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ARCHIVES  
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## **Fifth Columnists? German and Austrian Refugees in Australian Internment Camps**

*Public lecture for the National Archives of Australia, the Goethe Institute (Sydney)  
and the Centre for European Studies at the University of New South Wales, presented in Sydney by  
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*17 April 2002*

Let me begin by explaining what this lecture is *not* about. It is not about refugees in Australian detention centres – although you may remember that during last year's election campaign, members of the then and current Australian government suggested that there were fifth columnists among the Afghani refugees trying to reach Australia by boat. But while this is not a lecture about the present, the present was never far from my mind when I wrote the lecture. I believe it is one of history's most important roles to make us blink: to make us momentarily close our eyes to the present and contemplate a past seemingly disconnected from the present – only to open them again to a present that may now appear in a new light. I hope to make some of you blink tonight, and would not at all be upset if the discussion after the lecture was as much about Woomera as about Tatura, if it was as much about the present as about the past.

Those of you who saw the title of this lecture but did not read the fine print, may have come here tonight in the mistaken belief that I will mainly be talking about the men who became known as the *Dunera* boys. The *Dunera* was a British passenger ship, which in 1940 was used to transport more than 2500 mainly German and Austrian refugees from England to Australia, where they were interned as potentially dangerous enemy aliens. Their appalling treatment by British guards aboard the *Dunera* and their subsequent internment in the Hay and Tatura internment camps have been the subject of several books and documentaries. Their story is, to quote from one of these books, Cyril Pearl's *The Dunera Scandal*, 'the story of the great wrong inflicted on a number of German and Austrian anti-Nazis who sought sanctuary in England'.

But theirs is also a redemptive story. To illustrate what I mean by that, I give you an

example. Cyril Pearl provides a detailed account of how the British guards aboard the *Dunera* robbed the internees of their last remaining possessions. In the context of this particular account, Pearl writes:

One internee, Fred Gruen, devised an ingenious way of safeguarding two English pound notes – his sole capital – by concealing them in the lining of his tie, which he never removed even when sweating fearfully in the tropics. (Vienna-born Gruen was a student at Hern Bay College, Kent, when he was deported. In 1946 he graduated from the University of Melbourne and later held many important academic posts including the Chair of Agricultural Economics at the Australian National University. From 1973 to 1976 he was Senior Agricultural Consultant to the Australian Government.)

Books and documentaries about the *Dunera* are replete with similar stories: stories of resourceful refugees who, once they had properly arrived in Australia (that is, after their release from the internment camp), became successful citizens who made an important contribution to their new country. There are similar stories about Displaced Persons who migrated to Australia in the late 1940s and early 1950s. There are similar stories about Hungarian refugees who migrated to Australia in the late 1950s. There are similar stories about Indochinese boat people reaching Australia in the late 1970s. And one day, I wonder, will there will be similar stories about refugees whose resourcefulness allowed them to escape Saddam Hussein's Iraq or the Taliban's Afghanistan, to make their way to Australia, to endure Woomera and to get by while living precariously on a temporary protection visa? Will there be stories that claim that once Afghani and Iraqi asylum seekers had been issued with permanent residence permits, they became valuable and valued citizens of their adopted country, excelling as artists or scientists or public servants? Refugee advocates who are arguing that Australia should extend a generous welcome to asylum seekers, are often suggesting that such stories could be told – as if there had to be a trade-off when a society accepts refugees; as if a humanitarianism that is not self-interested were too much to ask for.

The story, or rather stories, that I am currently writing, and which form the basis of tonight's lecture, concern German and Austrian refugees who arrived in Australia in the second half of the 1930s and were interned during World War II. Their stories have not been widely told before. Maybe their lives did not lend themselves to being made into stories marked by a happy ending.

