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IDENTIFICATION OF ALIEN ENEMIES

An Address by

The Honorable Francis Biddle
Attorney General of the United States

on

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Starting tomorrow, February 2, the United States Government tackles a new and important part of the job of making America safe. Tomorrow the Department of Justice begins the process of identifying all German, Italian and Japanese aliens, 14 years or older--all non-citizens of enemy nationality--now living in this country.

This is a program of personal identification. It means adding vital information to the record we already have of these aliens. It means establishing their identities through signatures and photographs. And to each alien of enemy nationality so registered, it means the possession of a certificate of identification to be used at all times and in all places, for the duration of the war.

By this means, persons who through no action on their part have technically become "alien enemies", but who have remained above suspicion, will be protected from injustice or persecution which might arise from mistaken identity. Also by this means, the Department of Justice places further restraint on any alien enemy who may deliberately seek to violate our laws. And it is with both these objectives in mind that I describe the identification programs as another part of the job of making America safe--safety for the nation against the small minority of alien enemies who may be contemplating trouble, and safety for the great majority of aliens who are above suspicion.

It is a big job. It is a job that must be done with a minimum of misunderstanding and with a maximum of accuracy and dispatch.

For those directly affected, the Department of Justice has prepared detailed instructions which are now available at every post office.

Without going into those details, I want at this time to describe briefly the nature of the job that must be done, the machinery set up to do it, and the schedule for its completion.

More than a year ago, as a precautionary measure, we required registration by all aliens of all national origins residing in the United States. That was also a big job. But it was completed quickly, smoothly, in an atmosphere of understanding and with a fine spirit of cooperation.

Among the 5,000,000 aliens of all nationalities who made their presence in the country known at that time were natives of Germany, Italy and Japan numbering, all told, approximately 1,100,000 persons. We made no special demands on this group, and required of them no more than we did of any others.

Now that we are at war with all three of these nations, we are obliged to take new precautions with their nationals and subjects residing in our country--thorough-going, wartime precautions. The initial steps leading up to these measures, such as the Alien Registration of 1940, had been prepared well in advance. Enforcement of actual wartime regulations awaited only the proclamations relating to the conduct of alien enemies, which President Roosevelt signed on December 7 and 8, 1941. From that time forward, a number of regulations to insure the internal safety of the nation have been put in force as the necessity arose. This identification program becomes a part of the wartime regulations of alien enemies.

Among the 1,100,000 registered aliens of German, Italian and Japanese origin, a small proportion have records which suggest doubtful or divided loyalties. Some 3200 have been apprehended by the FBI. They are allowed to tell their stories individually before special civilian hearing boards appointed for this purpose in each judicial district, but upon each one rests the burden of proof of his own harmlessness to our cause. Unless and until he is able to give that proof to our complete satisfaction, he must remain in custody. The others--the overwhelming majority of these people who are technically called alien enemies--have thus far come through with a clean bill of health. There is no reason to suspect them, certainly none to persecute or inflict unnecessary hardships upon them.

But because of the disloyal few, the many must be inconvenienced. They must submit to certain blanket regulations which are intended to make this nationwide checkup simpler and more effective. We have forbidden alien enemies to possess cameras, for example, or short-wave radio sets, or any equipment which conceivably might be used to the detriment of our cause. We have laid down certain rules as to where they may go and where not. We require that they obtain permission for travel. Such regulations are neither oppressive nor, by implication, hostile.

So with this new identification program. There is implicit in this program no singling out of the individual for accusation or suspicion. That is not the intent; that will not be the effect. Rather, the individual alien's full compliance with the program and his cooperation with those who have the work in hand will be additional evidence of his good faith and will serve as his protection.

At the same time, the requirement of certificates will be of aid to federal and local authorities in making such checkups as are deemed necessary in the interest of national safety. We cannot take the risk, for example, of allowing complete or unregulated freedom of movement within the country to persons classed as alien enemies. We cannot risk the chance that a certain few such persons may attempt to impersonate others, or use in any way the credentials of others. In this way, the identification program is a necessary part of our wartime protection.

