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## ARNDT IN THE INTERNMENT CAMP

‘Please attend Hampstead Police Station on 3rd October 1939 at noon, and bring with you all papers regarding your nationality and those connected with your profession or business’.

So began Heinz Wolfgang Arndt’s ordeal as an enemy alien. The Chamberlain government had not intended it to be an ordeal. Determined to avoid the indiscriminating mistreatment of aliens that had occurred during World War I, it established 120 tribunals throughout Britain whose mandate was to assess the loyalty of some 73,500 foreigners. It was to classify them in three categories: A (dangerous; to be interned); B (of uncertain loyalty; to be restricted); or C (friendly; to remain at liberty). The majority would be C.

Heinz—24, single, MA (Oxon.), research student at the LSE, of German nationality—duly reported to the Hampstead police for a preliminary check of his papers. In the next week, in Hampstead Town Hall, a tribunal formally classified him C. He was practically as free as an Englishman. When the government commandeered the LSE buildings for the war effort and Arndt moved with the remaining students and staff to Cambridge, he immediately applied to do national service.

The government’s liberal policy, however, lasted barely six months. In April 1940, the Wehrmacht occupied Denmark in a few hours and Norway in a few days. In May, it conquered Holland and Belgium, and in June, France. An invasion of Britain was now expected daily. Aliens became targets of official and popular suspicion. The British Ambassador to Holland warned his countrymen to keep an eye on ‘refugees’ who were often disguised spies. The popular journalist Beverley Nichols, whose ridiculing of mindless patriotism had so delighted Arndt when he was an Oxford undergraduate, now demanded the internment of all Germans without exception, whatever their anti-Nazi pretences. Their dirty tricks, he wrote, would ‘make your hair stand on end. Particularly the German women.’ On 7 May, Churchill replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister and issued the order already cited: ‘Collar the lot!’

Accordingly, after lunch on a brilliant spring Sunday on 12 May 1940, the Cambridge police ‘collared’ Arndt. He outlined his trials in the next months in his regular letters to Ruth Strohsahl, whom he planned to marry.

The letters were written daily, then weekly, and all of the regulation-length 24 lines. They did not tell the full story. Arndt chose his words with care to make sure they passed the British censors. He also tried hard, sometimes too hard, to be cheerful. But he gave a characteristically clear record of the main events and of his gradual change of mood from confidence in his early release to despair that he might remain imprisoned for years.

Heinz spent his first night in a convent in Bury St Edmunds, which served as a temporary detention centre. His letter of 14 May was almost desperately reassuring

Don't worry, little one. It is not very comfortable here, but there is nothing to complain about. The soldiers and especially the officers are extremely nice and polite. There is no indication whatever as to when we shall come out. But I am quite enjoying my holiday, and I could hardly have more pleasant company (with one exception). Be good and work hard. Think of me, little one, and don't worry about us.

On 15 May, he described the plans for a *Volkshochschule* or camp university: 'I shall take a class on British government and possibly one on political theory, economic historians etc etc.'

In his letter of 16 May, he described 'the crowd in the camp'

There are about 250 altogether. Most of them Jewish refugees but also some non-refugees, among others the second son of the [Hohenzollern] Crown prince...Most of the people are dons or students who treat their condition philosophically, cheerfully or stoically. The grumblers are only two or three. This is largely due to the extraordinarily considerate, polite, and gentlemanly treatment which we receive from the officers in command.

A week later, the internees were moved to an Aliens' Internment Camp at Huyton, near Liverpool. Heinz described it on 27 May

It is a housing estate, fairly large, like a village. Some 2300 internees live in houses and tents. All people under 26 including myself in tents. Most of the administration is run by us. I have been elected 'father' to a village of tents with 200 people.

Could you please send me a parcel containing food, sewing material, a mirror, soap, toothpaste, my thin combinations, my light brown shoes, cigarettes? We are not allowed any newspapers or BBC news. We therefore know nothing about the war situation. But don't write about it.

He also asked Ruth to send to *Science and Society: A Marxian Quarterly* in New York a biographical note about him to be appended to his forthcoming article, 'The social outlook of British philosophers', his Marxising lament for English intellectuals.

By 17 June the internees had been moved again, to Douglas on the Isle of Man. The move was, however, temporary. The camp adjutant informed them that they would soon be moved to Canada, which, like Australia, had agreed to take in dangerous internees whose presence in England might weaken the war effort. (New Zealand, South Africa and the United States refused to take any enemy aliens.)