Much like the success stories told about the *Dunera* boys or about the Hungarians or Vietnamese, my stories are anecdotal. I did not make a comprehensive survey of refugees arriving in Australia from Germany and Austria before 1939, and can only be vague about the exact number of those among them who were interned. Probably well over 10 000 people successfully sought refuge in Australia between 1933 and

1940 – excluding the *Dunera* boys and other evacuees. Most of them came from Germany and Austria; some were from Czechoslovakia, Spain or Poland. Several hundred of these refugees were interned, most of them for less than a year. Dozens of them were interned for more than two years.

My account is not accompanied by precise statistics also because the group of people I am interested in cannot be easily defined. ‘Refugees’ is a problematic category. I have taken those Austrians and Germans to be refugees who identified as such, and refused to align themselves with Nazis in Australia. My group also includes people whose applications for refugee alien status were rejected by the Australian authorities, or who never applied for this status in the first place.

The question of whether or not somebody is a refugee is complex. Was a non-Jewish German who had never attracted the attention of the Nazi authorities and who left Germany simply because he was in love with a Jewish woman and was barred from marrying her under Nazi law, a refugee? Could a self-professed Austrian monarchist who left Germany because he objected to being ruled by a government led by Adolf Hitler (and who had earlier objected to being governed by Dollfuss and Schuschnigg), legitimately claim refugee status? And what about the nineteen-year-old kid who jumped ship in Australia, claiming later that he did so because he found life under the Nazis unbearable? Probably not one of these people would be recognised as a genuine ‘Convention’ refugee today (by either United Nations or Australian authorities).

To call those German- or Austrian-born people who in the second half of the 1930s sought refuge in Australia, ‘German’ or ‘Austrian’ is also problematic. They were not welcome back in Germany. In 1942, many of them were deprived of their German citizenship through the so-called *Ausbürgerungsverordnung*, a decree which revoked their German citizenship. Not being wanted by Germany, and not wanting Germany any longer, most of them applied to become naturalised as soon as they had fulfilled the five-year residence requirement. But even before then, they did not necessarily think of themselves as Germans or Austrians.

But let’s move from the preliminaries to the stories I promised you. Tonight I will talk about four individuals: George Huelscher, Hans Meyer, Maria Klaphake and Walter Stolting.

George (or Georg) Huelscher was one of dozens of young Germans who came to Australia by jumping ship in 1936, 1937, 1938 or 1939. Most of these deserters were allowed to remain in Australia; in fact in a directive issued in 1936, the Department of the Interior advised that the Collector of Customs was not obliged to charge a ‘deserter of good type’ with being a prohibited immigrant, and that if such charges were laid, it was not always desirable to secure an immediate conviction.

George Huelscher was fourteen when the Nazis came to power. From a young age, he worked as a sailor on ships plying Germany's rivers and canals.

I worked at different towns along the river, and I saw how things were going, and I was definitely anti-Nazi because I saw the way they were ruling. You were just put into concentration camps and children never saw their mothers again ... No one could believe it, but I dared not say anything against it.

But in 1937, he apparently did make a remark that was taken to be critical of the regime. He was arrested by the Gestapo, but released with a warning.

After his release, Huelscher worked on ocean-going ships. Together with a friend he jumped ship at Newcastle in December 1938. In 1941 he recalled,

I did not know the language; I could just speak three or four words to make people understand what I wanted. I saw Australia for the first time. A few days before we arrived, the Captain of the ship told us to be careful. I came here and met the people and everyone was very friendly to me. No-one said anything about my being a German; they just asked me a few questions, and I told them everything I saw in Germany. They helped me to find a job.

Neither Customs nor the Department of the Interior were initially willing to press charges against Huelscher (who could have easily been deported as a prohibited immigrant). It was only on 1 September 1939, the first day of the war, that Huelscher was arrested in Maitland. He appeared before the court, but was discharged a few days later, after neither the police nor the Intelligence Section of the Australian Military Forces had wanted to pursue the matter.

