

## **Mark Seddon**

### **Why do some people stand by during times of injustice, while others try to do something to stop or prevent injustice?**

It is my belief that we can live in a world free from injustice. Before this though, we must understand why people stand by during times of injustice, so that we will no more find ourselves as bystanders - indifferent to injustice, instead, taking an active stand to stop or prevent injustice altogether.

In the words of Edmund Burke - “evil triumphs when good people do nothing”. This quote powerfully encapsulates a primary reason for a lack of action in eliminating injustice, that being, some people don’t know enough to intervene, or don’t care enough to intervene. So often, we as individuals or as exclusive groups insulate ourselves from problems - ‘justified’ as the problem is not our problem. School bullying exemplifies this. Many of us, as students, have at one time or another been witness to bullying - seldom standing up to such injustice. At school we tend to isolate ourselves in friend groups, and inevitably act in such a way where injustice outside of our groups, is not injustice which concerns us. With reference to the Holocaust, we see similar behaviour - the alienation of Jewish people as ‘the other’ in conjunction with the strong German ethnic identity, paved the foundations for many to dismiss the rampant injustice, as racial prejudice *was* a concept accepted and not challenged, as we see in modern times. Not knowing enough was also grounds for some Germans to stand by during the Holocaust - Nazi officials’ attempts to disguise the truth - portraying the deportations as a ‘resettlement’ of Jewish people, were passively accepted by many Germans.

Conversely, many people do care enough to intervene to stop or prevent injustice. German industrialist Oskar Schindler for example, is credited with saving the lives of 1,200 Jews, employing them in his factories, furthermore providing Nazi officials bribes and gifts, selflessly spending his entire fortune to keep his workers safe. Additionally, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, German diplomat - used his position of power to organise the rescue of 7,220 Danish Jews, preventing the deportation of 95% of Denmark’s Jewish population. Benjamin Franklin famously stated, that “justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as

outraged as those who are” - Schindler and Duckwitz together with many other upstanders embody this notion, for their decisive stand against injustice, ensured that injustice would not be enacted upon those that they saved - conveying to us, the importance of these valiant upstanders, who put aside personal interests, to selflessly aid in the plight of others.

In times of injustice, many people are reluctant to intervene out of fear. Under the totalitarian rule of the Nazi Party, the course of justice was perverted, and injustice thrived under the abuse of absolute power - imprisoning or executing those who opposed them. For example the introduction of the death penalty to Poles helping the Jews in late 1941 strongly discouraged Poles from aiding Jews. Generational and village-wide massacres acted as strong deterrents in intimidating the general public to idly stand by in the face of injustice.

In spite of these threats of severe repercussions, many individuals, groups and even whole communities defied the injustice of the Holocaust. For example, the Ulma family of Markowa in Poland were executed for concealing eight Jews - which by no means deterred the other Polish families from hiding Jews - with at least 17 surviving the War in Markowa. The actions of these people along with many others are significant, as it exemplifies mankind's capacity to make moral decisions - showing that standing up to injustice is worth the punishment, as living with injustice, knowing that you could have done something to stop it, is in itself a punishment.

Another reason why some people tend to stand by during times of injustice is to conform with everybody else. The tendency of mankind to conform, is to the detriment of justice, as it fosters behaviour in line with the thought, if others aren't helping, why should I? In a modern sense, social conformity makes us somewhat uncomfortable standing up for injustice, we desire to fit in, to be popular, to be cool, and some times these desires obscure our moral compass - with our desires taking precedence over any injustices in our way of achieving them. With regards to the Holocaust, injustice ensued seemingly without opposition due to conformity, conformity that inherently distorted the truth due to Nazi indoctrination. Nazi indoctrination and propaganda meant that many German

citizens were led to believe that what we all know to be injustice, was not really injustice. Nazi propaganda on racial purity and antisemitism convinced many of Jewish racial inferiority, and made them believe that offences against them, were not unjust.

There were however some courageous opponents to Hitler, challenging the ideology and practices of the Nazi Party. A notable example of this being, German soldier, Karl Plagge who refused to conform to Nazism after witnessing the genocide of Jews in Lithuania - described by Plagge as “unbelievable things that [he] could not support”. Like Schindler and Duckwitz, Plagge’s inherent morality enabled him to recognise injustice in spite of what Nazi propaganda had dictated. Plagge’s actions saved the lives of 1,240 Jewish people. From this, we can see that people intervene to prevent injustice when their own sense of humanity is challenged, allowing for our innate morality to take command of our actions.

Injustice is a disease, one that is highly contagious - but fortunately, one that is curable. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” - in light of this comment, we see reason to intervene to eliminate injustice so that it doesn’t spread. The White Rose, a resistance group formed in Munich in 1942, widely known for their distribution of anti-Nazi leaflets, created unrest within the Nazi Party and incited greater German opposition to the Nazi regime - evidently reflecting mankind’s innate desire to prevent the spread of injustice.

Another reason why people stand up to injustice is that humans are inherently good, and our inner good tends to outweigh our inner evil. In spite of the atrocities witnessed - Anne Frank wrote that she “still believes that people are really good at heart”. German soldier, Klaus Hornig embodies this notion, having formally refused the order for his platoon to execute 800 Russian POWs, on the suspicion of being Jewish. Hornig’s defiance of the unjust and illegal orders, reflect why we take a stand and oppose injustice, acting with the hope that good will prevail.

To conclude, although there are several reasons as to why one would stand by in times of injustice, there are more compelling reasons as to why one *will* stand up

in times of injustice. Albert Einstein said, “the world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing”. Standing up to injustice means doing the right thing, even when the right thing, is the hard thing. We can have injustice, *or* we can have justice. The choice is ours, and is based entirely on the decision we each individually make. Injustice or justice. I choose justice.