Arndt was not able to send any letters during the two weeks of the voyage to Canada on the motor-ship *Ettrick*. In any case his experiences were too squalid for him to tell Ruth about them in detail. He almost lost not only his British optimism but his Germanic stoicism. To ease the humiliation, he kept a diary in letter form

3 July: She is a troop-carrier with large rooms (mess-decks) with low ceilings. One thousand internees were crammed together in three such rooms. At first conditions were indescribable. There were ventilators but the portholes had to remain closed.

4 July: By 4 p.m. practically everyone was sick who had not managed to get on deck.

5 July: After breakfast we organised a large cleaning campaign. Working from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m. we got the place fairly clean and more or less tidy...One grand Viennese spent an hour playing the accordion and singing with himself...One lies about reading or playing cards and enjoying the fresh air. The food is, on the whole, good and very plentiful.

6 July: Things have been much better today. The obstructionists are relatively few; but they give enough trouble. On the whole, people are good and willing to co-operate, considering the fact that they have been interned for eight weeks and are now being shoved

across the Atlantic like cattle. These young people take their fate stoically and with as much humour as they can muster. There are some older people who are leaving their wives and children, their property and position in England. They are pretty miserable and a few have broken down and can hardly be comforted.

7 July: In the morning when one shift of 300 people was taken on deck, a sergeant, while trying to push people back, suddenly pulled out a long large rubber truncheon and started beating ten, fifteen people right on the head as hard as he could. He had simply lost his head and temper.

It was a disgusting performance in front of the eyes of the [German] prisoners of war who no doubt enjoyed this re-enactment of concentration camp scenes. The sergeant even tried to grab a rifle with bayonet from one of the sentries. An announcement from the Command was made that the sergeant would be punished.

9 July: I played a lot of bridge and game of chess. Bridge now for very high stakes—half a bar of chocolate or two cigarettes. There is, of course, some thrill and sense of adventure in this sudden departure to a wholly new country and continent. And if it weren't for the enforced separation from you, the worry about your safety, and my dislike of leaving England I might be able to abandon myself pretty fully to this sense of excitement.

10 July: This morning I heard in a fairly authentic form the rumour that a ship with internees and prisoners of war [*Arandora Star*] was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland and sunk with the loss of 3000 men [the correct figure was 600].

13 July: Before breakfast we had reached the St Lawrence River and went upstream. The weather was wonderful and we enjoyed one of the most beautiful sceneries [*sic*] I have ever seen.

Soon it became necessary for some to go to the lavatory. I spent the next three hours trying to get permission for them. This has been one of our worst troubles during the whole voyage. We were locked up in our decks and unable to go to the lavatory. For two nights we had an epidemic of diarrhoea. It took us hours of argument with the sergeants—no officers were visible—until they allowed at first buckets to be put up inside the barbed wire and when they proved wholly inadequate permitted people to

go one after the other to the lavatories. The scenes do not suffer description. It was simply ghastly.

We docked at 1.30 p.m....The Colonel in command being unable to cope with disembarkation proceedings raged about shouting at everyone. A little Jewish boy was kicked by him and beaten with his stick...At 7.30 p.m. at last we were taken off the ship...By about 8 p.m. we once again reached barbed wire...Most of our things were put into green bags with our names on them.

15 July: When the green bags were opened it was soon found that the sergeants and privates had used the unrivalled opportunity of the night search to steal on a colossal scale. Money, watches, pens, cigarettes, lighters, everything of value had been appropriated.

At the same time our luggage was put up in a long row in the street. Here the robbery started again. The soldiers stole several typewriters in front of the eyes of their owners. [Later a military court of inquiry was set up.]

16 July: We are really being well and adequately fed.

17 July: An internee, who had the day before tried to attack another one in a hut and had been put into the camp hospital as mentally disturbed, apparently tried to break out of the hospital and was shot by a passing sergeant of the guard through the thin wood of the hospital wall.

In the first letter Arndt posted to Ruth from Canada (dated 17 July), he summed up the horrors of the trip to Québec in these spare words: 'Our crossing was not frightfully comfortable.' He added: 'I was very miserable when I arrived here and it dawned on me that I may never get out of this until the war is over. I am now more composed.'

19 July: Send me a pipe.

Meanwhile in England, protests at the treatment of internees were being organised by a range of refugee, professional and academic organisations. There were also two major debates in the House of Commons in July and August. Why, MPs asked, was it necessary to intern so many aliens with consequent hardship to their families? Why was it necessary to detain category-C aliens at all? Why arrest Sebastian Haffner, author of the anti-Nazi book *Hitler: Jekyll or Hyde?* (1941) Or Franz Borkenau, the anti-Nazi,

anti-communist author of *The Totalitarian Enemy?* (1940) Or the famed Dada artist Kurt Schwitters? Or the journalist Heinrich Frankel, author of *The German People Versus Hitler?* (1940) Why were thousands of less well-known anti-Nazis detained? Why was it necessary to deport the internees to Canada and Australia, with the obvious risk of U-boat attacks? Was the government aware that Nazi broadcasters were able to tell the world that Britain was now like Germany and had interned all its Jews?