By then, Huelscher was living at Martin's Creek near Paterson, some fifty kilometres north of Newcastle, where he worked for a German-born farmer. Concerns about Huelscher began to surface again in early June 1940. It was a time when Britain was bracing itself for a German invasion, just after British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk. On 4 June, the Martin's Creek postmaster wrote to the Minister for Transport: 'I wish to draw your attention to what I consider a grave danger and also a lack of appreciation of the position by those in authority.' The postmaster reported that Huelscher 'is allowed to carry a rifle about (said to be shooting rabbits) while I am employed watching an explosive magazine armed with a small revolver. I have been told that he is under observation but I emphatically contend that this is a case for more than observation.' Investigations by the police revealed that Huelscher did indeed possess a rifle – despite his protestations to the contrary. His contravention of the National Security Regulations (which prohibited him from owning a rifle), and the fact that his employer did not commit himself to keeping him in employment, were sufficient grounds for his internment.

Huelscher was very anxious to be released from internment. 'Of course, he would

be', you might say. But this was not always the case: some enemy aliens wanted to be interned, or kept in internment, because after September 1939 they experienced difficulties in finding employment and making a living. Not so Huelscher. But his objections to being interned were very specific. He wrote to the authorities from the Orange Internment Camp in August 1940:

We have all germans in here and most of them are 'Nazis' in factt some belong to the Nazi Partei in Germany. I do hope you will understand that I as a politican refugee can not mix with anny one here in factt got to bee very carefull to do so. That is the reason I would like to get out becaus in here it make's my life to hell. I only tell you one thing what happened. There has bee a singing on nig, all the german songs. as last one the Horst Wessel song every one got up and lifted his right hand, I could not do it and didn't want to so I got up and went outside. I don't think I have to tell you what people thought about it an what the told me afterwards.

A few months later, after his transfer to Tatura, he repeated his request to be released and concluded his letter: 'I bag you to remember it is not easy for me and a few more to be together in a camp with your own nazi enemy.' He was prepared to accept his internment as long as the authorities ensured that he was not accommodated together with German Nazis and Italian fascists: 'I only want to ask one favour', he pleaded with the Aliens Tribunal in September 1941, 'if I am not to be released, please do not put me back among the Germans and Italians; I do not belong to them.'

While his ownership of a rifle provided the pretext for Huelscher's internment, he was a suspect solely on account of being of military age and being a recent arrival (as there were no suggestions of anti-British or pro-German sympathies). The representative of the Minister for the Army advised the Aliens Tribunal:

a recent arrival must be put in one [of] two categories. If you are satisfied with his explanation that he wanted to get away from Nazi Germany – he certainly gave it very plausibly and volubly – then there is nothing sinister in the fact of his being a recent arrival. On the other hand, if you feel that he was trying to paint a picture, and his plausibility was overdone, then once you become skeptical of his explanation, you cannot afford to take any risk.

In this case, the Tribunal was satisfied with the internee's explanation and recommended his release. The Department of the Army concurred with this recommendation.

Hans Meyer and his wife Alice were dance instructors and ran their own school in Königsberg in East Prussia. Hans Meyer also lectured in deportment and physical education at the University of Königsberg. The Nazis classified him as *Halbjude*

(‘fifty per cent Jew’) on account of his mother’s Jewish ancestry (however, both he and his mother belonged to the Lutheran faith). In 1935 the Meyers were expelled from the Reichskulturkammer, the chamber of culture – he, because he was Jewish, and she, because she was married to a Jew. They had to close their school. The Meyers appealed against the Reichskulturkammer decision, but were told that there was no way that a Jew could be a member, and that Alice Meyer needed to divorce her husband if she wanted to reopen their school. In 1936, at that stage still hoping that their expulsion from the Reichskulturkammer was not final, they followed the invitation of a friend and moved to England. In 1937, English Quakers sponsored their migration to Australia, where they arrived in February 1938. Their English friends ensured that their entry into Sydney society would be smooth, and they soon were very successful, giving dancing lessons and hosting a memorable party for the Sydney establishment. Their success attracted envy and became their downfall. In September 1939, both Meyers were interned not least because the authorities suspected that their income could not possibly be derived only from their work. In February 1940, they were released on condition that they not return to Sydney (they moved to a farm near Wagga Wagga). But in June 1940, Hans Meyer was re-interned as part of a rounding up of all potentially dangerous enemy aliens.

