
The Deportation of Women and Girls from Lille

a cura di

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(Trascrizione di Serena Tiepolato)

La deportazione da Lille, Roubaix e Tourcoing nell'aprile 1916 (25.000 persone secondo le fonti dell'epoca) ebbe una vasta risonanza durante il primo conflitto mondiale. Sulla stampa e nelle pubblicazioni propagandistiche l'episodio fu presentato come emblematico del regime di terrore instaurato dall'esercito tedesco nei territori occupati. Quegli avvenimenti traumatici furono ricostruiti dal Ministero degli Affari Esteri francese nel rapporto pubblicato in lingua inglese con il titolo: *The Deportation of Women and Girls from Lille. Translated textually from the Note addressed by the French Government to the Governments of Neutral Powers on the conduct of the German Authorities towards the French Departments in the occupation of the enemy* (Hodder and Stoughton, London - New York - Toronto, 1916). Il rapporto era rivolto ai paesi neutrali e conteneva, oltre a note e relazioni del governo francese, documenti e proclami dei comandi militari tedeschi, numerose lettere e testimonianze di civili che costituiscono la parte più corposa dei 245 allegati. Alcuni documenti del rapporto furono in seguito inseriti in altre pubblicazioni ufficiali francesi (République Française. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents relatifs à la guerre 1914-1915-1916. Note adressée par le Gouvernement de la République Française aux Gouvernements des Puissances neutres sur la conduite des autorités allemandes à l'égard des populations des départements occupés par l'ennemi*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris 1916, e Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Les allemands à Lille et dans nord de la France*, Librairie Hachette et C.ie, Paris 1916). Come dimostra la ricca documentazione che correda il rapporto, ad essere deportati furono anche uomini e adolescenti. Con l'enfasi sulle donne e le ragazze si voleva sottolineare l'"inaudita barbarie" del nemico. Dal 1914 infatti la donna era al centro di una propaganda che presentava la guerra come una battaglia per la sicurezza e la sacralità della famiglia, l'inviolabilità del corpo femminile. Questo uso propagandistico, tuttavia, nulla toglie all'affidabilità e alla drammaticità delle lettere tra le quali ho scelto le più ampie e articolate. Dal testo della Nota del ministro Briand ho eliminato i numerosi riferimenti ai vari allegati che non avrebbero trovato un riscontro diretto alla documentazione qui riprodotta. Alcune di queste lettere appariranno in traduzione italiana all'interno del volume: *Grande guerra e popolazione civile. Violenza, repressione, deportati, profughi*, a cura di Bruna Bianchi e Daniele Ceschin, di prossima pubblicazione. Per

un'introduzione più ampia al tema e al documento si veda il saggio di Bruna Bianchi, *Ragazzi deportati durante la Grande guerra*, in questo stesso numero.

Note of the Government of the French republic on the Conduct of the German Authorities towards the Population of the French Departments Occupied by the Enemy

On several occasions the Government of the Republic has had occasion to bring to the notice of neutral Powers the action of the German military authorities towards the population of the French territory temporarily occupied by them as being in conflict with treaty rights. The Government of the Republic finds itself today obliged to lay before foreign governments documents which will establish that our enemies have put in force measures still more inconsistent with humanity. By order of General von Graevenitz, and with the support of Infantry Regiment No. 64, detailed for the purpose by the German General Headquarters, about 25.000 French-consisting of girls between 16 and 20 years of age, young women, and men up to the age of 55 without regard to social position were torn from their homes at Roubaix, Tourcoing, and Lille, separated ruthlessly from their families, and compelled to do agricultural work in the Departments of the Aisne and the Ardennes. Better than any comment which we can make, the official notices of the German authorities, the despairing protests of the Mayor and the Bishop of Lille, and extracts from the letters received from these localities which follow will throw upon this new outrage committed by the Imperial German Government.

The Minister of War, under date of the 30th June, 1916, gives us the following accounts of these occurrences:

Not content with subjecting our people in the North to every kind of oppression, the Germans have recently treated them in the most iniquitous way. In contempt of rules universally recognised and of their own express promises not to molest the civil population they have taken women and girls away from their families; they have sent them off, mixed up with men, to destinations unknown, to work unknown. In the early days of April, official notices offered to families needing work a settlement in the country-in the Department of the Nord - with work in the fields or at tree-felling. Finding this overture unsuccessful, the Germans decided to have recourse to compulsion. From the 9th April onwards they resorted to raids - in the streets, in the houses - carrying off men and girls indiscriminately, and sending them Heaven knows where. A wider scope and a more methodical application were soon given to the measure. A General and a large force arrived at Lille, among others the 64th Regiment from Verdun. On the 29th and 30th April, the public were warned by proclamation to be prepared for a compulsory evacuation. The Mayor entered an immediate protest, the Bishop tried to gain access to the local Commandant, local worthies wrote letters of protest. No effect! On Holy Saturday, at three in the morning, methodical raids began at Lille in the Fives quarter, in the Marlière quarter of Tourcoing, and at Roubaix. After a suspension on Easter Sunday, the work went on all the week, ending up in the Saint Maurice quarter of Lille. About three in the morning, troops, with fixed bayonets, barred the streets

machine guns commanded the road, against unarmed people. Soldiers made their way into the houses. The officer pointed out the people who were to go, and, half an hour later, everybody was marched pell-mell into an adjacent factory, and from there to the station, whence the departure took place. Mothers with children under 14 were spared. Girls under 20 were deported only when accompanied by one of their family. This in no way relieves the barbarity of the proceeding. Soldiers of the Landsturm blushed to be employed on such work. The victims of this brutal act displayed the greatest courage. They were heard crying "Vive la France", and singing the Marseillaise in the cattle-trucks in which they were carried off. It is said that the men are employed in agriculture, road-mending, the making of munitions and trench digging. The women are employed in cooking and laundry-work for the soldiers and as substitutes for officers' servants. For this severe work, housemaids, domestic servants and factory women have been taken by preference. No servants are left in the Rue Royale at Lille. But some brave girls of the upper middle-class have come forward and refused to allow the working-class girls to go alone. The names of Mlles B. and de B. are mentioned as having insisted on accompanying the girls of their district. The unfortunate people, thus requisitioned, have been scattered from Seclin and Templeuve, as far as the Ardennes. Their number is estimated at about 25.000, from the towns of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. The Quartier de la Place at Lille, the communes of Loos, Haubourdin, la Madeleine, and Lambersart are said to have been spared.

