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THE NEED TO LET CYPRIOTS GO HOME

The exchange of prisoners of war in Cyprus, agreed on last Friday by Mr Clerides and Mr Denktash, appears to be going ahead smoothly, though it will be ten or eleven days before all five thousand of them are freed. It was possible to negotiate this exchange only by presenting it as a "humanitarian" problem. But it is far from being without political significance.

The majority of the prisoners have their homes in the areas where they were being held: Greek Cypriots mainly in the area occupied by the Turkish army, and Turkish Cypriots almost exclusively in the southern zone where the writ of the Greek Cypriot administration still runs. They are therefore being offered a choice: to return to their homes, thus remaining under "enemy" rule, or to go to the areas controlled by their kith and kin, thus becoming in some sense refugees. The majority, it appears, are opting for the latter alternative. An important step is thus taken towards that "voluntary" redistribution of the population which alone can make sense of the Turkish demand for a federation composed of two geographically defined autonomous zones.

The word "voluntary" needs to be put in inverted commas because in reality the choices have

been largely pre-empted by acts of violence and force. This is obvious enough in the case of the Greek Cypriots. They would certainly want to return to their homes if that did not mean being isolated in an area occupied by foreign troops, without even the protection of United Nations forces. For the Turkish Cypriots there is at least the possibility of UN protection if they return to their homes in the south. But UN protection was found tragically wanting for a number of their compatriots during the terrible days of July and August. Understandably many of them now feel that, UN or no UN, they can never again live in safety in the midst of the Greek Cypriot population. And even those who might be willing to take the risk are clearly under strong pressure from the leaders of their own community to fall in with the Turkish plan.

If Mr Clerides accepted such a one-sided "voluntary" solution to the prisoner-of-war problem it was no doubt because the number of people involved was relatively small. It will clearly be much more difficult for him to let the same principle apply to the refugee problem. This is in effect what the Turks are asking. They want to turn the Turkish Cypriot refugees in the British base at

Episkopi into a "humanitarian" problem (by describing them as "hostages"), while insisting that the Greek Cypriot refugees who fled from the Turkish occupation constitute a political problem. Thus in their view the Turkish Cypriot refugees should be allowed to go straight away, not to their homes (where they are free to go anyway) but to the Turkish-occupied zone, before the Greek Cypriot refugees are allowed to return to their homes which are in that zone.

That will hardly do. Refugees are, of course, both a political and a humanitarian problem. Their humanitarian need is, as Lord Caradon so succinctly put it in his article yesterday, to "go safely back to their homes", and it is the task of politicians on both sides, as well as benevolent third parties, to make that possible. It will not be possible so long as Turkey persists in her aim of incorporating the homes of the Greek Cypriot refugees into a new Turkish Cypriot economy closely integrated into that of mainland Turkey. It will only be possible when the one-sided protection of Turkish troops is replaced by the two-way protection of a much stronger United Nations force, with the political backing of a Security Council Resolution.