When in Australia, Hans Meyer described himself as an anti-Nazi. It would probably have been more correct to say that he became a committed anti-Nazi some time after Hitler assumed power in Germany. Meyer’s political outlook before 1933 was not all that dissimilar to that of the Nazis. He probably voted for the far-right German National People’s Party. His correspondence with the Reichskulturkammer betrays his refusal to believe that the Nazi bureaucracy was unlikely to recognise that a mistake had been made when he was expelled. He was a German nationalist, and continued to socialise with Germans, including some German Nazis, after his arrival in Australia. His identification as an anti-Nazi refugee of Jewish origin happened gradually. The Australian security services did not allow for changes in an enemy alien’s political outlook; in fact such changes were often regarded as indications of an alien’s unreliability. ‘He made a very deep impression of unreliability and insincerity ... this person ... is a slippery and unreliable man’, found a Security Service officer interviewing Meyer in 1942.

Hans Meyer was unlucky because he had a very common surname, and four first names: Karl, Eduard, Hans and Joachim. There were numerous other Meyers in Australian internment camps; they included two Hans Meyers, one Hans Joachim Meyer, and one Hans Joseph Meyer. Karl Eduard Hans Joachim Meyer’s dossier was filed under ‘J’, as in Joachim-Meyer, perhaps to avoid confusion, but it was nevertheless mixed up with those of other Meyers suspected of subversive activities. The Australian authorities were not always thorough in their investigations and made mistakes. And when matters became too complex and confusing, they usually

opted for playing it safe and keeping a suspect interned.

Hans Meyer's case attracted a lot of support. Bishop Pilcher, Labor Member of Parliament Maurice Blackburn, and Lady Gowrie, wife of the Governor-General, all intervened on his behalf. His Sydney supporters included many respectable citizens who had met the Meyers in 1938 or 1939.

Hans Meyer was eventually released in February 1944. But the Security Service continued to dispute his claims that he was a refugee from Nazi Germany, and successfully vetoed the granting of refugee alien status to him.

'5' 9", stout build, blonde, prominent features: rather good looking, walks slightly pigeontoed with left foot and slowly with peculiar gait' – that is how Maria Klaphake was described by a military intelligence officer in 1942. Maria and Wolf Klaphake arrived in Australia in 1935 and lived first in Melbourne, then in Sydney. Wolf Klaphake was an industrial chemist who, after settling in Sydney, worked on the development of a process for the fermentation of household garbage. He was suspected of being a Nazi and interned from 1940 to 1944. Maria Klaphake was born in Germany of Swedish parents, and spent part of her childhood in Sweden. She was trained as a medical doctor and sexual psychologist, and worked at a place she identified as Institute for Sex Reform in Berlin. Presumably this was Magnus Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, which was ransacked and closed by the Nazis in 1933. Maria Klaphake was not Jewish herself, but her association with the Institute, with its predominantly Jewish and leftist staff, attracted the wrath of the Nazis. She was repeatedly threatened and, in early 1934, the Klaphakes' flat in Berlin was searched by Brownshirts. On that occasion, Maria Klaphake was physically assaulted. The Klaphakes' decision to leave Germany was probably motivated by Maria's experiences at least as much as by her husband's disdain for the Nazis.

Even when her husband was interned, Maria Klaphake's loyalty was not questioned. In 1940, two police constables charged with compiling a report about her – such reports were prepared about all enemy aliens – found that 'no good purpose would be served by taking further action to restrict this alien's movements from a national security point of view [and that she] can safely be left at her present employment.' But a year later, allegedly incriminating evidence was added to her file. In December 1941, it was reported that she 'is frequently visited at night by a man whose Motor Car No is DY 740. The visitor's name is not known but rumour has it that he is connected with Broadcasting', and as a result of this observation, her phone was tapped, her overseas mail opened, and Military Intelligence agent 222 tailed her for much of January 1942. The man driving the motor car was identified as Harold John Frost from Roseville who, together with his wife, was on friendly terms with Maria Klaphake. She and the Frosts were also on friendly terms with

Antonio Tesoriero, an Italian fruiterer, who had a shop in Chatswood, not far from the Klaphakes' house. There were reports of late-night gatherings at Tesoriero's house, involving many Italian men and Mrs Klaphake. In March 1942 Maria Klaphake was interned – together with twenty-six other German women and girls, most of them the wives and daughters of internees.

