

*File: Refugee  
children's  
bill*

STATEMENT OF CLARENCE E. PICKETT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE  
NON-SECTARIAN COMMITTEE FOR GERMAN REFUGEE CHILDREN,  
IN SUPPORT OF S. J. RES. 64 AND H. J. RES. 168, MADE AT A HEARING ON THE RESOLUTION,  
HELD ON MAY 24, 1939, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION

- - - - -

My name is Clarence E. Pickett. I appear in support of S. J. Res. 64 and H. J. Res. 168.

I am Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee. Through this committee the Quakers have since 1917 afforded relief and aid in stricken areas in various parts of the world. For four years after the War the American Friends Service Committee provided food for thousands of children in Germany, Russia, Poland and Austria--giving aid to more than 1,250,000 children in Germany alone during that period. The centers which the committee opened in Germany at that time have since been maintained and during the last several years have been actively engaged in trying to alleviate suffering among the minority groups in Germany.

In my capacity as Secretary, I have visited Germany and the headquarters of our organization there and have been in active charge of the entire task of relief which the Friends have undertaken.

I appear here also in the capacity of Acting Executive Director of the Non-Sectarian Committee for German Refugee Children, an organization which has sponsored the Bill now before you. I undertook that responsibility as a direct result of my experience in connection with the work of the Friends in Germany.

The Co-Chairmen of the Non-Sectarian Committee are:

His Eminence George Cardinal Mundelein  
Represented by  
Bishop Bernard James Sheil  
Chicago  
Canon Anson Phelps Stokes  
Washington Cathedral  
Governor Herbert H. Lehman  
New York  
William Allen White  
Emporia, Kansas  
Helen Taft Manning  
Dean, Bryn Mawr College  
Frank Porter Graham  
President, University of North Carolina

Clarence E. Pickett  
American Friends Service Committee  
Owen D. Young  
New York City

### The Proposal

The proposal before you is a very simple one. It is a grant of authority under specified conditions--and nothing more. Under its terms authority is granted to admit into the United States not more than 10,000 German children, in excess of the present quota, during each of the calendar years 1939 and 1940. No child shall be eligible for admission who is over fourteen years of age, and no child may be admitted unless satisfactory assurance shall have been given by responsible private individuals or by responsible private organizations that the child will not become a public charge. This is the whole proposal--a grant of authority, to the extent that satisfactory assurances are given, permitting, as an emergency matter, the rescue from Germany of a limited number of children of tender years.

### The Need

The need for this measure is overwhelming. A catastrophe has occurred. Unlike such catastrophes as fire or earthquake or tidal-wave, which have commanded the help of America to unfortunates abroad so often in the past, this catastrophe threatens not only death, but a living death, to thousands and thousands of children.

During my stay in Germany there was brought home to me, through daily, hourly experiences in working with the Friends' Centers, the appalling extent of this catastrophe and the unbelievable consequences to the innocent child victims. I want to portray for you what I myself have seen.

Masses of figures do not bring home the true situation. Although you need the figures to determine the extent of the problem, its intensity and reality can be visualized only if you compare the normal life of a normal child with the life of a rejected child in Germany today. Let us look at that life as it goes on from day to day at this very time. The child cannot go to the state schools. Lacking a school, he also lacks all of the legitimate outlets for play. The parks are closed to him. He walks on the street only at the risk of being taunted or spat on by other

children or perhaps beaten by his elders. Even in his home the tension and pressure of the environment are upon him. There is the ever present menace of the concentration camp for his father or his older brother. The child's father--a hunted man--sleeps first in one secret place, and then another, but rarely at home. There is the crashing of glass at any time of the day or night when the neighboring rowdies choose to throw stones through the windows. There is terror at a mere knock on the door. And over and around the child and ever present to him is the shattering anxiety of his parents, upon whom he has been accustomed to rely and whose present insecurity invades his life at every point and threatens to destroy the essential security which must be his. And beyond all this terror and insult, his parents have lost their means of livelihood, his family has been put out of their home and crowded into a small, unheated room, wondering how they will eat when the last bit of furniture has been sold. This is the daily life of those children in Germany whom the present regime has elected to disinherit.

I have given here a picture of the general environment. I have not referred to the children whose homes have been broken up. At the time of the November 10th excesses, masses of men were thrown into concentration camps; estimates have run as high as 35,000 during that period alone. Furthermore, the extreme German laws have led to hundreds and hundreds of divorces where Aryans and non-Aryans have been married. In addition, there is the terrible fact of suicide. An undertaker in Vienna told me after the annexation of Austria that while before that time his average rate of burials was five a week, after the annexation the rate increased to one hundred and forty per week. The children of families, thus rent asunder by concentration camp, divorce and suicide, are dependent in many instances upon crumbs from the neighbors' tables, surreptitiously given.

This is the situation as it exists in Germany today. The need is almost beyond description. If you would measure that need, I would request you only to visualize your own children in the situation which I have described and to ask yourself whether you too would not be willing, even eager, to have your children go else-

where for a haven.

