

Notes for Teachers (questions for discussion relating to the political prisoner experience)

The aim of these notes is to guide teachers in the kinds of answers that might be encouraged from pupils in classroom discussion. As teachers are not expected to be experts in the history of political prisoners and other victims of Nazism, or where they fit into the wider experience of the Occupation of the Channel Islands or Europe, guidance is given here so that discussions can take advantage of recent scholarship and thought. Each section below effectively answers the questions posed in each of the case studies, noting that many questions cannot be answered definitively. Others have a variety of answers, and you may wish to expand on those given here.

The political prisoner experience (overview)

The civilian authorities in the Channel Islands probably did not fight more strongly to represent in court those who defied the Germans because they viewed these people as troublemakers who caused problems in their efforts to maintain good working relations with the Germans. Those who tried to represent Islanders in court had a hard time and often only managed to try to plead to have sentences reduced. They were rarely successful. However, had the authorities been on the side of those who defied German orders, they would have made a stand against fascism, which would have been to their credit. Other courses of action could have been to help hide offenders, or to have taken a stronger anti-German stance themselves in the first place by fighting every piece of unethical legislation (such as the antisemitic orders).

It is a moot question as to whether silence favoured the persecutors. It didn't help the victims. We can argue that it made them complicit – or not entirely innocent – in the persecution of islanders who defied the Germans.

Those who informed often did so to settle old scores, or out of petty jealousies, or because they saw that their neighbours had more food or some advantage over them and wanted to even things up. By informing someone to the Germans they could have power over a person. This didn't necessarily make them Nazi supporters, but they did not act in a moral or ethical way, and their behaviour benefitted the occupiers and not the islanders. Discuss with students whether this makes them a 'collaborator' and why this is a loaded term which can mean a range of different things. Decide in class whether such behaviour fits within the definition.

I am in favour of stating that we should remember and honour equally all those deported to Nazi prisons and camps for a range of offences, because all of these people were victims of Nazism and suffered, and for that we should respect their memory. You may hold a different view, but it makes a good topic for classroom discussion. Remember to bring personal ethics and moral behaviour into discussions, remembering the bigger picture of the ideology they were fighting.

In terms of the roles of bystander, perpetrator, victim (the original three terms when the behaviours of occupied peoples were being conceptualised in this way), these are all up for grabs in classroom discussion and do not need elaboration here. Remember to consider the bigger picture. Do not feel that you need to / should 'protect' the memory of local people;

‘judge’ them in the same way as you would someone from another country. In response to the question of whether we can ‘judge’ the actions of people during the Occupation, the answer is: of course we can. If we can judge Hitler, the Nazis, the behaviour of ordinary Germans, then we can judge the behaviour of people in the past. Perhaps the term ‘judge’ feels harsh, as it brings with it connotations of standing in judgement over someone. Feel free to choose alternative words such as ‘providing an opinion of the way someone acted and assessing whether it was an ethical or moral response’. Indeed, this is not to argue that you or I would have acted differently. That is another matter. We all have the right to be scared by the situation in which we find ourselves. That doesn’t mean we can’t look back and wish we’d acted differently.

How can we take a stand today? Read the news and judge for yourself. We can join demonstrations. We can support charities that support persecuted minorities or refugees. We can stand up for people on the bus who are being bullied for being a different colour or religion or dressing differently. There are many more examples.

Frank Falla

It seems likely that Frank and people like him were seen as troublemakers, as those in positions of authority had to face the Germans afterwards and it made their dealings more difficult. They wanted a ‘model occupation’, where everyone behaved themselves and stuck to the Hague Convention. They didn’t want people to rock the boat and possibly land everyone in hot water. They failed to see that the German forces were serving a highly unethical fascist ideology.

In this particular case, we think that the man who denounced those who worked in GUNS was an informer paid by the Germans. He had a small-time criminal record and it looks like the Germans let him off on the condition he turned informer. He was also Irish, and the Irish were from a neutral country. Many were also anti-British. This was enough of a motivation for many to have no love for Britons. Remind pupils that the term ‘British’ applies to Channel Islanders, English, Scottish, Welsh and those in Northern Ireland, but not in the Irish Republic.

It’s worth considering the problems with the term ‘hero’. It often implies a whiter than white, impossible to live up to, saintly level of goodness. People tend not to be wholly good or wholly bad. Frank was an ordinary man who stood up against the occupiers in a way he knew how – through his writing, as a journalist. He was a brave man who fought unceasingly for the memory of his friends throughout his life. That makes him a good man worth remembering.

Frank Tuck

The Guernsey policemen argued strongly that they took food from the Germans in order to give it to the hungry and needy. People testified to this after the war. The men also cited radio broadcasts from London that encouraged occupied peoples to steal from the Germans. The problems come in the accusations of their theft from food stores of islanders who traded preferentially with the Germans. Was this trade ethical? Was the theft from such people ethical? You can argue it both ways. This was not a black and white case, but it seems likely that the general hunger in the islands at the time coloured the way people saw the police behaviour, which some saw as an ‘abuse of power’.