Like George Huelscher, Maria Klaphake was more concerned about the company of other internees than about the loss of her freedom. She insisted that she not be accommodated at the German family camp in Tatura (where the other women arrested with her were sent), and said she would rather be in a prison among criminals.

The allegations against Maria Klaphake boiled down to her associations with Antonio Tesoriero. Tesoriero himself, however, was not interned, nor was there any concrete evidence about illegal activities at his shop or residence. The nature of the friendship between Maria Klaphake and the Tesoriero family is not clear from the files; all I know is that she taught the Tesoriero children English. But Antonio Tesoriero was, much like Hans Meyer, the carrier of a rather unfortunate name. There were at least four other Italians by the name of Antonio or Antonino Tesoriero in Sydney. All of them hailed from the small island of Lipari near Sicily. All of them were fruiterers. And at least one of them had been in trouble with the police.

Many of those interned at the beginning of the war were released soon afterwards. But for several reasons, those who were interned or re-interned later often found it difficult to secure their release. The authorities believed that the onus was on recently arrived refugees 'to come forward and show that they are definitely safe, particularly from the Gestapo. This is necessary because it must be realised that virtually all the refugees in Australia from Germany left Germany by definite permission of the Gestapo.' But the internees hardly ever knew what sort of evidence they were expected to produce in order to prove their loyalty and harmlessness, as the security services only rarely let them know why they were suspected of being subversives. The appeals process was slow and the Aliens Tribunal's recommendations were not binding. Maria Klaphake waited ten months until her appeal was heard. The Aliens Tribunal recommended her release, and she was set free shortly afterwards.

Unlike the vast majority of German and Austrian refugees reaching Australia in the late 1930s, Walter Stölting (or Stolting, as he called himself in Australia) had been to Australia before. In 1927, at the age of 30, he spent almost a year here, travelling widely and writing a generous and perceptive book about Australia, which was published in Germany in 1930.

Stolting's mother came from a Jewish family, but converted when she was a teenager. Walter Stolting did not identify as Jewish, neither before 1933 nor as a

reaction to the persecution of Jews after 1933. When he went into exile in France in 1933 he did so as a socialist who had devoted his life to the task of overthrowing the existing order, as he told his son in a 250-page letter justifying his departure from Germany. But while Stolting sometimes liked to think of himself as a revolutionary, this was a state of mind rather than a reflection of his actions. From France, Stolting went to Spain, then Denmark, and from there to Colombia, where he applied for an Australian visa. By the time he arrived in Australia in 1936, his revolutionary idealism seems to have mellowed. But he was still without doubt a left-wing radical, albeit with idiosyncratic beliefs and without belonging to an organisation which would have channelled his energies in any particular direction. It also seems that his radicalism was often the outcome of a certain hot-headedness, rather than the result of a well-founded conviction.

It was this hot-headedness which got him into trouble in 1939. The windows of a Jewish library in Carlton had been smashed. There had been other similar incidents in Melbourne. Hooligans, rather than Anti-Semites, were held responsible. Stolting disagreed. He approached Jewish community leaders in Melbourne and suggested to them that the 'hooliganism' could well be the work of Nazis trying to stir up anti-Semitic sentiments. He recommended that, if the police were unable to protect Jewish property, Melbourne's Jews should form vigilante groups. Being good citizens, and anxious to prove their loyalty, the Jewish community leaders contacted by Stolting informed the police of his plans. Stolting's concern for the safety of Jewish institutions was probably genuine; but both the Criminal Investigation Branch and Melbourne's Jewish leaders thought that he might be an agent provocateur.

