

**Humanitarian Ambitions - International Barriers:
Canadian Governmental Response to the Plight of the Jewish Refugees
(1933-1945)**

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Abstract

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From 1933 to 1945, thousands of European Jews attempted to gain access to Canada in order to escape Nazi oppression. This thesis examines Canada's immigration records and policies during this period. In addition to bringing light to key issues concerning popular Canadian perceptions of Jewish immigrants and refugees in the thirties and forties, this history raises important questions about the Canadian government and ethical responsibility in a time of war; about the relationship between government policy and provincial politics; and about the position taken by Canada's longest serving Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, and his Cabinet.

The author's research brings attention to Irving Abella and Harold Troper's work, *None is too Many*, which, since its publication in 1982, has stood as the authoritative work on the subject. A variety of important issues which are not treated in detail in this earlier monograph are examined in depth in this analysis: The prevalence of anti-Semitism in French and English Canada, and the Canadian immigration record are treated in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 and 4 investigate accusations that William Lyon Mackenzie King, Ernest Lapointe, Frederick Charles Blair, and Vincent Massey harboured anti-Semitic views. It is found that such charges suffer from a serious lack of evidence. Although sometimes the language used by these men in their correspondence and letters can be shocking to the modern reader, it was the colloquial language during their lives. Furthermore, their personal documents often exhibit evidence of sincere sympathy for the Jews of Europe, and frustration with Canadian popular opinion.

The author concludes that collective memory of the Holocaust has affected perceptions concerning the Canadian immigration record during the period in question. Anti-immigration sentiment was strong in Canada during the Depression. Nevertheless, as the Canadian Government became increasingly aware of the persecution of Jews within the Reich, particularly following the events of *Kristallnacht* in November of 1938, measures were put into place to ease Jewish immigration to Canada, such as including refugees among the admissible classes of immigrants.

The Canadian Government did not begin to receive information concerning the extermination of European Jewry until 1942. By this time, there was hardly anything Canada

could do. Heinrich Himmler had forbidden Jewish emigration from the Reich in October of 1941, the war was in full swing by 1942, and ships carrying refugees and PoWs were not safe from U-boat attacks. From 1933 to 1945 Canada allowed 8,787 Jews into the country. However, all immigration to Canada was slowed during this time. Consequently, Jews, in actuality, represented a higher percentage of immigrants arriving in Canada, at this time, than they had from 1923 to 1932. This illustrates Canada's doors were not closed specifically to Jewish refugees during the Depression and Second World War.

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Chapter 1

Historiography and Methodology

The Holocaust was and remains one of the worst atrocities in human history. This is due largely to the fact that millions were killed, as well as the industrial and systematic fashion by which this was accomplished. The first major publication on the subject was Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961. At that time, the author had difficulty finding a publisher for his research due to the sensitive nature of his topic. Even so, since the publication of Hilberg's work, the subject has blossomed, and as Dan Stone notes, "the literature on the Holocaust is now so enormous that no individual can have real mastery over all its aspects."¹ Holocaust Studies are now an accepted branch of history with many sub-fields associated to it, such as the role of the German churches during the Holocaust, post-Holocaust philosophy, and gender during the Holocaust, just to name a few.

Early research tended to focus on the nature of the Holocaust and how it came to be. Two schools of thought have developed concerning this: the Intentionalists, who see the Third Reich and what resulted from it as deriving from Hitler's will; and the Functionalists, who see Hitler as acting in response to the environment he had created. This also led to debate as to when the idea of mass extermination of European Jewry presented itself for the first time. Lucy Dawidowicz in *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* argued that Hitler had plans to exterminate the Jews as early as 1918.² However, most historians agree that the final decision was taken in 1941, although there is debate as to the exact date on which this took place.

¹ Dan Stone, *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p.1

² Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976)

In order to better understand how the Holocaust could happen, historians began to study the perpetrators and bystanders, which remains a very divisive issue. In 1992 Christopher Browning published *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*.³ The author analyzes this battalion in detail and attempts to understand how they were able to complete their task of killing Jews, even though they often were not psychologically prepared to do so. Browning demonstrates that the majority of the members of the group were not hardline Nazi supporters, but were still able to perform their duties and even to legitimize them due to a variety of social and psychosomatic factors such as peer pressure. However, Browning's findings have been called into question by some, notably Jonah Goldhagen who argues that the type of anti-Semitism present in Germany during the Third Reich was an "eliminationist anti-Semitism" which had developed in the nineteenth century. For Goldhagen, the majority of Germans believed in the urgency of a Final Solution and acted as Hitler's willing executioners, which is the title of his study.⁴ Robert Gellately does not go as far as Goldhagen, but offers the view that the Holocaust was not conducted in secret, and contends that the German people were aware of what was going on. He explains that the Nazis converted the German population to their cause by building on long-held phobias and popular notions of what the ideal German society was. In this way, Gellately notes, the Nazis were successful in utilizing the population to accomplish their means.⁵

An interesting occurrence in the domain of Holocaust Studies has been the focus on international bystanders. This branch examines the roles played by the nations of the world, and international agencies, in the context of the Final Solution. Such work has tended to focus on the

³ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993)

⁴ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Random House, 1996)

⁵ Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

role of the Roosevelt Administration in the United States or of Pope Pius XII in the Vatican.⁶ However, some historians have ventured into uncharted territory and studied the role of less influential players on the national stage during the Second World War. Gerhard P. Bassler has even studied the refugee policies of the small Dominion of Newfoundland vis-à-vis refugees from the Third Reich.⁷ It is in this tradition of understanding what was known by the international community, and by specific national governments throughout the world, what was done, and what could have been done, that the following paper finds its place.

In the 1960s, there was a growing realization and understanding of the Holocaust within the Jewish community. In Canada, some began to put pen to paper in order to write of the Canadian Jewish community's attempts to secure admission for refugees. The works written during this period were published by those who had worked for organizations that had been directly involved in the refugee question. Filled with minutes from meetings and firsthand accounts, these works remain some of the best sources available in understanding the inner workings of the Jewish community's refugee organizations and their attempts at winning public and government support. In 1962, Joseph Kage⁸, who joined the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society in 1947, wrote *With Faith and Thanksgiving*. This work, a history of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, studied Jewish immigration and immigrant aid work in Canada from 1760 to 1960.

⁶ For Pius XII see: John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pope Pius XII* (New York: Viking, 1999); Ronald Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000); Margherita Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000); Gerard Noel, *The Hound of Hitler* (New York: Continuum, 2009); Lewy Guenter, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000). For the Roosevelt administration see: David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: New Press, 1998); Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1970); Verne Newton, ed. *FDR and the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000); William J. Vanden Heuvel, "America and the Holocaust." *American Heritage* (July/August, 1999)

⁷ Gerhard Bassler, *Sanctuary Denied: Refugees from the Third Reich and Newfoundland Immigration Policy, 1906-1949* (St John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1992)

⁸ It is interesting to note that Kage was himself an immigrant from Eastern Europe.

Although his period of study includes the Nazi era, the author does not give sufficient analysis of Canadian refugee policy during the period.

Likewise, in 1966 Simon Belkin published *Through Narrow Gates* which studied a similar subject. Although this time, the focus of the study was the Jewish Colonization Association and the period of study covered 1840 to 1940, which essentially omitted Canada's wartime refugee policies. In his preface Belkin explained that one of the questions his book attempted to answer was: "Did Canadian Jewry do everything possible to rescue those who were less fortunate during the critical periods, particularly during the decade that led to the great holocaust in Central and Eastern Europe?"⁹ In his final analysis, the author concluded in the negative. For Belkin, whereas Jewish organizations worked tirelessly to assure admission of Jewish refugees to Canada, the Jewish communities of the United States and Canada did not give sufficient financial aid to help refugees during the "Tragic Decade."¹⁰

So, as the Canadian Jewish community began to come to terms with the Holocaust, there was a growing wish to understand what the Canadian immigration record was, and whether the Jewish community had done all that was possible in order to save their coreligionists in Europe. In the 1970s, the subject began to find its way into works written by scholars who were not directly linked to Jewish agencies that had attempted to secure admission for refugees during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1975 Lita-Rose Betcherman's *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf*, which intended to shed light on the existence of widespread Fascist and anti-Semitic movements in Canada, was published. In it, the author briefly delved into the question of Canada's refugee policy leading up to and during the Holocaust. Writing of Canada's immigration record, she argued that anti-Semitic feeling, not the Depression, was the cause of the King government's

⁹ Simon Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates* (Montreal: The Eagle Publishing Co., 1966) p.vii.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.180.

refusal to allow large numbers of Jewish refugees into the country. “While unemployment was the reason cited for Canada’s closed door, underlying it was a strong Anglo-Saxon nativism permeated with anti-Semitism.”¹¹ She concluded that the government’s decisions were guided by public opinion, which was inherently anti-Semitic. Betcherman represented a shift in the way the subject of Canada’s refugee policy was studied. Whereas Belkin and Kage had focused on the efforts of the Jewish community to secure the admission of refugees, Betcherman had examined the efforts of the Canadian government to bar refugees.

Gerald Dirks, who wrote two chapters on Canada’s refugee policies from 1933 to 1945 in his 1977 work *Canada’s Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?*, did not completely agree with Betcherman. Dirks argued that immigration policies should have been much more sympathetic to the plight of European refugees, but reflected the mood of the Canadian public. He attributed the Canadian government’s attitude in regards to immigration, in part, to nativism, which he conceded often took the form of anti-Semitism. The author also pointed out that during this period there was a growing “indifference to the world beyond Canada’s borders” and he did not discount the importance of the Depression. Dirks realized that the personal economic insecurity which Canadians felt during this time influenced their opinion of immigration. Even so, he argued the Canadian government placed too much emphasis on economic considerations when it came to refugee movements. In chapter four, entitled “The Arrival of Refugees in Canada”, the author examined the various schemes that succeeded in bringing refugees to the Dominion during the war. He determined that these movements were allowed only after the government had ascertained that the people involved would not become public charges. He stated, “the exception to a general policy of prohibition can be explained, at least in part, as

¹¹ Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1975) p.134.

decisions motivated by a realization that these special admissions would cost the public coffers nothing.” So, for Dirks there were three branches which influenced public opinion and consequently the government’s immigration policies: the Depression, Nativism and Isolationism.¹²

The seminal work concerning government and public reaction to the Holocaust in Canada is *None is too Many* by Irving Abella and Harold Troper. Published in 1982, their work was the first full examination of Canadian policy regarding Jewish refugees and Canada’s immigration record from 1933 to 1948. The authors maintained that from 1933 to 1945 the Dominion had allowed fewer than 5,000 Jews within her borders, which they contended was the worst of all refugee-receiving states.¹³ Blame for this abysmal record was placed on popular anti-Semitism in Canada, most notably in Quebec, as well as anti-Semitic immigration policies, which were mercilessly enforced by Ottawa bureaucrats and the King government in order to maintain national unity and ensure votes. Notably, the authors contended that by 1939 an “unofficial unholy triumvirate” had been formed. This group was composed of the Director of Immigration, F.C. Blair, who along with Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, and Vincent Massey, High Commissioner to London, fought tirelessly to prevent Jews from entering Canada.

The book is very well researched and the authors gave numerous examples of impediments, which the Jews had to deal with in their attempt to gain access to Canada. Written for a popular audience, the book was widely acclaimed within and outside university circles. A manuscript of the authors’ work played an important role in influencing the Canadian

¹² Gerald Dirks, *Canada’s Refugee Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1977) p.50.

¹³ Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is too Many* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2000), p.xxii.

government to allow Vietnamese refugees entry into Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s; an occurrence which helped propel the authors into the media spotlight.¹⁴

However, there are some shortcomings with Abella and Troper's research. In their attempt to analyze why the Canadian government opposed the mass admission of Jewish refugees, the authors pointed to anti-Semitism as the determining factor. Although anti-Semitism undoubtedly played a role in influencing public opinion, limiting the explanation to this factor alone does not do justice to the historical period the authors had embarked to study. In order to correctly understand why there were so few Jewish refugees allowed to immigrate to Canada, one must also look to the Depression, which caused an unprecedented rate of unemployment. Struggling to find jobs for themselves, a large portion of Canadians were emphatically opposed to all immigration as new immigrants were viewed as competitors for the few jobs available.

Furthermore, the question of French Quebec was not conclusively analyzed by the authors. They argue that *La belle province* was more anti-Semitic than the rest of Canada and that the government's actions were dictated by a fear of losing the Quebec vote. However, the true nature of anti-Semitism in Quebec was not analyzed. French Canadians were no more anti-Semitic than their English counterparts; they demonstrated their anti-Semitism in different ways than the English due to their socio-economic standing and cultural tradition. In addition, their place in Canadian society made them more wary of an influx of immigrants. From the French

¹⁴ Ibid.p.xviii.

Canadian point of view, newcomers, it was argued, could conceivably lead to a loss of the legal rights protected by French Canadians since Confederation.¹⁵

None is too Many was not the first published work to shine light on the existence of anti-Semitism in Canada. In fact, the study of anti-Semitism in Canada was nothing new. As mentioned previously Lita-Rose Betcherman published *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf* in 1975 which examined fascist and anti-Semitic movements in Canada. Then from 1977 to 1981 David Rome, the archivist for the Canadian Jewish Congress published thirteen volumes of work entitled *Clouds in the Thirties*, in which he compiled numerous primary documents and previously published secondary material, in order to demonstrate its continuing existence in Canada. What made *None is too Many* different from these earlier volumes was the fact that for the first time Canada's dismal immigration record was shown in acute detail. Furthermore, the author's attempted to demonstrate a direct link between anti-Semitism and the Canadian immigration policy of the period. This was a shock for a country that took pride in being a nation which fought to safeguard the rights of the oppressed through peacekeeping. Abella and Troper showed that this had not always been the case. The myth had been broken and the refugee question during the Second World War was seen as an unforgivable blot on the country's history.

Since its publication in 1982, *None is too Many* has dominated scholarship relating to Canada's immigration policy from 1933 to 1948, and the conclusions made by the authors have not generally been called into question by scholars.¹⁶ An interesting development following the publication of their work has been the growing interest in the actors involved in determining

¹⁵ See. "Le problem de l'immigration et l'animosité antiquébécoise?" *Le Devoir*, December 16, 1943; "Les problèmes d'après guerre et la dénatalité anglo-saxonne" *Le Devoir*, September 3, 1943.

¹⁶ A critical review of *None is Too Many* by Pierre Anctil can be found in *Recherches sociographiques*, vol.25, no.1, 1984, p.138-141.

Canada's immigration policy during the period concerned. However, to date, no study has focused solely on the role of each actor and their opinions. Usually a simple paragraph or part of a chapter is devoted to analyzing the role of Vincent Massey, F.C. Blair, or Ernest Lapointe in implementing Canada's restrictionist immigration policy during the Second World War. These tend to reiterate the findings of *None is too Many* while also going into more detail about the supposed anti-Semitic tendencies of the three personalities mentioned above.¹⁷

Another development has been a growing interest in the role of the Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King. Freda Hawkins in her 1989 work *Critical Years in Immigration* compared the history of immigration to both Canada and Australia. In the section examining the pre-war and war years in Canada Hawkins echoed the conclusions of Abella and Troper. However, she suggested that the Prime Minister was indifferent to the plight of European refugees and held anti-Semitic views.¹⁸ This deviated from the two earlier authors who concluded that the Prime Minister's decisions were determined by political expediency and the realization that there were no votes to be gained by admitting Jewish refugees.¹⁹ It also departed from Howard Palmer's earlier statement that, whereas the Prime Minister privately held humanitarian views regarding the refugee situation, he was hindered by acting on them due to the prevailing sentiment in Ottawa, as well as among the general Canadian public.²⁰ Hawkins was not the last to suggest Mackenzie King harboured anti-Semitic views. Alan Mendelsohn contended in his 2008 publication *Exiles from Nowhere* that King inherited anti-Semitic feelings

¹⁷ See. Alan Mendelsohn, *Exiles From Nowhere* (Montreal :Robin Brass Studios, 2008); Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008); Lita-Rose Betcherman, *Ernest Lapointe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration*. p.29-30.

¹⁹ Abella and Troper, *None is too Many*. p.281-282.

²⁰ Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982) p.151.

from his early hero and acquaintance Goldwin Smith, who was a recognized anti-Semite.²¹ So, the view began to emerge that the Prime Minister himself was anti-Semitic and that his hand was guided by anti-Semitic views when the question of refugees came to the fore.

Nevertheless, not all authors have been so convinced that the Prime Minister was an anti-Semite. Gerald Tulchinsky in *Canada's Jews*, published in 2008, explained that the Prime Minister, with his sympathy for Jewish refugees, was by no means an anti-Semite and that his decisions were made due to the prevailing conditions in Canada during his tenure as Prime Minister. Allan Levine, in his 2011 biographical account of the Prime Minister's life, also does not go so far as to suggest that Mackenzie King was an anti-Semite. Though Levine evidently subscribes to the conclusions reached by Abella and Troper concerning Canada's immigration record, his analysis of King in this respect melds the view of these two authors with that of Howard Palmer and Gerald Tulchinsky. He notes that the Prime Minister allowed his hand to be pushed by political expediency as opposed to humanitarianism and empathy. However, Levine also suggests that the Prime Minister should have insisted that refugees be allowed into the country, even to the point of risking a Cabinet revolt.²²

In making such a statement, Levine falls into the same trap as many of his predecessors when examining the individuals involved in Canadian refugee policy and bystanders generally. Michael Marrus in *The Holocaust in History* criticized works focusing on bystanders for concentrating on what did not happen and for condemning those who were supposedly responsible. The author calls this the "historians' form of hubris", and explains that it is when the historian "appl[ies] to subjects the standards and value systems, and vantage point of the present, rather than those of the period being discussed. We believe that people should have

²¹ Mendelson, *Exiles From Nowhere*. p.64-67.