Let me attempt now to give you a few of the data which sum up the situation. I have gathered these facts from my own observation and from the work of the American Friends Service Committee. Still other data will be supplied to you hereafter by my associate, Mr. Balderston, who has just returned from Germany for the express purpose of bringing these facts to your attention.

The children in Germany who are now in such dire need are Jews, non-Aryans, and Aryans. We speak of non-Aryans for want of a better term. In this class fall all those who, because they have had at least one grandparent who was Jewish, suffer, under German law, all the disabilities visited upon the Jews; yet the vast majority of these have never considered themselves Jews nor have they been thought of by their neighbors as such, prior to the Nuremburg laws. For these, there is not available even such aid as the Jews can give their own. They are outcasts in the most stark sense, and it is they with whom the Friends largely deal. Of the Aryans who are in need, most are the children of families who, because of belief in the principles of democracy, have incurred the wrath of the new State.

Of these three groups, Jews, non-Aryans and Aryans, our most conservative estimate is that there are today in Germany (outside the territory that was Czechoslovakia) over 100,000 children under the age of fourteen who are in the desperate straits I have already described. My observation in the work of the Friends indicates that about forty per cent of these children are non-Jews. In addition to this hundred thousand there appear to be at least thirty-five thousand children in the same dire need from the territory that was formerly Czechoslovakia, and of these children the percentage who are non-Jews is materially greater.

Other countries have already taken steps similar to that proposed in the pending Joint Resolution. Five thousand children have been admitted to Britain. Fifteen hundred have been admitted to Holland. Belgium, France and Switzerland have taken hundreds more, the exact number of which we have been unable to ascertain.

Organization of the Non-Sectarian Committee

The moving conditions presented to me when I was in Germany at the time of the Munich agreement, and made more graphic after the outbreaks of November 10th, led me increasingly to consider what could be done for these children. I returned to this country in the latter part of 1938. When I reached here I found that groups other than the Friends--groups interested in child welfare and child guidance and individuals of generous impulses to whom the spectacle of suffering children presented an incentive to action--had been concerned with the same problem. Out of this common purpose the Non-Sectarian Committee for German Refugee Children was born and I felt impelled to assume the executive directorship of it.

Purposes of the Resolution -- Safeguards

With the announcement of the formation of the Committee, these groups drew to themselves like-minded persons throughout the land. I cannot enumerate them here. They include men and women of the most diverse backgrounds and interests who have been impelled to join together in this common purpose. It was these groups which heard with extraordinary satisfaction of the introduction into Congress of the bill which you are now considering.

The purpose underlying the proposal has a fundamental and universal appeal. At a time when age-old standards have been called into question, it is the children who still represent the essential human hope. That hope, a universal expression of the human spirit, transcends national and group lines. In the deepest sense, we affirm and reaffirm our faith in the future so long as we are willing to assume responsibility for, and to give of ourselves for the benefit of, the children of our time. The proposal, however, is something more. It is, I maintain, especially appropriate that the United States should play its part in the work of rescuing these children. It was here that public education was first viewed as a public necessity. It was here that principles of toleration were early adopted as the law of the land. It is, therefore, fitting and proper that the great democracy should evince particular interest in extending hospitality to the children who have been cast out and have been made wanderers on the face of the earth. I say, then, that the purpose of this bill, is, first, to symbolize our hopes by aiding these children, and,

second, to permit us to live out, in kindness and generosity, the principles which we have always regarded as basic to our society.

The Quakers have been known for generations as idealists. They are however, practical idealists. In supporting this bill they have not been carried away merely by a fine passion to do a kindly act. They have measured the consequences of their support. They have noted carefully the safeguards which have been thrown around the proposal. Is there risk that the children who will be brought here will include any who have been permanently injured by the terror of their recent years? That we find safeguarded by the statutes of the United States--left wholly intact by the pending bill--which prevent the entry here of those who are physically or mentally deficient. Is there risk that these children will aggravate the problem of unemployment? These few children, none of whom is more than fourteen, are not competitors for jobs; it is for this reason that the heads of the great labor organizations of America feel free to support this proposal. Is there risk that these children will become a public charge? That is protected by the requirements of the bill that satisfactory assurances will be given to prevent any possible result of that kind. We say, then, that the plan is practical and we are supporting it because we feel an affirmative need to help these children.

Make no mistake that this bill is the unstudied gesture of a few impractical humanitarians. Plans have been evolved covering every phase of the proposal from the selection in Germany of the children to be admitted to and including their placement in homes in the United States.

#### Selection and Placement of Children

If this bill is passed, there will be no indiscriminate or wholesale selection of children for admission into this country. The Friends and other American agencies have offered their services to undertake selection of children to be recommended to the American consulates for permission to enter this country. The Non-Sectarian Committee for German Refugee Children will supplement the staffs of these



organizations with additional well-trained persons who will investigate the particular children intended to be admitted. In this way none will come here save those who are, in the opinion of trained specialists, good material for American citizenship. I have referred before to the limitations provided by the laws of the United States as to the physically and mentally unfit. It is our intention to apply to these children not merely those minimum tests but others in addition, and persons trained in the field of child guidance and child welfare will investigate every ascertainable phase of the lives of the children to be recommended to the consuls.

