

TRANSCRIPT

- OF -

PROCEEDINGS BEFORE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS'
TRIBUNAL AT BLOOMSBURY COUNTY COURT, 209
GREAT PORTLAND STREET, W.1. TUESDAY, 4TH JUNE 1940

COUNT HENRY NOEL BENTINCK called.

Q. Are you Count Henry Noel Bentinck?

A. Yes.

Q. How old are you?

A. 20.

A statement was then put in by Count Bentinck which was partly read out by the Chairman. It included the following:-

"I went to Sandhurst in August 1938. I saw young men as yet unable to view the Army system and principles objectively being trained from youth as professional killers. I was horrified and after stormy but unproductive interviews with my guardian I ran away.

I base my attitude of conscientious objection to military service on a positive belief in the underlying unity of man."

Q. Are you in employment at present?

A. No, sir. When I left Sandhurst I was abroad for a considerable period. I only got back in January.

Q. You got back in January.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. I am afraid I have not grasped this statement fully. You say you have no objection to war work as such?

A. I mean practically everything under the status of war work. What I mean is that I do not object to doing any form of work which existed before the war and which is now under the auspices of the military and which I might have done before the war.

Q. Can you in a few sentences say what work you'd like to do?

A. In the first place I think it unreasonable to say that in order to have a preference for one form of activity one can have a conscientious approval of that kind of action rather than a conscientious objection to its opposite. I have a very strong feeling that during a war it is essential for the Government to build up a very high pitch of determination and morale which becomes a

part of war fever. It is difficult to make people in time of war think clearly and constructively towards their enemy. We must prepare their minds to make a really constructive Europe.

Q. That is the outline?

A. Yes. We cannot make any re-organisation unless the people are prepared immediately to make any such construction and then we are going to have another Versailles and it will be too late.

Q. I wonder whether a young man of 20 is the right person to determine that, or whether there is some more useful and urgent thing for him to do.

A. I don't suppose a young man of 20 could do very much.

Q. You say that you have no wish that the Nazis should go into this country.

A. I think that if England can go Nazi it will be a great set-back for Europe.

Q. That being so, you will agree that whatever may be done after the war the most urgent thing as the country is on the verge of being invaded is to do something?

A. Neither one thing is more essential than the other.

Q. The prevention of a successful invasion is the more urgent. However, you do admit that it is important to take any step one can to prevent the success of the Nazi influence in England. Now you are a British citizen and I take it that you as a citizen are willing to do what you can for the community?

A. I am willing to do what I can for mankind because I believe myself to be primarily a man.

Q. You are enjoying the products of their labours?

A. I am also enjoying the products of ----- (inaudible)

Q. You are getting food at the expense of the lives of young men of your own age. You were at Sandhurst and probably you were sent there?

A. Yes.

Q. Your objection is the killing.

A. Yes.

Q. Are you a conscientious objector to non-combatant service?

A. Yes, because the Ordnance Corps - the Royal Army Ordnance Corps - anything which bears the insignia of the Army is integral to the Army, because otherwise they would not do it.

Q. You know what the non-combatant sections are? They are the Royal Army Medical Corps for instance and the Dental Corps. Have you a conscientious objection to being in one of them?

A. It is this. That in going into some non-combatant Corps I release another man for military duty, so that

the effect of my being there is its effect upon the lives of others.

Q. Is that the extent of your objection?

A. Yes. And that I would be supporting a part of the army which was integral to its success.

Q. But you would be quite willing to see the success of the Army having regard to what Nazism would mean to this country?

A. Yes.

Q. Then you do not object to the success of the army?.

A. That is a point I have foreseen and I cannot answer it. We are better off as a democracy than we would be as Nazis.

Q. I still have not heard any definite objection to non-combatant service.

A. I do say that on the one hand I conscientiously object to killing and on the other hand that I conscientiously object to directly helping others to kill.

Q. Have you any objection to the work of the Royal Army Medical Corps?

A. I have no objection to the actual work of the Royal Army Medical Corps because I have no objection to the medical practitioner around the corner.

