

A CERTAIN prominent politician, whom for his own sake I shall not name here, is reported to have said the other day a thing the like of which I never expected to hear from the lips of an Australian leader.

Talking about refugees — whom he preferred, of course, to call "enemy aliens" — and remarking in a hearty tone that if he had his way they would all be interned, he added that "the obligation should be on them to prove their loyalty to Australia, not on the Commonwealth to disprove it." Reporters are pretty careful nowadays; otherwise I should be inclined to doubt whether the personage in question really made that statement. Consider, please, what a monstrous statement it is; what a flat denial of what we have been taught to regard as elementary justice!

These unfortunate persons are to be presumed to be spies and traitors until they can prove that they are not; and they have no way of proving that they are not. I myself am not in the habit of committing burglaries; I ask you to believe this statement, but I know of no possible way of proving it. If the politician in question had the power to throw me into prison on the chance of my being a buglar, saying sternly, "You scoundrel, it is not for me to prove that you are a burglar; it is for you to stay there till you can find some way of proving that you are not," I should be in a hole. I am, however, fairly confident that this regrettable incident will not occur, because I am in Australia, where the British idea of justice prevails; not in Germany, where the Nazi idea of justice prevails. I am a citizen of a country which has inherited the British sense of fair play, a country where the accuser is required to show that he has some grounds for his accusation; where, moreover, to bring a groundless accusation is to be in danger of punishment for defamation of character.

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AN acquaintance of mine—who seems to have, graven on his heart, the noble, inspiring, heroic motto, "Safety First!"—tells me that he thinks the politician is quite right; because, in times like these, "you can't be too careful." Can't you? I say that you can. You can be too careful of your own skin, and too careless of your country's fair fame; too careless of our national reputation for courage and fair play; too careless of what we Australians consider decent behavior. I say with conviction that to some of the refugees in our midst we have not behaved decently, but, on the contrary, in a manner cowardly and unjust and absurd. Cases have come under my own notice of which I, as an Australian who cares for the honor as well as for the safety of his country, am ashamed.

I admit, of course, that treachery is a real danger. We know enough of Germany's methods to feel fairly sure that there are enemy spies among us, persons who are loyal to their own country, not to ours; persons who would betray us if they were given the opportunity. This danger calls for an unceasing alertness and vigilance on the part of the proper authorities. I admit, too, that the circumstances are extraordinary and that extraordinary precautions are justified. Our peace-time idea of justice may have to be modified to this

Plea For Fair Play

THE REFUGEE

By WALTER MURDOCH

extent, that where the authorities have reason to suspect a person of disloyalty and treachery, that person may justifiably be put in a place where he can do no harm, even though it may be impossible to prove his guilt. Where, after careful inquiry, it is held that reasonable grounds of suspicion exist, it would be foolish to wait for cast-iron proofs. Probably it would have been impossible to prove, beforehand, beyond possibility of doubt, that Major Quisling was a traitor. When the proof was forthcoming, it was too late.

All this may be freely admitted. But in the cases I am speaking of there have been no reasonable grounds of suspicion; there have been no grounds of suspicion at all. And to persecute persons whom we have no reason to suspect of anything wrong is a piece of flagrant injustice, dictated by rank cowardice. The politician spoken of would put all refugees in prisons or internment camps whether they are suspected or not; and then invite them to explain why we should not suspect them!

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HE states that in pleading for this Nazi method of treating refugees, he has "popular sentiment behind him." If this is true, so much the worse for popular sentiment. I would reply: a politician of any courage would flout such popular sentiment and do the right thing in the teeth of popular disapproval. But it is not true. As a politician, he is supposed to know all about public opinion; but if this is his idea of public opinion in Australia I believe I know my fellow-countrymen better than he does. They are not bullies, they are not cowardly, they have a sense of fair play, and they would be ashamed of not behaving decently to the men and women who have sought and found a refuge with us from the hurricane of persecution that has beset them elsewhere. The idea of people who have escaped from the terrors of Hitler's Gestapo being now confronted with an Australian Gestapo is not an idea that appeals to any decent Australian; and most Australians are decent.

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THE "popular sentiment" which is behind this politician is the sentiment of a small section of the public, the section whose morale has allowed itself to become rattled, hysterical, and jittery, and to display the spitefulness which is born of panic. The voice of these frightened people should not be mistaken for the living voice of Australia, nor their morale for the nation's morale. Unfortunately this section, though small, is exceedingly vocal, while the great mass of decent, kindly, courageous and fair-minded people is silent.

It is just possible that some spies may have been sent here from Germany in the guise of refugees, with stories of persecution which are not true. But there can be no doubt that the vast majority are perfectly genuine refugees. Their hatred of

homeless. Are we now going to turn on them and convince them that in escaping to Australia they have only escaped out of the frying-pan into the fire? If such things are done, we must hope the refugee will realise that they are done by a small official class in ignoble deference to a small hysterical section of the people; not by the Australian nation as a whole, which if it knew what was happening would be sorry and ashamed.

The good sense and decent feeling of Australia are against this treatment of our refugees, just as the good sense and decent feeling of the British people have been outraged by some of the doings of officials in England. You saw what the London Evening Standard said the other day about this sort of thing? "The good repute we have gained during the centuries for humanity and love of freedom have been wantonly and shamelessly besmirched," it declared; and, speaking of a particularly flagrant case, it called this a "damnable crime against the good name of England." But England will not put up with this sort of thing when the facts are known and the public conscience is awakened to what is being done. It was exceedingly refreshing to read the report of Mr Churchill's speech on the "silent column," and to note that loud applause came from all parts of the House when he politely but caustically dismissed this nasty little body of informers into "innocuous desuetude" and promised that sentences passed on the evidence of these people would be reviewed. I do not doubt for a moment that Mr Churchill's voice was on this occasion the voice of Britain.

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A GERMAN refugee, a medical man devoted to his profession and giving useful service to the community, was a few weeks ago put in gaol in one of our capital cities. To the best of my knowledge and belief there was no evidence against him. His wife was allowed to visit him in prison for a brief period every day. One day, when she arrived at the prison, she was calmly informed that her husband had been sent away to a camp in another State. Husband and wife had not even been allowed to say farewell to one another. I call this a damnable crime against the good name of Australia; it is the sort of thing that makes one see red. There ought to be a Parliamentary inquiry into this case, and into other cases. I have said again and again in this column that in this war we are fighting for justice. If we allow such things as this to be done without protest, I fancy we had better leave the word "justice" out of our vocabulary.

For the rest, I believe it would be better that we should have a few spies at large in our midst than that we should become a nation of spies—of eavesdroppers, busybodies, informers and whisperers. Let all known traitors, or all whom there is good reason to suspect of being traitors, be arrested and treated firmly though humanely; but let us not forget that it is possible to be a traitor to Australia's fair fame. When we are denouncing disloyalists, let us remember also those who are disloyal to what Australia stands for—her ideals of fair play and steady courage and decent behavior generally.

Nazism is more intense than ours, because they have tasted its abominations which we have only read about. Their sympathies are with us in our fight against this hateful regime; they are grateful to the country that offered them a home when they were