

11/24/42

## THE PROBLEM OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN MOROCCO

There were as of November 7th approximately 4,000 people interned in the 14 camps in Morocco. Of these people, practically all men, there are approximately 2,000 Spaniards, 400 Poles, 50 Czechs, 500 English, perhaps 500 Jews of various nationalities, and a scattered number of non-Jewish Russians, anti-Nazi ex-Germans and Austrians. The Spanish are nearly all refugees from Republican Spain, and were rounded up into these camps by the French. The others are political refugees from the Axis powers, or were interned by the French as a result of military operations. Many of the men were in France at the outbreak of the war in 1939 and volunteered with the French armies. With the fall of France they were sent to North Africa and as a reward for their voluntary service in the defense of France they have been interned in these camps, many at forced labor under rather atrocious conditions, which still unfortunately persist in some cases.

The coming of the Americans has naturally increased the hope of these men that deliverance is immediately at hand and they have become restive. Most of the English have already been released from the camps and the rest soon will be. The Poles constitute no problem as they will be taken care of immediately by the Polish government. The same will undoubtedly hold true for the Czechs. Many of the Poles and Czechs will join the military forces, and there are American and other visas available for many of the others for migration, just as soon as transportation is available. By the terms of the arrangement between the French government and Mexico most of the Spanish could emigrate to Mexico once transportation is available. This leaves then merely the anti-Nazi ex-Germans and Austrians, although many of them could be absorbed into a civilian corps attached to the U.S. Army, as many of these men have special skill, being professional men, engineers and trained workmen. There have been some attempts by French officials to force some of these men again to "volunteer" in the French Foreign Legion. With their past experience it is unlikely that any will do so and there is grave danger that further attempts by the French to force them will provoke serious incidents. All of these circumstances and the long period of internment without adequate food, clothing or medical attention brings about a tension which may be the cause of serious trouble; but by prompt action now it is believed such trouble may be avoided with great good for all - internees, French and Americans.

What would appear to be the simplest solution - namely to give them all their freedom immediately - probably would cause confusion worse confounded as they would all flock to Casablanca and the larger towns which are in no position to receive them all at once due to already over-crowded conditions.

A suggested program for handling this situation is given below:

1. Notify the camps at once to keep quiet - that they are receiving prompt attention but that patience will be required on their part pending working out details.
2. The men in the camp of Berguent should be distributed among other camps and the camp of Berguent suppressed due to its conditions. (Dr. Wyss-Dunant, Delegate of the International Red Cross to North Africa recommended last summer the suppression of this camp; but in defiance of his recommendation the French authorities have continued this camp although the conditions have been somewhat improved.)
3. Arrangements should be made as soon as possible for most of the Spanish to emigrate to Mexico as outlined previously.
4. Remove the Poles and Czechs as soon as possible as previously outlined.
5. Arrange with the authorities to handle those remaining after items 3 and 4,

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caring for them under civil administration, or possibly under some private civil organization such as American Friends Service Committee.

6. If the French authorities are unable to furnish adequate food supplies while the people are still required to stay in the camps, it is of great importance if the AEF could supplement present feeding to bring the food supply to the camps up to a reasonable standard.

7. It would really help enormously if the Americans should supply certain clothing to some of the most needy men while they still have to remain in the camps. (The French apparently have no clothing available.)

8. Prepare a list of all men not likely to join the armed forces nor likely to emigrate soon, so that places may be found for them, either as civilians employed by the U.S. Army, or by the French industry in Morocco.

9. Camps should be visited as soon as possible by a disinterested individual so as to secure the cooperation of both French Authorities and the Internees.

November 24, 1942

-- Leslie O. Heath  
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