Four years later, Stolting's well-meaning but foolish advice to the leaders of Melbourne's Jewish community had metamorphosed into something more sinister. 'His [Military Intelligence] record reveals him as a suspected Nazi agent and as violently anti-semitic. His activities included the stirring up of Anti-Jewish demonstrations', an Army report stated.

Stolting was considered to be 'troublesome' and prone to quarrelling. (There was evidence that he had been involved in brawls before his internment.) But more importantly, both he and Meyer (who often acted as a spokesman of the German anti-Nazi internees) acquired the reputation of being trouble-makers because they complained to the camp authorities. The most common ground of complaint of most interned refugees, including Meyer and Stolting, was the fact that they were interned together with German-born Nazis. Stolting's appeal echoed those of George Huelscher and Maria Klaphake: 'If you think I cannot be released, do help me, and help all the others of us to be separated from the Nazi camp', he pleaded with the Aliens Tribunal.

While Hans Meyer enjoyed the support of Lady Gowrie, Brian Fitzpatrick and the Council for Civil Liberties lobbied the authorities on Stolting's behalf. Such support could also backfire: it emphasised an internee's tendency to be difficult – especially if his supporters included people like Fitzpatrick, whose loyalty was also questioned by the security services.

His proneness to speak his mind came to haunt Stolting also for another, and for him unexpected, reason. He had a son in Germany. In 1938 he corresponded with his former wife, who had custody of the son, about sending him abroad, and suggested Denmark as a possible destination. 'Denmark is a fine country for a child like Peter to grow up in, but that cannot be said of Australia,' he told his ex-wife. 'When I tell you that the leaving examination can be completed here in Australia at the age of 16 years, you will understand. When I further tell you that I am very much alone, it means that the number of congenial companions is very limited. Most of the people have no thought for learning, knowledge or culture.' I believe these remarks, extracted from a letter intercepted well before the beginning of the war, more so than his alleged activity as an agent provocateur, convinced the Security Service to insist on Stolting's internment until 1944.

The contents of this intercepted private letter played a very prominent role in Stolting's Aliens Tribunal proceedings. In his spirited defence he emphasised how little the Australian authorities understood about the motivations and thinking of refugees from Nazi Germany.

[If] you understand how difficult it is to find a country to which you have a sympathetic feeling, a country in which you like to live and a country that will take you at a time when no other country will, when all the world is closed, where you can go and have only a pocketful of money – when a poor man finds the door slammed in his face, when a poor man may run from one Consulate to another and is told 'No, I cannot give you a visa', or when you are told 'You can work in this country provided you marry a Danish girl', if that is the thing that all the countries in the world introduce, then you will probably understand how grateful a man is when he comes to a country where he can work, even if he is a critic of this country.

I don't think his listeners understood. This lack of comprehension helps explain why so many refugees were considered security risks and why many were interned for lengthy periods of time.

Sheer ignorance about the situation in Europe by those charged with investigating the activities of enemy aliens extended to a lack of understanding about the application of the Nuremberg Laws. The Australian authorities did not always comprehend that somebody who did not identify as Jewish, who had been baptised, and who would not necessarily have been accepted as Jewish by an Australian

rabbi, could face persecution in Germany.

To the investigating officers, it mattered whether or not somebody was recognised as Jewish by other Jews, that is by a rabbi in Sydney or Melbourne or Adelaide, and by Jews in the internment camps. Few refugees interned for lengthy periods were practising Jews, but many of them were Jews according to the Nuremberg laws. In Stolting's case, the Crown's representative reminded the Aliens Tribunal that Stolting 'protests that he is a refugee, affected by the Nuremberg laws, and yet he is not accepted by the jews. He was not accepted in Paris, nor in the camp here.'