One polemic, a Penguin Special, *The Internment of Aliens* by François Lafitte, was especially influential. Published in November 1940, it attacked the government's panic of the previous May, exposed the hysterical xenophobia of some journalists and documented the mistreatment of the refugees. The government, Lafitte concluded, 'has declared war on the wrong people'. When he republished his book 48 years later, he conceded that the fear of German invasion and conquest in 1940 was perfectly rational. He also recalled the internees' understandable fear of being turned over *en masse* to the Nazis (as had happened in France), but he found 'astonishingly little' that he wanted to rewrite.

Meanwhile in Canada, the internees formed a refugee committee to negotiate with the camp authorities over grievances. There were two factions: one cooperative, one confrontationist. The spokesman for the first was Count Lingen, the Kaiser's grandson and a cousin of King George VI. Internee and chemist Anthony Michaelis described him as 'tall, blond, blue-eyed, and sportive-looking, always immaculately dressed and clean shaved'. He had won the internees' respect on the *Ettrick* by the efficient way in which, ankle-deep in faeces and vomit, he had organised squads of cleaners with gumboots, mops and buckets to restore hygiene and order. Michaelis was one of the cleaners. The incident led another internee, Max Perutz, the biochemist (later a Nobel Prize winner), to declare this Hohenzollern scion 'King of the Jews'.

One of Count Lingen's memoranda began: '*Hoeflichkeitswegen ist es wuensenswert, dass die Internierten nicht sitzen bleiben, wenn der Kommandant durch die Huetten oder durch das Lager geht.*' (As a matter of courtesy, it is desirable that internees do not remain seated when the Commandant passes through the huts or the camp.)

Many internees were impatient with the Count's old-style diplomacy. Rejected by their native country as Jews, arrested in their country of adoption as enemies, they were now treated as Nazis. The circumstances favoured confrontation. Their first and continuing demand was that their

correct status be acknowledged: they were not prisoners of war who had fought for Hitler, but refugees from Hitler. Some, like Arndt, had already had close relatives murdered by the Nazis. They should not now be fingerprinted, locked in their huts at night, have machine-guns trained on their camps and be forced to wear striped clothes with red patches. Orthodox Jews should be able to observe the Saturday Sabbath and not be forced to have their hair cut.

One of the most active of the confrontationist groups was the communist cell led by Hans Kahle of the OGPU, the former Soviet secret service (and later a Stasi agent in East Germany). It included the brilliant German physicist Klaus Fuchs, who later spied for the Soviet Union when working on the Manhattan (atom-bomb) Project at Los Alamos, New Mexico. Members of this cell purported to find in the refugees' grievances evidence of the basically fascist policies of the British and Canadian 'imperialists'. They also saw an opportunity to win back the support they had lost over the continuing Hitler–Stalin alliance of August 1939. Arndt, torn between both groups but committed to neither, drafted letters for both.

The subject of grievances ranged from the restrictions on internees' letters (number, length, content) to the harassment of internees who preferred courses in the camp university to camp duties in the latrines, gardens or kitchens.

A more serious grievance arose out of the decision of the Canadian authorities in October to segregate Jews and Christians. The Jewish internees considered the policy anti-Semitic: their quarters were two abandoned, sooty and leaking railway sheds with five cold-water taps and six latrines for 720 men. They went on a hunger strike. A disciplinary officer told them that Canadian workmen would soon make the camp habitable, but if they persisted in striking they would be locked in the sheds with the heating cut off and would then be transferred to the Nazis' camp, Camp R. The Jews gave up their strike but not their bitterness.

In drafting complaints about medical and dental services, Arndt was sometimes able to draw on his own experience. On their arrival in Québec, the internees were promptly inoculated against typhoid. They were also vaccinated. But other services were inadequate. The Camp Committee instructed Arndt to describe the unsatisfactory ophthalmic treatment in the camp: 'The oculist who comes to the camp is often unable to treat the patients for lack of the requisite instruments here in the camp. It would be very desirable if urgent cases could also be sent to the oculist in town where they could receive proper treatment.'