²² Allan Levine, *King* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre Publishers, 2011) p.292.

acted otherwise, and we set out to show they did not.”²³ In addition to a growing trend of studying the individuals involved in Canada’s decision to limit the entry of Jewish refugees there has been an increased understanding of the realities of the conditions in Canada, and of the Holocaust in general. Such information is quintessential in any endeavour to understand the personalities involved and their decision making process. Donald Avery in his essay “Canada’s Response to European Refugees, 1939-1945” examined the security dimension of the refugee question. Avery realized the exigencies of being involved in a total war with a foreign foe and argued convincingly that the fear of a potential fifth column establishing itself via immigration played a significant role in keeping Canada’s gates closed.²⁴ William Rubinstein’s *The Myth of Rescue*, published in 1997, was a direct response to the “semi-scholarly, semi-popular” group of writings which had been published in the United States and elsewhere since the early 1980s, which accused the Western Allies of acting as accomplices in the Final Solution by preventing the immigration of Jewish refugees. Rubinstein noted that a flaw with many of these studies was that they assume “many more Jews could have been rescued and that failure to rescue was caused by high entry barriers put up by Britain and the democracies, rather than by insurmountable exit barriers erected, after mid-1940, by Nazi Germany.”²⁵

As concerns the Holocaust, researchers now tend to agree that the Final Solution was not implemented until the spring of 1942. The Canadian government, for its part, did not know anything until the end of 1942. This conclusion was arrived at by Victor Sefton as early as 1978

²³ Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1987) p.157.

²⁴ Donald Avery. “Canada’s Response to European Refugees, 1939-1945” In. *On Guard for Thee*, ed. Norman Hilmer, Bohdan Kordan and Lubomyr Luciuk (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988) p.179-216.

²⁵ William Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.6-12.

in his essay “The European Holocaust – Who Knew What and When – A Canadian Aspect.”²⁶

In addition, David Goutour in his 1997 essay “The Canadian Media and the ‘Discovery’ of the Holocaust: 1944-1945” examined how the Canadian media portrayed the Holocaust from 1944 to 1945. Goutour’s essay illustrated that there was information about the Holocaust in the newspapers of the era. Nevertheless, it was shown that papers often focused on the most sensationalist stories which made it difficult for the general public to be certain of the authenticity of the events mentioned.²⁷

Although the Holocaust was unknown in Canada and the democracies in general until the end of 1942, and was difficult for contemporaries to understand, this reality has often been ignored due its pervasiveness in the media and in movies. In 1999 Peter Novick released *The Holocaust in American Life*, in which he examines how the Holocaust became part of American collective memory and why. The author states he is of Jewish origin and wrote this work in opposition to what Norman Finkelstein termed “the Holocaust industry” wherein the Holocaust and victimization of the Jews is used for political reasons by various interest groups. Although the work focuses on the United States, the conclusions can easily be applied to Canada due to the proximity of the two countries and the shared media between the two. The author explains some very interesting phenomena. First, Novick contends that in the 1940s and 1950s American Jews did not want to be considered victims, and shunned the possibility of taking on a “victim identity”. Nonetheless, by the 1980s and 1990s Jews wished to become part of a “victim community” for various reasons.²⁸ The author notes that “[w]hen a high level of concern with the Holocaust became widespread in American Jewry, it was, given the important role that Jews

²⁶ Victor Sefton, “The European Holocaust – Who Knew What and When – A Canadian Aspect” *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 2 (1978) p.121-133.

²⁷ David Goutour, “The Canadian Media and the ‘Discovery’ of the Holocaust: 1944-1945” *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 4-5 (1996-1997) p.88-119.

²⁸ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999) p.8-9.

play in American media and opinion-making elites, not only natural, but virtually inevitable that it would spread throughout the culture at large.”²⁹

Franklin Bialystok’s 2000 publication, *Delayed Impact*, came to conclusions similar to the latter. Yet, in this case, the author was studying the Canadian Jewish community. The author noted that Canadian Jews did not fully comprehend the enormity of the Holocaust following the end of the Second World War and that it took 20 years before the events began to be understood. The author attributed this late interest to the fact that most Canadian Jews were uninterested in what had happened to survivors; the survivors, for their part, were not yet willing to speak of their experiences. However, as the 1960s saw the threat of Israel’s existence, the Eichmann trial, as well as anti-Semitism in both Canada and abroad, the community began to become more interested in the Holocaust. Then, in the 1980s the Holocaust became a part of the Jewish community’s ethnic identity, this was helped by the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) miniseries *Holocaust* which premiered in 1978 and the ensuing explosion of plays, books and movies on the subject in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁰ Notable among these being Claude Lanzmann’s extensive 1985 documentary *Shoah* and Steven Spielberg’s 1993 blockbuster *Schindler’s List*.

As Novick explained, as a repercussion of this popular focus on the Holocaust in the media and society at large, the event has now become part of collective memory. This term, originally coined by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, explains that memory is not an individual affair. Instead, Halbwachs argued, memories are influenced by society and “the mind

²⁹ Ibid, p.12.

³⁰ Franklin Bialystok, *Delayed Impact* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000) p.179

reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society.”³¹ Nevertheless, this is not limited to memories of one’s own lifetime alone. Social pressure and the media also influence how groups perceive the past. As concerns history, this is a dangerous occurrence. When an event becomes part of the collective conscience of a society the historical realities and the chronology of events are often overlooked as they are taken out of their original contexts.

Today, the terms genocide, Holocaust and *Kristallnacht* are commonly used in academic and public circles alike when speaking of the events which took place in Germany from 1933 to 1945. Even so, it is important to understand these terms were not popular among contemporaries of the events and only came to the fore following the end of the war. Given the information available at the time, there was nothing which would have led the government to conclude that *Kristallnacht* was a precursor to a policy of genocide. Likewise, there was no way for the government to conclude the Jews of Europe were to be exterminated when the war began.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Canada was in the midst of an economic Depression, which lasted throughout the decade. Her immigration policies were based on assimilation and employment. As the Third Reich became increasingly intolerant of Jews, many sought refuge outside of their homelands. Unfortunately immigration to Canada was limited during this period and the Canadian government attempted to determine how best to deal with the situation in Germany. There was a fear that if Hitler found new homelands for his unwanted ethnic groups other dictators would follow suit and persecute their own. By all accounts, the democracies were not aware of the Final Solution until the end of 1942. By this time, immigration from Germany had long been closed, the war was in full swing, and transatlantic

³¹ Maurice Halbwachs, Edited and Translated by Lewis Coser. *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) p.51

voyages were risky. There was not much that could have been done to save the persecuted groups of Europe by this point. Ultimately, the only option left was winning the war.

One must also understand that the Jews were not the only group victimized by the Nazis before and during the Second World War. The Canadian government was aware of this reality and viewed it as unfair to focus all of her efforts on aiding the Jews, particularly when it was believed that other groups were also threatened. Such was the case concerning Social Democratic Sudeten Germans, who were in jeopardy following the Munich agreements of September 1938, which ceded the Sudetenland to the Third Reich.³² Likewise, before the Nazis began their policies of systematic extermination of Jews everywhere in Europe, they were also targeting Slavs in order to make room for German colonists. The Germans hoped to prevent these populations from organizing against them. Therefore, they attempted to reduce the population by breaking their morale. This was done by destroying their traditions and eliminating the religious leadership. Polish Catholic priests were consequently targeted by German forces and in the first few months of the war over fifteen thousand priests were killed along with many other prominent Polish intellectuals and artists.³³ So, when studying this period, one cannot ignore the historical realities of the time and needs to consider the historical intricacies of the era.

With the increase in scholarship surrounding the subject of Canada's immigration policy, the role of her politicians, and knowledge of the Holocaust, the subject of Canada and the plight of the Jewish refugees remains ripe for discussion. This work is an attempt to give a balanced interpretive understanding of Canada's immigration policies and record from 1933 to 1945. The

³² Memorandum, October 24, 1938 In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.829-831.

³³ Doris Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*. (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009) p.104-105.

conclusions brought forward by Irving Abella and Harold Troper nearly thirty years ago have yet to be seriously called into question. This work is a meticulous review of the period which these authors had studied with the help of new materials.

With the use of statistical data, it will be shown that Canada's doors were not closed to Jewish refugees during the Holocaust and that Canadian immigration policies were not guided by anti-Semitism. Furthermore, Prime Minister Mackenzie King, Ernest Lapointe, F.C. Blair, and Vincent Massey will be examined, in order to illustrate to the reader that key Canadian policy makers were not rabid anti-Semites, although they sometimes subscribed to then-current attitudes concerning Jews.

For the purpose of this study, Helen Fein's definition of anti-Semitism will be used. Fein proposes to define anti-Semitism as:

a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collective manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in action – social or legal, political mobilisation against Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews.³⁴

It is essential to note, that in this definition, the anti-Semite does not see the Jew as an individual, but as part of a collective group, from which he or she cannot disassociate. In the context of this study, the discussion of anti-Semitism must also take into consideration the extent to which an individual or an organisation was willing to put into action and program gestures, opinions and prejudice against Jews. In other words, there is an important difference between harboring hostile perceptions or attitudes against Jews, on the one hand, and deciding to take action against them on the basis of theses abstract notions. Actions, gestures, utterances and

³⁴Helen Fein, "Dimensions of Antisemitism: Attitudes, Collective Accusations and Actions" In. *The Persisting Question. Sociological Perspective and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism*, ed. Helen Fein (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1987) p.67.

hostile writings are the true measure by which one can evaluate historically the impact of anti-Semitism.

The Liberal government of the period was acting on the information they knew, or thought, to be correct and took stances which they believed to be just at the time. In some cases more could have been done to help European Jews. However, aware of the worsening international situation and the possibility of war, Canadian unity was seen by the King government as being of paramount importance and took precedence over the plight of European Jewry.

Chapter 2

Understanding the Situation:

The Canadian Immigration Record During the Depression and Second World War

Immigration has played an important role in Canadian history. Even so, individuals already residing in the country have often been wary of newcomers. In the 1930s, immigration became a very touchy subject as the Depression affected nearly every segment of Canadian society. Whereas only 3 percent of Canadians were out of work in 1929, by 1933 that number had jumped to 26 percent.³⁵ Such scarce work led to strong protest against a more liberal immigration policy. Nativist thought had been present in Canada prior to the Depression, as many Canadians feared that large scale immigration would change the cultural construct of Canada. A popular view dictated that immigration needed to be restricted in order to assimilate the newcomers and preserve the British traditions of the country.³⁶ Or, in the case of French Canada, the francophone and Catholic aspects of the country.³⁷

The lack of available jobs led a large segment of Canadian society to become more xenophobic as immigrants became recognized as competitors who could potentially steal the few occupations available. Such a view was well founded as is seen in a letter dated, January 29, 1929 from W.J. Egan, Deputy Minister of Immigration and Colonization. He writes:

Surveys carried out by request of the Provinces had shown that during the period of the railway agreement many non-preferred country immigrants had drifted into non-agricultural work almost immediately upon arrival, contributing to the displacement of Canadians and otherwise filling positions that might have been filled by immigrants from the mother country.³⁸

³⁵ Freda Hawkins. *Critical Years in Immigration*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), p.30.

³⁶ Martin Robin. *Shades of Right*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p51.

³⁷ See. Pierre Anctil. *Fais Ce Que Dois*. (Quebec: Septentrion, 2010)

³⁸ Government of Canada. *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, (Toronto: Wood, Gundy & Company Limited, 1929) p.159.

Unfortunately, few officials during this period recognized the existence of, or gave much attention to, another theory, widely supported by economists, which suggested that population growth, by creating a market for goods and services, would actually lead to the creation of more jobs.³⁹

The Depression was a very trying time for the Jews in Canada as anti-Semitism, which already had a strong foothold in the Dominion, gained momentum. The Jews were viewed as urban dwellers and were easily identified as the ethnic “other”. It is important to note that Jews were not the only minority group which was discriminated against during this juncture; Natives, Blacks, Japanese and Chinese along with various other ethnic groups were victims of racism as well. However, this chapter will focus on the history of Jewish immigration to Canada. In order to do so, it is essential to understand anti-Semitism and the various ways by which it manifested itself in Canada at this time.

There is a commonly held belief that Quebec was more anti-Semitic than the other provinces during the 1930s. Through a careful analysis, an alternative view emerges. It is seen that Quebec was no more anti-Jewish than the other Canadian provinces. However, anti-Semitism was manifested differently in Quebec due to the economic, and socio-political, situation of the time. Throughout Canada there were signs which stated that Jews were not allowed to enter certain establishments, or to bathe on certain beaches, and restrictive quotas, set by universities, prevented many from attaining higher levels of education.⁴⁰ Likewise, in many

³⁹ Gerald E. Dirks. *Canada's Refugee Policy*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977) p.51.

⁴⁰ See. Pierre Anctil, *Le rendez-vous manqué: les juifs de Montréal face au Québec de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Institut de Québec de recherche sur la culture, 1988).

upper-class areas there were silent gentleman's agreements which prevented the sale of property to Jews.⁴¹

In Alberta, the Social Credit party was elected to power in August of 1935. The party advocated monetary and social reform and was based largely on the writings of C.H. Douglas, whose works were influenced by his interpretation of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.⁴² William Aberhart, who led the party from 1935 until 1943, and Ernest Manning, who led thereafter, demonstrated no anti-Semitism and openly repudiated it. However, for one wing of the Social Credit party in particular, who strongly adhered to Douglasite views, the Jews were seen as international financiers and the cause of the financial woes of Alberta and the world. Norman Jacques, the MP for Wetaskiwin from 1935 to 1949, went so far as attempting to read from the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* in the House of Commons in 1943.⁴³ Though anti-Semitism was never central to the ideology of the movement in Alberta, the presence within the party itself became so troublesome that in 1947 Ernest Manning began a purge of the anti-Semites from the movement.⁴⁴

In 1931, Manitoba boasted the third largest Jewish population of all the provinces. Even so, much was closed off to them within this province, ranging from resorts, golf clubs and beaches, down to the workplace. It proved more difficult for this group to find work during the Depression era than perhaps any other group within the province. James Gray, a contemporary, in his memoir about the Depression on the Prairies, recalls that in Winnipeg nearly every employer discriminated against Eastern-European workers.

⁴¹ Stephen Speisman, "Antisemitism in Ontario" In. *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation*, ed. Alan Davies (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992) p.121.

⁴² Bob Hesketh, *Major Douglas and Alberta Social Credit* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) p.4-5.

⁴³ Howard Palmer, "Politics, Religion and Antisemitism in Alberta, 1880-1950" In. *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation*, ed. Alan Davies (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), p.179.

⁴⁴ Janine Stingel. *Social Discredit* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) p.4.

The oil companies, banks, mortgage companies, financial and stock brokers, and most retail and mercantile companies except for the Hudson's Bay Company discriminated against all non-Anglo-Saxons. For the young Ukrainians and Poles, there was a possible solution if they could beat the accent handicap. They could change their names. So they changed their names, sometimes formally and legally, but mostly informally and casually. [...] But, for the Jews, a name change was not enough. It was not enough even to leave the synagogue, as did many of the young Jews who became Communist converts. In the minds of anti-Semitic Winnipeggers, there was no way in which a Jew could escape from Judaism.⁴⁵

As in other parts of English Canada, discrimination was not consigned to the workplace alone. The University of Manitoba's Faculty of Medicine began to strictly limit the amount of Jewish students admitted in 1932. During the 1920s, between twelve and sixteen Jewish students on average were admitted to the program per annum. However, from 1932 to 1944 Jewish student admittance to the faculty dropped to the point that only nine or fewer students were accepted per year.⁴⁶

Ontario proved to be no different than Manitoba, other than the fact that it was home to the largest population of Canadian Jews. Even so, Toronto remained the most British city in Canada and was what Lita-Rose Betcherman has called a "stronghold of Anglo-Saxon nativism" with 81 percent of its population of 631,207 being of British descent.⁴⁷ The community sought to preserve its strongly entrenched Anglo-Protestant tradition and, as will be seen, was willing to fight for it.

The increased immigration of the twentieth-century brought a new type of Jew to Canada. A large proportion of the Jews who arrived in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century arrived from Great-Britain and were already assimilated to the culture of the surrounding community. They were hardly recognizable as Jews; they spoke English, wore mainstream clothing and lived among the dominant British class. This was the case in Canada until the increase in Jewish immigration at the end of the nineteenth-century. The newly arrived Jews were mostly poor

⁴⁵ James Gray. *The Winter Years* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1966) p.127.

⁴⁶ Allan Levine. *Coming of Age* (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2009) p.260.

⁴⁷ Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975) p.47.

Eastern-European Yiddish speakers who were easily identifiable by their clothing and speech. They lived in the immigrant quarters of the city, and would nearly recreate the *shtetls* in which they had lived in Eastern-Europe. The arrival *en masse* of this new type of immigrant to Canada made the dominant classes feel as though their city was being overrun by foreigners. Consequently, as will be seen, actions were taken to defend against the invasion.