Unequalled emotion was felt by the population of the North of France, without distinction of classes, during these days of Holy Week. These measures surpass in inhumanity those previously adopted. It is, however, necessary to return to the latter. It appears necessary to compare the documents annexed to this Note with a reply given by the German Government to a previous complaint relating to work enforced, in violation of the Convention, on the civil population of Landrecies and Hancourt. After declaring that at Landrecies the French who are liable to military service have work suitable to their profession assigned to them, the German Government asserts that at Landrecies, Hancourt, and everywhere else the population of the occupied French districts is treated with justice and perfect humanity. The documents annexed to the present Note will show the value of this assertion. It is not a matter of men liable to military service having been forced to work; women, and girls between 16 and 20, have been taken into captivity and sent into exile. Does the German Government, denying the principles, the sanctity of which it accepted in the Hague Convention, maintain that a belligerent has the right to compel enemy civilians to work? In a Note dated the 22nd March, 1916, it stated that it felt compelled to "request the French Government to issue orders to all commandants of internment camps on the subject of forced labour, and to require a formal declaration with regard to the matter". This declaration was made to the Imperial Government on several occasions and in the most definite form. How can that Government reconcile its claim in respect to interned German civilians - whom it declares not to be liable to forced labour-with its admission that French civilians, liable to military service, but at liberty, are constrained to labour, or with the disgraceful measures taken at Roubaix and Lille with regard to women and girls? In orders placarded at Lille the German military authority has endeavoured to

justify the wholesale deportations ordered at Lille and Roubaix as a retaliation for the attitude of England in making the provisioning of the population increasingly difficult. Nothing can justify such a barbarous measure. Seizure of contraband and interference with enemy commerce are acts of war; deportation of the population without military necessity is not an act of war. Moreover, to dispose of this pretended justification, it is sufficient to show that Germany has not only stripped - for her own profit - the occupied districts of all the products which would have ensured the subsistence of the inhabitants, but also, previously to any interference with enemy commerce, organised for her own benefit the exploitation of the labour of French civilians. To show this, extracts from the depositions of French citizens who have been evacuated from the invaded Departments are annexed to the present Note. These depositions were made on oath before the magistrates of the districts where the evacuated people found asylum in all parts of France, by refugees from all points of the invaded Departments. They were made in response to a form of enquiry in which the question of forced labour was not in contemplation- it was too much at variance with international law. They emanate from persons of all ages and conditions, and their absolute agreement (more than two hundred have been taken) proves that the civil population of the Departments occupied by the German troops has been reduced to absolute servitude by the army of occupation. Article 52 of the regulations annexed to the Fourth Convention of the Hague permits requisitions in kind and in services for the needs of the army of occupation. In the recorded depositions there is no question of any regular form of requisitions. Services, sometimes of a most repulsive nature, have been forcibly imposed on the entire civil population, without distinction of sex, age, or social position. These unhappy people had to present themselves for the work imposed on them by night or by day, at all sorts of places and at great distances from their home, sometimes even under artillery fire, in most cases without any kind of remuneration, in others for a few crusts of bread. The German military authority has never concerned itself with the care of the population which the war has brought under its provisional administration. The products of the forced labour of the population has been transported to Germany in spite of the absolute destitution of the workers. Finally, it can be established from these depositions that the German authorities have not hesitated to compel the population to take part in military operations against their own country; they have even obliged them to assist in pillaging their own countryside! They have employed them as direct auxiliaries of the combatant forces, either by placing them in front of the German troops, to serve as shields or by compelling them to (to work in connection with military operations. Where this working material -for there is no more a question of human beings but of mere machines moved from place to place as required- where this human material gives out in certain districts of the occupied territory, the German authorities draw without limit either on the internment camps where, contrary to all law, the mobilisable men belonging to this territory have been confined, or on the other invaded districts. The people are not sent back to their former homes. These civilians are formed into regiments and, although the Germans themselves acknowledge that they ought not to be compelled to work, they are sent to any point of the districts occupied by the German army and compelled to perform the

most severe labour. And when France demands, in the name of some agonised family, information as to the fate of an unhappy exile, the German Government replies that the military authorities do not consider themselves under any obligation to explain their reasons for these transferences. For entire months it is impossible to find out what has become of the unhappy people. The indisputable result of the following declarations, read as a whole, is that, without any immediate necessity, not in the excitement of battle - moments which might excuse the violations of international law committed by the German authorities - those authorities, in pursuance of a deliberate purpose and according to a predetermined method, have reduced the unfortunate population of the invaded districts to a condition which can be likened only to slavery. In 1885, at the time of the African Conference of Berlin - with respect to which Germany had taken the initiative - she engaged, so far as the African territories subject to her sovereignty or her influence were concerned, to preserve the native populations and to improve their material and moral conditions of life. After having collected the information, of necessity very restricted, which reaches it from invaded France and which it submits to the consideration of the Neutral Powers, the Government of the Republic is entitled to doubt whether the German authorities are observing, with regard to the populations of which it has for the moment the charge the engagements entered into by the Imperial Government in respect to the black populations of Central Africa. A.BRIAND. President of the Council Minister of Foreign Affairs

[...]Annexe 13. Letter attached to the above.

Lille, April 30th, 1916.

“My Dear E., What I have to tell you is so sad and so long that I have not the heart to write it twice. Will you read this letter and then pass it on to M., for her to send round and finally keep in her own hands.

