

### **Security and Humanity in the First World War. The Treatment of Civilian „Enemy Aliens“ in the Belligerent States**

**Veranstalter:** Arnd Bauerkämper, German Historical Institute London; London School of Economics; Gerda Henkel Foundation

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In contemporary memory culture, stories of civilian internees feature less prominently than the narratives of prisoners of war (POW) or even fallen soldiers, often stylized as heroes who died for their country. Nevertheless, around 800.000 civilians experienced internment in the course of the First World War – this number highlights the relevance of the topic of the conference. Terms like „internment“, „detention“ and „deportation“ remind us of the contemporary dimension, especially the treatment of migrants throughout Europe and the USA. In his introduction, ARND BAUERKÄMPER (Berlin) established the framework of the conference and key concepts. Firstly, he introduced „security“ as a variable concept, a construction driven by changing interests and power relations. As the concept of „human rights“ was not yet established at the time, Bauerkämper highlighted the importance of humanitarian engagement by both non-governmental organizations and individual activists in opposing internment. Furthermore, he established the context of total war as underlying the state of emergency under which all belligerent countries treated their civilian „enemy aliens“.

TAMMY M. PROCTOR (Logan) opened the first panel, which introduced central problems and dimensions. She reflected on the usage, definition and difficulties of the terms essential to the conference. Proctor mainly focused on the concept of the „civilian“ and its fluidity during the First World War. „Enemy aliens“ formed a special group as they stood between civilians and enemies – both as possible security threats and as subject to popular attack and hardship. Civilian or non-civilian status was therefore not a binary distinction but a matter of degrees of involvement. The subsequent discussion dealt with questions of

loyalty and identity. In his paper, ANDRÉ KEIL (Liverpool) exposed a lack of concrete codifications in international law regarding the protection of „enemy aliens“. Moreover, he pointed out that, in practice, the respective national states of emergency in wartime overrode the protection of civilian „enemy aliens“ in international law, e.g. agreed upon in the Hague Conventions, under the pretence of national security. As „enemy aliens“ could not be classified as combatants under international law, legal fictions were used to portray them as potential soldiers of opposing nations. The subsequent discussion focused mainly on concepts of citizenship and nationality. DANIELA L. CAGLIOTI (Naples) emphasized the importance of the economy while talking about the „War on Enemy Property“ during the First World War. Companies and assets of „enemy aliens“, especially, were targets of economical restrictions, even leading to compulsory purchases. After the war, few people could reclaim their property. During the discussion, Caglioti pointed out that especially in Germany and Austria there was barely any chance of compensation as these countries went bankrupt and had to pay reparations following the Treaty of Versailles. HEATHER JONES (London) argued that the wartime principle of reciprocity offered less protection than one would think, as many prisoners did not fall into a group that had an equivalent in enemy nations. Other determining factors included the nature of war between two nations as well as interventions by non-governmental organizations and ambassadors. Jones furthermore concluded that although the First World War brought a new mass internment of foreign civilians, reprisals against enemy aliens occurred much less frequently compared to official reprisals against prisoners of war. Questions of internee identity were the focus of the discussion that followed.

The second panel centred on civilian enemy aliens in belligerent states in Europe. PANIKOS PANAYI (Leicester) talked about „Germanophobia“ in First World War Britain. Panayi described Germans as „lone voices“ confronted with a hostile mass, and victims of riots and internment. He also questioned the image of „British fair play“, as it was

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mainly the German Red Cross who helped compatriots. During the discussion, the participants accentuated the role and organisation of (mob) violence. LUKAS KELLER (Berlin) shed light on how enemy foreigners in Germany were the target of economic anti-espionage measures such as the interruption of international money flow as well as nationalist pressure on the job market. According to Keller, this meant that even for the foreign elite, e. g. Russian guests in German spa towns, the situation quickly became critical. The plenary discussion problematized the difficult situation local guest-house owners found themselves in. Furthermore, both Panikos Panayi and Lukas Keller agreed to some extent that humanitarianism had largely failed civilian „enemy aliens“. MATTHEW STIBBE (Sheffield) presented his thoughts on the treatment of „enemy aliens“ as well as internal enemies in the Habsburg Empire. He pointed out that Austria-Hungary had to fight for its very existence as a state during the war. Internal enemies therefore seemed to be an even bigger threat than „enemy aliens“. Although Austria-Hungary prided itself on being a *Rechtsstaat*, this did not lead to humanitarian treatment in camps. The discussion then centred on the origin of the degree of violence towards internees in Austria-Hungary, which dehumanized them as *Ungeziefer* (vermin), and the differentiation between poor and wealthy foreigners. In his paper, ERIC LOHR (Washington) examined policies against „enemy aliens“ in the Russian Empire. While internment of civilian foreigners was infrequent, the Russian case is extraordinary in the extent to which property of „enemy aliens“ was confiscated and liquidated or redistributed in an effort to expel foreign, and especially German, influence from the Russian economy. Lohr argued that what began ostensibly as a set of prophylactic security measures turned into an unprecedented burst of Russian economic nationalism. In the subsequent discussion, the nationalization of property was interpreted as a possible move towards communism.

