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# Ellis Island — A Dantean Hell

by Edgar Owens

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Thirty-eight men are on Ellis Island awaiting deportation., With them are 12 women and 24 children, families of the deportees. They have been there since April 9th [1921], and will be kept there indefinitely.

Ellis Island is a cheerless place at best. But the detention rooms are desolate indeed, especially for those classified as politically undesirable. For them Ellis Island is a prison, stone walls, steel bars, locked doors. And they will be kept there indefinitely — unless.....

Soviet Russia has closed her borders to American immigration until such time as some sort of recognition is afforded her by the United States. And the deportees are the innocent victims of this new policy. The women and children, although not deportees themselves and merely accompanying their husbands and parents, are being held virtually prisoners on the Island. For them conditions are indeed sad. They are charged heavily for food of inferior quality; the women complain that the milk contains chalk and is unfit for the children, and when they ask for boiled water for their babies, they are informed that sink water is good enough for them. Are they not Communists? What right have they to expect human consideration? Down with them!

A number of the children are less than a year old. Two of the women are soon to become mothers. All of them are suffering from the poor food and unsanitary surroundings. Their vitality is low and they are susceptible to disease. Sleeping quarters are such as to make one shrink. Privacy is out

of the question. Bunks are in tiers as in a prison stockade. Under these circumstances steps must be taken to get our comrades off the Island.

The deportees are sent to Ellis Island from all over the country, some of them coming all the way from the Pacific Coast. Arrested at the time of the “red raids” engineered by the unspeakable Palmer; herded into filthy jails; subjected to the most inhuman indignities such as Palmer’s agents have become artists in administering; given hearings before Immigration courts where their “crimes” were duly cataloged; appeals to the Department of Labor overruled; and finally they arrive at the Island only to learn they will not be admitted into Russia until the government of the United States changes its policies regarding the Soviet government.

As matters now stand the **National Defense Committee** is the only body our comrades on the Island have to look to for aid. The problem confronting the Committee is of such weight that assistance must be forthcoming from all sources in sympathy with these men, women, and children, who abhor the whole damnable policy of deportations.

Plans have been made to remove our comrades from the Island. The men can be released providing bail is secured. But bail is expensive, and premiums must be paid. Arrangements are in preparation to establish a place near New York in which to put the women and children where there will be plenty of fresh air and room for the children to play without danger to life or limb. We

want none of our babies born on Ellis Island. We must be enabled to maintain the men after their release until such time as they may obtain work and thus be in a position to take care of themselves and their families.

Bills amounting to more than \$500 have already accumulated in caring for our people. The Defense Committee furnishes physicians and medical aid when sickness overtakes any of them. We take no chances on the tender mercy of the Island officialdom.

Eliminating every possible expense, our plans for bringing about the release of the men on bail and paying the premium necessary; for establishing the place for the women and children; and to furnish the small amount of cash to each of the men that will tide them over the period required to get located, will involve an expense of approximately \$2,000. The amount is small when the results aimed at are considered.

The **National Defense Committee** therefore sends forth this appeal. We urge that this matter be brought to the attention of all who may be in sympathy with our comrades. Haste is imperative. Funds should be sent in at the earliest possible moment. We want none of our babies born on Ellis Island.

Make remittances payable to **The National Defense Committee** and mail to Edgar Owens, Secretary-Treasurer, 7 Bank Street, New York City.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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