My Dear E., The last three weeks, and especially the last week, we have spent in the most terrible anguish and moral torture possible for a mother's heart. On the pretext of difficulties caused by England in the matter of provisions and of the refusal of the men out of work to volunteer for work in the fields, the Germans have embarked on a forcible evacuation of the population, with an inconceivable refinement of cruelty. They did not proceed as on the first occasion by whole families; no, community of suffering they thought would be too easy for us, and so they took one, two, three, four or five members from each family - men, women, youths, children of 15, girls, any one - whoever was chosen, quite arbitrarily, by an officer. And to prolong the agony for us all, they operated by districts, without even giving notice in which district they would operate each night; for it was at dawn, at 3 in the morning, that these heroes, with a band, and machine guns and fixed bayonets, would go and hunt out women and children to take them away. God knows where or why. They say: Far from the front, for work which has nothing to do with the war; but we have already heard that the poor things have been received in certain places with volleys of stones because they were coming, it was alleged, voluntarily, to work where the population had refused to do so. It is a diabolical lie, as is the whole scheme; for this was the object of the registration card, giving age, sex, capacity and aptitude for all sorts of work, and the identity

card which we had to carry with us always, and the prohibition to sleep away from home. Well, for about the last three weeks raids were carried out in the two large neighbouring towns; any one was taken, in the streets, in the trams, and those who were taken never reappeared. We were terrified, and when several girls and children had been carried off like this, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities protested in admirable terms: "I cannot believe" said one, "in this violation of all justice and all rights; this abominable act, opposed alike to morality and justice, would bring on its authors universal condemnation". "I learn", said another, "that our families are threatened with extreme measures; I have faith in the conscience of humanity; a punishment which could tear girls and children from their mothers, to send them to unknown destinations in horrible promiscuity, would be as cruel as it is undeserved; it would be contrary to the very elements of morality. You are a father, your Excellency, and you will understand what such extreme measures would mean for our closely united families". In answer to this, the writers of the protests were assembled on Thursday before Easter at 4 o'clock, and when they were assembled placards of terror were posted up, and they were given to understand that that was their answer, and that when they went into the streets they could read it like the rest of the population. Further, they were told, as the abominable action had been decided upon, they had nothing to do but to hold their tongues. Well, the notice warned everybody - except infirm old men, children under 14 and their mothers to hold themselves ready for deportation, each being entitled to 30 kilogrammes of luggage. With this object in view, domiciliary visits were going to be made, all the inhabitants of a house being bound to present themselves at the door of the open house with their identity card in their hands, to show themselves to the officer, who notified which of them was to be deported: no protest was to be made. As we came out of church we read this threat, which was to be carried out at once for some, and which, in other cases, hung over our heads like a sword of Damocles; and this during ten long days and ten interminable nights, since the Germans were working by districts. And it was left to the arbitrary pleasure of an officer to choose the victims. And not knowing from night to night if it was our turn, we used to wake up as if in a dreadful nightmare, with sweat on our brow and anguish in our heart. No words can tell you what those days were. We are all still prostrate from it...

On the night of Friday to Saturday before Easter, at 3 o'clock, the troops, on their rounds to invest the first district on the list, Fives, came to our house. It was terrible. The officer went round, pointing out the men and women whom he chose, and giving them, to make their preparations, a period varying from an hour to ten minutes. Antoine D. and his sister of 22 were carried off. After considerable difficulties the sister under 14 was left, and her grandmother, ill from grief and terror, had to receive the rites of the Church at once; at last the girl was allowed to return. But here an old man, there two invalids could not get leave to keep the daughter who was their only support. And everywhere the German jeered, adding insult to injury. For example, at the house of the doctor, B's uncle, they left Madame the choice between her two servants; she chose the elder one. "Good", they answered, "that is the one we will take". The youngest Mile L., who has just had typhoid and bronchitis, saw the sergeant who was carrying off her servant

approaching her: "What a sad duty we have to do". – "More than sad, monsieur, one might call it barbarous". "That is a bard word. Are you not afraid that I shall give you away?" And, as a matter of fact, the traitor did denounce her. She was given seven minutes and carried off bare-headed, in slippers, to the colonel who was in charge of this noble military operation and who condemned her to go in spite of the doctor's opinion. And it was only due to his inexhaustible energy and the pity of a German less brutal than the others that she obtained her release at 5 o'clock in the evening, after a day of perfect agony. The miserable people, at whose doors a sentinel for each victim was on guard, were taken off first to some place - a church or a school - then in a troop, all classes together, of all moral grades, modest girls and prostitutes, surrounded by soldiers, with a band at the head, to the station, whence they set out in the evening without knowing their destination or to what work they were to be set. And through it all our people preserved their calm and their dignity admirably, although that day the Germans gave them every provocation, by parading the motors full of these wretched victims round the streets. They all started off with cries of "Vive la France!" "Vive la liberté!" and singing the Marseillaise. They comforted those who were left behind, their poor weeping mothers and the children; pale with grief and choked by tears, they forbade them to weep; they did not weep themselves and remained proud, appearing impassive in face of their persecutors. I will go on with my story. A respite was announced for Easter Day and the Monday, forty-eight hours; it was a great deal. A fresh vehement indignant protest was despatched to the High Command; a slight hope sprang up again. In the evening the sermon ended with these admirable words: "I should have liked to leave you with a word of joy and hope, but those who for the last two years have oppressed us and have overwhelmed us with a thousand persecutions, have turned these days of rejoicings into days of mourning. My risen Christ, wilt Thou not breathe in me a word of confidence on this day of the Resurrection? Listen, my people, let the wicked man accomplish his iniquity, keep your soul tranquil and your heart courageous. And you, my children, be brave. Providence is near and will know what you have suffered, the Eternal God will take upon Him your defence. He will brand with an indelible mark the forehead of your oppressor, and those who have seen you set out on a bitter path with mourning and weeping will see you return with triumph and great glory, for suffering passes away, but to suffer for the Right and for Justice endures for ever (Prophecy of the Prophet Baruch)". These words, delivered from the pulpit, with authority, seemed a very Anathema. All shuddered, and tears stood in the eyes of all.