In Ontario, as in other provinces, there was the fear that the presence of Jews in certain neighbourhoods would depreciate the value, and many neighbourhoods were therefore closed off to Jews. The Jews were seen as undesirable citizens by a significant portion of Torontonians. However, this was due in large part to the lack of social contact between Jews and the “native” Torontonians. This assertion was confirmed by Esther Einbinder in her 1934 M.A. thesis “An Exploratory Study of Attitudes toward Jews in the City of Toronto”. In the study, Einbinder concluded that Torontonians with the least personal contact with Jews were the most likely to harbour unfavourable opinions, along with those who competed with them on a professional level.⁴⁸ Even so, there were some exceptions to the rule. For example, at Knox Presbyterian Church, located in the heart of Toronto’s Jewish district, Rev. J.W. Inkster often spoke of the “invidious Jew” and the *Toronto Telegram* would often print his sermons for a larger audience.⁴⁹

The tension increasingly mounted as the Jews were forced to live as an unaccepted group on the outskirts of society. Goel Tzedek Synagogue of Toronto and the Jewish cemetery in Kitchener were vandalized during this time.⁵⁰ However, it was not only the Jewish religious institutions which were victims of violence in the 1930s.

⁴⁸ Speisman, “Antisemitism in Ontario”, p.119.

⁴⁹ Irving Abella “Anti-Semitism in Canada in the Interwar Years” In. *The Jews of North America*, ed, Moses Rischin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p.243.

⁵⁰ David Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties vol.3* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1977) p.63.

No examination of anti-Semitism in Ontario would be complete without looking at the notorious unfolding of events which occurred in 1933. In that year, Swastika Clubs were formed by some gentile youths in Toronto's Balmy Beach area. The area had become a favourite outing for many of the immigrant population from the central part of the city. This caused much discontent among the Anglo-Protestants who lived in the area, and who accused the Jews and other minorities of littering the beach and changing in public.⁵¹ The members of the Swastika Clubs endeavoured to keep Balmy Beach *Judenrein* by wearing the swastika emblem and harassing Jewish bathers. Harassment was sometimes done through the use of violent attacks, yet on other occasions members of the swastika clubs vented their anti-Semitism and taunted Jews through the use of songs. This example would have been sung to the tune of "Home on the Range":

Oh give me a home where the Gentiles may roam,
Where the Jews are not rampant all day,
Where seldom is heard a loud Yiddish word
And the Gentiles are free all the day.⁵²

The events finally reached a head on the night of August 16, during the second game of the junior semi-finals of the city softball championship. The match had pitted a mostly Jewish team against a predominantly Gentile team. At the first game, a week earlier, a group in the audience watching the game displayed a swastika sign and proclaimed "Heil Hitler". At the end of the second game, things worsened as a swastika symbol was displayed once again by members of the "Pit Gang". This led to an ensuing six hour battle, during which many were bloodied by the multitude of weapons used by both sides. The event has come to be known as the Christie Pits riot, and is a striking example of the ethnic tensions in Canada during the Depression era.

⁵¹ Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf*, p.53.

⁵² Stephen Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979) p.333.

The situation in Quebec was unique because of the fears of the French-Catholic population of the province. French-Canadians realized that Confederation, and the British North America Act represented a significant break from the assimilationist tactics the British sought to employ with the Act of Union in 1840. With Confederation, the province of Quebec was created. The new province was officially bilingual; both English and French could be used in the debates of the provincial legislatures and courts, and all government publications were to be issued in both English and French. It maintained a French civil law system, and could legislate on education (although Protestant education was protected by law). In addition, like other Canadian provinces, the government of Quebec had power over nearly all areas of social, civil, family, and municipal affairs, along with the administration of public lands, prisons, and hospitals.

Although Confederation protected French-Canadian culture, French-Quebecers believed that this was only the case as long as they remained the majority group in Quebec. Increased immigration, and the growth of non-French speaking populations within the province, presented a significant problem. If the French-Catholic population of the province became diluted, there would be no reason to protect their language, culture, and traditions.

In 1931, Jews were the third most represented ethnic group in Quebec; outnumbered only by the inhabitants of French-Catholic, and Anglo-Protestant origins. In Montreal, Jews accounted for 5.79% of the total population.⁵³ The growing Jewish population in Quebec, and a fear that the survival of French-Canadian culture was in jeopardy, led to a growing opposition to immigration in general among many French-Canadians; this sometimes translated to anti-Semitism.

⁵³ Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) p.308.

It is well documented that anti-Semitic rhetoric was voiced in Quebec newspapers as well as from the pulpit. However, when studying ideological anti-Semitism, researchers are often pulled to study newspapers which are more explicit in their beliefs and stance. The problem with such papers is that they do not represent the views of the population as a whole, but instead represents the ideals of what is usually a small segment of the society.⁵⁴ This has been the case in Quebec, where *Le Devoir* and *L'Action catholique* have received more scholarly attention than *La Presse* and *Le Soleil*, both of which had a more popular orientation.⁵⁵

Another problem when studying ideological anti-Semitism in Quebec is that the context of the province is often forgotten. It must be stressed that although the majority of Quebec is francophone, the seat of power belonged to the Anglophones during this period. This is of importance for two reasons. First, as Gary Caldwell argues, the structure of Quebec's society at this time, which saw English-Canadians at the top, and French-Canadians below, allowed the former to act in an anti-Semitic fashion without justification. French speaking Canadians on the other hand, being in a weaker position, felt they had to justify their stance, and did so through the use of sermons and newspapers.⁵⁶ Secondly, French-Quebecers were unhappy with the position of the English-Canadians in the province. The Anglophones were seen as the representatives of big business and the changes which were occurring in Quebec society during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the French-Canadians wished to resist, they realized that the English-Canadians were too powerful. So, the Jews became a substitute for the English-Canadians of sorts. Everett C. Hughes, who had studied the small town of Drummondville in the 1930s, stated:

⁵⁴ A small segment of a bourgeois class, or educated professionals who felt very close ideologically to the positions defended by the Catholic Church.

⁵⁵ Gary Caldwell, "L'antisémitisme au Québec" In *Juifs et réalités juives au Québec*, ed. Pierre Anctil and Gary Caldwell (Montreal : Institut Québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1984) p.298.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the symbolic Jew receives the more bitter of the attacks which the French Canadians would like to make upon the English or perhaps upon some of their own leaders and institutions [...] The department stores, chain stores, banks, and large industrial and utility corporations have been introduced and are controlled by Anglo-Saxons. The Jew in Quebec is the physically present competitor rather than the hidden wirepuller of high finance and big business. The Jew operates and competes upon the French-Canadian businessman's own level.⁵⁷

Even in the outspoken newspaper *Le Devoir* there was never any frontal attack on the Anglo-Protestants. Both the Jews and the Anglo-Protestant were viewed as a competitor in French-Canadian circles. However, it was understood that the latter were too well established, politically, institutionally and monetarily to attack in the press. The Jews on the other hand were not nearly as deep-rooted, but were nonetheless associated with this group. This association of the Jews with the English was not difficult for French-Quebecers to come by. The newly arrived Jewish immigrants had realized very early that the English were the dominant community in Quebec. Therefore it seemed beneficial to align themselves with them, as opposed to the French-speaking minority. This alliance was eased as a consequence of the 1903 law on education, which forced Jews to be schooled in the English Protestant system. Nevertheless, there was a strong attraction to the English, even without such laws. Jacques Langlais and David Rome pointed to this when they wrote:

for most Jews and other newcomers to Quebec, becoming Canadian meant joining the English community – specifically, the English Protestants who led the country. In the *shtetl*, they had looked to St. Petersburg, Vienna or Berlin. Now their eyes were on London, Washington and Ottawa. Joining a French Catholic society and aligning themselves with the French minority would have meant divorcing themselves from the rest of North America, from the Jewish diaspora, from an immense social and economic network.⁵⁸

Although the school question and the *achat chez nous* are often mentioned in debates concerning anti-Semitism in Canada, for those who view Quebec as the core of Canadian anti-Semitism, the presence of Adrian Arcand in the province is often seen as the nail in the coffin. However, this simplistic argument is flawed. Adrien Arcand was arguably the most active

⁵⁷ Everett Hughes, *French Canada in Transition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p.217.

⁵⁸ Jacques Langlais and David Rome, *Jews and French Quebecers* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991) p.73.

Fascist in Canada in the 1930s and 1940s and published vile anti-Semitic rhetoric in three newspapers: *Le Goglu*, *Le Patriote* and *Le Chameau* along with his colleague Joseph Menard. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that he was not alone. Fascist movements were sprouting throughout Canada during the 1930s. Two of the largest Fascist groups at the time were the Canadian Union of Fascists, led by Joseph C. Farr in Toronto, and the Winnipeg-based Canadian Nationalist party, led by William Whittaker, which endeavoured to combat Jewish and communist influence and to reform the government.⁵⁹ In 1937, Arcand's *Parti National Social Chrétien du Canada* formed an alliance with these groups. Then, in 1938 the groups merged forming the National Unity Party of Canada. Arcand was named the national leader, and Farr became the party's organizer.⁶⁰

Furthermore, Arcand's membership, which was never disclosed officially, was not substantial. Even at its peak, Fascism attracted only a small number of supporters in Canada and was formed mostly of the same type of disaffected youth which patrolled the beaches of Toronto.⁶¹ It was even less popular than the Communist party, which for its part, could not boast a significant following.⁶² In reality, Arcand had little to no influence in Quebec politics. He never became an elected official, nor did any of his sympathisers; although he was a talented orator, and his skill at propaganda guaranteed him an audience, his Fascist movement suffered from a number of pitfalls. The Catholic Church often berated Arcand, which, as a consequence, discredited his movement in Quebec. His support of British Imperialism did not sit well with the autonomist aspirations of French-Canadian nationalists. Furthermore, his movement's

⁵⁹Robin, *Shades of Right*, p.200.

⁶⁰ For more information see. Jean-François Nadeau, *Adrien Arcand: The Canadian Führer*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers, 2011) p.209-213.

⁶¹ Robin, *Shades of Right*, p. 93 and 156.

⁶² Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock. *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) p.225.

association with Hitler, which lasted until 1938, was cause for concern.⁶³ In the end, other than a noticeable oratory and journalistic flair, Arcand was no different than the myriad of fascist leaders who emerged throughout the provinces during the 1930s.

Anti-Semitism was present throughout Canadian society in the 1920s and was only exacerbated by the Depression of the 1930s. However, evidence seems to demonstrate that the Liberal government was under the impression that measures to impede immigration, and especially the immigration of Jews, were indispensable in order to secure the Quebec vote. The government of the period without doubt was aware of two phenomena which affected popular opinion in the 1930s throughout the country. There was hostility to immigration on the one hand, and anti-Semitism on the other. Sometimes these coincided, but very often they did not. Nevertheless, both of these factors pushed for a more restrictive immigration policy. Therefore, in order to maintain order, the government opted not to open wide its doors to Jewish refugees.

It is in this chaotic situation that the Canadian Jewish community attempted to gain admission for a number of their coreligionists during the period of Nazi power in Germany. Aware of the presence of anti-Semitism throughout Canada the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) was reconvened in January of 1934 after years of inactivity; Sam Jacobs, a Liberal MP for the Montreal riding of Cartier, became the new president. The main goal of Congress at this point was to safeguard the rights of Canadian Jews and to protect the community from anti-Semitism. However, as the situation in Europe worsened it became clear that something had to be done in order to help the Jewish communities of Europe, particularly in Germany and later in Austria, Poland and Romania.

⁶³ Nadeau, *Adrien Arcand: The Canadian Führer* p.313.

Prior to the reconvention of the CJC there were organizations in place which focused on Jewish immigration to Canada. The Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), created in 1891, pushed for organized group settlements of Jewish agriculturalists in Canada. It also attempted to secure funds to help maintain Jewish farming colonies, in order to demonstrate that Jews could become farmers given the resources. There was also the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS), founded in the 1920s, which dealt with the government on a case by case basis in the interest of individual Jews. Furthermore, JIAS also lobbied for the government to adopt more liberal policies in its immigration laws.

Even though these organizations were in place, the Jewish community was not certain how to approach the situation at hand and divisions were evident within the community. Simon Belkin, who lobbied for the admission of Jews in Ottawa during this period, wrote in his 1966 study of Jewish immigrant aid work in Canada that the “Jewish communities of the United States and Canada cannot claim that they contributed financially in sufficient measure to help the refugees during this tragic decade.”⁶⁴ Abella and Troper added, “any notion of a Jewish community that was well-financed, well-organized and united in a common cause during the crucial years immediately preceding the war is a fiction.”⁶⁵

In the early years, a large portion of the Jewish community placed their faith in the hands of their representatives in Ottawa, hoping that they could influence government policy through quiet diplomacy. There were three Jewish MPs in Ottawa following the 1935 elections, each representing one of the three urban Jewish centres of Canada: A.A. Heaps, of the newly formed CCF, was re-elected as MP for the riding of Winnipeg North;⁶⁶ the Liberal MP for Toronto West

⁶⁴ Simon Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates* (Montreal: The Eagle Publishing Co., 1966)p.180.

⁶⁵ Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, p.14.

⁶⁶ Heaps had previously been a member of the Canadian Labour Party.

Center, Sam Factor, was re-elected as the representative for the newly created district of Spadina, Ontario;⁶⁷ and Sam Jacobs, also of the Liberal Party, maintained his seat in the Montreal riding of Cartier, Quebec. Together they attempted to secure admission of Jews to Canada in private meetings and passionate speeches in the House of Commons. On April 8, 1937 Sam Factor announced in the House that he could not support a trade agreement with Germany. He reasoned “Since the establishment of the dictatorship in Germany thousands of human beings have suffered persecution and outrageous offences against civilization” and continued, stating “I feel that I have a right as a Canadian to stand up in this house and utter my protest.” He then read the letter of resignation of James G. McDonald, the former High Commissioner for German refugees, dated December 27, 1935 which spoke of the intensification of persecution within the Reich.⁶⁸

Although all three of these politicians were respected in Ottawa, their pleas on the part of Jewish refugees never amounted to any promises on the government’s part, and by 1938 the Jewish community was becoming increasingly frustrated with the little headway they had achieved. This feeling was not abated when Sam Jacobs passed away in August of 1938. In December of that year the Canadian Jewish Congress began to take steps towards the formation of the Canadian Jewish Committee for Refugees (CJCR) and in 1939 the whiskey magnate, Samuel Bronfman, became the new president of the CJC.

Bronfman realized there was a need for the Jewish community of Canada to be united in its efforts. In a CJC manifesto to the Jews of Canada in January of 1939, he pleaded for the Canadian Jewish community to concern itself with the plight of European Jewry and to be united

⁶⁷ The riding of Toronto West Center was dissolved in 1933 and redistributed between the ridings of Spadina, St. Paul’s and Trinity.

⁶⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, April 8, 1937, p.2736-2739. This call for unity was influenced largely by the events of Kristallnacht.

in their own interests, as well as those of international Jewry.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, realizing the CJC did not necessarily speak for all the Jews of Canada, the CJCR incorporated other Jewish organizations that were not affiliated with Congress, such as the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Colonization Association of Canada, and the B'nai Brith. In so doing, the CJCR could be seen as a national body to act in the name of Canadian Jewry in matters pertaining to the refugee problem.⁷⁰ In addition, just before the Second World War, the CJC created the United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies (UJRA), a federation of various organizations which lobbied the government to admit Jewish refugees.

The Canadian Jewish Congress also allied itself with sympathetic gentile associations. Upon the initiative of the CJC the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Persecution (CNCR) was formed. This organization boasted representation from the CJC along with many Christian churches, the League of Nations Society in Canada, the National Women's Organization and several others. The CNCR was under the direction of Senator Cairine Wilson and attempted to open Canada's doors to refugees and combat Canadian anti-Semitism through several educational campaigns. However, this organization only operated in English, even in Montreal, and there were no French-Catholic priests included in its administration. In addition, certain Protestants who had been recruited were noted anti-Catholics. For this reason, the CNCR had little to no influence in French Canada.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Memorandum, 1939, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Benjamin Robinson files.

⁷⁰ Sam Bronfman to Members of the Dominion Council, Canadian Jewish Congress, Presidents of Refugee Committees, and Presidents of local Jewish organizations throughout Canada, March 21, 1939, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, CA Box 11, File 54.

⁷¹ "Le problème de l'immigration et l'animosité antiquébécoise?" *Le Devoir*, December 16, 1943.

See also, Claris Edwin Silcox, "Protestant-Catholic Relations in Canada: Address at the Canadian Institute of Economics and Politics, Lake Couchiching, Ontario, August 11, 1938." (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1938).

The CNCRs focus on education was an attempt to influence public opinion towards a more open immigration policy. This emphasis on education was due in large part to an interview that the organization had with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet in December of 1938. The committee commended the government for having sent a representative to the Evian Conference in July of that year, and proceeded by presenting their resolutions to King and his Cabinet. The committee pointed to the growing intensity of persecutions in Europe and maintained the view that carefully selected individuals, or groups of refugees, could be of inestimable value in aiding Canada's economy. It was also explained that there was no need to question the ability of carefully selected refugees to assimilate. Furthermore, the government was asked to modify its restrictions to facilitate entry for relatives of individuals already residing in Canada.