With his paper on Dutch neutrality, WIM KLINKERT (Amsterdam) opened the third panel, which was concerned with civilian „enemy aliens“ in European neutral states. How-

ever, deserters, for instance, were interned according to international law and were frequently transported through the country. Klinkert illustrated how Dutch humanitarian actions were related to state security, as they aimed to strengthen the Dutch neutral stance. This was essential because as the Netherlands were too small to defend themselves they had to prove the importance of their neutrality to the belligerent states. Thus, the collection of intelligence about both sides of the war, exchanges of POWs, negotiations between belligerent states, and humanitarian actions characterised the Dutch stance. SUSAN BARTON (Leicester) discussed internment in Switzerland, which was a neutral state during the war. She drew attention to the good humanitarian conditions for internees, mostly wounded and sick prisoners of war with a chance of healing. Switzerland benefitted economically from treating internees well – visiting family members brought money into the country. Switzerland exchanged knowledge with the Dutch government in order to improve each other’s treatment of prisoners of war. During the discussion the participants criticized that no matter how good the conditions in internment were, residents still suffered from „barbed wire disease“. Yet Barton argued that many internees in fact did not even want to return to their home countries.

The fourth panel focused on civilian „enemy aliens“ in the non-European world. JÖRG NAGLER (Jena) shed light on the control and internment of „enemy aliens“ in the USA during the First World War, specifically the German community. He argued that as the war was not liked by American society, anti-alien sentiments and fears of foreign subversion and espionage had to be mobilized on the home front, especially by the yellow press. The notion of making „enemy aliens“ visible became the focus of authorities and a massive intelligence apparatus was established. However, as Nagler pointed out, only a surprisingly small number of „enemy aliens“ were actually interned. The discussion highlighted connections between anti-German sentiments and American prohibition, which conveniently put predominantly German breweries out of business. This in turn was linked to economic nationalism as

presented by Eric Lohr. GERHARD FISCHER (Sydney) added another geographical sphere to the conference by reconstructing internment in Australia during the war. The process was largely arbitrary and capricious, giving local military and police authorities wide-ranging powers to arrest and prosecute persons suspected of disloyalty. One notable aspect of the situation in Australia was that its national security was never actually at a risk. Though prosperous and well integrated, Germans were considered „enemy aliens“ and interned, enduring rough treatment. After the presentation, a controversial discussion on problems in using a certain terminology (namely „ethnic cleansing“ and „concentration camps“) evolved. STEFAN MANZ (Birmingham) finished the fourth panel with his contribution on the mechanics and conditions of global internment of German enemy aliens in the British Empire. Although conditions in British internment camps were overall relatively benign, Manz pointed out that there were vast local differences throughout the Empire. Furthermore, he argued that this benign treatment was only partially motivated by humanitarian considerations. Instead, Stefan Manz named the fear of global repercussions, the concept of *bellum iustum*, as well as the principle of reciprocity as determining factors in the British treatment of „enemy civilians“. The subsequent discussion was occupied with the discourse of humane treatment Britain upheld throughout World War I and the question of whether it was successful in overcoming prior mistreatment of Boers in South Africa.