But then, officers from the Criminal Investigation Branch, the Army, and the Security Service had their own ideas about whether or not somebody was Jewish. The head of the Branch in Melbourne wrote about Stolting in 1938: 'I would not worry about him. He is looking for contacts with a view to business. There is a Hebrew strain in him.' Not that it was always an advantage to be identified as somebody with a Hebrew strain. Quite a few of the officers dealing with interned refugees were Anti-Semites. The Security Service officer attached to the Loveday internment camp wrote about one internee, '[he] is a typical slimy German Jew'.

During World War II, Germans were interned selectively. Despite intense public pressure to intern all enemy aliens, the Menzies and Curtin governments acted with circumspection and tried to avoid a repeat of the mass internments that had taken place during World War I. In March 1942, Prime Minister Curtin declared in Parliament that 'the Government does not believe in taking people en bloc and throwing them into internment camps'. The government's rationale for internment was seemingly straightforward. A memorandum prepared by the Department of the Army in July 1940 stated:

Internment of enemy aliens and others is in effect a precautionary measure designed to protect the national interests ... This is not intended to be a definite reflection on their avowed loyalty and disposition towards the country, but military considerations take precedence over all others. Action is thus necessarily taken on reasonable grounds which give rise to definite suspicion; the general policy being that the nation should always be given the benefit of the doubt.

The Australian authorities were concerned about sabotage and espionage, and expected that saboteurs and spies had arrived in Australia not long before the outbreak of the war – as had of course most of the refugees. With the benefit of hindsight we now know that these concerns were unfounded. One could argue, as Anthony Burke does in his recent book *In Fear of Security*, that the sense of insecurity which underlies the angst about sabotage and espionage has run like a thread through Australia's history.

Suspicious were often triggered by observations made by private citizens who took it upon themselves to spy upon their neighbours. But incriminating evidence was also provided by fellow internees who hoped to gain favours by becoming informers.

The Australian authorities also kept people interned because they had reservations about their character. 'Very weak type of character', the Loveday camp commandant wrote about Hans Meyer. 'Character is extremely doubtful', read one report about Walter Stolting. 'A shifty type', read another.

The success stories I mentioned earlier emphasise the contribution migrants have made to Australia on account of their skills, intelligence and ingenuity. But reputed intelligence and skills were not assets for German and Austrian refugees during World War II. The Australian authorities were convinced that 'enemy or subversive organisations did not choose stupid men as their tools', as an Army Intelligence memorandum put it, and were therefore suspicious of refugees who were considered smart or who had skills that were unusual in Australia. 'This man is probably the cleverest in the compound', the Loveday camp commandant wrote about Walter Stolting in 1943. Meyer is an 'extremely clever person', found the Aliens Tribunal in 1941, and recommended his continued internment. Even language skills were regarded with suspicion. Many of the refugees who were interned until 1943 or 1944 were multilingual. Walter Stolting spoke Spanish, French, Dutch and Danish. Maria Klaphake spoke Swedish and Serbian, and her English was good enough to allow her to give lessons to the Tesoriero children. Her husband spoke several European and non-European languages. While in internment he learned Chinese and Tibetan; the Loveday camp commandant wrote about him: 'while he was here, he practised and taught "Chinese", which we thought at the time might easily be converged to "Japanese", he was consequently placed under surveillance, as a doubtful character.'

Most refugees knew that they had to prove both that they had been persecuted by the Nazis and that they would not cause any trouble in Australia. George Huelscher stressed that he was not politically minded – this was not so much to deny that he had firm opinions about the Nazi regime while he was still in Germany, as to suggest that he would not express a political opinion in Australia. In July 1941 he wrote to the Australian Military Forces:

The reason I deserted my ship is that I hate these nazis and everything that they stand for and nothing that the people in this camp can say will ever change my mind, or alter my opinion. I am 22 years of age and far to young to have any political Ideas of any kind.

Walter Stolting would have fared better if he, too, could have persuaded the Australian authorities that he was not interested in politics.