We were counting on a respite of at least one more night, but in the evening, at half past nine, the Town Hall caught fire. It is better to preserve the general silence about this occurrence; what is the good of talking? The fire broke out just above the office in which were the only requisition vouchers, pledging the credit of State to State. Thanks to our Town Councillors, who were more devoted than can be expressed, these vouchers were saved, as well as the town records and accounts, till the next time. But the fire soon took hold in every part; there was no water and the building was gutted. And by the light of the fire, at three in the morning, the domiciliary visits began again in the Vauban quarter. By good luck the D's,

counting on the respite, imagined it was a simple verification, and, as no one was chosen in their house, were not even alarmed. It was not until an hour later that they realised that people were being carried off. Mlle B., Mlle de B., Mlle L., who could only be released at 5 o'clock in the evening; young men, D., D., Van P., Jean F., J., M., mostly 17 years old, and numbers of others, 1.500 to 2.000 a day. The servants were carried off everywhere almost, or offered themselves voluntarily to take the place of the daughters of the house or to accompany them. On the other hand, Mme D. took the place of her maid who was ill; when she was sent back she wanted to stay: "You ought not to send me back because I have some money, can't you see that it is disgraceful", and they threatened to send her back forcibly. The concentration camps looked like slave markets, and the Germans were told so.

As our turn came late, we had time to warn as far as possible the girls whom we call among ourselves "les Soeurs" or "les Nous Deux". They packed their luggage courageously, each of them wanting, in case of the worst, to take the other's place, and I had to decide who had better be let go. On the Monday we got some comfort in the small village where we used to go with you last year; everybody overwhelmed us with their sympathy, anxious for us and with us, for no one, not even our Town Councillors, was free from fear. All did their best for us and Mme D. made me promise to let her know; if the above mentioned girls were to go, she, as she was free, would go with them and be a mother to them. And for the whole week this agony lasted, this anguish weighed us down. A., A.'s servant, was carried off but let go again, thanks partly to her father; so too C. and her young sister, whose gratitude was touching. L. A.'s daughter carried off. At last our turn came. As you can imagine, I could not sleep. I heard the troops coming round and woke up the whole household when the visits began in the street at four o'clock. It lasted till half-past one, our turn at half-past ten. Do you realise our agony for those six mortal hours? No doubt we had a chance of succeeding in getting them exempted, but it was almost equally certain for every one that some would be taken and was it not too much to spend the day without any real certainty of getting them off - a day for them spent among the lowest girls of our district. Well, God again showed us his fatherly protection, and after counting every one the Germans went on without choosing anyone; but we are still prostrate. It was wretched to watch the girls of our street going past in silence, one by one, escorted by a sentry; three from the little workshop which I had started. I had warned them with deep emotion of the dangers they would have to guard against. It was the Good Friday before the first deportation and they could not restrain their tears and like everyone else they were distressed at the thought that they were going to be made to work for the enemy and were asking what they would have to do. Meanwhile all fear has not passed for us. Is not father himself, alas! Threatened? They have taken the principal accountant of our factory, the husband of M., who is the same age as he is. What if he were to be taken, too? Pray, dear, pray all of you with us, I implore you, and while thanking God for having spared us this time, us, Aunt A. and all her children as well as our relations and friends (relations of B.), pray God to continue His protection, we have such great need of it! Will deliverance never come? Think, my friends, of the grief of all these mothers who were watching over their daughters with such care and from whom their daughters have been roughly torn.

And soldiers and officers have consented to do such work. They were told another lie - that we had revolted and that it was a punishment. And at Roubaix the officers of the Guards refused, in the face of a calm and dignified population, to carry off women and children by night. Here it is the 64th regiment, back from Verdun, that has consented to do the work. Some of them, they said, would have preferred to stay in the trenches...At any rate they will get the Iron Cross, and the name of this glorious feat of arms will decorate their colours. Above all, above all our soldiers at the front must not avenge us by similar acts; that would sully the fair name of France. Let them leave it to God to avenge such misdeeds, such crimes. The Germans, as a woman told them from whom they took her husband, her son, and her daughter, will be accursed in their race, in their wives and in their children. This is the end of this long and miserable story, but I have not been able to depict the terrible suffering of those whose homes have thus been decimated. Many will die of it. As Monseigneur said, it is the passion of our families added to the Passion of Christ. One woman sweated blood on seeing her young son taken; he was brought back to her, but she did not recognise him. It is terrible and our position seems to me very critical. Pray for us. Soon, we are told, it will be all the men. Many, who are left, were told: "In a fortnight". Then, the story runs, it will be deportation to France, if one pays, and that we shall have to refuse to do...The Germans are trying already to get money and I know one who is near to you and who refused with his usual calm dignity; like all good Frenchmen he has given his all to France and has nothing left, but then no more business, no more outside trade, and I was afraid they will try to force us that way, no more food. Already, since you went away, or rather during the last three months, they have only distributed meat twice. But let us finish on a more cheerful note. Yesterday we had a good letter from H. at last; he cannot, unfortunately, tell us of the family which is on the other side, but only of those who are near him, that is how he told us that our dear G. and H. have gone to work and are well. If at the price of all our sufferings we could succeed in seeing all those again whom we love, with what joy would we bear our misery! How cheerfully do we already offer our sacrifice to that end! We are not at all overwhelmed, everyone remains firm and full of courage, and the Germans, in spite of the pleasure some of them say they have taken in the sight, have hardly ever had the chance of seeing our women and girls weep. Do you remember? We used to say laughingly: "When you have gone, we shall tell you that what we suffered when you were there was nothing". Alas! We did not think we were speaking so truly. The very day after your departure came the proclamation about typhus and the Draconian regulations for those who had it, the threat, carried out in many cases, of patients being taken to hospital where their families could not nurse their or even see them. Then a thousand annoyances: cards, registration, &c., and the privation of everything, meat, butter, eggs, vegetables, potatoes, nothing more except by smuggling, which was getting more rare and more dangerous every day. And less news than ever - only one letter since your departure and M. P.'s. And yet others get news. Still, perhaps, all these small trials spare us greater ones. Let us say our "Fiat" together, pray God together to continue His protection to us. Here we think of you, love you, pray with you, suffer

for you. Love to the dear children whom we miss so much and to all our dear ones, to G., and to you, all love from. MARIE

