

Camphill pioneers: friendly enemy aliens!

Robin Jackson

There is one particular episode in the early development of the Camphill Movement about which relatively little has been written. This may have resulted from a wish to draw a discreet veil over one of the less glorious moments in British history. When Britain declared war on Germany on the 3rd September 1939 all immigration was stopped and all temporary visas granted to people from enemy territories were declared invalid. This meant that the great majority of Germans and Austrians in Britain who were *bona fide* refugees were now trapped, stateless, in a country which was uncertain what to do with them.

During the autumn of 1939 tribunals were set up to decide the relative danger that each individual 'enemy alien' posed to British security. The tribunals were held in secret and their members drawn from the legal profession. The aliens were not allowed a solicitor but were able to bring a 'Friend'. Refugees were allocated to one of three categories, with most falling into the final category

A: to be interned

B: to have restrictions placed upon their freedom
(a ban on travelling more than five miles, owning cameras or large scale maps)

C: dubbed friendly and to remain at liberty

The third category of 'friendly enemy alien'—notwithstanding its oxymoronic character—accurately reflected the ambivalent attitude of both the British press and officialdom to these refugees. The War Office warned that the categories should not be applied too vigorously although a refugee classed 'C' could be interned if he, or she, was considered to be of 'bad or dubious character or repute'.

With the fall of Holland and Belgium to the Nazis and the failure of the Dunkirk invasion, the government decided that drastic action had to be taken. On 10th May, Churchill succeeded Chamberlain as Prime Minister and set up the Home Defence (Security) Executive. This had the remit to act on the prediction made by the Chiefs of Staff that 'alien refugees' were a most dangerous source of subversive activity and recommended that they all be

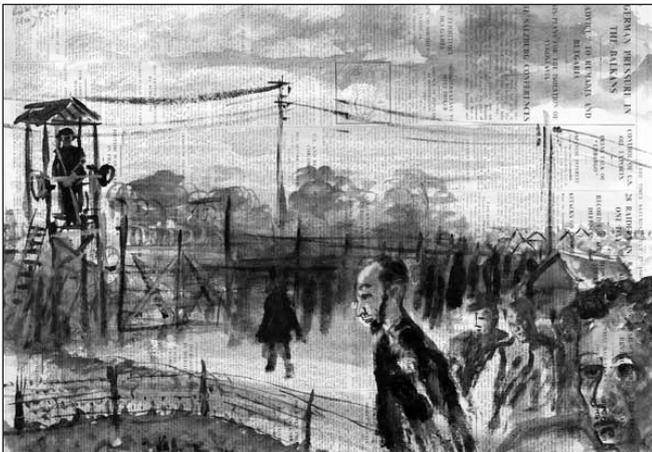
interned. As a result a note was sent to all Chief Constables instructing them to intern any German or Austrian man or woman in Category C where they had grounds for doubting the reliability of an individual. This meant that MI5 was able to nominate its own arrests and local police forces to follow their own initiatives and prejudices.

Dr. König has described the events which led up to his arrest. On Whitsunday, 12th May 1940 after a Children's Service, he went for a walk with the older children. When he returned to Kirkton House he learned that Peter Roth in Heathcot House had been arrested. This news was received with astonishment. Then as they all sat down together to enjoy a celebratory Whitsunday meal, the police arrived at Kirkton House. The men were told to pack clothes and underwear and be ready for departure in 30 minutes. The police sought to assure everyone that this was likely to be a temporary measure and that they should be back in a matter of weeks. Everyone was confused and taken aback by what had happened. The men departed in a turmoil of emotions not knowing what would happen to their wives and children. Would the proposed move to Camphill come to nothing? In fact, had the whole enterprise of creating a community come to a premature end? They embarked on the waiting bus, joining other men who they did not know. And on a glorious Whitsunday they travelled northward with their unknown companions through the beautiful Aberdeenshire countryside to an undisclosed destination (Müller-Wiedemann, 1996).

The arrest of refugees throughout the country appears to have been conducted in a reasonably civilised fashion by the police. Tilla König in a letter to George MacLeod dated 16th May 1940 noted that: 'my husband and all the other men in our community have been taken away to Duff House in Banff. I have heard from my husband today that he and all our friends are well and are very kindly treated' (NLS, 2004).

An indication of the level of confusion that must have existed at that time is reflected in a later part of Tilla König's letter to MacLeod: 'No one at Duff House knows why they are there and for how long they will remain there' (NLS, 2004). The purpose of Tilla König's letter was to see if there was anything MacLeod could do to help: 'I do not want to trouble you with all these things but I know that my husband would like you to know how things are with us, and perhaps you would know if anything can be done for him and our friends' (NLS, 2004). In a further letter to MacLeod on the 3rd June 1940 Tilla König expressed concern at the fact that she had not received a reply to her letter of the 16th May. She hoped it was not because MacLeod had thought that all the women had also been interned.

