



WORKSHEET: GROUP 1

Instruction

Read the news article of “The Springfield Union”, published in Massachusetts, U.S.A, on June 2nd 1939. Based on the article and on the additional background information, try to make a short presentation of the main actors in the St. Louis affair, as well as the course of events.



The Springfield Union, Massachusetts, reports on the St. Louis, 2.6.1939, p. 1.

Courtesy of the Boston Public Library



The Springfield Union, Massachusetts, reports on the St. Louis, 2.6.1939, p. 20.

Courtesy of the Boston Public Library

Transcript - The Springfield Union reports on the St. Louis, 2.6.1939

Threatens to Use Gunboats To Tow Tragic Shipload of Jews From Cuban Waters

President Laredo Bru Orders Liners to Leave for Homeland with 917 German Refugees; "Suicide Pact" Feared

HAVANA, Cuba, June 1 (AP) – A tragic shipload of 917 German-Jewish refugees tonight faced return to the land from which they fled. President Federico Laredo Bru coupled an order for their ship to leave with a threat to use gunboats if necessary to tow it from Cuban waters.

The presidential decree came during a day of uncertainty in which the captain of the German liner St. Louis, expressing fear of a "collective suicide pact" among his refugee passengers, sought in vain to have the Government rescind its order against landing them.

Although the President directed the St. Louis to leave "within the day," and marines were held ready to carry out his order, it was understood the liner was granted a delay until it could refuel and take on provisions for the return voyage to Germany.

The Cuban treasury department, instructed to carry out Laredo Bru's order, was said to have granted Luis Clasing, agent for the Hamburg-Amerika line, until 6 p.m. tomorrow to get the ship out of port.



It was held probable in port circles, however, that Capt. Gustav Shroeder of the St. Louis would try to complete the task of taking on stores and get under way early tomorrow while his passengers are asleep.

Driven to Desperation

This move was understood to be under consideration because of the fear that the refugees, including 500 women and 150 children, might be driven to desperation and try to jump overboard.

Port police had several boats ready to escort the ship out of the harbor and pick up any who might try to end their lives in this manner rather than return to their former homeland.

Cuban guards, maintaining a close watch on the passengers, reported during a change of shifts this afternoon that their situation was desperate. Mothers and children wailed incessantly and calls to meals virtually were unanswered.

President Laredo Bru denied flatly reports in Washington that American representatives of Jewish organizations had reached an agreement with Cuba for a partial solution of the refugees' problem.

Private dispatches received in Washington from Havana said the Cuban government would permit all refugees to land who have valid landing permits and whose relatives or friends either in Cuba or the United States guarantee a bond of \$500 a person.

Informed of these reports tonight, Laredo Bru declared: "This is false. The only truth is that the ship must leave Cuba as soon as possible."

The ship, which arrived last Saturday, was scheduled to start the return voyage, to Germany this afternoon, but her captain, Gustav Schroeder, announced postponement of the sailing in the hope that the Government would rescind its order denying the refugees permission to enter Cuba.

Fears Mass Suicides

Capt. Shroeder had requested the Government to reconsider its action because of his fear of a "collective suicide pact" or perhaps a "mutiny" among his passengers once they learned finally that they must return to Germany.

Police in launches and aboard kept close watch on the passengers, who included 500 women and 150 children. They said that women and children cried continuously and that calls to meals for the most part went unanswered.

Port police had several boats ready to escort the St. Louis from the harbor and to pick up any of the passengers who might jump overboard.

Shroeder's fears of mass suicides arose when one passenger slashed his wrists and jumped overboard yesterday. The man, however, was rescued.



In case the presidential order to depart was not “carried out within this day,” the decree declared that “the Secretary of the Treasury, with the proper authority to do so, will ask the co-operation of the constituted navy forces, and will proceed to take the ship St. Louis, with all its passengers, out of the jurisdictional waters of this country.”

The President also directed that any member of the crew of the liner who may have entered Cuba illegally be taken aboard and that an official investigation be launched into the whole affair.

The government order was delivered to Clasing at 4 p.m. He asked for time to refuel the ship and take on food and water because he said the liner did not have sufficient supplies for the voyage.

The refugees were refused permission to land when they could not show Cuban consular visas, passports and Cuban Labor Department permits. They held only provisional permits of the Immigration Department to land as passengers en route to the United States where they hoped eventually to gain admission.

U.S. Groups May Aid Some of Refugees

WASHINGTON, June 1 (AP) – Private dispatches from Havana stated tonight that American representatives of Jewish relief organizations in New York have reached an agreement with Cuba for a partial solution of the problem of 917 German-Jewish refugees who are now in Havana harbor aboard the liner St. Louis and are unable to land.

The Cuban government, it is understood, will permit all refugees to land who have valid landing permits and whose relatives or friends either in Cuba or the United States guarantee a \$500 bond per person. The bond is returnable when the refugees leave Cuba.

The dispatches said that before leaving the Reich practically all refugees had themselves placed on the immigration quota for entry into the United States. Their stay in Cuba will be temporary, since they will merely await their turn to enter the United States under the quota.

Besides the 917, several thousand other German refugees are concentrated in Cuba. Most of these have had their names placed on the quota list.

They, like the others, must await their turn for entry into the United States. Those whose names come at the top of the list will be admitted first.

Source: The Springfield Union, Massachusetts, reports on the St. Louis, June 2, 1939. Courtesy of the Boston Public Library.