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WHAT IS TO HAPPEN TO THEM?

Vernon Bartlett, M.P., and Two Refugees Discuss
Europe's Exiles

"THE LISTENER" is not becoming a propagandist journal for refugees. It has, however, been pointed out to us that the problem discussed in our last issue was the subject of a BBC discussion a week or two earlier, and that the views expressed then would be of special interest now to our own readers.

I.—By a Czech Soldier

I AM a Czech, and I am dead. Four years ago I was fighting in France, and the Germans told my family that I had been killed in action. To my wife and son, my mother and father and brothers, I am four years dead. They keep no place for me in the future. To them I do not exist. With thousands of my comrades I am cut off from my country and my past with a completeness that is difficult to imagine. I have nothing left but a name, and even that is a new one. It is made up of our three initials—my wife's, my son's and my own.

But we are not refugees. We came here only to fight. We did not come because we thought our country wrong. We did not come to earn a living or to be safe. We came first to Yugoslavia, afterwards to France and Great Britain, always to the country where we were nearest to the enemy. That was why we left our homes. Even after the collapse of France, in the darkest hour of the war, we did not look for refuge, we looked for resistance. That light came from Great Britain, so we are here. But our goal is to go back. And to what? We are imagining our families as they were five years ago. But we know they cannot be the same. I have been five years without news of my family. My son was 10 in the month I left home. By now he is already almost a man.

When I left them, there was money enough for one year. What has happened since? Have they food? Has the Gestapo spared them? How did they go through those nights of mass executions? These are the questions we are asking. What shall we find when we go back? A starving country, and our children brought up as Nazis? Or shall we never find our children at all? We are not heroes. Can you wonder if there are nights when deep in our hearts we are trying not to see the future? But we shall go back, though at first we shall be strangers, who have forgotten what their country is like. We shall go back because we must rebuild our Republic again, differently and better.

II.—By a German Writer

I AM a refugee. I am a German by birth. I am still a German by passport. But if I had a free choice, I should choose to stay in this country. I am not assuming it will be easy to stay here. I am not even assuming that it will be possible. I am only explaining why it is that some of us would like to become British citizens.

There are two sides to it. Going back to Germany would be going back to a

place that has become hateful. I have lived in Berlin. I have loved Berlin. But it is not because Berlin has been destroyed that I do not want to see it again. Physical destruction can be a clean thing, especially as far as the Nazi monuments are concerned. It is because the place has been spoilt for us. There are the haunting memories of the most ruthless persecutions we have witnessed or suffered: I have been imprisoned myself. But even if we could repress the memories, there is still the fear of the future. Our relatives and friends may be dead or morally broken.

There are some young people who hardly know Germany at all, and dream of a country which can be rebuilt easily. They will go back. There are a very large number of middle-aged refugees who have taken root in a new country and are happy, most of them.

And there are the people like myself who are neither old nor young. To us the years of exile have become part of our development, because we are on the side that we chose, long before we left Germany. When the war came, a great number volunteered for the pioneers. Most of them are now in the ranks of the British Army. Others help—making the tanks and the aeroplanes for the Allies. We speak your language to each other—even if we speak it badly. We think in English; sometimes we even dream in English. When we talk about the news, we say to ourselves, though perhaps not to you, "We have lost so many bombers," and we feel a sense of personal loss. Total war is not just an episode. It ties you as closely to the comrades you have chosen as any blood relationship. That is why we should like to stay in England if we are given the chance.

III.—By Vernon Bartlett

TWO refugees from Europe have just spoken to you. From what they said you can realise a little what they have been through before they reached this country, and ultimately this microphone. Even if you multiply these two speakers by several millions, you will not easily realise the terrible and tragic variety of human problems that will have to be solved at the end of the war.

The moment the collapse comes in Germany, the first thought in the minds of nearly all these people will be to get home somehow as soon as they can. The Allied Governments, as you know, are planning the distribution of food and medical supplies through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration—UNRRA for short—but nobody can foretell how much their careful plans will be destroyed, how much railways and roads will be crowded by this uncontrollable mass of poor, pathetic people returning to their smashed homes in bankrupt countries.

One expert, Dr. E. M. Kulischer, in a report published by the International Labour Office, estimates that there will be some 30 million people to be resettled when the fighting in Europe comes to an end. I do not know whether

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