“P.S.-This letter is no exaggeration. You can communicate it, so as to make the German people known to those who would not have enough hatred and contempt to prevent them having dealings with Germans after the war. We are told that on the other side people think that our life, apart from some petty persecutions, is bearable. Well, then, no. It has not been for the last five months. There was the typhus gaining ground steadily, then the explosion and the terrible shock of it even for those not directly affected. And the privations of all sorts. The petty persecutions which go so far as to deprive the town of all substantial food. No meat, except that of the Committee, may be brought into the town, and we have had twice 150 grammes per person in four months; again, one pays 5 francs a pound for it even to the Committee. In order to give my family a slice of meat as thin as a leaf and as large as the hollow of your hand, each slice costing me 1 franc 50, I am almost always obliged to go and fetch it in Hellemmes or Marcq, risking nothing less than to be led off into the Citadel, since it is forbidden to bring into Lille from the outside any meat or other provisions in however small quantities. All the grocers, greengrocers, butchers, are shut. Many live on nothing but rice. One day a cartload of fish and eggs arrived for us; contrary to all right, they were commandeered and sent to Germany. Another day there arrived, through the Committee, for the town 55.000 francs worth of meat. A series of vexatious proceedings stopped it and left it to rot where it lay. The potatoes were and in the neighbourhood are being spoilt; the Germans will not let them be brought in and our strength is diminishing... I am not telling you this to make you pity us, but to show you that oven physically we are not strong enough for the moral tortures which we endure, deprived of all comforts, of all news of you. So the mortality is increasing alarmingly, 45 per cent, in a population reduced by half. Numerous cases of madness in certain districts are not to be wondered at. We are at the end of our strength; one has to be constantly on the watch to defend and help the poor people. We only keep going by a constant strain of spirit and strength. Up till now I have written each week, but I am losing heart for it, and I think I am going to resign myself to waiting for an answer. Communicate this scrap, too, to everybody.(Signed) D.”

The following 16 letters have been communicated by the Ministry of War, and the originals are preserved in that department.

Annexe 14.

Letter from X, at Lille, 1st May, 1916, to Mme L. G., at Paris-Passy.

“This week has been terrible for our unhappy town: 1.200 to 1.500 people have been carried off every night, escorted by soldiers with fixed bayonets and bands playing, machine guns at the corners of the streets, principally girls and young women of all sorts, also men from 15 to 50, sent off promiscuously in cattle trucks with wooden benches, for unknown destinations and employments, nominally to work on the land. You can imagine the despair and agony of their relations. We

learn this afternoon that the horrible business is over and our quarter has been spared. I had come to sleep at home for the first time in two years, in the attempt to save any maid. I am at last going to sleep without the fear of being wakened in the middle of the night to go and open the door to an invasion of soldiers. There will be nobody left except mothers with children under 14, or old men. In the middle of all this the Town Hall was burnt out one night, as if by magic. The deported people, however, showed truly French courage; they kept back their tears, and the trains left the station to the sound of the Marseillaise. The worse things are, the nearer to deliverance it seems to us we are coming”.

Annexe 15.

Letter from M X., at Lille, to M. V., at Paris.

“We have seen our streets invaded in the middle of the night by hordes of soldiers, with fixed bayonets and machine guns (how shameful!) tearing girls of all ages and lads of fourteen from their mothers’ arms without pity for these mothers who, on their knees, implored their conquerors for mercy, and all these unfortunate creatures massed indiscriminately with the dregs of the population, packed into commandeered trams, sent off like troops of slaves to an unknown destination. What impotent hatred for the moment, but later what responsibility for the higher authorities, from the private to the general! Tell all this to our son”.

Annexe 16.

Letter, dated 26th April, 1916, from X., at Lille, addressed to Mme E., at Versailles.

“People like us carry on fairly well from day to day in the matter of provisions, and those who are suffering would hardly admit it, now that it is being used as a pretext for a measure which turns the three towns upside-down, namely, the deportation of the citizens. I say pretext, for there are sure to be other reasons - to aggravate us, to carry out noisy reprisals, for they know quite well that we shall get them, and to lay their hands on the male population from 17 to 55, which would be especially explicable if they want to prepare for their retreat. But why are they taking women in the proportion of 20 to 30 per cent., as far as one can see from the last few days? Is it for agricultural work, as they say? Is it to form concentration camps? Is it to repopulate the Ardennes region which is said to be depopulated, or to have all the remaining civilians from here to oppose our advance down there? I also think that they may have embarked on this vile business through sheer stupidity: the order comes from above, the subordinates, including the Governor, carry it out; the protests of the Mayors and the Bishop have been rejected. The decision, so they say, is irrevocable; the slaves have nothing to do but to keep silent. We are in their bands. The first operation took place on the night from Good Friday to the Saturday; pause for Easter - the second took place last night, and it will go on. You know that each house has to have a list posted of the inhabitants.

We must be at home, there is no means of getting out of it since the identity cards. I did not see the proceedings of tonight, but the ceremonies must have been the same as before. The streets guarded at both ends by troops, sent on purpose a week ago from Cambrai or, elsewhere, machine guns in place, 10 to 15 men halt before the house with fixed bayonets, two enter with a non-commissioned officer and the officer, who decides and chooses those who are to go. These have from 20 minutes to an hour to come down into the street with a nominal 30 kgm. of luggage, and are marched to some place - the church of Fives, the school of St. Joseph - and from there to the station for the east. In the morning the women cried out as they passed: "We are going to Belgium. It is not to cultivate the soil of France". If they want to carry us off into Germany before the advance of our troops let them say so. But the worst is this uncertainty. I do not want to overload the picture, it is dark enough. It is enough for you to know that since the beginning of this raid they have carried off young girls; that that still seems to be part of their system; that, as a matter of fact, these deportations of young girls were frequent the first night, although they have, it is said, sent a certain number of them back from the station, and this has been done again tonight. Think of the terror of the fathers and mothers, of the distress of daughters of good families, who do not know what is happening, of the horrible situation of those who see their dear ones go, and if, as I think, the people of the upper classes escape these risks almost entirely, how wretched is the lot of the respectable people of the lower classes, who have nothing but their respectability, to have it so exposed. The mothers with children under 14 are left. What more can they do with us, except sell us in the public squares of German towns?"

Annexe 17.

Letter addressed to Mme D., in Paris, by X., in Lille, 3rd May, 1916.