According to the CNCR minutes, upon hearing the resolutions of the committee, the Prime Minister,

indicated that there was a great deal of sympathy for the request of the delegation, but stated that the public and members of parliament needed considerable education on the question. He stated that he had received a number of letters from members of parliament indicating they would oppose any immigration measure. He felt that any influence used with members of parliament and provincial governments would be most helpful.⁷²

In order to educate the public the CNCR funded speaker tours across Canada, ensured favourable editorials in the English press, and published various brochures and literature on the refugee question such as a memorandum entitled "Should Canada Admit Refugees?" which was published into ten thousand copies and released in January of 1939. The committee was so optimistic about the result of their educational campaign that in a confidential report from

⁷² Minutes of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution, December 6, 1938, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Box 4 ZA1939 32-46A

February 1939, Simon Belkin wrote that “It was felt that by now opinion has been crystallized and the government should be in a position to tell the Jews of Canada what it intends to do.”⁷³

What did the government do? In order to understand the decision taken concerning Jewish immigration, it is first necessary to have a general overview of Canadian immigration history from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Aaron Hart, the first Jew to have settled permanently in Canada, did so in 1763. Over the next century, Canada’s Jewish population remained minimal; census records show there were only 1,333 Jews living in Canada in 1871.⁷⁴ Jewish immigration to Canada, for all intents and purposes, began in the 1880s, when a large number of Russian Jews began to emigrate following the pogroms of 1881-1882 and the May Laws of 1882.⁷⁵ Consequently, Canada’s Jewish population had grown to 6,501 by 1891 and to 16,401 by 1901.⁷⁶

In 1905, the failed revolution shook Russian Jewry once again. This led to a mass exodus which lasted until the First World War. Canada’s Jewish population grew exponentially during this period and by 1911, 75,681 Jews were living in Canada.⁷⁷ Furthermore, 12,636 Jewish immigrants arrived in Canada in 1912, followed by 15,142 in 1913, and another 24,054 in 1914.⁷⁸ Explaining why there was such a significant increase in Jewish immigration following the events of 1905, Rebecca Kobrin writes:

A concatenation of technological, commercial, social, and ideological factors intersected around 1905 to impel so many Jews to leave Russia. First, advances in technology, shipping, and print transformed the practice of overseas migration, enabling thousands to contemplate leaving Russia. But most important,

⁷³ Confidential report of Interview held with Minister of Immigration, the hon. T.A. Crerar and the Director of Immigration, Mr. F.C. Blair. February 24, 1939. Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Box 4 ZA1939 32-46A

⁷⁴ Rosenberg, *Canada’s Jews* p.10.

⁷⁵ The May Laws were a set of temporary regulations concerning Russia’s Jews sanctioned by Czar Alexander III in May of 1882.

⁷⁶ Rosenberg, *Canada’s Jews* p.10.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

Russian Jews' distinctively new attitudes, economic aspirations, and political expectations that derived from their exposure to intellectuals and new modes of thought in fin de siècle Russian Jewish society ultimately drove many Jews to give up on the dream of transforming Russia after 1905.⁷⁹

These high figures would also have been helped by Canadian immigration regulations of the time. Early immigration acts in Canada were open to most immigrants. The earliest acts focused on keeping out groups which were viewed as harmful, such as: the insane, the deaf, the blind, the diseased, criminals and prostitutes. This was the case until 1910, when clause 38 of a new act allowed for the prohibition of “immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada.”⁸⁰ The 1910 act also gave the government the power to regulate immigration through Orders-in-Council. Then in the 1919 amending act, clause 38 was expanded and stated the governor-in-council could:

Prohibit or limit in number for a stated period or permanently the landing in Canada or the landing at any specified port or ports of entry in Canada, of immigrants belonging to any nationality or race or of immigrants of any specified class or occupation, by reason of any economic, industrial or other condition temporarily existing in Canada or because such immigrants are deemed unsuitable having regard to the climatic, industrial, social, educational, labour or other conditions or requirements in Canada or because such immigrants are deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life and methods of holding property, and because their probable inability to become readily assimilated or to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship within a reasonable time after their entry.⁸¹

The 1923 Order-in-Council, P.C. 183, and its 1931 successor, P.C. 695, severely limited the flow of Jewish immigrants to Canada in the 1930s. P.C. 183 stipulated that immigration to Canada was limited to:

1. Bona fide farmers with sufficient means to begin farming in Canada.
2. Bona fide labourers entering Canada with reasonable assurance of employment.
3. Female domestic servants entering Canada with reasonable assurance of employment.
4. The wife or child of any person legally admitted to and resident in Canada, who is in position to receive and care for his dependents.⁸²

⁷⁹ Rebecca Kobrin, “The Russian Revolution Abroad: Mass Migration, Russian Jewish Liberalism, and American Jewry, 1903-1914” In: Stefani Hoffman and Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) p.228-229.

⁸⁰ Government of Canada. *Acts of the Parliament of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1910) p.218.

⁸¹ Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) p.17.

⁸² Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, p.127

British and American citizens were exempted from these requirements. In addition, the administrative regulations, which were adopted at this time by the Department of Immigration, added regulations not written into the orders-in-council themselves. Most importantly, immigrants were now divided into three distinct groups based on racial characteristics and their supposed likelihood of being assimilated.⁸³

The first group consisted of the “preferred immigrants”. Within this group fell citizens of Iceland, Norway, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, France, Belgium, Luxemburg and Switzerland. These immigrants were believed to have very similar racial characteristics to the dominant Canadian Anglo-Protestant group. This, in turn, made them desirable immigrants, and they benefitted from nearly the same immigration procedures as British and American citizens.

The second group was termed the “Non-preferred Group” and included citizens of Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Unlike the “preferred immigrants”, those who found themselves in this second group had to fall within the regulations of P.C. 183 in order to immigrate to Canada.

The final group was the “Special Permit” group, which extended to all citizens of Greece, Turkey, Armenia, Syria and Italy. Also included in this group were all Jews born outside of the United States or the British Empire. Members of this group were viewed as possessing the least desirable racial characteristics and were viewed as being the least assimilable; therefore they represented a threat to the preservation of an Anglo-Protestant culture in Canada. For a prospective immigrant from this class to be allowed into Canada, he or she had to obtain a special permit which was granted by the Department of Immigration. Immigrants in this group were evaluated on a case by case basis. These restrictions, brought into being in the 1930s, were

⁸³ Ibid. p.127-128.

still in place by the time of the Second World War when Jews were attempting desperately to flee Europe.

The final changes which affected refugees during the war took place in early December 1938 and were most likely influenced by *Kristallnacht*. The information concerning who could and could not be admitted can be found in a Memorandum by Norman Robertson. For the most part, immigration stayed the same as it had in P.C. 183. Canada still would not accept a quota basis. However, immigration was no longer limited to agriculturalists, domestics, wives and children alone. Exemptions were now made due to the situation in Europe and refugees were now mentioned as an admissible group. As the document stipulated, Canada would admit:

- (b) Refugees joining first degree relatives resident in Canada in a position to receive and care for them. First degree relatives will consist of parents, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters, and the wives and children of those that may be married. The term "refugee" will include not only those who must leave Greater Germany or Italy because of racial, political or religious views, but also those who have already left these countries and are temporarily residing elsewhere.
- (c) Persons having sufficient capital (not less than \$15,000) to establish themselves and provide their own employment and maintenance.
- (d) Professional and technical persons when their labour or service would be of advantage to Canada.
- (e) Persons coming to establish new industries such as the manufacture of high grade glass and porcelain, when capital is available for that purpose.
- (f) Refugee orphan children under fourteen for adoption and education, by families resident in Canada who are able and willing to provide suitable homes.
- (g) Male fiancés when the Departmental investigation shows that settlement arrangements are satisfactory; this to apply only to applications already filed in by the Department.⁸⁴

The Statute of Westminster of 1931 made the Dominion of Canada, for all intents and purposes an independent state. The British government could no longer intervene in Canadian affairs, as this would have represented a breach of the statute. So, when examining Canada's immigration record from 1933 to 1945 it is important to keep in mind that immigration was dictated by the Canadian government alone. The Dominion sought to protect its own interests and therefore framed its policies independently from Great Britain.

⁸⁴ Memorandum, December 8, 1938. In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.846-847.

Historians who have analyzed Canada's immigration record in the 1930s and 1940s have argued that Canada did not do enough to help the Jews of Europe and that the number allowed into the country was minimal. Harold Troper and Irving Abella in their pioneering work, *None is Too Many*, write that "between 1933 and 1945 Canada found room within her borders for fewer than 5,000 Jews" a record which is "arguably the worst of all possible refugee-receiving states."⁸⁵ The statistics compiled by Abella and Troper have been nearly unrevised since the publication of their work in 1982. Even Allan Levine in his recent biography of Mackenzie King sites these numbers once again as proof of Canadian inaction.⁸⁶ However, the centrepiece of this argument is flawed.

Through a careful examination of the data compiled in the 1930s and 1940s by Louis Rosenberg, it is realized that the statistics brought forward by Irving Abella and Harold Troper are incorrect. To begin, it is important to note that Louis Rosenberg was a social statistician of Canadian Jewry, and a foremost authority on the Canadian Jewish community during his lifetime. Rosenberg was in constant correspondence with the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (DBS), and continuously examined a wide range of available statistical sources in order to conduct his socio-demographic works of Jewish life in Canada during the 1930s and onwards. By corresponding with the DBS and the Department of Immigration, Rosenberg received accurate figures concerning the number of Jews arriving in Canada on a monthly and yearly basis throughout the 1930s and 1940s.⁸⁷ In fact, when comparing the data forwarded by Rosenberg for Jewish admittance to Canada from 1931 to 1937 with those given by Frederick

⁸⁵ Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, p. xxii.

⁸⁶ Allan Levine, *King*, (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011) p.292.

⁸⁷ For a fuller biography, see Morton Weinfeld's introduction to *Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of Jews in Canada in the 1930s*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008) p.xi-xxiii

Charles Blair, the Director of the Immigration Branch, in a letter dated June 6, 1938 to William R. Little, Canada's chief immigration officer in Europe, the figures are shown to be identical.⁸⁸

Although Abella and Troper utilized the Louis Rosenberg Fonds, their conclusions concerning Canada's immigration record from 1933 to 1945 do not come from these. Instead, their claim that Canada allowed entry to fewer than 5,000 Jews from 1933 to 1945 seems to be based on a file from Frederick Charles Blair to Norman Robertson, the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, dated March 22, 1943. In the document, Blair explains that Canada had accepted at least forty-five hundred refugees since 1933.⁸⁹ One must note that in this instance, Blair was speaking of refugees alone, not immigrants.

With Rosenberg's statistical data, it can be concluded that Canada allowed entry to 8,787 Jewish immigrants from 1933 to 1945. Of these, 5,160 arrived via ocean port, and 3,627 arrived via the United States.⁹⁰ The numbers increase to 11,127 when adding the 2,340 interned Jewish refugees who arrived in Canada in 1940, and were subsequently allowed to stay following their release.⁹¹

It is often believed that during the Depression and the Second World War immigration to Canada was nearly completely barred off to Jews. Such an argument seems valid at first when comparing the number of Jewish immigrants who landed in Canada from 1933 to 1948 with those who had arrived in the ten years preceding, as shown in the following table:

⁸⁸ F.C. Blair to Little, June 6, 1938. In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.796-800.

⁸⁹ Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, p.135.

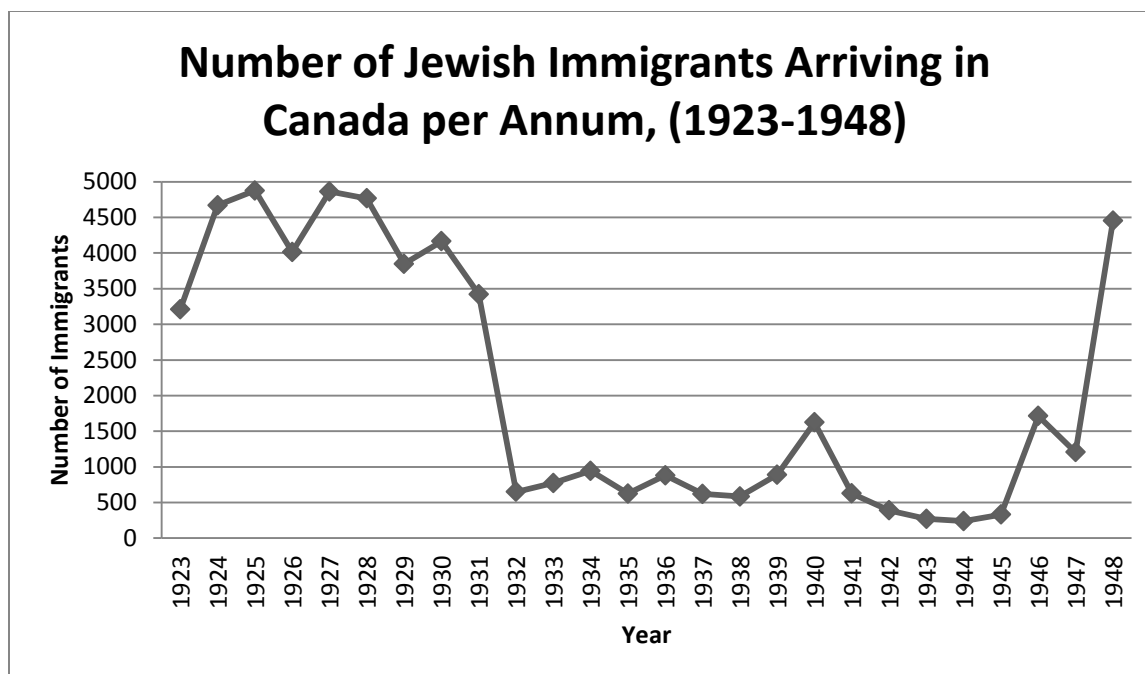
⁹⁰ Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

⁹¹ It should be noted that nearly half of these refugees decided to return to Great-Britain during the war. For more information on the interned refugees, see Paula J. Draper, "The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees," Part 1, *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 2.1 (1978) pp.1-38; Part 2, *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 2.2. (1979) pp.80-112. See also by the same author, "The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1983).

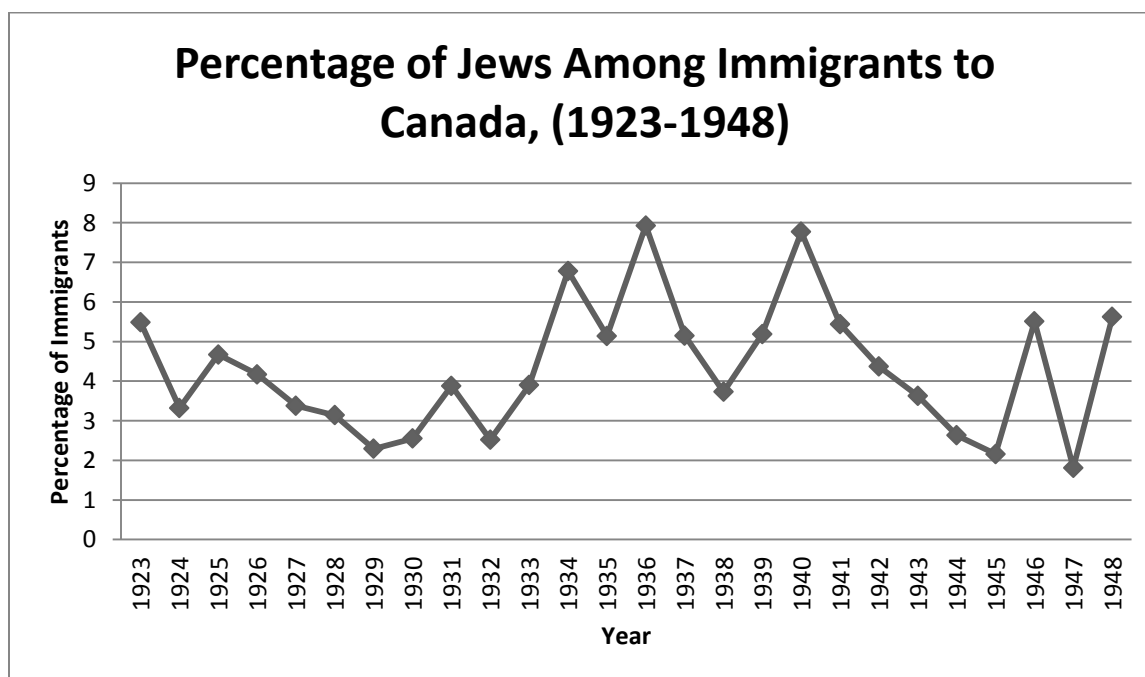
Jewish Immigrant Arrivals to Canada by Fiscal Year from 1923 to 1948				
Year	Total of Jewish Immigrants	Arriving Via Ocean Ports	Arriving Via United States	Percentage of Total Immigrants
1923	3,209	2,793	416*	5.49
1924	4,671	4,255	416*	3.32
1925	4,876	4,459	417*	4.67
1926	4,014	3,587	427	4.17
1927	4,863	4,471	392	3.38
1928	4,766	4,296	470	3.14
1929	3,848	3,301	547	2.29
1930	4,164	3,544	620	2.55
1931	3,421	3,908	513	3.88
1932	649	202	447	2.52
1933	772	346	426	3.90
1934	943	599	344	6.78
1935	624	335	289	5.14
1936	880	655	225	7.93
1937	619	391	228	5.15
1938	584	317	267	3.73
1939	890	621	269	5.19
1940	3,963**	3,661**	302	10.01
1941	626	284	342	5.44
1942	388	111	277	4.37
1943	270	31	239	3.63
1944	238	56	182	2.63
1945	330	93	237	2.16
1946	1,713	1,345	368	5.51
1947	1,205	605	600	1.81
1948	4,454	3,922	532	5.62

*Estimates **Including 2,340 interned refugees

Source: Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)



Source: Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)



Source: Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

However, when dissecting the numbers and looking at the amount of Jewish immigrants who arrived in Canada proportionately as opposed to numerically alone, the records become all the more surprising. 38,481 Jews arrived in Canada from 1923 to 1932 compared to 8,787 from 1933 to 1945. Even so, Jews represented a much higher proportion of the immigrants allowed

into the country in the later period. For the ten year period concerning 1923 to 1932 Jews represented 3.54% of all immigrants. Then from 1933 to 1945 they represented an average of 4.91% when excluding the interned refugees, and 5.16% when they are included. This demonstrates a jump of 1.37% in immigration from the first period to the second. What these findings illustrate is that all immigration to Canada was slowed due to economic and political factors from 1933 to 1945. Nevertheless, the doors were not barred to Jews, and they represented a higher proportion of Canada's immigrants at this point than they had in the past.