The final panel dealt with humanitarian engagement and presented an outlook on the Second World War. Talking about the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the Ottoman Empire in the early 1920s, DAVIDE RODOGNO (Geneva) emphasized the importance and controversy of photographs in the context of crimes committed by Greek forces against Muslim forces and vice versa. He resumed the debate on the term „ethnic cleansing“, earlier discussed following Fischer’s presentation. Rodogno here referred to the violent behaviour of Greeks in Turkey. In the ensuing discussion, participants drew attention to the question of security and the

danger of overemphasizing the role of humanitarian actors, as they did not occupy leading roles in the conflicts. As an outlook, RACHEL PISTOL’s (Exeter) „Lessons learnt?“ traced internment in the UK and USA during the Second World War. While Britain introduced a – quite inconsistent – system of categorization for Germans, the USA’s policy against Japanese (Americans) was rigorous and highly racially motivated. In contrast to internment in the UK, US American internment dehumanized internees by substituting their names with numbers. Since the Second World War, there has been little public discussion of internment in Britain, whereas the USA has witnessed a presidential pardon and the payment of reparations to Japanese survivors of American internment.

In his concluding remarks. DAVID STEVENSON (London) framed the conference, initially referring to its title. He pointed out that once a state got involved in the war, there was barely anything to protect „enemy aliens“, especially from a legal point of view. Stevenson criticized that the contributors had neglected groups like merchants and Protestant churches who could have played a crucial role in terms of protecting „enemy aliens“. Overall, stories of „enemy aliens“ are less known today than narratives of soldiers fighting in battle, even though they are equally important. During the final discussion, attention was drawn to topics that had recurred during the conference; class differences were important for the treatment of internees, while citizenship and nationality often appeared as competing factors in order to determine the loyalty of a person to the state. Furthermore, interpretations of „cultural cleansing“, especially in the context of hostility against „German culture“ in the USA, were vividly debated. Dealing with loyalty, the threat of internal „enemies“ such as Bolsheviks had also been highlighted. Participants remained at odds about the application of terms like „ethnic cleansing“ or „concentration camps“ but agreed that language and its usage is to be problematized. Furthermore, they shared the view that race was a significant element, as it keeps recurring. The conference highlighted the importance of research on internment during the First World War. After all, as Pis-

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tol's contribution had shown, these were the concepts that laid the foundations for the disastrous concentration camps of the Second World War.

### **Conference Overview:**

Arnd Bauerkämper (Freie Universität Berlin):  
Welcome and Introduction

#### *Panel 1: Problems and Dimensions*

Tammy M. Proctor (Utah State University Logan):  
Defining Civilians in the First World War: Experiences and Treatment

André Keil (John Moores University Liverpool):  
Civilian „Enemy Aliens“ in International Law

Daniela L. Caglioti (University of Naples):  
Property Rights in Pieces: The War on Enemy Property in Europe and the United States during the First World War

Heather Jones (University College London):  
The Wartime Principle of Reciprocity: Reprisals and the Evolution of the Treatment of Civilian Internees in Europe in the First World War

#### *Panel 2: Civilian „Enemy Aliens“ in Belligerent States in Europe*

Panikos Panayi (De Montfort University Leicester):  
Germanophobia, Security or Perhaps Fair Play: The German Community in First World War Britain

Lukas Keller (Freie Universität Berlin):  
National Security, Distress, Humanitarianism. Enemy Foreigners in World War I Germany

Matthew Stibbe (Sheffield Hallam University):  
Security and Visions of the Future of the Dual Monarchy: The Habsburg Empire's Treatment of „Enemy Aliens“ and „Internal Enemies“, 1914-1918

Eric Lohr (American University Washington):  
Enemy Aliens and the Nationalisation of Property in Russia

#### *Panel 3: Civilian „Enemy Aliens“ in Neutral States in Europe*

Wim Klinkert (University of Amsterdam):  
The Netherlands

Susan Barton (De Montfort University Leices-

ter): From the Hell of Imprisonment to the Heavenly Alps – Wounded and Sick Military and Civilian Prisoners Interned in Switzerland, 1916-1919

#### *Panel 4: Civilian „Enemy Aliens“ in the Non-European World*

Jörg Nagler (University of Jena):  
Control and Internment of Enemy Aliens in the United States during the First World War

Gerhard Fischer (University of New South Wales Sydney):  
Internment, War Aims and the Rule of Law in Australia during the First World War

Stefan Manz (Aston University Birmingham):  
Internment Conditions in the British Empire: Humanitarianism at Work?

#### *Panel 5: Humanitarian Engagement and Outlook*

Davide Rodogno (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies Geneva):  
The International Committee of the Red Cross and a Fact Finding Mission of the Allies in the Sea of Marmara in the aftermath of the First World War

Rachel Pistol (University of Exeter):  
Second World War Internment in the United Kingdom and the USA: Lessons Learnt?

#### *Conclusion*

David Stevenson (London School of Economics)

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