In the case of dentistry, however, Arndt reported his own case

I was taken to the dentist on August 13 with three other internees. There were two cases who had bad holes in their teeth. One had a broken gold filling. I suffered from an abscess. As we came in we were informed by the dentist that he was only allowed to perform extractions. The two internees with bad holes, in spite of the fact that they suffered acute pain and had been wanting to see the dentist for days, thereupon refused to have their teeth extracted and returned without having received any treatment.

The internee with the broken gold filling found that he merely had the gold filling put back into place, although the dentist stated that the tooth underneath was beginning to decay.

The dentist dealt with two, if not three, patients at the same time and was working under extreme pressure. He looked at my abscess for two or three seconds and stated that the tooth would have to come out. Then he attended to another patient and when he returned I assented to the extraction whereupon he gave me a local anaesthetic. While the anaesthetic was taking effect an orderly made me sign a form on which I could merely recognise some such words as 'Work done satisfactory'. Then minutes later the dentist reappeared, extracted the tooth, held it up before my eyes, and, without looking at the wound again or dealing with it in any way, went away. The dental orderly gave me some water to rinse my mouth with after which I left.

After Arndt had been drafting complaints for some months, the Camp Commandant informed him that his name was now included on a list of internees suspected of 'communist leanings' and therefore of being pro-Hitler and 'hostile' to Great Britain and the Empire. Fearing that these suspicions might jeopardise his hope of returning to England, or of being naturalised as a British subject, Arndt demanded to see the evidence against him and he put in writing his loyalty to the British cause.

He did not and, because of censorship, could not write to Ruth any of these worries. His letters to her remained cheerful, sometimes nostalgic, and only very occasionally gloomy

12 September: Dearest little one, don't get killed. I live and wait for you. One does feel like praying, because one is so helpless. It is silly. It is much better to hope and to be optimistic, confident.

15 September: On the whole camp life is quite comfortable, the food is excellent, and we can earn some pocket money by doing cleaning work, and there is a very well stocked canteen. We have a lot of concerts, recitals etc, sport competitions as long as the fine weather lasts...all that can't make one forget the barbed wire, the waste and the worries for those in England. And one feels 'lonely' among the crowds of people and even friends.

One program featured the concert pianist Helmut Blume (later Dean of the Faculty of Music at Montreal's McGill University) as well as a harmonica player and a Grosses Wiener Potpourri culminating in community singing. In the 'university', Arndt lectured on English liberalism, Romanticism and the rule of law. He also prepared camp students for the McGill University 'matric'.

22 September: The memories of Cambridge, hundreds of them, of London—Keats Grove, Hampstead Heath and LSE are with me every day and every night. They are the best thing I have here; but even they are not enough...

27 October: The food is shamefully good, compared with what you probably get. I am getting awfully fat...My dearest little one, your picture hangs by my bed and you smile at me when I go to sleep.

The war news was bad, including the bombing of English cities in the Battle of Britain and British shipping losses to German U-boats in the Atlantic. Britain and the Empire were still almost alone. The United States remained neutral and the Soviet Union was still allied with Hitler. The internees followed as best they could the battles in Greece: 'We cheer the Greeks to the echo every day.'

At last in November there were good omens. The Home Office sent Alexander Paterson to Canada to sort out who was and was not an enemy alien. A classically educated prison commissioner, active Christian, chain-smoker and whisky-drinker, Paterson arrived in Canada on 18 November and interviewed the internees daily. He ordered most of them freed as soon as possible. His report was humane, generous and sceptical

Many so far lost their emotional control that I had to keep them after the interview was at an end, rather than that their comrades in the queue outside should witness their condition. While smoking a

cigarette with me they recovered their composure, but it was then necessary to wait till their cigarette was at an end, for it was not any more desirable that they should face the company with a cigarette in their mouth, than with tears on their cheeks. So the time passed.

On 1 December, Heinz wrote his last Canadian letter to Ruth

Good news today for the first time in 6 months. I shall probably be back in England shortly and may be free again in 2 or 3 months. Last week a high civil servant of the H.O. [Home Office] was here to sort out those, among C cases only, who will be sent back to England and those who want to join the A.M.P.C. [Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps]. He was very nice to me, advised me strongly not to join up but to go on with my academic work. He said he would try to send me on the second ship, possibly soon after Xmas. We shall go to an English internment camp and have to apply for release from there...

Heinz was allocated to the first ship, the *Thysville*, a requisitioned Belgian steamer. They crossed the Atlantic via Iceland to avoid U-boats. There were no guards, the food was good, the cabins warm, the sheets clean. He arrived in Liverpool on 11 January 1941, after a crossing of 25 days, escorted by the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Air Force.