupied France, has been due to your active efforts, I thought that the least I could do would be to tell you about the children now that they are here awaiting departure for the United States aboard the SS Mouzinho early next week.

They are really a fine group of boys and girls and they have endured much in the last year or two. They arrived completely exhausted after a gruelling trip from Marseille that took four days and five nights. Through the kindness of the Lisbon newspaper "O Seculo", who placed at our disposal the paper's beautiful seaside children's colony, we were able to bring the children to quiet, restful surroundings by the sea where they could play in the sun and regain childhood spirits.

When they came here they looked like tired, wan, broken, little old men and women. None dared to laugh aloud and few smiled - even the youngsters of seven and eight. Their clothes were in tatters. The more fortunate of them clumped around in wooden-soled shoes. The others had improvised sandals and pitifully worn slippers with paper and cardboard stuffed in to serve as soles.

One of the most pathetic sights I have ever seen was that of these children, freed of restraints, trying to learn to play again. After their experiences of the last few years they simply didn't know how to relax. They played grimly as though fearing that at any moment the sun, the beach, the food and this new unaccustomed liberty would be snatched from them and they would be thrown back into the misery and distress from which they have just escaped.

Through our Quaker friends we secured some new clothing and shoes. Whatever can be done for them physically is being done. An eminent Viennese specialist, himself a refugee, has taken over the responsibility for their health. They will arrive in New York a bit bronzed and looking fit. But it will take more than this week of care to erase the imprints of their bitter experiences.

After a few days here they smiled and laughed a little - but apprehensively, as though they might be punished for it. The results of experiences which no child should ever have to go through cannot be shaken off easily. I hesitated to call them over and speak to them individually because of the look of panic that swept their faces when they were singled out.

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The memories some of these children must have! They were permitted to say farewell to their families - those still having relatives. The train on which they travelled from Marseille stopped at the station of Oloron and the fathers and mothers interned at the Gurs Camp were brought to the station under police escort and given a last three minutes with their children. And these kiddies, knowing they were to see their parents, refused to eat their breakfasts on the train that morning but wrapped up bread and rolls and bits of sugar and handed them to their parents when they met.

There is one tot in the group, a wan, undersized girl of seven whom we haven't yet been able to make smile. She had been separated from her mother for over a year. When they met at Oloron, for the last time, for it is most unlikely that they will ever meet again, they were unable to converse for the child had forgotten her native German in the effort of learning French and English, and they had no common language except tears.

There is another girl of thirteen, busy mothering her four younger brothers and sisters. Her father died in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Her mother died of pneumonia at Gurs. I found her writing a letter to a woman at Gurs, encouraging her, "because she befriended my mother when she was sick." Lisa is taking her brood to live with their grandmother in America.

And the little boy who was smiling when the train pulled out of Oloron while all his comrades were in tears. "It is my birthday", he explained, "and I've just had the nicest gift in the world - I saw my mother."

Everybody will love Bobby Bergmann. He is ten years old and has written poetry in French and German. He wants to be a writer some day and I think he will be. He is chubby and can be made to smile, and I think I detected traces of childish devilment in him.

I could go on for pages telling you about these children. There is something about each of them - as there is about every child. Bruised in spirit, most of them. Frail in body, many of them. And they are the fortunate ones. I know that in America they will get the sympathy and understanding they need, and I hope that with the passing of time the scars each one of them bears will be healed, and they will recapture the spirit of the childhood stolen from them, and will have the opportunity to grow up into normal men and women.

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I recall with pleasure the interesting discussion about the refugee situation we had at the time of my visit to the White House with Mrs. David M. Levy last April, and I am grateful to you for your continued activity on behalf of Europe's child victims which has been so largely instrumental in the achievement of the results we have had.

Sincerely yours,

Morris C. Troper
Chairman

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt
The White House
Washington, D. C.

U. S. Committee for the Care of European Children, Inc.
215 Fourth Avenue
New York
Algonquin 4-5162

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A group of 132 European refugee children will arrive in New York tomorrow (Saturday, June 21) aboard the S. S. Mouzinho, Marshall Field, president of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children, Inc., under whose auspices the children are coming, announced today.

The Mouzinho, which sailed from Lisbon on June 10, 1941, is due to dock at Pier 8, Staten Island, at 10 A.M. Saturday.

The children, ranging in age from 8 to 15 years, represent Protestant, Catholic and Jewish families. Some of them have been evacuated from one European country to another. They came originally from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czecho-Slovakia. They were assembled by welfare organizations at Marseilles, from which point the United States Committee financed their transportation to Lisbon, reception care there, and trans-Atlantic passage.

This is the first large group of children to arrive under United States Committee sponsorship since December 23.

Selection of the children for evacuation to the United States saves them from being placed in concentration camps on their 16th birthdays.

The United States Committee announced that, to the extent of its financial ability, it will seek to bring other

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groups of refugee children unaccompanied by relatives when transportation can be arranged.

Many of the children arriving tomorrow are destined to relatives in the United States, and others will be placed in private homes already arranged for. None of the children is available for adoption.

People who believe they may have relatives among the children may call the National Refugee Service - Edgecombe 4-0393.

The children will be taken from the ship to a reception center in New York.

Tentative plans call for the children to be met by a committee consisting of Mr. Field, the Rev. Emil N. Komorra of the Committee on Catholic Refugees - - - - -

- and the Rev. Almon Pepper of the Episcopal Educational Service.

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt is honorary president of the United States Committee. Robert Lang is now executive director.

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