We know that Dr. König was taken from Banff to Liverpool. It is highly probable that Dr. König spent some time in Huyton internment camp before being deported to the Isle of Man. Huyton camp, which was sited on the outskirts of Liverpool, was one of the largest in the country. The camp comprised several streets of empty council houses and was surrounded by eight-foot barbed wire fences. [See painting *Empty Days* by Hugo Dachinger: © Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool]



Empty Days, Hugo Dachinger,
Walker Art Gallery Liverpool

It was the married men, Karl König, Thomas Weihs, Hans Schauder, Peter Roth and Rudi Lissau who were interned on the Isle of Man, whilst the unmarried men—Willi Amann, Hugo Frischauer and Carlo Pietzner were interned in Canada.

The Isle of Man

Residents in the Isle of Man were taken aback at the 'invasion' of their island for it had not been included in the list of camps drawn up by the War Office in August 1939. And yet, on the 12th May 1940, the boarding-house keepers received a letter from the Secretary to the Island government, on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor, acting on instructions from the British War Office, ordering them from their premises within six days. They had to leave behind 'all furniture, bedding, linen, cutlery, crockery and utensils'. This order was given first to boarding house keepers in Ramsay and soon afterwards to those in Onchan, north of the main town of Douglas.

These requisitioned bed and breakfast houses and hotels were cordoned off and used as a series of 'camps' with different camps catering for different nationalities—women and children were housed around Port Erin and Port St Mary in the south of the Island which had controlled access from the rest of the Island, UK Fascists and Italians were interned at Peel and a section of central Douglas promenade was cordoned off for use as a series of male camps for Austrians and Germans.

Opposition to internment soon grew and within a few months many had been released and by July 1941 the largest of the men's camps on the Isle of Man had been closed. The government had soon come to realise that internment was not only unfair but was also very expensive. But one event more than any other probably brought about this change of mind. On July 2nd 1940 news came of the sinking of the *Arandora Star* on its way to Canada. It was loaded with 1,700 internees and guards along with a normal ship's crew. The *Arandora Star* was on its second day out from Liverpool and somewhere off the west coast of Ireland when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat. Over 1000 perished.

A number of reasons contributed to the very high loss of life. Not enough life jackets had been provided, rafts had been lashed to the deck, there had been no lifeboat drill and the decks had been partitioned by impenetrable barbed wire which cut off access to the lifeboats. Prior to the ship's departure the captain, Captain Moulton, had strongly protested at the erection of the wire because he claimed it had turned the *Arandora Star* into a floating death trap. The authorities ignored his protest. Captain Moulton and his Second and Fourth Officer were seen by survivors steadfastly standing on the ship's bridge as the *Arandora Star* sank into the Atlantic. This disaster led to vigorous protests about the British internment policy, which was changed to internment for enemy aliens and in camps in Britain only. Whilst most internees had been released by the end of 1942, there were some who were not finally freed until late 1945. The practice of deporting internees overseas also ceased because of the high number of ships carrying internees to Canada and Australia which had been sunk by U-boats.

The internment of Dr. König

We know relatively little about the nature of Dr. König's internment other than he appears to have spent most of



Two internees bowing in front of an officer
Hugo Dachinger, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

it with a few friends in a hotel in Douglas that had been commandeered by the authorities. König acknowledges that the outer circumstances of life in the camp were relatively comfortable. Internees were permitted to send out two letters per week neither of which could exceed 24 lines. There was no restriction on the number of letters received.

Most of his time appears to have been spent in reading and studying with his colleagues. They were able to do more or less what they pleased and spent much of their time in intensive spiritual research. Whether by chance or not, Dr. König and his colleagues shared their accommodation in Douglas with Dr. Ernst Lehrs and Dr. Willi Sucher, both leading anthroposophists.

There was one event during König's internment that was to have a profound influence on the history of Camphill. On his release in 1940 he describes a spiritual encounter with Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf (1700–1760), the founder of the Herrnhut Brotherhood. In that encounter, which occurred on the night of the 29th August, it was suggested that König should introduce a Bible evening in Camphill. This would involve people gathering together every Saturday evening, joining in a common meal, reading the Bible and seeking an understanding of the text with the help of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science (Müller-Wiedemann, 1996).

König identified Zinzendorf as one of the three 'stars' in the development of the Camphill Movement (König, 1962). What is not widely appreciated and merits attention is that the religious thinking of Zinzendorf and the other two 'stars' identified by König, Comenius (1592–1670) and Robert Owen (1771–1858), was strongly influenced by the English reformer John Wyclif (1328–1384). Wyclif, who was an early proponent of fundamental changes in the Roman Catholic Church during the 14th Century, is today considered as one of the originators of the Protestant Reformation. He challenged papal authority, sought the removal of church hierarchy, urged the handing over of all ecclesiastical properties and lands to the state and argued for a return to a more primitive form of Christianity where priests took the gospel direct to the people.

Wyclif's views were to have a deep effect on John Hus (1369–1415) who was to initiate a religious movement in Bohemia based on Wyclif's ideas. The sincere desire of Wyclif and Hus to reform the Church failed and, without intending it, both became founders of two heretical



Waiting, waiting, Hugo Dachinger,
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

bodies—the Lollards and the Hussites. The Bohemian Brethren, which was founded in Bohemia in 1457 and of which Comenius was a member, can be traced back through a chain of sects starting with Wyclif. In 1722 a small remnant of the Bohemian Brethren blossomed into a new and vigorous body under the name of Moravian Brethren. Zinzendorf was its founder. And the success of Moravian Brethren settlements in England—which were essentially utopian experiments in communal living—had a profound influence on Robert Owen (e.g., Fairfield Moravian Settlement in Lancashire).

