

ODEGARD, Peter H.

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APR 8 1944

Dear Peter:

I want to thank you very much for your letter of April 5 and the suggestions which you were kind enough to give to us. You can be sure that we will consider them all carefully and take them into account in our work on the psychological side of our task.

Thanks again.

Very truly yours,

(s) John
J. W. Pehle
Executive Director

Professor Peter H. Odegard,
Amherst College,
Amherst, Massachusetts.

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TREASURY DEPARTMENT

WASHINGTON

WAR FINANCE DIVISION
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April 5, 1944

Mr. John W. Pehle
Executive Director
War Refugee Board
Treasury Department
Washington, D. C.

Dear John:

Coming to Washington the other day, I realized I hadn't followed up on my earlier note to you. I, therefore, jotted down some suggestions that occurred to me and which I pass on to you. Some are obvious, others, perhaps, unsound and, perhaps, none of any great use. But here they are:

The refugee problem is mainly a problem of rescuing Jews in Central Europe from systematic persecution, torture and death.

From a public relations or propaganda point of view, therefore the problem is inextricably bound up with that of Anti-Semitism. The causes of racial prejudice are diverse and complex. They are a compound of historical residues, social myths, economic insecurity, prestige, hunger, frustration, misinformation, and, in some cases psychopathic obsessions, to mention but a few.

It is obvious, however, that the rescue of Jewish and other refugees cannot wait upon the extirpation of racial prejudice.

It is equally obvious that no realistic approach to the problem is possible which fails to take account of the existence of anti-semitism not only in Europe but in other countries, including the United States.

Anything, therefore, which helps to disarm, silence or by-pass the anti-semites should make the job of the Refugee Board less difficult.

It is therefore necessary to inquire how far the anti-semites can be disarmed and by-passed by the terms in which the refugee problem is discussed. The following are suggestions looking toward this.

1. Emphasize the non-urban refugee as much as possible. Agriculture continues to be a strongly affirmative symbol. Jefferson's



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notion that the chosen people of God are those who live and labor on the land is part of the folk culture of western civilization. Moreover, the Jew has been for centuries identified with the city. Indeed Lewis Browne in his book on the causes of anti-semitism (see How Odd of God) attributes it in no small measure to the reaction of the rural dweller against the city and of rural values against urban. Jews have suffered from this identification and hostility.

2. Emphasize the child as the victim of Nazi persecution. Even anti-semites are sensitive to the suffering of children. Tests of reader interest show that children are near the top. The child is one of the most incontrovertibly plus symbols in western culture.

3. Personalize the problem. Stories of how hundreds of thousands are suffering are often less effective than stories of how one individual or one family suffers. People generally will read of a holocaust that takes the lives of thousands with more equanimity than they will read of the suffering and death of one person. Black Beauty, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Grapes of Wrath and countless other cases could be cited. The individual can become the symbol for thousands in a way that thousands can never come to symbolize the individual.

4. Identify the refugees with the United Nations rather than with the enemy. Stories showing how the persecuted people of Europe fight for freedom should help.

5. Fear of retribution may be an effective appeal under certain circumstances but, generally, people react more quickly to promised rewards than to threatened punishment. Hence a suggestion that the terms of settlement may be mitigated in return for a demonstrable change in policy with reference to the Jews and other persecuted peoples may have more effect than threats of hell fire and damnation.

6. Emphasize the contribution which refugees already admitted to this country and to England have made toward the war effort. Give less attention to refugee actresses, actors, writers, etc. and more to inventors, scientists and specially skilled workers and farmers, if possible.

7. Organizations supporting the work of the Refugee Board should, so far as possible, be representative of all major American groups - and not exclusively of Jewish or non-Jewish groups.

8. Make clear that Nazi persecution of racial minorities is part of the Nazi war against Christianity, democracy and freedom.

Use Konrad Heiden's thesis that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the so-called bible of anti-semitism, is not only a fake and forgery but what is more important that it is in effect a rough blueprint of the very methods employed by the Nazis in their war against western civilization.

9. Point to the fact that America, with its polyglot population, simply cannot endure as a nation on any other basis than that of racial toleration. But, in doing so, emphasize our tradition not as a "melting pot" but as the "homeland of humanity".

10. With reference to Germany itself and the Axis satellites - propaganda can serve only as a support or supplement and never as a substitute for military action. Threats of punishment or of punitive peace terms, or for that matter, promises of more lenient treatment, that come in the wake of Allied military and naval advances will be more effective than if they follow Allied reverses.

I personally would doubt the effectiveness of the appeals made on behalf of Jewish and other minorities by President Roosevelt and Mr. Eden to Axis collaborationists in Hungary on the heels of Nazi occupation. To make more moderate treatment of these minorities a sign and symbol not only of non-cooperation with but resistance to the Nazi regime - at the very time the Nazi armies are moving in, may well prove to be a boomerang. Under such circumstances, Axis collaborationists might well intensify their persecution, if for no other reason than to prove their loyalty to the Axis and thus save their own skins. This is badly stated but I hope you can get what I'm trying to say.

11. Emphasize always and in every way that the life and happiness of every one in Axis countries, in the satellite nations and in the United Nations - are bound up with the life and happiness of these persecuted minorities. This means simply everlastingly to make clear that these are human beings and, as a great Jew once said "Even as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me". I mention this because Howard Odum in his recent book on Race and Rumors of Race points out that the average Southerner's attitude toward the negro is based fundamentally on his assumption that the negro is not really a human being. The anti-semite, similarly, seems to assume that in some mysterious way Jews are different from other humans. This is not new, of course - see Shylock's soliloquy in The Merchant of Venice.

Sincerely yours,



Peter H. Odegard

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AMHERST COLLEGE

Amherst, Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

March 16, 1944

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 To: Files
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 Date

Mr. John W. Paley
 Executive Director
 The War Refugee Board
 The Treasury Building
 Washington 15, D. C.

Dear John:

Thank you for your note of March 13th and for sending the enclosed memoranda and releases. Since I returned to Amherst yesterday I have been up to my ears meeting classes, giving examinations and trying to finish an article for Transatlantic Magazine. I have not, therefore, had much time to think about the problems raised in your memorandum. I do hope to write you more fully when I have had a better chance to think about it. It ~~seems~~ seems, to me, however, off-hand that one of your major problems, in addition to those listed, may be the attitude of people in the United Nations, including those in the United States. The effectiveness of your Board can be greatly increased by the whole-hearted support, not only of the President and other leaders of the Administration, but of the American people. I should not, in a brief note, attempt to get hold even of a tiny fragment of the tangled skein of prejudice, self-interest, prestige hunger and downright sadism that contribute to anti-semitism here and abroad. But it does seem to me that perhaps the most desperately in need of all the refugees are the Jews. The problem of anti-semitism and the rescue of these people are not, therefore, unrelated.

But I should like to write you more fully when I have had more time to think about the problem.

Cordially,

Peter H Odégard
 Peter H Odégard

Because the chaotic character of this note, our joint departmental secretary has too much to do to waste time on unprocessable transcription

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