The identification program will take at least a month to accomplish. The sheer mechanics involved in taking stock of more than a million individuals--each to be dealt with separately--makes it a huge job. If the aliens do their part as intelligently and cooperatively as they did in the registration completed last year--and there is no reason to assume that they will not do so--then the load will be lightened and the time required will be kept to a minimum.

To facilitate this task, the program is scheduled in two periods, and the work divided geographically. In the first period, starting tomorrow and carrying through February 7, eight states in the western part of the country will be covered--California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Arizona, Montana, Utah and Idaho. We are handling the West Coast first because that is a potentially critical area. We don't take chances. Between February 9 and February 28, the job will be completed in all other states.

The procedure which the alien must go through to obtain his certificate is simple enough. He studies the printed directions now available

at all post offices. Then he goes to the nearest first or second-class or county seat post office, bringing with him the receipt card which was issued to him in the alien registration of 1940. He also brings three small unmounted photographs of himself, two by two inches in size. At the post office he fills out an application form. That is all he does. Then he is fingerprinted and goes home. Later his certificate of identification will be delivered to him. And that is all.

Aliens may get assistance from friends or relatives, or from recognized social agencies. The post office officials will also be glad to assist them in filling out the necessary forms. The aliens should pay no one any money in connection with this program. The only expense the alien need incur is the cost of the three small photographs he is required to submit. If any one approaches a person for money in connection with wartime regulations of alien enemies, he is a racketeer and should be reported to the Department of Justice immediately.

The alien will be required to carry his certificate with him at all times. That is his obligation, as well as his protection. That same government which has seen to it that he is not persecuted in this country will be just as firm in its insistence upon strict compliance on his part. Alien enemies who fail to apply for their identification certificates face severe penalties. One penalty will be internment for the duration of the war. Our government, in time of war, cannot accept carelessness or neglect as excuses from those of its own citizens who fail in their duty to the Nation. It cannot be expected to make exceptions of those who are subjects of enemy power.

Thus far I have addressed my remarks primarily to the aliens of enemy nationality. I now wish to talk for a minute or two to our citizen

population. I wish to assure you that your government is taking every precaution to guard against espionage, sabotage, or other fifth column activities. Through the splendid work of the FBI and other divisions of the Department of Justice, we have been very much on the alert and have thus far met all problems as they arose. And I promise you that your Department of Justice will continue to be on the alert in protecting the internal security of our country.

At the same time, I want to point out that persecution of aliens -- economic or social -- can be a two-edged sword. Such persecution can easily drive people, now loyal to us, into fifth column activities. Economic discrimination against loyal aliens deprives us of skills and manual labor which will become more important as time goes on. It also deprives these people of a livelihood. The logical conclusion of a policy of economic discrimination is to make of these people public charges. It is entirely unnecessary. And don't forget there are still many Americans in Axis and Axis-controlled countries. Let's not give the Axis countries any excuse for retaliation against innocent Americans living abroad.

And let us remember, also, that the great majority of the so-called alien enemies came to our shores for the same reasons that many of our fathers came--to escape persecution; to enjoy the privileges and obligations of democracy; to raise their children in a free world. These people are loyal to our ideals and loyal to our form of government. Let's encourage that loyalty rather than discourage it. Let us judge people by what they do and not by what they are.

You have all read in the papers of the landing a few days ago of an American Expeditionary Force in North Ireland. Perhaps you will

recall that the name of the first American soldier to march down the gang plank was Private Henke. Private Henke is the son of a German immigrant who came to our country in search of freedom and opportunity. His son is in the vanguard of our Army fighting to preserve that freedom and our land of opportunity.

I give you this incident not because it is odd but rather because it is typical. The alien of today is the citizen of tomorrow. Large numbers of those people we classify as alien enemies have American-born children--perhaps future leaders of our country.

Let us not be hasty in our judgment of them. Let us not deprive them of their jobs. Let us not be suspicious of them unless we have grounds for suspicion. Let us not persecute these people as an outlet of our emotions against the bandits who are at the moment in control of the nations where they were born.