Q. You say it would be a disaster if Nazism came to this country

A. I cannot honestly answer that question.

Q. Is it right to kill somebody in defence of your country?

A. I believe it is wrong to kill people.

Q. You say you consider it would be a disaster to this country if Hitler were established?

A. Not specifically to this country.

Q. You did say that you considered it would be a disaster?

A. It would be a disaster to Europe, yes.

Q. And to this country as part of Europe?

A. Yes.

Q. You would welcome the defeat of the Germans to that end?

A. Yes.

Q. You said that Nazism should be destroyed?

A. No, I did not.

Q. You believe Nazi power should be destroyed?

A. I believe there are powers which one might supplant for the good of mankind.

Q. Do you believe that Nazi power as you now see it should be destroyed?

A. What does the destruction of Hitler entail?

Q. I ask you if you think it should be destroyed?

A. I think Nazism is the wrong word. I think the things which go to make Nazism should be destroyed.

Q. You think it should be changed?

A. Yes, because I do not think that Nazism is a good thing.

Q. You admit that you are in a dilemma. On the one hand it would be disastrous if Hitler scored against us and on the other hand you feel a great objection to killing?

A. Yes. I cannot honestly think of any answer that would satisfy both.

Q. You cannot answer the question whether you should take up arms in defence of England. If you cannot answer the question you cannot obviously say that you think it wrong.

A. No sir, because if I say that to take up arms to defend England is right I give my approval to the killing of people, whereas if I say that the taking up of arms is wrong I give my approval to the Nazi regime.

Q. Then it is wrong to defend England by force of arms?

A. Yes.

Q. Then you can answer the question?

A. It is wrong to kill people.

Q. Therefore it is wrong to fight for England?

A. It must be so.

Q. It must be so. So that when you stated that you could not answer the question it was not absolutely what you meant?

A. I have not changed my mind. I maintain my opinion which I have not changed that it is a question which is impossible to answer.

Q. We have limited jurisdiction here. Perhaps your statement has a rather more lengthy subtlety than we are concerned with. What we have to discover is what would this man feel as to the right or wrong of being in the Army. Here is a simple illustration. Take the question of stealing. That is a thing which I think you will take as being wrong?

A. Yes.

Q. About that you do not feel any difficulty?

A. No, because if I say that everybody should be allowed to steal, the result would not be the same as if we all became Nazis. I can say quite definitely that I find it wrong to kill other people.

Q. Then if you were put in the Army you would be doing something wrong just as you would be doing something wrong to steal?

A. The alternative is one which is also wrong.

Q. Then you have not got the same definite feelings as

you have about stealing?

A. I have a very strong conviction that it is wrong to kill.

Q. You do not want to see the Nazi system established?

A. No.

Q. And you probably realise that invasion may be a very imminent question during the next few weeks?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you think the British Army would be doing a crime in defending its country against an invasion by the German Army?

A. I beg your pardon?

Q. Do you think the British Army would be doing a sin or a crime?

A. Yes.

Q. The alternative to that is that in your opinion we should surrender in the event of a German invasion?

A. Yes.

Q. That is your clear conviction?

A. Yes.

Q. That if Hitler attempts an invasion the Army should lay down its arms?

A. That is my opinion. I don't propose to hold my conscience to test others.

Q. Well, it is your conscience we are testing. What work are you doing at present?

A. At the present moment I am engaged in work the nature of which I feel it would not be in the interests of the people concerned to disclose. However I can say that I am engaged in writing a book of which my statement is a précis.

Q. Some form of propaganda?

A. Yes.

Q. Your present work is more important in the interests of the country and that is your objection to agreeing?

A. Yes.

Q. Do I understand that you think there should not be a British Army?

A. Yes. There should be no Army at all because it is possible to create a state where an Army would not be necessary.

Q. When did you first hold that view?

A. The conclusion I have come to began during my time at Sandhurst and has matured since.

Q. You think there should be no British Army?

A. Not necessarily the British Army. Any Army.

Q. You disagree specifically with the British Army?

A. I disagree with every Army.

Q. But if you disagree with every Army you must disagree with the British Army. Do you think there should not be a British Army?

A. There should not be any armies and that includes the British Army.

Q. Should there come a time when there should be no armies?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you thought recently and do you think now that there should not be a British Army?

A. I feel that under no condition should there be any Army.

THE TRIBUNAL THEN RETIRED

THE CHAIRMAN.

We are satisfied that the applicant has a conscientious objection to military service. We are not satisfied that he has a conscientious objection to non-combatant service and he will be registered for non-combatant duties only.

COUNT BENTINCK CALLED 3.57 p.m.

DECISION OF TRIBUNAL ANNOUNCED 4.45 p.m.