"Our Eastertide was very miserable. They have conceived the idea of transplanting, part of the population into abandoned or half - abandoned villages in the invaded parts of France to work in the fields. It was done in the best military way. They took men, women, lads, girls of all classes. Exemption for women with small children. Each morning they operated in a district at 3 a.m. The victims were packed together half an hour afterwards at the St. Sauveur station. They did not come to us. There were, as you can imagine, some distressing scenes. Mme C. H., who had gone back to sleep at F. in order to obey the proclamation, was taken, but was released twelve hours later, having had the good luck to meet at the station an important personage from the factory, who was one of the American Committee. I was not molested".

Annexe 18.

Letter addressed to Mme R. D., in Paris, by X., in Lille, 2nd May, 1916.

"But this material part (the high price of food) is nothing to the agony that we had to endure the whole of Easter week, owing to the military deportation of

women, by night, to go we know not where. You can understand the revolt and indignation of decent people to bring up children in order to have them carried off in this inhuman fashion. The town completely plunged in grief that was our Easter week; this is far more terrible than shortage of food. No one slept for a week, always wondering, "Will it be tonight?" At 3 in the morning one heard the patrols, a regular deportation of slaves. These odious measures will, we hope, attract attention to us, and we shall be avenged for these barbarous proceedings".

Annexe 19.

Letter from X., at Lille, dated the 7th May, 1916, and addressed to Madame B., in Paris.

"Horrible affair at Lille, tell it everywhere; the deportation of 6.000 women and 6.000 men; for eight nights at two in the morning, districts invested by the 64th Regiment (spread it in France that it came from Verdun), forcibly dragged off girls of 18 and women up to 45; 2.000 a night. Herded in a factory; sorting out during the day and carried off in the evening; scattered from Seclin to Sedan in abandoned villages, farms, &c.; cook and wash for the soldiers, replacing orderlies sent to the front; working on the land, especially servants and working girls, few girls of good family. Rue Royale, hardly any servants left; crowded in with men of all ages without distinction; horrible immorality; some German officers refused to obey, some soldiers were crying, the rest brutal. Ernest W. carried off, his brother C. was one day in the fortress for having protested, sons have remained; X. is near Hirson. Mlle B. and Mlle de B. carried off; wanted to follow some poor girls who were their protégées; came to any house at four in the morning, no one taken; no one came to No. 14. Protests by the Mayors and the sous-prefets. Useless. Same operations at Tourcoing (6.000) and at Roubaix (4.000). The town is in despair".

Annexe 20.

Letter from J., the 8th May, 1916, to Madame V., at Berck-Plage.

"M. C.J., It is only a fortnight since my last letter and here I am again. My excuse is that you and your friends, perhaps, want news of the forcible deportation of part of our population, and that I can reassure you about the fate of those who are dear to you. The operation went on the whole of Easter week. Except the centre of the town, all the districts suffered. They carried off nearly 10.000 inhabitants, men of 55 and lads of 16, women who were keeping shop and young girls who were torn away from their parents, with only this restriction that those under 20 years of age were accompanied by some member of their family; it was very sad, and the Germans will never purge themselves of such conduct. Many of the soldiers were in despair at the duty which was imposed on them; the old men of the Landsturm may have blushed at it, but the young non-commissioned officers carried it out with real Prussian thoroughness. As you can imagine there were moving scenes at the moment of separation; the soldiers led off their victims to the

St. Sauveur Station, and their parents could not accompany them. They stayed there till the evening when cattle trucks, with planks for seats, carried them away. They started with cries of “Vive la France”, and to the tune of the equally forbidden Marseillaise. This is the first time since the occupation that this song and this cry have been heard. In spite, of their misery those deported showed a firm bearing in the face of the enemy. A small number of those deported is in the villages round Orchies, the rest are on the Aisne, in the Ardennes, and in Belgium. Very few seem capable of working on the land. You cannot make farm hands out of clerks and young girls and shop girls, of dressmakers and factory hands. We shall not know till later the true reason of these deportations, but the pretexts given will not hold water. The vehement protests of the authorities, perhaps, helped to reduce the expected number of victims, perhaps they will help to get the women back; we hope so without counting on it too much. Meanwhile, the whole city is in consternation. As far as the people who affect you, or whom I know, here is my news. At your cousin’s house, Rue X., the Germans did not even appear; at your aunt’s everything passed off quietly, they contented themselves with asking your uncle’s age and that was all. At Madame C.’s and Madame B.’s no one was taken, they are all on the favoured list. On the other hand, on the list of the unlucky ones you must put your employer’s cook and maid, our comrades V., C., R., the engineer F. and his wife. My baker has kept his daughter, but the poor child had been so afraid of possible deportation that she has been ill for the last week. Numbers of people besides are reported to be still in bed in consequence of their anxiety or of the despair caused by separation. Roubaix, Tourcoing had the same fate as us, but the communes in the neighbourhood were spared, such as Loos, Haubourdin, La Madeleine, Lambersart, &c. E’s wife was not molested. In short, your family and the families of your school friends, with whom you are in touch over there, have come off all right, and that is what I wanted to write and tell you at once. There was no trouble either at Madame S.’s or Madame G.’s. Beside these deportations nothing counts and I ought to end my letter here; but here are a few words more on our situation”.

Annexe 21.

Letter signed R., not dated, and addressed to Madame B., in Paris.

“My dear C., I suppose the people in France already know of all the trials through which we are passing, each more painful than the last. We have come out of this last one again scot free, and have stayed here, both of us, till a new order comes. We spent a terrible Easter week here; this is what happened. On Wednesday the 19th of this month, a placard warning the population that there were going to be deportations by order in the invaded territory, that each person was to furnish himself with household utensils and had the right to 30 kilogrammes of luggage. You can imagine the panic in the town. Two days of waiting passed and at last, on the night of Friday 21st to Saturday 22nd, the streets of one district were blocked by the police at 3 in the morning and the alarm given in each house, with the order to keep in the passage with all luggage. They had brought for this vile

