Dear Professor Fisher,

Many thanks for your letter of the 5th and the statement which together with other testimonials will, I hope, have the desired effect on the Naturalisation Dept.

Fortunately I have a fairly well developed sense of proportion, and my great admiration for this country and its political and cultural institutions never allowed my grievance over our internment to assume undue proportions. Nevertheless, I believe that the Government’s policy of wholesale internment was fundamentally wrong. It was the result of panic and based upon the ignorance —not of the Home Office, but of the uninformed public and probably of the Army about refugees and the distinction that could be made between the different aliens from enemy countries. It caused much suffering and a feeling of complete frustration among many thousands of people—many of whom regarded the cause for which Great Britain is fighting as their own cause; and it was a great waste of much talent among the refugees who had been simply itching to be allowed to take part in the war effort.

What you say about the reasons that have prevented an improvement of the registration system in this country was a surprise to me. Deplorable as the state of affairs may be in general, I think that in the case of refugees neither the police enquiry nor the registration system could have been stricter than it was. To illustrate the measures taken by the authorities to check and sift carefully German and Austrian refugees before and after their arrival I should like to quote from speeches of a Government speaker, Mr. Peake, Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office. He said on August 22 in the House of Commons:

"The people of this country were not able to realise the great distinction between our position and the position of Holland and Belgium. Holland, for instance, had a treaty with Germany, whereby they could not refuse the admission of any German, and I am told that something like 300,000 Germans had come into Holland shortly before the act of aggression."

On July 10 Mr. Peake said:

"Practically all the German-Austrian aliens who have come to this country in the last five or six years have been sponsored either by a refugee organisation or by a private individual... Apart from that vouching of character by the organisation or the individual, there was
then an examination by the British Consul abroad of the bona fides of the individuals who wished to come. Then there was a scrutiny by the immigration officer when the alien came into this country. After landing the alien had to report and register with the local police, and since the outbreak of war every alien has been before a tribunal of some kind or another; many have been before two tribunals .... I can only say on behalf of the Home Secretary and myself, that I wish we knew half as much about many of the neutral aliens and many British subjects as we know about the enemy aliens now in this country."

From my own experience and that of many other refugees, I have come in contact with, I can assure you that all facts of personal history and association worth knowing were known to the police and thus to the Home Office. All our movements in this country and our travels abroad had to be registered with the police and endorsed in our Certificate of Registration from the moment we set foot on this island. (At the moment 22 out of the 24 pages of my Registration Certificate are filled with endorsements and remarks)

To quote Mr. Peake again (10th July):

"On the outbreak of war we interned every man and woman who was on the security list. Some who were on the list had gone back to Germany; ... but every known suspect who was still in this country was interned on the outbreak of war, and our policy at that time was, rightly or wrongly, to submit every enemy alien to individual examination."

For all the reasons given and from personal knowledge of hundreds of interned refugees in three camps which I represented successively as 'floor leader', 'Deputy Camp Father' and 'Camp Speaker' I am of the opinion that it would be possible for the great majority of interned refugees to produce adequate evidence that they are not enemy agents. In fact, a large minority has already been released without producing any new evidence about their reliability, but simply on the basis of a well-established clean record to their credit.

Excuse this long epistle, but I hope that from the facts given above you will appreciate that there is some justification for a certain amount of grievance among well-disposed refugees.

With all good wishes for X-mas and the New Year,

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]