Immigration to Canada during the period studied here was to be limited to farmers and domestics. This had been put to paper with P.C. 183 in 1923. The Dominion had always given preference to immigrants who could be considered farmers or domestics. The sad fact was that the majority of European Jews did not fall into these categories. This realization had been made very early on by Canadian officials. Clifford Sifton, in a memorandum written to Wilfrid Laurier on December 10, 1900 stated: "Experience shows that the Jewish people do not become agriculturalists. However strong the attempts that are made to induce them to remain upon the land and become cultivators of the soil, such efforts have, so far as Canada is concerned proved an undoubted failure."⁹² Nevertheless, although rules and regulations were passed, which limited immigration to certain groups, evidence suggests these were not followed as stringently as some would have wished. This can be attributed in large part to the difficulties encountered when screening potential immigrants during this period. It was very challenging at landing to determine if an immigrant had been an agriculturalist in the country of origin, or would remain one in Canada. Consequently, officials could count almost solely on the immigrant's oral declarations, which were not always truthful.

⁹² Sifton to Laurier, December 10, 1900. Library and Archives Canada, Wilfrid Laurier Papers (MG 26-G)

When looking at the listed occupations for Jews arriving in Canada, it is clear that the numbers who fully satisfied the requirements to be deemed admissible were very slim. From 1933 to 1939 a mere 1.4% of Jewish immigrants per year, on average, were farmers and 4% were domestic servants. Among non-Jewish immigrants during this span 8.7% were farmers and 4.7% were domestics. Most Jewish immigrants who listed an occupation were merchants; 14.5% of Jews arriving in Canada listed this as their occupation compared to 3.4% of other immigrants. Nevertheless, the largest categories for both Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants were the dependents. Among Jews, wives accounted for 22.6% and children 28.8% respectively, compared to 25.8% and 33.72% among non-Jews.⁹³ With these statistics, one can safely say that Canada's doors were not open only to farmers and domestics and many exceptions to the regulations were made.

In order to understand immigration in general, one must analyze the push and pull factors. So, attention will now turn to the events which took place in Germany from 1933 to 1939, and their effects on emigration from the Third Reich. This will aid in determining how strongly Jews within the Reich wished to leave.

A German census taken in June of 1933 indicates 499,682 Jews living in Germany at that time. Of these, 400,935 (80.2%) were German nationals; the remaining 98,747 (19.2%) were stateless Jews, or citizens of other countries (56,480 were Poles).⁹⁴ Studies have found that when Hitler ascended to power in 1933, the dominant view among Jews in Germany was that the crisis and disorder would be short-lived, and life would return to normal. Even so, there was a short spike in Jewish emigration from the Reich at this time. 37,000 Jews emigrated from Germany in 1933; the majority of these emigrants were Jewish intellectuals, who had been involved in the

⁹³ Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

⁹⁴ Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore, *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States* (New York: Bergahn Books, 2010) p.207.

two main left-wing political parties of the country, and therefore perceived as enemies of the state (who secretly fled to neighbouring countries), and foreign Jews living in Germany.⁹⁵

The number of departures from Germany began to recede in 1934 and 1935, and some Jews began to return to the Reich during this period.⁹⁶ It was believed the situation in Germany would remain tolerable, and that the Jewish population would, at least, be able to adapt to the changing circumstances. Jews who emigrated during these years, like those in 1933, tended to look towards neighbouring countries as new homelands. There are a variety of socio-cultural and economic factors which help to explain why German emigrants were drawn to neighbouring countries. German Jews knew more about these than countries overseas; there was often less of a language barrier; it allowed them to keep in touch with family members and friends; the cost was much lower, and admission was much easier to secure.⁹⁷ Emigration to Palestine also became popular during this period. For younger Jews who were unemployed, or who were now excluded from their expected career, occupational retraining became a strongly advocated option by German Jewish social agencies; this was also supported by Reformist, Socialist, and Zionist ideologists, who called for a return to productive manual or rural occupations in Palestine.⁹⁸ In addition, the Ha'avara transfer agreements made Palestine an interesting option for wealthy German Jews. With the goal of ridding Germany of as many Jews as possible, the German

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.207-208; Doron Niederland, "The Emigration of Jewish Academics and Professionals in the First Years of Nazi Rule," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 33, no.1 (1988) p.288; Herbert Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I)," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 25, no.1 (1980) p.326.

⁹⁶ See. Herbert Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I)," p.357: "In 1933-1934, Jewish opinion as well as the Jewish press in Germany had gained a clear view of the increasing misery of middle-class emigres and their families in Western countries sliding into marginality and, ultimately, poverty and dependence on welfare. Return migration appears to have persisted through early 1935 when a Nazi threat of internment in a concentration camp for returnees appears to have put a stop to such return movements."

⁹⁷ Werner Rosenstock, "Exodus 1933-1939: A Survey of Jewish Emigration from Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 1, no.1 (1956) p.380.

⁹⁸ Herbert A. Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (II)," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 26, no.1 (1981) p.348.

Government granted Palestine a special status, and signed a series of agreements with Zionist institutions in 1933, which facilitated the transfer of Jewish property from Germany to Palestine. It was agreed that potential German Jewish immigrants could deposit their Reichsmarks in a special account in Germany. Subsequently, the funds were used towards the purchase of German goods which were then exported to Palestine. The goods were afterwards sold in Palestine by the Ha'avara Company, who paid the newly arrived immigrant the revenue from the sale of the items in Palestine pounds, minus a commission. Originally, the agreement had no limit on the amount of Jews who could take part in the program. However, on January 1st 1935, the German Government set a limit of 20 a month; then, in April of 1936 the program was cancelled completely.⁹⁹

In 1936, Jewish emigration overseas exceeded emigration to European countries, as well as to Palestine. Even so, Jewish emigration from Germany remained relatively stable from 1934 to 1937. Whereas 37,000 Jews had emigrated in 1933, by 1934 the number had dropped to 23,000, this was followed by 21,000 in 1935 (the Nuremberg Laws were enacted in September of that year), then 25,000 in 1936, and 23,000 in 1937. After the pogrom of November 9-10 in 1938, now known as *Kristallnacht*, German Jews realized the situation within the Reich would not ameliorate, but would only continue to worsen. This period saw a significant jump in the number of Jews emigrating from the Reich; 40,000 Jews left Germany in 1938, followed by another 78,000 in 1939, and 15,000 in 1940.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Aviva Halamish, "Palestine as a Destination for Jewish Immigrants and Refugees from Nazi Germany" In. *Refugees from Nazi Germany*, ed. Frank Caestecked and Bob Moore (New York: Bergahn Books, 2010) p.135-137.

¹⁰⁰ Herbert Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I)," p.326.

Total Number of Jewish Emigrants from Germany (1933-1940)		
Year	Total Number of Emigrants	Difference
1933	37,000	
1934	23,000	-14,000
1935	21,000	+2,000
1936	25,000	+4,000
1937	23,000	-2,000
1938	40,000	+17,000
1939	78,000	+38,000
1940	15,000	-63,000

Source: Herbert Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I)," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 25, no.1 (1980) p.326.

These findings tend to coincide with the countries of birth listed by Jewish immigrants to Canada from 1933 to 1942, shown in the tables below. One table shows figures from 1932 to 1936, and the other continues from 1937 to 1941. The ten top countries from which Jewish immigrants were coming are noteworthy. The statistics illustrate that as the situation became graver within the Reich, Jewish emigration began to increase, particularly after the pogrom of 1938. Likewise, Jewish emigration began to noticeably increase in a territory as soon as it became occupied by the Nazis. This can be seen clearly when looking at the change in the number of immigrants Canada received from Austria, which was annexed in 1938, and Czechoslovakia which lost the Sudetenland in November of 1938, and was occupied in full by March of 1939. Although Poland was annexed in 1939, there is only a slight growth in immigration in 1940. This is explained by the fact that in October of 1940 Jewish emigration from Poland was forbidden by the Nazis in order to keep emigration possibilities as open as possible for Jews within the Reich.¹⁰¹ This effectively limited the amount of Polish Jews Canada could receive. Then, in October of 1941, Heinrich Himmler ordered an end to emigration from the Reich. This effectively paralyzed Jewish emigration from Europe as the majority of the continent was under Nazi control by that point.

¹⁰¹ Saul Friedlander, *The Years of Extermination*, (Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2008) p.83.

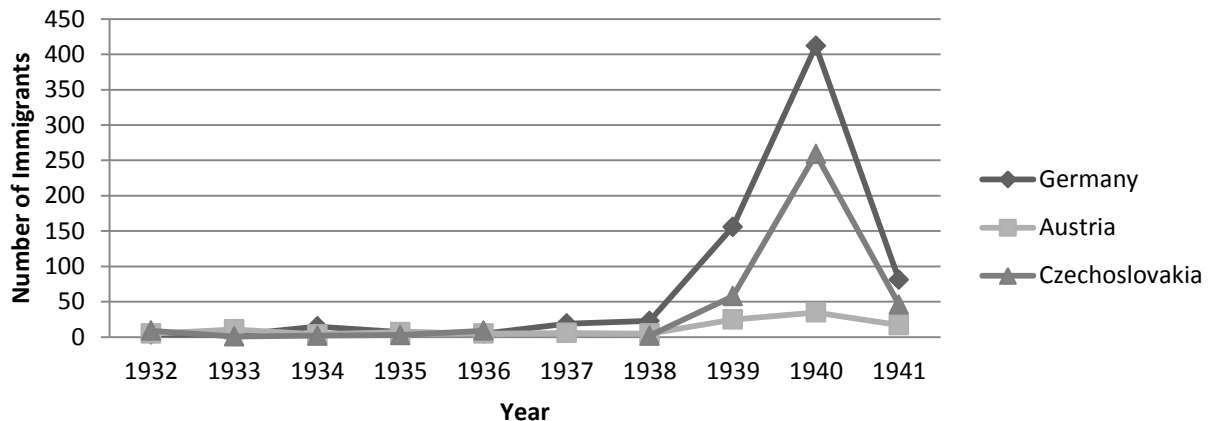
Country of Birth of Jewish Immigrants to Canada by Fiscal Year, 1932 to 1936						
Country of Birth	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	Total
Poland	168	292	533	278	566	1,837
U.S.A.	254	251	214	185	127	1,031
Russia	90	81	78	61	55	365
Great Britain	49	34	25	35	17	160
Romania	26	32	25	21	29	133
Lithuania	18	30	9	7	21	85
Germany	4	3	15	7	18	47
Austria	5	11	4	7	5	32
Latvia	3	7	6	4	7	27
Czechoslovakia	9	1	2	3	9	24

Source: Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

Country of Birth of Jewish Immigrants to Canada by Fiscal Year, 1937-1941						
Country of Birth	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	Total
Poland	297	228	228	340	65	1,158
U.S.A.	155	179	185	193	196	908
Germany	19	23	156	412	81	691
Czechoslovakia	-	2	58	259	46	365
Great Britain	27	37	58	74	51	247
Russia	42	52	45	47	53	239
Romania	25	11	45	66	20	167
Lithuania	24	14	20	44	15	117
Hungary	4	4	12	59	20	99
Austria	6	5	25	35	17	88

Source: Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

Number of Jews Immigrating to Canada from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, (1932-1941)



Source: Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

One could make the argument that the rise in Jewish immigration to Canada from Austria, Germany and Czechoslovakia from 1939 to 1941 is due to the general increase in immigration which Canada saw at this time. However, this would be a mistake and is easily illustrated when comparing records for 1936 and 1939. There were 655 Jews who arrived in Canada via ocean port in 1936. Of these, 18 were from Germany, 5 were from Austria and 9 were from Czechoslovakia. In 1939 there were 34 fewer Jews who arrived by ocean port, bringing the total down to 621. Even so, there was a noticeable rise in Jewish immigrants from these three countries; 156 arrivals from Germany, 25 from Austria and 58 from Czechoslovakia. This cannot be considered a fluke, but must be attributed to the socio-political factors in Europe at this time in history.

Many have begged an answer to the question of whether Canada did enough to help the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust. A common occurrence with studies concerning the Holocaust is that collective memory and modern interpretations of the event cloud the truth and

make it difficult to fully understand why more Jews were not saved, and why the doors of the democracies were not fully opened to the desperate Jews of Europe. What are often forgotten in attempting to answer such a question are the unalterable facts of that time.

A side-effect of the popularization of the Holocaust is that the understanding of events as they chronologically occurred is not fully understood. Many believe that the governments of the time knew what was happening in Europe much earlier than they actually could have.

Furthermore, there is the constant question of why more was not done. There is now a common sense of guilt, which is present in society, that the democratic leaders of the period did not do more to ease the plight of refugees, and allow them entry into their countries, whether it was acceptable to their population or not. The history of Canadian immigration has now become a politically charged arena wherein the concerns of the government during the war are now discounted as political fabrications.

Numerous authors have now stressed that government arguments of the period were false. However, any unbiased analysis of the evidence will show that this was not the case. It cannot be stressed enough that the Allied governments did not begin to receive information concerning the Final Solution from various circles until 1942; even then, the stories remained nearly impossible to fully comprehend.¹⁰² However, when well documented attacks took place, the Canadian government did move to open doors to refugees; statistics show that following

¹⁰² Friedlander, *The Years of Extermination*, p.454-463.

Also, see Telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 8, 1942. Library and Archives Canada, RG25-A-3-b vol.3122 file 4637-4640, which states:

1. "Jewish organisations here have recently organised considerable publicity regarding the existence of a German plan for the extermination of Jews and have approached the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs [,] the United States and Soviet Ambassadors with a proposal that the United Kingdom [,] United States and Soviet Governments should issue a declaration condemning the German policy and threatening retribution.
2. Whilst it is impossible to obtain confirmation of particular incidents or of the general allegations we have little doubt that a policy of gradual extermination of Jews except highly skilled workers is being carried out by the German authorities. The Polish Government have [sic] recently received reports tending to confirm this view which they regard as reliable and which read convincingly."

Kristallnacht in November 1938, there was an increase in Jewish immigration. Sadly, this lasted for only a little over two years, because immigration from the Reich was prohibited in 1941. Canada's involvement in a total war against a foreign enemy also affected immigration at this time. As Donald Avery has written in response to Irving Abella and Harold Troper's claim that Canada was too bureaucratic in dealing with Jewish refugees: "No doubt, the country's refugee policies between 1939 and 1945 were 'legalistic and cold,' but these policies must be understood within the context of total war, which does not encourage fine distinctions."¹⁰³

In such a war, where espionage and sabotage were real threats there was a fear of foreign-born Canadians. Not only were new immigrants suspected of Nazi or Fascist ties, but those already residing in Canada also became suspects. When Canada declared war on Germany in September of 1939, there was a growing concern that European refugees were a potential Nazi fifth column. The RCMP warned the government that some refugees could be Nazi or Soviet agents, or that they could be coerced through blackmail to partake in espionage or sabotage for the enemy.¹⁰⁴

In addition, in May of 1939 the Liberal representative for Parry Sound Ontario, Arthur Graeme Slaght spoke in the House of Commons of this potential threat. He alluded to "enemies within our bosom, who are prepared to destroy our country from within" and continued by warning the people of Canada "that we may expect at the present moment to find within our midst a powerful, destructive force of secret service German agents, ready to operate against our property and the lives of our people should war with Great Britain become a fact."¹⁰⁵ This was not as farfetched as some have argued. In a 1939 interview with F.C. Blair, Floyd S. Chalmers,

¹⁰³ Donald Avery, "Canada's Response to European Refugees, 1939-1945" In. *On Guard for Thee*, ed. Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan and Lubomyr Luciuk (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988) p.205.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.204-205.

¹⁰⁵ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, May 13, 1939, p.4042-4046.

editor of *The Financial Post*, was told that the records of the Department of Immigration have been made available to the R.C.M.P. and that a close watch was being kept on all enemy aliens. Blair shared an example of a case of sabotage which took place in order to demonstrate the potential havoc enemy agents could cause in the country.

In one plant in Hamilton where 700 men were employed there were three attempts at sabotage. If successful they would have put the plant out of production for some months. It was found that all of these attempts took place on one shift and the workers on that shift were carefully weeded out. It was then discovered that a German who had been refused admission to Canada on two occasions had slipped into the country a couple years ago and gotten a job in this plant. He was promptly locked up.¹⁰⁶

During the war, all German immigrants who had arrived in Canada after 1922 were forced to register with Canadian authorities. Those who were viewed as potential subversives were to be interned. In all, 850 German Canadians were interned during the Second World War.¹⁰⁷ When Italy joined the war in 1940, Italians were forced to register and over 700 Italian Canadians were interned. Such measures demonstrate to what extent there was a real anxiety of subversives entering the country, or having already entered. This undoubtedly had a negative impact on Jewish immigration to Canada during the war.