duty soldiers, or rather brutes, from another locality simply in order that there should not be any friendliness or weakness towards families who would have begged for mercy. Then, according to the number of people living in the house, the brute made his choice. They carried off girls of the family, servants, men of all sorts and of all ages. They attacked chiefly the working class, which unfortunately always suffer the most; lads and girls of good family who were caught in the raid were released; the same was the case with people seriously ill, but for them application had to be made and often they were put into the train before exemption was granted. From the 22nd to the 29th, inclusive, 9.890 were deported; a reprieve was granted for Easter day. All these poor people wondered where and why they were being taken away; there were, I can assure you, sad pictures, but always the cheerful side as well, for one heard groups singing, some patriotic songs, others popular tunes, and as they were kept at the station the whole day some groups played cards, while waiting for their departure. One could even say that the greater number were cheerful, or rather put on a good face against their misfortune, to the bewilderment of the Boches, who were amazed to see the French character not recoiling before any sacrifice. In spite of that, it is painful to be at their mercy like this, for everything about them is false, and one wonders what is the object of this deportation and in what state of health and morale these people will come back. Then, as a climax to our misfortunes, on Easter night, a fire, due to some unknown cause, entirely destroyed the Town Hall; fortunately the essential things were saved, but what a tragic nights”.

Annexe 22.

Letter of the 9th May, 1916, addressed to Mme Jules T., at Versailles, by X., in Lille.

“It began on Saturday before Easter day, at 3 in the morning, at Fives, for Lille, at La –Marlière, for Tourcoing, and for Roubaix I do not know in what district. A regiment arrived for this duty, the marked streets were blocked with machine guns and armed soldiers, and men, women, lads, young girls from 14 or 15 years of age, were carried off indiscriminately, but to their greater misfortune the mothers with children below 14 were exempted. During the whole of Easter week 40 to 50 thousand people were carried off from the three towns, district by district. Slavery re-established for the French under the occupation. These poor slaves were crowded anyhow into cattle trucks, men and women together, and sent in unknown directions. We have heard that some landed at Orchies, Templeuve, Hirson, Sedan, Lens, come to work on the land, on the roads, at munitions and at trenches. Women, especially the servants, kept to wait on the officers, to replace the orderlies. All the districts were visited, except the district of La Grand’ Place, Rue Nationale, Boulevard de la Liberté; shop girls, clerks, men and women. The first days - they carried off girls of the aristocracy, so their mothers in despair tried to accompany them, but they released them generally; in the schools, some boys carried off too, but few. When people had officers living in their houses, these often interposed to get them leave to stay. It is terribly sad here, the bombardment,

bombs, the explosion, were nothing to the agony of this week; it ended with the St. Maurice district. Monseigneur, the Mayor, the Director of Provisioning, all protested against these deportations (the pretext given for them was the difficulty of feeding the population because of the English). The Germans have never troubled to feed us, and provisioning has never been so well assured, except for meat”.

Annexe 23.

Letter signed “Louise”, dated the 9th May, addressed for M. E. c l o M. le Chanoine D., St. Omier, Pas-de-Calais.

“Dear Papa, On Thursday, 20th April, placards were put up in the evening. “The attitude of England makes the provisioning of the population more and more difficult. In order to lessen the misery, the population will be deported. By Order”. The following night the military began their brutal work in Fives. At 3 o’clock in the morning there was a knocking at the doors, an officer came in and chose the people who were to go. A soldier was on sentry duly, with fixed bayonet, at the door. A few minutes were given for packing. Machine guns were placed at intervals; the streets were full of patrols and blocked by soldiers; fixed bayonets everywhere. They collected the people in the church of the district, and they were all sent off promiscuously in cattle trucks. What morals, what hygiene! Mothers with young children alone got exemption. As we all three came under the conditions, we packed our luggage in great depression. Monseigneur and the Mayor courageously had several conversations with the Generals; as Monseigneur was energetically standing up for the population, he was answered with these courteous words: “You Bishop, be quiet and go!”. The Germans operated by police districts; Rue I., our old street, was dealt with on the night of Easter Sunday to Monday. People were sleeping peacefully, for the night before they had been told that a despatch from neutrals had put an end to this disgraceful state of affairs. The Milles J., who had been carried off with their brother and their maid, have been released. Madame L’s maid has been taken, and, generally speaking, all servants; as our street is in a different district, it was only dealt with on the night Wednesday to Thursday. Fortunately, before reaching us the Germans had made enormous raids at Wazemmes, and they were less unpleasant. Mother stayed in bed, saying she was ill. A. and I received the officer, who authorised us to stay. I think the picture of father in uniform, which we have had in the dining room since the separation, saved me. I said I was the daughter of an officer of whom we had had no news since the battle of the Marne. It was pretty terrifying, this military visit. We thank God every day for leading your steps to Naerd. You would certainly have been carried off, both of you. The Germans realise that by this disgraceful act they have set an indelible stain on their flag. Several officers and soldiers are imprisoned in the fortress for having refused the duty. On the other hand a Boche, doctor of philosophy and of political jurisprudence, a clergyman, told a gentleman that they would recoil from nothing for the safety of the Empire. Is this Satan’s last blow, or are we to expect fresh crimes? On the night of Easter Sunday to Monday,

fire broke out in the Town Hall. A short circuit, it is said. The Germans were pleased, thinking they saw all their requisition vouchers, &c., disappearing in this huge furnace. A great many things are saved, but of the Town Hall there only remains the tower and the four walls. We were uncertain about hiring a safe, and did not do it. An embargo has been put a second time, on the banks”.

Annexe 24.

Letter signed C., Lille, dated 1st May, 1916, addressed to Mme A. A., at La Tronche (Isère).

“For the moment I am well enough in spite of the annoyance caused daily by these dirty dogs, and in spite of the present difficulties of provisioning, which will soon end in complete famine if this goes on...About Easter, on the Saturday before, the Boches proceeded in all districts in the town, except the centre, forcibly to deport a certain number of inhabitants - men, women, girls, lads, without distinction of social status. At 4 o'clock in the morning they blocked the streets and the regiment charged with this work, the 64th, hammered on each door with the butts of their rifles. Then an officer went round and pointed out the people in the house who were to go. About 8,000 persons were carried off like this and no one knows exactly where they were sent or what work they are to do. Today about 40 women have come back. You can imagine the effect of this hooligan measure. The same thing was done in the neighbouring towns and villages. With the Germans we must no longer be astonished at anything”.

Annexe 25.

