

Oh, For A Way!

Human persecution is not debatable. It is not tolerable. If one poor, trembling Jew is the innocent victim of oppression in Germany, there can be no argument, no indifference, about such a thing. It is invariably and forever wrong. It would be a lie against one's deepest instincts to argue or equivocate in such a case. Self-integrity demands protest—though, in certain circumstances, that protest might use the eloquent means of dead silence.

There is not merely one poor, trembling Jew innocently and frightfully suffering in Germany. There are hundreds of thousands—who have no part in the controversies that seethe around them, who want only to live in peace and good will.

There are bewildered, terrified children, who know nothing of what this is all about. Old men and old women, inured to trouble, yet coming upon incredible despair in their last years. Fathers, frantic to do something, yet helpless. Mothers, with that quiet, desperate courage of mothers—praying, comforting, seeking surcease in meeting the necessities of the moment—but carrying hopelessness, that greatest burden of all, deep in their hearts.

These are people who through no act or responsibility of their own suffer the unbearable fate of the outcast. Hounded and hunted in places so many of them had loved as home, as the home of their forefathers; deprived of opportunity to sustain life, yet having to go on living; unwanted where they are, yet having no place to go, and afraid even to seek escape—surely this is modern tragedy perhaps worse than any terrors of the past because in this age men once had the hope and seemingly the chance of being done with such things forever.

There is no doubt about this black agony. New details only make it more horrible. Explanations only confirm it.

Confronting such a reality, who can be indifferent? Not even governments, of course.

Such a state of things is not simply an internal condition with which outside governments have nothing whatever to do. Governments are only the instruments of the people, after all—that is, in free lands. When people look upon the unbearable, they will employ any means they believe will bring mitigation. If they do not impose great restraint on themselves, they may even utilize means that will only make things worse. But in this case the outraged feelings of the American people would, if it were necessary—which happily it is not—force their government to protest—and to whatever means of resistance might seem effective.

THE BIRMINGHAM AGE-HERALD NOVEMBER 16, 1938 EDITORIAL

If a brutal father were beating his own innocent, helpless child, merciful people, seeing the cruelty, could not be indifferent, saying it was not their business.

But the American government is not waiting to be forced into protest and consideration of what else it might do. The recall of Ambassador Wilson from Berlin is manifestly both an emphatic protest and a decisive step toward seeing what else can be done to check persecution, even though it be within another country.

This country, of course, still holds to the generally sound doctrine that no government should interfere with the internal affairs of another country. This country, as always, continues to urge discussion and negotiation as the civilized means of dealing with differences between nations.

But it would be a perversion of these wise doctrines to interpret them as requiring even an outward indifference toward the present horrors in Germany. Such a course would be only a stupid, cruel falsity. For the plain fact is that Americans are overwhelmingly aroused by this latest persecution.

Many feel that the situation calls out for rescuers, just as does the case of any single helpless human being in the grip of a monster anywhere.

If ever war were justifiable, many must feel, it would seem to be if it could end such horrors.

But most people know that war would only increase human suffering and injustice—not reduce it. Some, conceding that fact, might still prefer such an ultimate means of protest as essential to their own consistency. But wiser and cooler minds will continue to seek, disheartening as the search is, for better means of both protest and resistance.

As this paper said yesterday, the long-suffering, noble forbearance of so many Jews themselves under this torture, this terror; the futility—and worse—of retaliation in kind, and the failure of so many other methods—all tend to suggest—if only as a last desperate resort—that most revolutionary of all ways of trying to meet the situation—that one way that really never has been tried by whole nations.

That way would be instinct, eloquent with protest, because it would

be so dominantly concerned with righting wrong, not seeking revenge; because its emphasis would be against brutality and injustice and would tend to leave the more inciting, more complicated eternal judgment of individuals to themselves, their state and their God.

That way would seek any method of resistance that did not stoop to the evils it was fighting and thus multiply those evils.

That way through the centuries has obviously been beyond most men. It is perhaps just as much so now. But it may be that men one day will be forced to try more earnestly to attain that way. This seems like that day.

About one thing we should be clear. That way is no weak or apathetic way. It is no way of non-resisting submission. It is certainly no way of cowardice.

It is said it can be the strongest and most effective of all ways because it not only defends, but regenerates and creates. Men and women really don't know much about that way. They are, in their self-concern, not very accustomed to it. Nations almost never have tried it. Therefore, such a course necessarily may seem vague, stumbling, indecisive, uncertain. It is so fundamentally untried, it is so much a matter of moods, manner and even of such seemingly little things as the kind of words used that to many it may seem hopelessly impracticable and futile.

But at least we do know that the world most desperately needs a new and redeeming way; that it needs a way of transformation rather than a way of compulsion; that however difficult it may be, it may not be so difficult as continued refusal to attempt it.