Furthermore, mass movement of refugees was hampered logistically, as there were severe limitations on shipping during the war. Traversing the Atlantic was not a task to be taken lightly. The Germans realized that the surest way to defeat Britain was to suffocate her by blocking her supply lines. An October 1939 German Naval Staff memorandum states,

Germany's principal enemy in this war is Britain. Her most vulnerable spot is her maritime trade [...] The principal target of our Naval Strategy is the merchant ship, not only the enemy's but every merchantman which sails the seas in order to supply the enemy's war interests. Military success can most confidently be expected if we attack British sea communications where they are most accessible with the greatest ruthlessness. The final aim of such attacks is to cut off all imports into and exports from Britain.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Interview with F.C. Blair, November 10, 1939. Archives of Ontario, Floyd S. Chalmers fonds, F 4153-3-0-8.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005) p.20.

¹⁰⁸ Frederick B. Watt, *In All Respects Ready*, (Sacraborough: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1985) p.3-4.

Ships were subject to attack from all angles. Enemy planes kept lookout for Allied vessels from the air, and the sea was booby-trapped with enemy mines. In addition, there was always the very real possibility of being attacked by the feared U-boats. Even Winston Churchill recalled in his record of the Second World War, “the only thing that ever frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril.”¹⁰⁹ This fear was not unfounded, as shown in a document from the Trade Division of the British Naval Staff dated, October 1, 1945. Entitled *British and Foreign Merchant Vessels Lost or Damaged by Enemy Action During Second World War*, the file notes that 2,003 Allied and Neutral Merchant ships were sunk in the North Atlantic alone due to U-boat action.¹¹⁰

Even refugee ships were not exempt from attack by U-boats, a lesson which the Canadian government learned the hard way. In 1939 Canada had received only 253 British children; most of these being housed by relatives. As the situation in Europe changed, and it became evident that Great Britain was Germany’s next target, following the fall of France in June of 1940, the CNCR began to push the Canadian government to allow admission of European child refugees. Explaining the scheme to the House of Commons, T.A. Crerar stated:

the government here, on its own initiative, [has] offered to assist in bringing to Canada British and refugee children.... There will be included in this movement children from five to fifteen years of age inclusive... ocean transportation arrangements will be made by the United Kingdom government, which will supply ships and pay ocean passage.¹¹¹

The reasons for which Canada offered aid were public support of the scheme, as well as the knowledge that these children’s lives were in jeopardy by staying in Britain. Even so, Mackenzie King realized the possibility that a ship carrying children could be attacked by a German U-boat. In July of 1940, after being informed of the torpedoing of a ship carrying German and Italian prisoners to Canada, he wrote: “The act was one of a German torpedo.

¹⁰⁹ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War* Vol.2 (London: Penguin Classics, 2005) p.529.

¹¹⁰ Department of National Defence Library, *British and Foreign Merchant Vessels Lost or Damaged by Enemy Action During Second World War*, October 1, 1945.

¹¹¹ Cited in Dirks, *Canada’s Refugee Policy*, p.86.

Evidently it must have been thought that children were aboard.”¹¹² Eventually a ship carrying children was torpedoed; this occurred on September 17, 1940 when the *City of Benares*, transporting 90 evacuee children, was torpedoed. Only thirteen of the children survived and the incident brought the evacuation project to a screeching halt. Nevertheless, 3,127 children found safe haven in Canada through the scheme.¹¹³

If the Canadian government did not fully appreciate the dangers of maritime travel following the *City of Benares* incident, they certainly would have four months later. In the fall of 1940 the Minister of Munitions, C.D. Howe, had gone to visit England. At the end of his stay he boarded the *S.S. Western Prince* en route to Canada. However, the steamship never reached her destination as she was torpedoed on December 14. Luckily, Howe survived. Nevertheless, it took a few days before word of his rescue was confirmed. The Minister finally returned to Ottawa on January 26, 1941 after crossing the Atlantic aboard the British battleship *King George V*. Even so, the sinking of the *Western Prince* would undoubtedly have raised awareness of the U-boat peril in the Atlantic.

With no guarantee of safe maritime travel, pro-refugee lobbyists recognized that winning the war was of paramount importance, and the surest way of ensuring the survival of those targeted by the Nazis. On September 6, 1941 Sam Bronfman stated at a National Executive Meeting of the CJC in Montreal that:

With reference to financial responsibilities, it was immediately concurred in that our obligations are three-fold; first, that Canadian Jews as Canadian citizens support to the maximum of their ability all patriotic funds, war and auxiliary services. Our aid in winning the war is of paramount importance; all other matters, no matter how important in themselves, are subsidiary; second to carry on needed home services in local charities, and third, the added obligations arising out of the ravages of the war to offer assistance to our co-religionists who were the immediate victims of Nazi barbarism.¹¹⁴

¹¹² King Diaries, July 3, 1940.

¹¹³ Patrick Stewart, “The Children’s Overseas Reception Board,” [http://www.pier21.ca/wp-content/uploads/files/First_75_Years/research_british_evacuee_children.pdf], accessed September 30, 2011.

¹¹⁴ Found in Patrick Reed, “A Foothold in the Whirlpool: Canada’s Iberian Refugee Movement” (MA diss., Concordia University, 1992).

Even so, by 1943 there was a slowly growing support for government action on behalf of Jewish refugees. In August of that year, T.A. Crerar, the Minister of Mines and Resources, stated to F.C. Blair that “We should consider making some gesture toward relieving the situation by agreeing to accept some refugees from Spain.”¹¹⁵ So, a scheme was approved on September 8, 1943 allowing temporary residence in Canada for 200 family units of Jews residing as refugees in the Iberian Peninsula. Originally, efforts were made to keep the number of refugees secret; however, these proved a failure and the plan was ultimately announced in November of 1943. This was done in an attempt to satisfy the pro-refugee lobbyists, while maintaining Canadian unity, and to prevent incensing anti-refugee sentiment. Regardless, public controversy ensued, and in Quebec Maurice Duplessis used the event to his advantage in the provincial elections by alleging that his Liberal opponents were being financed by Zionists who wished to settle 100,000 European Jewish refugees in the province.¹¹⁶ In the end, 354 adults and 92 children received Canadian visas before operations were terminated in September of 1944.

Although there were many other Jews in neutral territories during the war, the government could not focus all of its refugee efforts on these groups alone, as they were not the only victims of Nazi persecution. This reality is demonstrated clearly in a letter dated August 3, 1944 from Viscount Cranborne, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Mackenzie King, which reads:

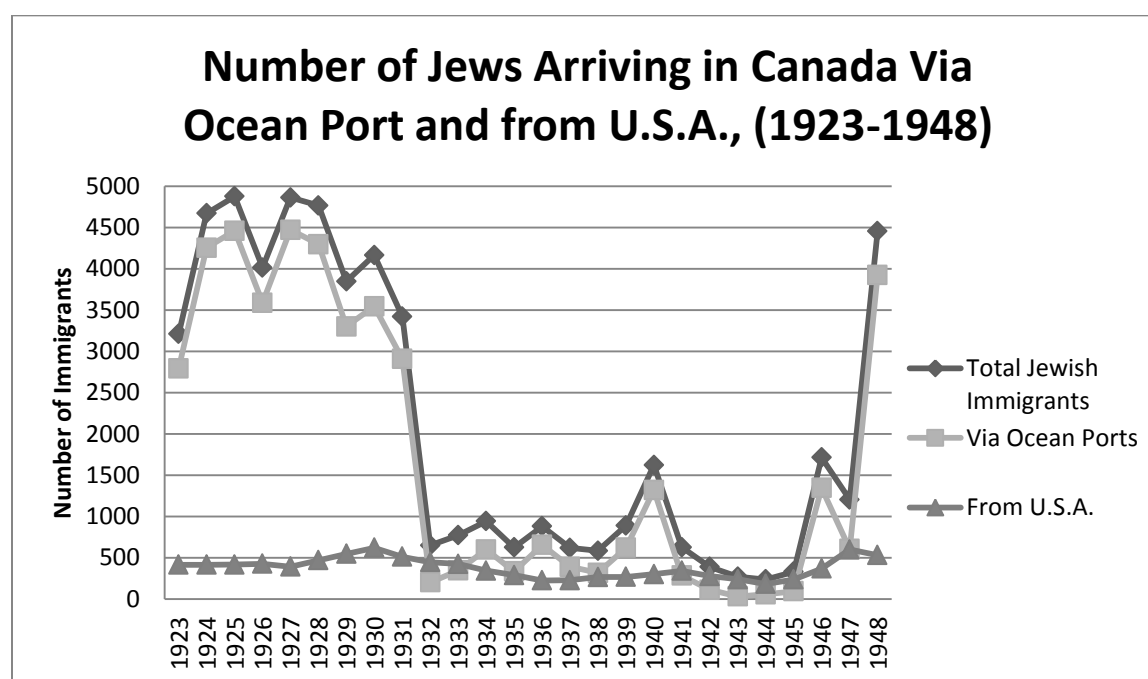
To offer Jews, and Jews only, priority of escape would be to overlook the extent to which German brutality has been exercised against non-Jews (above all in Poland), and would undoubtedly cause resentment among our Allies in whose countries large numbers of non-Jewish nationals are in grave danger.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Found in Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy*, p.95.

¹¹⁶ Kelley and Trebilcock. *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* p.271.

¹¹⁷ Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Secretary of State for External Affairs, August 3, 1944, Library and Archives Canada RG25-G-2 vol.5747 file 47-C (5) pt.1 p.7

When the Second World War ended, Jewish immigration began slowly to increase. From 1946 to 1949, 16,329 Jews arrived in Canada. In 1946, 1,713 came, followed by 1,205 in 1947. Then, in 1948 there is a noticeable jump with 4,454, and in 1949 8,957 landed in Canada. Interestingly, the number of Jewish immigrants arriving from the United States remained close to what it had been prior to the Depression and Second World War. An average of 467 Jews arrived from the United States from 1923 to 1932. Then from 1933, at the depth of the Depression, to 1938 the average dropped down to 297. During the war there was a slight increase, as the average reached 308. But from 1946 to 1949 the average attained 500. So, the majority of Canada's postwar Jewish immigrants came via ocean port.¹¹⁸



Source: Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

There has been some criticism that Canada was slow in opening her doors to Jewish refugees in the immediate postwar period.¹¹⁹ However, such a claim dismisses two of the main concerns which the government had to contend with at that time. First and foremost, Mackenzie

¹¹⁸ Statistics from Library and Archives Canada, Louis Rosenberg Fonds (MG 30 C199 vol.31)

¹¹⁹ See. Abella and Troper, *None is too Many*.p.xxii, 279; Mendelson, *Exiles From Nowhere*. p.86-87

King and his government wished to re-establish Canadian servicemen and dependents, still overseas, which took up a large part of the available transportation. Secondly, it was believed that no large-scale immigration schemes could be accepted until Canadian industries had been converted to their peacetime roles, and that international trade had been stabilized.¹²⁰ Such a stance was based in the fear that the Second World War would be followed by an economic recession, as had been the case following the First World War.¹²¹

Even so, the public began to demand a new immigration policy in the months following the end of World War II. This can be attributed to two main factors. First, there were over one million displaced persons and refugees in Europe following the war. The camps in which they were living, and the events the individuals had endured, led many Canadians, particularly those with relatives in these camps, to push the government to allow refugees entry into Canada as an act of humanity.¹²² Second, many influential members of Canadian society, notably C.D. Howe, argued Canada's post-war prosperity could be maintained. To do so, the expanding economy was in need of additional manpower; it was argued that an increase of this kind would provide a larger consumer market for Canadian goods and services.¹²³

The strong pleas from pressure groups, advocating for changes to Canada's immigration policies, did not go unheard. In May of 1947, Mackenzie King spoke in the House of Commons, outlining the course of Canada's postwar immigration policy. In his address, the Prime Minister acknowledged that past policies had been restrictive, and noted that Canada had a moral obligation to assist in meeting the problem of refugees and displaced persons. He calmed common fears by explaining that immigration did not necessarily lead to a reduction in the

¹²⁰ Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy*, p.123-124.

¹²¹ Roberto Perin and Harold Troper, "Immigration Policy," In *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, ed. Paul R. Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) p.706.

¹²² Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy*, p.130.

¹²³ Ibid. p.131; Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, p.239.

standard of living, and that if properly planned would actually ameliorate it. However, he explained the importance of basing immigration on Canada's absorptive capacity. In so doing it was believed that less Canadians would emigrate, as they would be able to secure jobs in Canada. Most importantly, the Prime Minister examined the question of discrimination in immigration policy and set the groundwork for policy which allowed equal opportunity for prospective immigrants.

With regard to the selection of immigrants, much has been said about discrimination. I wish to make it quite clear that Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable citizens. It is not a "fundamental human right" of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege. It is a matter of domestic policy. Immigration is subject to the control of the parliament of Canada. This does not mean, however, that we should not seek to remove from our legislation what may appear to be objectionable discrimination.¹²⁴

When the statistical data is compiled, and Canada's actions concerning Jews and victims of political persecution from 1933 to 1945 are examined, it becomes evident that the Canadian immigration policies were not based on anti-Semitism, although there were undoubtedly people involved in the process who harboured prejudice or opinions unfavourable to Jewish immigration. From 1933 to 1945 Canada allowed 8,787 Jews entry to the Dominion, which, as has been shown, demonstrated a significant proportional increase in the number which had arrived in the 10 years prior. Although public opinion played a role in the way immigration was dealt with, it was the Depression and the Second World War which were the determining factors of Canadian policy. The Depression led to an increasing fear of immigrants. Even so, with a growing realization of persecution in Europe, and an increase in applications from Jews in Europe for entry to Canada, the Canadian government began to allow refuge to the persecuted groups of Europe; even going so far as modifying immigration regulations to ease such movements.

¹²⁴ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, May 1, 1947, p.2644-2646

When the war began, Canada's immigration numbers concerning Jewish refugees remained high. But, in 1941 all Jewish emigration from the Reich was prohibited by Heinrich Himmler. This along with the increased U-Boat presence effectively eliminated the possibility of safely transporting refugees to Canada. By 1942, when the Democracies finally became aware of the Final Solution and condemned it, it was too late.¹²⁵ It was impossible for these governments to fully comprehend the Nazi persecution of European Jews during the war. Also, as German brutality had affected so many, it was believed that refuge could not be given to Jews alone; priority could not be given to Jews over other victims of the Nazis. In the end, the Allies believed the surest option available to save the persecuted groups of Europe was by winning the war and that is what they set out to do.

¹²⁵ The Allied governments condemned the Nazi policy of exterminating Jews on December 17 1942:

"Persecution of the Jews: Allies' Declaration: [...]"

The attention of the Governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Yugoslavia and of the French National Committee has been drawn to numerous reports from Europe that the German authorities, not content with denying to persons of Jewish race in all the territories over which their barbarous rule has been extended, the most elementary human rights, are now carrying into effect Hitler's oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe. From all the occupied countries Jews are being transported, in conditions of appalling horror and brutality, to Eastern Europe. In Poland, which has been made the principal Nazi slaughter-house, the ghettos established by the German invaders are being systematically emptied of all Jews except a few highly skilled workers required for war industries. None of those taken away are ever heard of again. The able-bodied are slowly worked to death in labour camps. The infirm are left to die of exposure and starvation or are deliberately massacred in mass executions. The number of victims of these bloody cruelties is reckoned in many hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent men, women and children.

The above-mentioned Governments and the French National Committee condemn in the strongest possible terms this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination. They declare that such events can only strengthen the resolve of all freedom-loving peoples to overthrow the barbarous Hitlerite tyranny. They re-affirm their solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution, and to press on with the necessary practical measures to this end."

Parliament of the United Kingdom, "House of Lords Debates, 17 December 1942, vol.125 cc607-609"

[http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1942/dec/17/persecution-of-the-jews-allies#S5LV0125P0_19421217_HOL_3]

Chapter 3

Who Was King?:

Analyzing the Discourse of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King

There has been no conclusive research done on whether Prime Minister Mackenzie King was anti-Semitic. Even so, many scholars and public figures alike have come to the conclusion that he was.¹²⁶ This stance is often based on the Canadian immigration records before and during the Second World War, when the plight of Jewish refugees was becoming increasingly more desperate as each day passed. However, as shown in chapter 2, the statistics employed for such claims are not always well utilized and are flawed. Nevertheless, King continues to be reprimanded for his government's immigration record during the Second World War. Brian Mulroney in a 2003 speech stated nothing was done for Jewish refugees "because of political expediency [and] because the Prime Minister had a visceral distrust of Jews."¹²⁷ Likewise, Freda Hawkins, following along the same lines, has written that Mackenzie King adhered to a "deeply uninspiring philosophy, which shaded off into anti-Semitism and a total indifference to the plight of Jewish refugees."¹²⁸ Still, one must inquire whether the popular assumptions surrounding Canada's longest serving Prime Minister are well deserved, or if they represent a latent urge to find a scapegoat for Canada's supposed shortcomings on humanitarian grounds during the Nazi era.

