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MAY 1 1944

TO: Dr. Charles W. Sheerin

FROM: Lawrence S. Lesser

The following is a resume of my part of our conversation last Saturday morning:

On January 22, 1944, the President created the War Refugee Board consisting of the Secretaries of State, Treasury and War. In the Executive Order creating the Board, the President stated that it was the policy of this Government "to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war." The Executive Order includes among the functions of the Board "the development of plans and programs and the inauguration of effective measures for (a) the rescue, transportation and maintenance and relief of victims of enemy oppression, and (b) the establishment of havens of temporary refuge of such victims."

The rescue of victims of enemy persecution necessarily involves their escape from enemy-occupied areas to the neutral countries contiguous thereto, i.e., Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and Turkey. The establishment of new and the enlargement of old escape routes obviously depends first, on the attitude of the German and satellite border guards and second, on the attitude of the authorities of the neutral countries. It was soon learned that the latter were, generally speaking, reluctant to permit the enlargement of old escape routes or the creation of new ones because they fear the effect of a greater influx of refugees on their already overtaxed domestic economies. American offers to supply funds necessary to the maintenance and support of the refugees are not considered to suffice since the problem is not one of money but of housing, food and clothing, of which there are shortages because of the war and its disastrous effect on continental and overseas trade. As a consequence, the rescue of victims of enemy oppression becomes, in large measure, a problem of finding havens outside of Spain and Turkey for the

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refugees they have already admitted and may in the future admit so that they will continue to admit additional numbers of them, and, so far as Switzerland and Sweden are concerned (egress from those countries now being impossible) the extension of adequate assurances that just as soon as practicable, the refugees they have and will receive, will be removed to other havens. The President recognized this, when in a statement issued on March 24, 1944, he said:

"In so far as the necessity of military operations permit this Government will use all means at its command to aid the escape of all intended victims of the Nazi and Jap executioner — regardless of race or religion or color. We call upon the free peoples of Europe and Asia temporarily to open their frontiers to all victims of oppression. We shall find havens of refuge for them, and we shall find the means for their maintenance and support until the tyrant is driven from their homelands and they may return."

As a partial solution to this problem, arrangements have been made with the French authorities in North Africa for the use of a camp to house a limited number of refugees arriving in Spain. So far as those who arrive in Turkey are concerned, there is some hope that they may continue to be routed to Palestine. Generally speaking, however, the havens thus afforded are not sufficient to induce either Spain or Turkey to throw their border wide open. With respect to the Swiss and Swedish problem, the United Nations have more or less agreed to receive back into their homelands, after the war, such of their nationals who may have sought refuge in Sweden or Switzerland, and to make conditions in the enemy countries such that refugees from such countries will be able to return thereto. This, of course, has too much the ring of promise when present performance is what is desired.

America's great interest in the rescue of the victims of enemy persecution is accepted the world over as another manifestation of the humanitarian instincts of the American people. On the other hand, America's efforts to rescue such victims, aside from financial support which is not of the essence, have been limited to attempting to get the other nations of the world to do something. These efforts are always faced with the express or implied inquiry: "What is America prepared to do?" Moreover, it has been indicated that the Germans and their satellites remain unconvinced of our real interest in the people they are persecuting since to date words rather than action have evidenced our concern. Of course, America has agreed to receive

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as immigrants five thousand refugee children who might be admitted into Switzerland and Spain between January 1 and July 1, 1944. Furthermore, a number of refugees have been received as immigrants under the quota laws and others as temporary visitors. The numbers, however, are comparatively insignificant.

With this as the background, Samuel Grafton, a writer on current topics in a column which appears in the New York Post, the Washington Star and a number of other newspapers, suggested in a column which appeared in the New York Post on April 5, 1944, that refugee camps be established in this country where victims of enemy persecution could be received and housed until after the war when they would be either returned to their homelands or transported to such other places for immigration or colonization as might be worked out for them with their consent by such private and public agencies as are charged with such matters. Mr. Grafton's suggestion was that these camps be established on the same theory that governs merchandize in free ports, i.e., that the persons admitted to such camps be considered, for the purposes of the immigration laws, not to be within the United States just the way merchandize admitted to a free port is not considered to be within the United States for the purposes of customs laws. Persons in such camps would be, for all intents and purposes, like merchandize in bonded warehouses awaiting transshipment. They would not be permitted to take jobs outside the camps and it is assumed that their time would be spent in educational and vocational retraining and rehabilitation.

Mr. Grafton repeated his suggestion in a column that appeared in the Washington Star on April 15, 1944 and on April 17, 1944. Representative John W. McCormack of Massachusetts inserted Mr. Grafton's latter article in the Congressional Record. On April 18, 1944, John W. Pehle, Executive Director of the War Refugee Board, was asked by newspaper reporters whether consideration was being given to Mr. Grafton's plan. Mr. Pehle replied, in substance, that that proposal, as well as a great many others, was being studied. This statement was emphasized by the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune on April 19, 1944 and on the same day Dr. Cavert of the Federal Council of Churches, wrote Mr. Pehle supporting this plan. On April 20, 1944, the New York Herald Tribune, The New York Post and the Christian Science Monitor editorially supported Mr. Grafton's proposal and the British Information Service issued a release stating that Britain had maintained such a camp since 1939. Also, on April 20, 1944, the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Associations, wrote the Board supporting the proposal. On April 22 and April 25, 1944, the New York Post

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collated favorable editorial comment on the proposal quoting the Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal, the Daytona Beach (Florida) Evening News, the Seattle Star, the Mitchell (South Dakota) Daily Republic, the Chicago Sun, the San Diego (California) Daily Journal, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Daily, the Wilmington (Delaware) Star, the Asheville (North Carolina) Citizen Times, the Lynn (Massachusetts) Telegram News and the Charlotte (North Carolina) News.

In support of Mr. Grafton's proposal, it has been argued that for the United States to embark on such a program itself would be of great aid in its efforts to get the other countries of the world to do something. It has also been pointed out that there are a large number of German war prisoners and German civilian internees in this country who are receiving excellent care and treatment and that it seems shocking that the same care and treatment is not available to refugees from Nazi persecution. While a number of people feel that the housing of refugees from Nazi persecution in what amount to detention camps is neither morally nor socially just, it is conceded that to do so would nevertheless better their condition and what is more important, save many lives. It has also been pointed out that while there may be more desirable programs, from the social and moral points of view, this program has the advantage of being feasible and practical.

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