I have frequently been asked whether it is our thought, if this bill is passed, to deprive families of their children. Nothing, of course, could be further from our intention. Every effort has been made and will continue to be made to keep families intact. It is only in cases where families have been broken up, or where the parents plead to have the children come, that any attempt will be made to take children out of Germany. Those pleas, uttered in terror and amid tears, I have myself heard in scores of cases.

Questions concerning the placement of children in this country will be handled with equal care. A fundamental of the whole plan is the placement of these children to the fullest extent possible in private homes. This is now considered an essential of sound child nurture, and we propose to follow that policy wherever possible. Homes will be investigated and selected, to the extent possible, before the children are brought over. Then small groups of children who have been selected abroad will be brought here and kept at temporary shelters at ports of entry until they can be properly placed in a simple and orderly way throughout the country. From the time of their arrival in this country they will be under the care of the various social agencies of their own faiths which have signified their willingness to accept this responsibility. And supervision by these agencies will continue even after placement.

That there is every likelihood that most of the children can be placed in excellent free homes is already apparent to us. There will be presented to your

committee hundreds of offers to receive these children, constituting a part of the offers which have already been received without solicitation by various organizations. These offers, I understand, have come from more than forty states, and from Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic homes. It thus becomes apparent that a very large proportion of these children can be placed in splendid homes among people sufficiently eager to receive them so that they have not even waited for the passage of the bill to make their desires known. To the extent that free homes are not available, after investigation, it is proposed to place the children who would come here in carefully selected paid foster homes. A few children who would, in the opinion of the agencies responsible, work out their problems better in a group situation, will be handled in that way, either in schools or other institutions.

#### Financial Needs and Plans

The financial requirements of this program are difficult to state in definite and specific terms. I have told you before that it is our expectation to place most of these children in free homes which are eager to receive them. It would be part of our plan, so far as possible, to obtain commitments from each home in which a child is placed, agreeing to support that child until it became a self-sustaining member of the community. Thus we would have in most cases an absolute obligation to support on the part of the receiving families. With this as the core of the program, the rest of our needs would be taken care of by funds obtained through the Non-Sectarian Committee for German Refugee Children. That organization would be responsible, first, where necessary, for the transportation costs of the children; second, for what ever costs must be undertaken to expand the staffs of the respective social agencies which will assist in the work, and third, for the cost of maintaining such of the children who are brought over as are ultimately placed in boarding homes. Assuming that we work out the program slowly and ascertain about what percentage of children we can count upon placing in free homes, there would be no great difficulty in sustaining the remaining children in boarding homes.



In this way the requirement of the pending proposal and of other applicable law that there be assurance that the children be adequately cared for would be met. The law sets forth the standard, which must be complied with to the full satisfaction of those executive agencies of our government who administer it for the protection not only of the immigrant but of our own citizens. To meet this standard, there will of course have to be money. I and the others working with me have consulted with various organizations and foundations, with the religious groups under which these children would be placed, and with philanthropic organizations and individuals who are deeply interested in the plan, and, as a result of our discussions with them, we have no doubt whatever that the whole undertaking can be appropriately financed.

Incidentally, our first test has already been met. We have realized that in dealing with so large a group of children, regardless of any general financial provision, emergencies might arise. We, therefore, felt that it would be wise to establish a special fund of \$250,000 as a contingency reserve against any unexpected situation. I am glad to advise you that the full amount of this reserve already has been underwritten.

I greatly regret that two very important matters of official business for the City of New York have prevented the attendance at these hearings of Mr. Newbold Morris, President of the New York City Council, and also the Treasurer of the Non-Sectarian Committee for German Refugee Children. At the prior hearings, Mr. Morris gave testimony in relation to the financial need and plans of the Committee. That testimony I have tried to summarize in my statement. I ask the privilege, however, of including in the record of these hearings Mr. Morris' testimony at the prior hearings because I feel that this Committee should have the benefit of his statement. I deeply regret that he could not be with us today or tomorrow. His acceptance of the post of Treasurer, however, is and must be a guarantee to you that he has considered and investigated the financial structure underlying the entire plan, and regards it as wholly and completely sound. In his own words to the prior

Committee, "We give you our solemn pledge that we shall meet the full obligation that we assume today."

CONCLUSION

I have described for you the need which has prompted this plan, how we propose to carry it out so far as the children are concerned, and our prospects of financing. Others will go in greater detail into the various aspects of the matters which I have mentioned. I do not believe that the practical aspects of this grant of authority raise any fundamental questions. The essential issues are and remain: Will the United States in a critical emergency in human affairs open its doors to a few thousand children who have been reduced to penury and misery, living in fear and in terror, by no act or fault of their own? Will it in gentleness and kindness suffer little children to find haven here?

- - - - -