King was born in Berlin, Ontario (now Kitchener) in December of 1874 and was the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, who led the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion. He entered

¹²⁶ See. Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration*. p.29-30; Mendelson, *Exiles From Nowhere*. p.64-90

¹²⁷ Brian Mulroney. "Anti-Semitism: An Enduring Reality"
[<http://www.utoronto.ca/mcis/antisemitism/Mulroney.htm>], February 9, 2003.

¹²⁸ Hawkins. *Critical Years in Immigration*, p.30.

the civil service in 1900 and became the Deputy Minister of Labour. In 1908 he was elected as the Member of Parliament for North Waterloo, Ontario and in 1909 became the Minister of Labour. He was defeated in the 1911 elections and began work as a labour consultant for the Rockefeller foundation in 1914. He continued to work for the Rockefeller foundation until he was elected leader of the Liberal Party at the 1919 Liberal convention. King remained leader of the Party until 1948, and was Prime Minister of Canada from 1921 to 1926, then again from 1926 to 1930, and finally from 1935 to 1948.

In order to fairly assess the decisions taken by the Canadian government, and government officials, during the period under question, it is important for the reader to understand the economic difficulties and social realities which existed in Canada during the 1930s and 1940s.¹²⁹ For Mackenzie King, and the Canadian government of the time, it was impossible to foresee the atrocities that would come to pass in Europe as part of the Final Solution. The governing bodies of the day attempted to determine how best to deal with the situation in Germany with the information they knew to be true.

This chapter focuses on William Lyon Mackenzie King and whether or not he can be considered a virulent anti-Semite, and if so, whether this affected his government policies. For the historian attempting to study William Lyon Mackenzie King, there is a wealth of information available, the most important source being his personal diaries. From 1893 until his death in 1950 King kept a diary. The author explained his reason for producing the diary, and his objectives, in his first entry. On September 6, 1893 he wrote,

This diary is to contain a very brief sketch of the events, actions, feelings and thoughts of my daily life. It must above all be a true and faithful account. The chief object of my keeping this diary is that I may be ashamed to let even on day have nothing worthy of its showing, and it is hoped that through its pages the reader may be able to trace how the author has sought to improve his time. Another object must here be

¹²⁹ See Chapter 2.

mentioned and is this, the writer hopes that in future days – be they far or near – he may find great pleasure both for himself and for friends in the remembrance of events recorded, surrounded, as they must be, by many an unwritten association. If other aim is reached the present diary will not have been in vain.¹³⁰

Although the diary entries were fairly short at first, by the time that Mackenzie King became Prime Minister he was writing several pages a day and in the end it counted nearly 50,000 pages. The diaries of Mackenzie King will therefore be analyzed in order to flesh out instances where Jews are mentioned. These will be dissected in order to understand the true feelings of King in each instance. In so doing, it will be possible to make an enlightened judgment on the subject of William Lyon Mackenzie King's personal opinion regarding Jews and his political decisions concerning Jewish refugees.¹³¹ The goal of this chapter is not to accuse, nor exonerate Mackenzie King of anti-Semitism, but to produce an accurate analysis of his personal opinions concerning the Jewish community. It will be shown that Prime Minister Mackenzie King shared the general pattern of mild prejudice that prevailed in interwar Canada.

¹³⁰ King diaries, September 6, 1893.

¹³¹ Diaries are a valuable source for historians. For diarists, the diary is an exercise in self-discovery and psychological self-scrutiny. The author is therefore much more open; sharing his or her true sentiments with the reader. As diaries are written systematically over long periods of time, the reader can also discern changes in the diarist's feelings and opinions. This is in stark contrast to official documents and letters, which are not written as a fluid continuation of daily events, and often use highly conceptualized and self-protected language. When examining a diary, one must determine whether the document being dissected is the original, or has been edited. In edited volumes, sections may be omitted or re-worked. In such cases, it is important for the researcher to find out the motives or intentions of the editor in doing so. Fortunately, the Mackenzie King diaries have been unedited, and are available to researchers through Library and Archives Canada. Mackenzie King had originally intended to use his diaries to write his memoirs; if he passed away before this was completed, the diaries were to be used for the purpose of writing his biography. King had hoped to go through the diaries and mark the passages that were to be used for his memoirs. He had stated that the diaries were to be destroyed, except for the passages indicated. However, he passed away before completing this task. Following King's death, his literary executors, having no way to determine which passages he had wished preserved, decided the diaries, being an invaluable historical source, should be preserved in full. For this reason, the documents available to researchers have not been edited in any way, and offering a candid view of Mackenzie King.

For more information on diaries as a historical source see: Christa Hämmerle, "Diaries" In. *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, ed. Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (New York: Routledge, 2009) p.141-158; Steven Stowe, "Making Sense of Letters and Diaries," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/letters/>, July 2002.

Even so, the evidence will illustrate he was by no means rabidly anti-Semitic, and was genuinely concerned of the plight of European Jewry.

Concerning the Prime Minister's personal view of the Jews, an interesting argument has been forwarded by Alan Mendelsohn. He contends that Mackenzie King inherited anti-Semitic thoughts from his early friendship with the intellectual Goldwin Smith, a notorious anti-Semite, who, in King's belief, remained present even after his passing in 1910.¹³² It is evident that Mackenzie King held great respect and admiration for Smith, and they met on several occasions. In a diary entry from March 3, 1946, the Prime Minister stated that his father, Goldwin Smith and William Ewart Gladstone, four-time Liberal prime minister of Great Britain, had been the greatest influences in his life.¹³³ The equation of Goldwin Smith with his own father is quite telling of the relationship King and Smith shared. Nevertheless, there is a lack of evidence in attempting to prove that King's affection for Goldwin Smith led him to foster anti-Semitic thought. In a 1907 diary entry King wrote of a conversation he had with Smith at dinner stating: "He [Smith] thought the transportation of the negro to America & the dissemination of the Jews, over the earth were the most unfortunate events in history."¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the future Prime Minister does not give any indication of his own views concerning this statement at the time. On August 9, 1936 King wrote in his diary: "The day seemed to center around European conditions, the hatred of Jews, the association of the Jews with Russian Sovietism. The association of Roosevelt with Jewish influence, etc. My own view is there are good as well as bad Jews and it

¹³² Alan Mendelsohn. *Exiles From Nowhere*, (Montreal: Robin Brass, 2000) p.64-67.

¹³³ King Diaries, March 3, 1946

¹³⁴ Ibid, Sept 3, 1907.

is wrong to indict, a nation or a race.”¹³⁵ Then, in February of 1946, King recalls his discussion with Goldwin Smith, and reiterates his opinion concerning the Jewish community; he writes:

I recall Goldwin Smith feeling so strongly about the Jews. He expressed it at one time as follows: that they were poison in the veins of a community [...] I myself have never allowed that thought to be entertained for a moment or to have any feeling which would permit prejudice to develop, but I must say that the evidence is very strong, not against all Jews, which is quite wrong, as one cannot indict a race any more than one can a nation, but that in a large percentage of the race there are tendencies and trends which are dangerous indeed.¹³⁶

This entry clearly demonstrates that Mackenzie King did not subscribe to the views of Goldwin Smith in regards to the Jewish community; whereas Smith lumps all Jews into a collective, King does not. For King, “one cannot indict a race any more than one can a nation.” When interpreting the final portion of this entry, which speaks of dangerous trends and tendencies among the Jews, one must not be too quick to accuse King of anti-Judaic feelings. It is important to remember that this diary entry was written in February of 1946. The Gouzenko affair, which revealed a Soviet spy ring operating in Canada, had taken place in September of 1945 and the Cold War was beginning. Canada was gripped by the “Red Scare” at this time, and the tendencies which Mackenzie King is speaking about in this entry are likely Communist and Socialist leanings within the Jewish community. Although it can be argued that the association of Jews with communism and socialism is an anti-Semitic classic, it is important to understand that, concerning the Jewish community in Canada, such association were not completely unfounded.

Discussing Jewish membership in the Communist Party, Erna Paris writes:

In the 1930s and 1940s, when the fascist threat loomed ominously both inside and outside Canada, Jews grew deeply attached to the Communist Party's official United Front against fascism. Jewish membership in the Party grew substantially during this period, but it never represented more than a fraction of the Jewish population.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid, Aug 9, 1936.

¹³⁶ Ibid, Feb 20, 1946

¹³⁷ Erna Paris, *Jews: An Account of Their Experience in Canada*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980) p.145, 181.

It is true that only a fraction of the Canadian Jewish community subscribed to Communist ideals. According to secret RCMP estimates, Jews made up less than 10 percent of the party membership in 1931; these members seem to have been from the lower classes of the Jewish community as RCMP reports suggest wealthier Jews were not interested in Communism.¹³⁸

Jewish socialists were far more numerous than the Communists. This was due in large part to the fact that Socialist doctrine could blend with the mainstream Zionist ethos. There were a variety of socialist parties blossoming in the Canadian Jewish community during the 1930s and 1940s. Some of the most well-known being: the Bundists, the Marxists, and the *Poale Zion* (Labour Zionists).

As concerns the mentality of the Prime Minister following the Gouzenko affair, it should be stressed that Fred Rose, the only Communist MP in Canadian history (in office from August 9, 1943 – January 30, 1947), was elected in the Montreal riding of Cartier, a predominantly Jewish riding, was himself Jewish, and was convicted of conspiring to communicate wartime secrets to the Russian in June of 1946. Furthermore, of the twenty-six individuals named in the Royal Commission investigations, based on the Gouzenko documents, seven were Jewish.¹³⁹ Commenting on this in his diary, King noted: “It is a rather extraordinary thing that most of those caught in this present net are Jews, or have Jewish wives or of Jewish descent.”¹⁴⁰

When Mackenzie King is speaking of dangerous tendencies and trends among Canadian Jews, he is exhibiting prejudice. It is possible that King did not differentiate between Jewish Socialists and Communists. Even if this was not the case, the Prime Minister still demonstrates an inflated view as to how many Canadian Jews he believed subscribed to Communist thought.

¹³⁸ Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) p.266-267.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p.270.

¹⁴⁰ King Diaries, March 21, 1946.

Nevertheless, with the information he was receiving at the time, King's statements concerning the Gouzenko affair were loosely based on fact.

The first instance in which one finds anti-Semitic rhetoric in the diaries is in an entry dated February 2, 1900. In this instance King is writing about Frederick David Schloss, a Jewish academic who was writing an article on sweating labour for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Mackenzie King had previously written about sweating labour. Therefore, Schloss naturally decided to ask him some questions on the subject for the article. King seems to have felt uneasy about the way Schloss went about doing this and wrote: "The Jew came out in him, and where I liked him before, I could not help but despise the way in which he was seeking to get his information."¹⁴¹ The following day, Mackenzie King again wrote about Schloss, this time stating: "There is something in a Jew's nature which is detestable. The sucking of blood. I cannot abide another man trying to 'use' me. I will not be 'used'."¹⁴²

In these two excerpts there is clearly anti-Semitic rhetoric, most notably the blood libel. At a quick glance, it would seem that in this instance Mackenzie King is attacking the generic nature of the Jew. However, one must examine these excerpts in the context of the early twentieth-century, keeping in mind that language which would seem shocking today, would have been more common in the period. When scrutinizing these excerpts it is clear that Mackenzie King is not attacking all Jews. The frustration which Mackenzie King is exhibiting here is directed at one man only, Frederick David Schloss. Nevertheless, in order to put his displeasure with Schloss to paper, King had recourse to historically prominent stereotypes which associated Jews with usury, as well as the blood libel. These two entries clearly illustrate that King held prejudiced and anti-Semitic views concerning the Jews. However, it must be remembered that

¹⁴¹ Ibid, Feb 2, 1900

¹⁴² Ibid, Feb 3, 1900

this was written early in his career. This case alone is not enough to conclude King was rabidly anti-Semitic. By examining the remainder of the diary entries, it will be possible to establish whether King's views concerning Jews were consistently ingrained with anti-Semitic rhetoric, or whether these views changed with time.

The discussion of Jews and their acquirement of property presents itself fairly often in the diaries. This is first seen in a May 15, 1927 entry in which the Prime Minister, speaking of Kingsmere, his property in the Gatineau area, writes of the "entire property being imperilled by the presence of undesirable neighbours, Jews of a low order and others."¹⁴³ This fear of Jews coming in and ruining Kingsmere is a common feature of the King diaries. What's more, one finds a similar entry dated February 10th, 1937, this time speaking of Sandy Hill, where Mackenzie King lived from 1923 until his death in 1950. The entry reads "the Jews having acquired foothold of Sandy Hill, it will not be long before this part of Ottawa will become more or less possessed by them."¹⁴⁴

Alan Mendelsohn has taken these accounts as evidence that Mackenzie King harboured anti-Judaic feelings. The author argues that for King, a good neighbour was a non-Jewish neighbour, for he feared Jews would wreak havoc on the desirable properties of Ottawa and Kingsmere.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this argument misses an important factor. When Mackenzie King was speaking of "undesirable neighbours," he spoke of "Jews of a low order". This focus on Jews of a low order evinces that the Prime Minister's prejudice was based on class distinction. For King, it was the unassimilated poor Jew who was not wanted as a neighbour. He feared that they would enter these areas and attempt to recreate the *shtetls* of Eastern-Europe, as had been

¹⁴³ Ibid, May 15, 1927

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, February 10, 1937

¹⁴⁵ Mendelson. *Exiles From Nowhere*, p.68-69.

the case in Toronto's Ward and Montreal's Main. He had seen these areas when studying the sweating system in the 1890s and did not want this transplanted to the desirable neighbourhoods of Sandy Hill and Kingsmere. Furthermore, King believed that such grouping did not help the Jews to integrate into their new communities. This is seen in an 1897 article where the future Prime Minister writes that it would be beneficial "to check as far as possible the tendency to group, or the formation of a foreign section, in any part of the city. Only by spreading these foreign elements are they likely to be adapted to the new surroundings and properly assimilated with the general community."¹⁴⁶

One could make the argument that Mackenzie King was anti-Semitic for holding views which promoted assimilation; however, this individual would be mistaken. When examining the dynamics of the Jewish community of Montreal in the early twentieth century it is evident that the established wealthy Jews shared similar views to King. Israel Medres, a journalist for the *Keneder Adler*, expressed this opinion when writing "[t]he uptowners were determined to maintain their ascendancy and eyed the downtown Jews with distrust."¹⁴⁷ Samuel Bronfman, the wealthy Montreal whisky magnate, who became the president of the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1939 shared similar views. Bronfman's daughter, Phyllis, noted that Sam was embarrassed by many of the habits of Montreal Jews such as speaking loudly and gesturing with their hands while talking.¹⁴⁸ Michael Marrus, in his biography of Bronfman explains that "when exasperated

¹⁴⁶ Mackenzie King, William Lyon. "Foreigners Who Live in Toronto," *Toronto Mail and Empire*, September 25, 1897. In *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism*, ed. Howard Palmer (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1975) p.93-97

¹⁴⁷ Israel Medresh, Translated from original Yiddish by Vivian Felsen. *Montreal of Yesterday: Jewish Life in Montreal, 1900-1920*. (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2000) p.48.

¹⁴⁸ Cited in Michael Marrus, *Samuel Bronfman* (London: Brandeis University Press, 1991) p.250.

with his co-religionists [Sam] could issue pungent denunciations that could fill the armoury of a fervent anti-Semite.”¹⁴⁹

With this in mind, it makes it more difficult to label Mackenzie King’s views in regards to what constituted an ideal neighbour as anti-Judaic in nature. King adhered to a belief popular among elite Canadians, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike, who attempted to preserve their communities from the influence of the masses of unassimilated immigrants coming to Canada in the early twentieth century. In other words, this was more of a social class issue, which wealthy Jews could share, than a strictly cultural issue alone.¹⁵⁰

The truth is William Lyon Mackenzie King was not an anti-Semite in the classic sense of the term. King adhered to the belief that, as in any group, there were good as well as bad Jews. He did not subscribe to the view that all Jews were inherently bad by nature. The examples which authors have used to accuse King of anti-Semitism are usually taken out of context and are completely outweighed by instances during which he demonstrates a genuine interest in ameliorating the condition of Jews in Canada and abroad. Although King did harbour some prejudices regarding the Jewish community, there is no conclusive evidence to demonstrate that he was a fervent anti-Semite, and such a judgement is not well founded. This is proven by the numerous instances where Mackenzie King writes of his humanitarian concerns for the Jewish community, as well as entries where he offers insight into his close friendships with various members of the community.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p.249.

¹⁵⁰ It should be noted that Mackenzie King visited Adolf Hitler in 1937. The Prime Minister wished to use his skills as a labour negotiator to prevent war. Mackenzie King was strongly attracted to Hitler and illustrated this in his diary entries; by 1940, the Prime Minister’s views of the Fuhrer change. Although the Prime Minister viewed Hitler in a positive light, this cannot be used as proof of anti-Semitism on the part of Mackenzie King, and his diary entries disprove such an assertion.

As early as 1897 the diaries illustrate the humanitarian side of Mackenzie King. At this point in his career King was researching Jewish sweating labour. Reflecting on the conditions of the workers, he penned “[w]hat a curse this is to fight. Oh that God will use me to accomplish some good for these people.”¹⁵¹ Then, in a front page article entitled “The Sweating System in Canada”, written in 1898, the future Prime Minister made public the disheartening realities of the sweating system and deconstructed popular beliefs regarding those trapped in the system. He wrote, “[i]t is sometimes asserted that the immigration of a large foreign population, composed largely of persons of an inferior degree or skill and intelligence, is the main cause of such low wages and prices. [...] among the class of Jews engaged in work, many are quite the reverse of being incapable or ignorant.”¹⁵² These are not the words of an anti-Semite, as they show an ability to pass an enlightened judgement on a complex situation, rather than solely on prejudice and stereotype.