Letter unsigned, from Lille, to M. M., at Rennes, 16th May, 1916.

“In the last forcible deportation none of our friends were compelled to go except our old housekeeper and her daughter (the wife of the policeman). They have come back, as M. is not 17 and is a delicate girl. As you must know, we have to submit to all sorts of humiliations and petty persecutions, if not worse”.

Annexe 26.

Letter unsigned, from Lille, 8th May, 1916, addressed to M. B., at Vigan.

“The men in grey made raids and carried off men, women and girls to send them nominally to the Ardennes; 200 pupils of Institut Turgot were carried off, little girls of 15 . . . The number is put at 20,000 for the towns of Roubaix and Tourcoing”.

Annexe 27.

Letter from X., Lille, Hay, 1916, to Mme Chi. F., at Wimereux.

“At this moment households almost everywhere are upset; deportation of men and women above the age of 15, disgraceful in point of morals and cruelty. The indignation of certain mothers made the business a little less bad; we try to think it is a secret beginning of retreat; we always keep before us that gleam of hope of deliverance. In our families we were spared: the common people were especially affected”.

Annexe 28.

Letter from P. and from A., at Roubaix (20th May, 1916), to the family M., at St. Germain-en-Laye.

“At this moment there is great excitement here. All our towns are full of disquieting rumours as a result of some deportations of men and lads, as well as of some women and girls. They say that this might become general. A first proclamation had announced that families out of work might go and settle in the country in the Department of the Nord, in the districts where they could make a living more easily. Some days later, about the 5th of April, a second proclamation announced: “Workmen can find healthy and congenial work at Gommagnies and Herbignies, in the Val district, 60 kilometers behind the front. It is a question of cutting medium-sized trees in the Mormal Forest...Wages, 3 fr. a day, plus board and lodging”. Apparently hardly anyone offered himself. A few days later, in Roubaix and Tourcoing, young men, women and girls were arrested in the street and in their houses without any reason being given. It is said the arrests were especially of people who had previously been convicted of smuggling potatoes, or of failing to appear at roll calls, &c. For we are bound hand and foot, no question of passes of any sort, even to villages near by, nothing except for Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing. It is said that all these people were sent to Sedan, Mézières and Vervins, to form agricultural colonies to work on the land; feeling grew even stronger when the rumour got about on Saturday that a score of German employees were working at the town hall on the recent census lists of the population, with a view to taking haphazard 25.000 people in Lille, 15.000 in Roubaix, 10.000 in Tourcoing, three-fifths of whom are to be women and girls and two-fifths men from 17 to 50. People refuse to believe it; it is contrary to international law; but one cannot be wholly sceptical, for they are said in several factories, Lepers-Duvene, C. & F. Flipo, Veuve Fouan et fils, to have prepared some of the store rooms to house people, with lavatories for men and for women and a surgery for medical examination, &c. The most improbable rumours are current; that it is a case of reprisals by the German Government for the English blockade, or for a similar act of deportation by the French Government in the conquered German Colonies, or that it is a scheme for repopulating too sparsely-inhabited districts, either with a view to the harvest or as a protection against bombardment by the Allies. Whatever it is, all families are in an agony. Indignant protests have been sent by our leading

men, the Mayor of Lille and Monseigneur Charost. The strict enforcement of this measure seems provisionally to go suspended. Let us hope they will get back to a more sound appreciation of international law... As regards the deportations of men, are they meaning to, take those of military age? No one knows”.

The two following letters were received and communicated to the Foreign Office by M. Boudenoot, Senator:

Annexe 29.

Extract from a letter from Roubaix.

14th April, 1916.

“Now deportations are beginning. Two thousand men and lads have gone from our town, and that is not all. At first they were taken in the streets, then in their own Homes, only among the common people up till now. I have seen troops of them starting off, and I assure you it is heartrending. The women throw parcels to their husbands, brothers, sons as they pass. These latter are generally resolute, some of them were singing. It was the sending off of women and girls whom they had hunted out that roused the strongest feeling. You can realise the state of mind of parents seeing young girls of 16 to 20 going off amongst lads of all conditions, no one knows where. In our circles mothers are trembling for their grown sons. The men are packing their belongings in case they have to go. We are in an atmosphere of misery, owing to these new measures, but in spite of it we keep up our courage and our confidence”.

Annexe 30.

Extract from a letter from a mother to her son, aged 17.

April 14th, 1916.

“I used to deplore your absence, but now I thank heaven that you are away. Our invaders are embarking now on a terrible man-hunt. I have seen boys of your age led off in herds with grown men for an unknown destination. It is heartrending. It is said that this is only the beginning, and all the men are making their preparations”.

Annexe 31.

Letter from Mme D., from Lille (Nord), to her husband, M. D., at Wimereux. May 14th 1916

(Communicated to the Minister of the Interior)

“My dearest J., Our friends who have been deported will have given you recent news of us and a number of details of our secluded life, of the advantages of our situation, the benefits conferred by German administration, and the kindness of the authorities. Since their departure. we have witnessed a humanitarian measure which consists in dividing up families, taking here a daughter, there a mother, there

a father, or leaving an octogenarian of either sex without support or help, in order to permit the people “voluntarily” deported to get provisions better, and to lead a more normal life by – “planting” potatoes, as they call it. Nothing that has happened has made me so indignant as this infamous proceeding, criminal in its consequences and in its possibilities, carried out under the cloak of humanity. These families are in tears over these forced separations. Parents have lost their reason at seeing their daughter or their daughters going off into the unknown, which is so full of dangers and snares. It has caused the death of others, and as for me I have thanked heaven for all these months of separation, which have at least spared me this last agony, alas! such justifiable agony. The town is in the depths of depression since the deportations, and for the last ten days my mind has been blank, and my heavy heart has been feeling all the despair which I have witnessed. I have had to give consolation and help; poor X. has been carried off, we do not yet know where and under what conditions. All France, all nations must be told of this fresh crime, with its cunning preparation, its cloak of lies, its hidden rascality. Many of those who carried out the work were disgusted with their task. All I hope is that their minds may be enlightened by it, and that they may understand what it means. As usual I was spared, though I held myself in readiness to go since any one might to be chosen”.