This seminal moment in the development of the Camphill Movement, which occurred in a Douglas hotel during König's internment, deserves to be put in this broader context. For understandable reasons the Central European antecedents to the growth of the Camphill Movement have been stressed to the exclusion of other possible influences. Whilst Comenius, Zinzendorf and Owen may be rightly viewed as the stars, a debt is also clearly owed to an Englishman, John Wyclif.

The internment experience

According to Daniel Snowman in his book *The Hitler Émigrés* (2002) most former Austrian and German internees have looked back on internment with a measure of nostalgia and no bitterness. Many of these former internees were surprisingly positive about their experience and understood why the British government, faced by an imminent invasion, found internment necessary.

It did not take long for a sense of community to emerge given that most of the internees shared a common language and Central European intellectual and cultural inheritance. Probably at no other time in British history have so many extraordinarily gifted people lived in such close proximity to one another. Whilst internment presented a challenge, it was one to which internees responded positively and creatively. The internment camps quickly turned into mini-universities. At one of the Isle of Man camps the following intellectual fare was on offer during the course of just one week in October 1940:

History lectures on Metternich, The Rise of English Democracy, Church history, Medieval Culture and the British Empire; science lectures on bacteriology, physical chemistry, mathematics and aspects of nutrition; a philosophy series on the Ancient Greeks; lectures on

French and German literature and various literary and musical recitals.

Snowman notes that some internees were paralysed by indecision not knowing whether they should attend Professor William Cohn's talk on Chinese Theatre which coincided with Egon Wellesz's Introduction to Byzantine Music? Or should they go to Professor Jacobsthal's talk on Greek Literature which was being held at the same time as Professor Goldmann's lecture on the Etruscan Language? One rather suspects that if the camps had held British internees, the choice would have been rather simpler. Cricket or football, chaps?

Not a few of the émigrés were later to express their bafflement at what they saw as the philistinism of the British, their apparent disregard or contempt for what might be termed 'high culture'. One explanation that was half-jokingly advanced was that since the governing class in Britain was at that time drawn almost exclusively from those who had attended English public schools the only occasion when the 'arts' would have been encountered by pupils would have been on wet Wednesday afternoons when games had been cancelled!

The Hitler émigrés, most of whom had been interned, went on to make a lasting mark on the intellectual and cultural life of post-war Britain—perhaps the most profound of any émigré group in British history. There was hardly a part of British cultural life that was not touched. There was Rudolf Bing, the creator of the Edinburgh and Glynebourne Festivals, the philosopher Karl Popper, the biochemist Max Perutz, historians Eric Hobsbawm and Geoffrey Elton, the economist Friedrich von Hayek, the architectural historian Nicholas Pevsner, the publishers George Weidenfeld and Andre Deutsch, members of the Amadeus String Quartet, and so the list goes on.

One of the enormous ironies of the policies of the Nazi regime was the gift of brilliant scientists to Britain and America. Of the 100 Nobel prizes in science awarded from the first one in 1901 until 1932, 33 went to Germans or scientists in Germany, Britain had 18 and the USA 6. In the next 27 years, Germany won 8 of the science prizes and Britain 21.

Dr. König's release

Dr. König was among the first to be freed from internment and was able to leave the camp on the 4th October 1940. The other men returned later in 1940 and during 1941. It would be interesting to know if Tilla König's letter to MacLeod had been instrumental in securing that early release. MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community and one of the leading churchmen of his day, would certainly have had access to the corridors of power. It is quite clear that he was very impressed by König's pioneering work in community building. Within three weeks of his release from internment, König was invited by MacLeod to address a large gathering in Edinburgh—an invitation that König had regretfully to decline because of illness (NLS, 2004). However, soon after, MacLeod visited Camphill where he was amazed at the 'atmosphere' created by the community. In his endorsement of the school's prospectus, MacLeod commented favourably on the open happiness of all the children and the quite phenomenal advances that some of the children had made since coming into the school's atmosphere of 'ordered rhythm' (NLS, 2004).

One other person who might have been in a position to exert some influence was W.F.M. Macmillan, a member

of the School's Board of Management, who had provided the loan that permitted the Community to purchase the Camphill Estate on the 1st June 1940. W.F.M. Macmillan was related to Harold Macmillan—later to become Prime Minister from 1957 to 1963—who in 1940 was invited by Churchill to join the government as permanent secretary to the Ministry of Supply.

Many questions remain unanswered. How did Dr. König gain such a speedy release? Did anyone intercede on his behalf? If so, who? Why did it take much longer for the other men arrested at the same time as König to be released? Why were the women not interned? What might have happened to the Camphill Movement, had König been interned for a year or more?

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Robin Jackson is a consultant to Camphill Rudolf Steiner Schools, Aberdeen and was for three years Development & Training Co-ordinator for Camphill