Earlier I suggested that the lives of most interned refugees do not seem to lend themselves to being rendered as stories marked by a happy ending. At this stage, I do not know enough about most interned refugees to rule out happy endings. After his release, George Huelscher worked for farmers in the Upper Hunter Valley. He married an Australian woman. I do not know what became of him after 1945, but believe that he stayed in Australia.

The Meyers lived in Melbourne after the war, where they set up a School of Movement and Language. Hans Meyer lectured in physical education at the University of Melbourne, taught German at various high schools, and in 1966 was appointed honorary consul of Venezuela. In 1969, he received an order, a Bundesverdienstkreuz Erster Klasse, from the Federal Republic of Germany. The media paid some attention to the Meyers in 1970 because they offered a course that prepared Victorian women for the Queen's visit. 'Terrible things can happen to some poor woman who doesn't know how to curtsy properly', Hans Meyer was quoted as saying.

After her release in 1943, Maria Klaphake worked for a Sydney company that manufactured ethereal oils. She died in March 1945. Her husband thought that her death was the result of 'the worry and trouble of internment'.

After his release in 1944, Walter Stolting worked for two years as a clerk for the South Australian Railways in Adelaide. He became naturalised in 1946. That year he moved to Sydney and went into partnership with another former internee, Norman Howard, to set up the Howard Health Centre in Darlinghurst. This venture does not seem to have been very successful, for Stolting soon left the health centre and worked once more as a clerk. In 1948 he applied for an instructor position at the Bonegilla Migrants Reception Centre. The Education Department was satisfied with his skills and qualifications, and recommended his employment. But the Department of Immigration objected to his appointment. 'I feel it would be most inadvisable to engage an ex-internee even though Security Service may have nothing against him since his discharge from internment', Tas Heyes, the Secretary of the Department, wrote. I know little about what happened to Stolting thereafter. He lived for some time in Sydney, wrote poetry, and by the early 1970s had returned to Germany.

Of course the issue is not so much whether or not a life lends itself to being rendered as a story with a fairy tale ending. The issue is whether or not it is desirable to focus on such endings. And the issue is also why in Australia so few migrant stories are told, and listened to, that do not culminate in a happy ending, and that emphasise the migrant's life before coming to Australia, and his or her difficulties in being accepted here.

A history that paid at least as much attention to Hans Meyer's internment as to his

role in preparing Victorian women for the Queen's visit is likely to give rise to questions such as: Were refugees ever compensated for the time they spent in Australian internment camps? Did the federal government ever apologise to former internees? No, former internees did not receive any compensation. And no, the federal government did not apologise. However, about ten years ago, the Senate and the West Australian and New South Wales governments issued apologies directed primarily at former Italian internees and their families.

As long as histories emphasise happy endings, and as long as the public knows little about the history of World War II internment, the federal government will hardly feel compelled to apologise to former German and Austrian internees. This may change: the National Archives and the National Museum have just started a large research project about internment, which could lead to a major exhibition at the museum. But I actually do not think that a public apology to *all* Germans and Austrians who were interned during World War II would be appropriate.

Not only do Australian histories of immigration stress happy endings. They also neglect the lives of refugees before their arrival in Australia, and they tend to subsume all those who came here and became Australians – ten pound Poms and Indochinese refugees – under the category of 'migrants'. In the collective imagination of Australians it matters little what motivated migrants to come here. For that reason, the only public apology I can see happening in the short term would be an apology to *all* former German- and Austrian-born internees – to those who sang the Horst Wessel Lied, and to those who left the room when it was sung. Such an apology would perpetuate the greatest injustice suffered by interned refugees during the war: the fact that they were interned together with committed Nazis.

I doubt that the stories I want to tell – stories that feature the lives of Walter Stolting, George Huelscher, Maria Klaphake, Hans Meyer, and others – will easily strike a chord with the Australian public at large. But I think that they are important nevertheless, raising issues about Australian insecurities, suggesting that a debate about who is a refugee should not be left to the Minister for Immigration, drawing attention to the lives of a small group of truly remarkable individuals and, hopefully, every now and again making members of my audience blink.

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