Like other victims of Nazism, the punishment did not fit the crime. The extreme suffering of the men in forced labour camps and concentration camps should give us pause for thought in deciding whether or not to condemn the memory of these men. The men were given long sentences to make an example of them.

As for how the men should be remembered today, you decide. Remember the problems associated with the terms 'hero' and 'villain'. Maybe you might think of other terms to describe these men. Remember that they suffered brutal treatment and one of their number was murdered by a guard in a forced labour camp. Remember too that the sentence against them has still not been overturned.

Harold Le Druillenec

Harold suffered PTSD as a result of the horrors he witnessed and suffered in concentration camps. PTSD can last for decades; it is also a condition that can manifest itself long after the original trauma, especially if you try to suppress painful memories and not process them with the help of prolonged counselling. In the 1940s / 50s, it is unlikely that Harold had any such counselling or psychotherapy.

Harold's motivation for testifying at war crimes trials was undoubtedly to stand up and speak on behalf of his dead friends, and to make sure that perpetrators were made to face the consequences of their actions. Recounting his experiences and rehearsing them in his mind undoubtedly re-traumatised him. We can surmise that Harold was an extremely mentally strong man with an iron self-discipline. He described himself in such terms.

We shouldn't be surprised at Harold's awards. What should surprise us more is the lack of awards from the island / the British government. We might observe that he helped shelter a Russian slave worker, and Cold War politics hardly encouraged a sympathetic view of the Russians or those who helped them. The lack of acknowledgement indicates to us that official Occupation memory told a different story of those 5 years of occupation. The story told was not about victims of Nazism; it was about the Germans, about make-do-and-mend, and surviving on parsnip coffee and nettle tea and shoes that had been re-soled a dozen times. It was about Red Cross parcels and bunker restoration. It was not about the suffering of people like Harold. This is how he got forgotten. Perhaps Harold was seen as just another trouble-maker who rocked the boat.

Clifford Cohu

Cohu's behaviour was undoubtedly brave, but he was probably not wise to have been so public in his behaviour. He believed that his behaviour was good and ethical; indeed it was. What other words can we use to describe the actions of this courageous man?

The Germans wanted to control the news that reached occupied peoples. They wanted them to hear only German propaganda. This is why they didn't want them to listen to the BBC.

Britons were rare in concentration camps and labour camps. This is because mainland Britain had not been occupied and so fewer British people were around to be put in camps. Because Britain was also fighting the Germans and had not been occupied, British people were easy targets for the hatred of guards. The British were bombing German cities, so the guards hated British prisoners even more. Priests were targeted because Nazism was hardly a Christian organisation. Priests also occupied a position of power and place of respect in society – they

were power rivals for the Germans. People listened to what priests said, and they had power to preach anti-Nazi sermons.

Stanley Green

Acts of espionage were relatively rare because the kinds of people trained in this work were in the military. People of this description had either gone off to fight, or were retired veterans of the First World War. For Stanley to be involved tells us of his committed anti-Nazi stance. He was keen to use his photography skills to help those skilled in espionage.

Stanley was therefore an upstander, but on the quiet (which was the safest way to do it). However, after he was deported he became a victim – a victim of Nazism. This change in categorisation indicates to us that people changed category during the war in a variety of ways – some perpetrators even became victims and vice versa. People should not be labelled and categorised; humans are complex creatures.

Having a faith can help a person endure difficult circumstances because of a belief that they will be protected by a higher power (God), or that that higher power can help the person endure whatever is thrown at them. It can give them a faith in survival. It can also help give a different perspective – why is this happening? Is this suffering happening for a reason? What life lesson can be learnt? A faith can also help a person behave ethically and help others in difficult situations.

Marie Ozanne

Marie Ozanne had a very strong Christian faith; she also practised what she preached. Her Christian beliefs and the Bible motivated her to stand up for the persecuted. Motivation doesn't always require a religious faith, but it often requires a strong personal code of ethical and moral conduct and sense of right and wrong.

Marie Ozanne was not the slightest bit ashamed of or cowed by doing God's work. She was a 'loud and proud' upstander. She therefore had no desire to speak out anonymously. She would probably have seen that as cowardly. The implications of not hiding her identity was that she was easily identified for punishment.

Marie stood up for foreign labourers and Jews and foreigners because she was a Christian woman and followed the teachings of Jesus about looking after the weak and standing up for those who are persecuted. Ethical and moral standards of behaviour tell us that we should stand up for people with whom we have no direct connection if we see them being badly treated.

Marie had a very strong sense that she was doing the right thing because she was doing God's work. It was more important to do the right thing than it was to have a sense of winning or losing. To her mind, the prize was waiting in Heaven, not on earth. She knew that she had to stand up for the persecuted and had to stand up to the persecutors. She hoped to change their minds and to make them feel shame and change their minds. Even if she knew that what she was doing couldn't or wouldn't work, this would not have deterred her in the slightest. She was a strongly and morally principled woman.