During his investigation, the members of the Jewish community proved to be an invaluable asset to the future Prime Minister. In fact, King had close friendships with, and was fond of, many Jews throughout his life. When his relationships with these individuals are examined, it becomes ever clearer that Mackenzie King was not a virulent anti-Semite.

Most noteworthy among this group of friends, were Archibald Jacob Freiman (1880-1944), a wealthy Ottawa businessman, Zionist, and Jewish community leader, and his wife Lilian (1885-1940).¹⁵³ Archibald was born in Lithuania and immigrated to Canada with his family in 1893 and was cut from the same cloth as many of the Eastern-European Jews arriving in Canada

¹⁵¹ King Diaries, Sept 18, 1897)

¹⁵² Mackenzie King, William Lyon. “The Sweating System in Canada,” *The Globe*, November 19, 1898. In. *On Mackenzie King and Jewish Sweating Labor*, ed. David Rome (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1979) p.116-128.

¹⁵³ Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1990) p.163; 189.

at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Like many of them, Freiman was a peddler during his early years. Then, when he had finally acquired enough wealth he opened his own store, and eventually became one of the wealthiest and most influential Jews in Canada.

Mackenzie King shared a longstanding friendship with both Archibald and Lilian, and they are mentioned on several occasions in his diary, always in a positive light. The Prime Minister viewed the Freimans as “outstanding members of their community,”¹⁵⁴ “wonderfully fine people, each of them.”¹⁵⁵ He had so much confidence in the abilities of Archibald that in 1940 he wished to appoint him to the Senate to represent the Jewish minority.¹⁵⁶ Further evidence demonstrates King must have had similar confidence in Freiman’s son, Lawrence, for he wrote him an introductory letter to Harvard in 1930.¹⁵⁷

Mackenzie King’s affection for the Freimans is perhaps best demonstrated in the diary entries pertaining to their deaths. When the funeral service was held for Lilian in 1940, the Prime Minister wrote: “Of what is termed Jewry in Canada, Mrs. Freiman without doubt was the Queen. She well merited all that has been said of her. I never listened to words more appropriately applied than those quoted from Solomon in reference to her.”¹⁵⁸ Being the spiritualist that he was, King even told Mr. Freiman over the phone that he was “sure that [his] mother and Mrs. Freiman were together and talking to each other as surely as [he and Mr. Freiman] were talking together.”¹⁵⁹ Archibald Freiman passed away four years after his wife on June 4, 1944. His funeral service was held on June 6, 1944, D-Day. Even with the flurry of

¹⁵⁴ King Diaries, Aug 27, 1936.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, Dec 31, 1939.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, February 15, 1940.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, June 7, 1930.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, November 5, 1940.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, January 1, 1942.

communications and political events of the day the Prime Minister made sure he was present for the funeral of his dear friend. Of the service, King noted, “the whole tribute to Mr. Freiman was as fine as anything I have seen anywhere. Deeply moving and in every way worthy of his fine and unselfish life.”¹⁶⁰

Although the Freimans stand out as King’s closest Jewish friends, they are not the only members of the religious community to receive praise and to be mentioned in his diary. King also shared a strong friendship with Sam Jacobs, the Liberal MP for Cartier, Quebec from 1917 to his death in 1938. On March 5, 1925 the Prime Minister nominated Jacobs to the prestigious Rideau Club of Ottawa. According to King, “Jacobs was voted in by a close call” and was only the second Jew ever to be voted into the club.¹⁶¹ A letter that Jacobs received on the occasion of his sixty-second birthday in May of 1933 from King reads:

As the years go by, the friends with whom we have had happy associations in public life become more precious than ever. On life’s journey you and I have passed a good many milestones in each other’s company. For myself, not less than for you, I hope that the number similarly to be shared may be many, and particularly, that they may be marked for you by increasing recognition of your public service and high personal and professional attainments¹⁶²

Following Jacobs’ passing, his wife sent a letter to the Prime Minister. King kept this letter in front of him as he spoke of Sam Jacobs in the House of Commons on January 13, 1939. King forwarded to Mrs. Jacobs a copy of the unrevised Hansard, spoke of the deep feelings he continued to feel for her and the members of her family, and brought to her attention the atmosphere in the House of Commons as he spoke on that January day. He wrote: “I do not recall in my time in Parliament excepting the case of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Robert Borden,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, June 6, 1944

¹⁶¹ Ibid, March 5, 1925.

¹⁶² King to Jacobs, May 3, 1933, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Sam Jacobs Fonds, MC 16 Box 2.

an expression of sympathy received with more general feeling and acclaim than was the case of yesterday's references to Sam.”¹⁶³

In addition to the Freimans and Sam Jacobs, there were many others members of the Jewish community whom King spoke of in his diaries, although his relationship with them may not have been as strong. At a dinner in 1914, King met the American sculptor, Victor David Brenner, whom he described as “a man with a world's reputation. In character, he is one of the most gentle, spiritual types of men.”¹⁶⁴ Then, on May 12, 1926, King met a young Jew from Montreal named Hyman Carl Goldenberg. Being very impressed by him, King stated Goldenberg reminded him of himself at a younger age and would “be surprised if he d[id] not rise to high places in the future.”¹⁶⁵ In fact, Goldenberg did reach high places; he worked as a lawyer, later became Mackenzie King's constitutional advisor, and received the Order of Canada in November of 1967 for his service as a mediator in labour disputes and as an advisor to the Canadian Government concerning international labour problems. Finally, one cannot ignore the fact that King's own biographer, Emil Ludwig, was a Jew.

Mackenzie was first introduced to Ludwig in December of 1935 by the Governor General, Lord Tweedsmuir, this first meeting went very well. King encountered the author again on August 26, 1943, Ludwig having stayed an extra day in Ottawa in the hopes of visiting the Prime Minister. Although King was feeling tired and had wished the meeting could take place on another day, he “felt it was important to see him” and arranged for a meeting at Kingsmere.¹⁶⁶ The account of this visit is 8 pages in length. The author undoubtedly made an impression on King. Three days later, the Prime Minister received a letter from a U.S. firm

¹⁶³ King to Mrs. Jacobs, January 14, 1939, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Sam Jacobs Fonds, MC 16 Box 2.

¹⁶⁴ King Diaries, December 31, 1914.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, May 12, 1926.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, August 26, 1943.

hoping to have a biography written of him. The firm suggested the biography be written by: John Wesley Dafoe, [?] Bruce, Bruce Hutchison, or [Leonard?] Brockington. Concerning the authors mentioned, King went through the list and found none of those mentioned suitable for such an endeavour.

Hutchison of Vancouver, evidence of great fatigue unable to recall names etc.- Dafoe is too old, & wd only be able to treat of political, not personal side – too racy in style & not understanding of inner life or point of view.- Brockington too indolent & unconcerned with others than himself wd be all right to revise & rewrite in certain style but hopeless re research.- Far better no biography at all than one that wd miss the secret of life.¹⁶⁷

The Prime Minister then continued, “Ludwig could do it, but he is too great a man & too busy, & in the eyes of the public today I am too insignificant to merit such a biographer.”¹⁶⁸

On November 21, 1943 King received a letter from Ludwig, concerning a letter the biographer had received from the Prime Minister. The author stated: “Since I received your most interesting letter, my intention has crystallized to write a portrait of you in the form of an elaborate essay”.¹⁶⁹ In his diary, King notes the uncertainty he feels concerning the wisdom of allowing anything about himself to be published until he is out of office. However, these thoughts were quickly put aside as it was noted “I feel Ludwig has an understanding of character and our short acquaintance made me realize that we had no end of kindred sympathies and aims. I believe he can be trusted to do something that will be helpful.”¹⁷⁰ The essay was published in 1944 under the title *Mackenzie King: A Portrait Sketch* and both the author and subject remained close acquaintances until the first’s passing in 1948. Following Ludwig’s death, the Prime Minister noted in his diary that he was “a true friend and a very remarkable man.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, August 28, 1943

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, November 21, 1943

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, September 19, 1948.

A very interesting note in the King diaries is found very early on. In September of 1899 he writes “Dreyfus was pardoned yesterday & is now free. I feel a sense of personal relief.”¹⁷² It is remarkable that King was so concerned about this Jewish artillery officer of the French army who had been unjustly charged of treason. Nevertheless, this sense of just treatment of others is a trademark of Mackenzie King’s diary and becomes particularly prevalent during the Nazi era.

The year in which the Prime Minister began to understand what Nazism entailed was 1938. In March of that year he wrote “[m]uch I cannot abide in Nazism – the regimentation – the cruelty – oppression of Jews.”¹⁷³ Then, following *Kristallnacht*, King’s emotions began to influence the way in which he believed Canada should deal with refugees. On March 12, 1938 he wrote, “[t]he way the Germans have allowed their younger to destroy Jewish property and others siding with the government to deal with Jews in higher positions is appalling.”¹⁷⁴ The next day, one reads, “I feel Canada must do her part in admitting some of the Jewish refugees. It is going to be difficult politically, and I may not be able to get the cabinet to consent, but I will fight for it is right and just and Christian.”¹⁷⁵ Then, on the twentieth he penned, “I said that as a Christian nation, we should not bar our doors; that on the grounds of humanity we were bound to let in some of the refugees whether they were Jews or not.”¹⁷⁶

What one sees during this period is that Mackenzie King began to realize the plight of German Jewry was an international affair. He showed this in an entry dated November 24, 1938 where he wrote, “the time had come, when as a Government we would have to perform acts that were expressive of what we believed to be the conscience of the nation, and not what might be,

¹⁷² Ibid, September 21, 1899.

¹⁷³ Ibid, March 27, 1938.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, November 12, 1938.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, November 13, 1938.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, November 20, 1938.

at the moment, politically most expedient.”¹⁷⁷ Even so, King was not the type of politician who would single-handedly change government policy. An accurate image of King’s idea of government was given by Jack Pickersgill, Mackenzie King’s Assistant Private Secretary, during an interview in the 1970s. When describing the Prime Minister, Pickersgill stated he “had no use for these swashbuckling types of leader, who tried to push people around and so on. He genuinely believed in government by consent and he didn’t think that governments had the right to do things that the public weren’t ready for.”¹⁷⁸

Pickersgill’s description seems to be a fair assessment. It is well known that Mackenzie King subscribed to the politics of compromise. This was seen early in his career. As the Deputy Minister of Labour, King had to mediate labour disputes and attempted to assuage both the workers and the owners. When both sides were willing to listen, he attempted to find a middle-ground which was acceptable to each of them and would have the workers return to their jobs. This early exposure to conciliatory tactics affected the way the Prime Minister would control his Cabinet later on in his career as he realized one had to be sensitive to the needs of all sides involved in an argument.

Although King would have liked to allow refugees into the country, his own beliefs concerning government made such a decision difficult. First, he understood that such a resolution would be unpopular among a large portion of Canadians. Furthermore, he believed that it could potentially cause social unrest as refugees entered the crippled job market. In addition, the Prime Minister did not want to force refugees onto provinces that did not wish to accept them, as this would disrupt Canadian unity. These fears are seen throughout the thirties in King’s diaries. In 1934, writing of a meeting he had with Thomas Crerar, he pens: “I told him as

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, November 24, 1938.

¹⁷⁸ Stanley E. McMullin, “Mackenzie King a Personal View,” *Canadian Issues* 1, no.2 (1977), p.21.

long as we had unemployment we wd. not endorse such a scheme. I told him I thought the Fed. Govt. ought to cease to have a Dept. of Immigrat'n & leave all that to the Provinces – only making the laws that should generally be applicable.”¹⁷⁹

These same sentiments are seen once again in the months leading up to *Kristallnacht*, when one reads, “My own feeling is that nothing is to be gained by creating an internal problem in an effort to meet an international one [...] I fear we would have riots if we agreed to a policy that admitted numbers of Jews. Also we would add to the difficulties between the Provinces and the Dominion.”¹⁸⁰ Then, in December of 1938, the diary states:

Quebec ministers strongly against any admission, and feeling in Cabinet more to the effect that other provinces would be unwilling. I think we should avail ourselves to the [British North America] Act and say as legislation respecting immigration is concurrent, we will seek to further the wishes of any province desiring to admit immigrants and seek to avoid provinces which do not desire additional immigration. In this way endeavour to preserve the unity in Canada.¹⁸¹

What these entries demonstrate is that for Mackenzie King to have moved forward and allow Jews *en masse* into the country, he would have had to break his own political beliefs. Likewise, he would have had to make a decision which would without a doubt have been unpopular among many Canadians. Equally, he would have been pushing a motion which did not have the full consent of his Cabinet. And perhaps most importantly, this decision had the potential to put Canadian unity at stake.

Mackenzie King was not willing to push his government to accept an open door policy. Even so, his government did push changes through concerning Canadian immigration policy in December of 1938, which recognized European refugees as an admissible group.¹⁸² Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that in certain cases King broke from the accepted

¹⁷⁹ King Diaries, Oct 12, 1934.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, March 29, 1938.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, Dec 1, 1938.

¹⁸² See chapter 2.

government course of action and personally secured admission to Canada for individual Jews. In August of 1938, the Prime Minister received a letter from Hyman Carl Goldenberg¹⁸³ to the effect that his aunt, living in Vienna, and her family were given ten days to leave the country.¹⁸⁴ Making sure to drive home the urgency of the situation, he emphasized: “You can well imagine the alternative if they do not leave.”¹⁸⁵ The Prime Minister received the letter two days after it had been written and decided to intervene on behalf of the family. He immediately sent word to F.C. Blair that he “wished everything possible be done to meet this request.”¹⁸⁶ Finally, on August 25, Goldenberg received word from Blair that the Department of Immigration had decided to recommend the admission of his relatives from Vienna, although it remained impossible to get them out by their deadline of August 30.¹⁸⁷

As mentioned earlier, it was impossible for the Canadian government to fully comprehend the extent of the Nazi plans concerning the Jewish community. Even when the democracies began to receive information concerning the Holocaust they were wary to believe them. This was due in large part to the proceedings of the First World War. During this earlier war, many believed the Germans to have been the perpetrators of horrible atrocities such as the

¹⁸³ The same Hyman Carl Goldenberg he had met on May 12, 1926.

¹⁸⁴ With the Anschluss of March 1938, Austria was annexed to Germany.

¹⁸⁵ H. Carl Goldenberg to Mackenzie King, August 20, 1938, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, H. Carl Goldenberg box.

¹⁸⁶ Mackenzie King memorandum, August 22, 1938.

¹⁸⁷ A similar case of successful intervention by King, to secure immigration to Canada for Jewish refugees, is recorded by David Rome, the lead archivist and historian of the Canadian Jewish Congress from 1974 to 1994. In his work entitled *Clouds in the Thirties*, Rome describes an incident in which Mackenzie King receives and incoherent call from a Montreal shoeshine man, pleading to secure admission to Canada for his niece. The Caller spoke little English, and was very difficult to understand, but he had called a long distance telephone wire and stated he would speak with “Mr. King at Ottawa” only. Rome states that after some confusion the caller was finally connected to the Prime Minister, who made out what sounded like “I want my niece” and realized the call was concerning immigration. As the story goes, following this realization, the Prime Minister secured admission to Canada for the man’s niece.

Unfortunately, the veracity of this story cannot be confirmed due to the fact that Rome did not cite his source. For Rome’s version of the event, see. David Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties vol.11* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1980) p.63. p.611-612.

raping of nuns, the mutilation of babies and the crucifixion of a Canadian soldier to a barn door. However, as evidence was lacking and never brought forward, it was realized that the majority of these stories were inflated retellings of actual events, or pure propaganda. This made it difficult for governments to accept such stories during the Second World War. As A.J.P. Taylor has remarked on the subject: “In the first World war nearly everyone believed the stories of German atrocities, though relatively few were true. In the second World war nearly everyone refused to believe the stories, though they were true [...] the most atrocious crimes ever committed by a civilized nation.”¹⁸⁸

Such caution in accepting stories of atrocities meant that it was nearly impossible for the Canadian government to justify opening its doors. Even though Mackenzie King’s diaries and his own actions behind closed doors demonstrate feelings of humanity and a wish to help Jewish refugees with their plight, Canada’s arms were never opened wide to them. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister, moved by the events of *Kristallnacht*, pushed for his Cabinet to accept more humanitarian concerns in regards to immigration, and, as illustrated in the preceding chapter, Canadian immigration statistics show an increase in Jewish immigration to Canada via ocean ports at this time.

King’s position concerning Jewish immigration would have been affected by the numerous letters he was receiving from Canadians of all walks of life putting forward their opinion of the situation in Germany and how Canada should deal with it. These letters only represent the views of a small proportion of Canadian society at the time. Even so, when looking at the letters which the Prime Minister received from 1936 to 1939 it can be concluded that prior to *Kristallnacht* Jewish immigration did not receive much attention from the public; when it did,

¹⁸⁸ A.J.P. Taylor. *English History, 1914-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.19.

the majority of letters received from both English and French Canadian citizens were against immigration while unemployment was present.

However, in the weeks following the events of November 9-10 1938, a flurry of letters were received by the Prime Minister. At this point, in English Canada, the sentiment began to turn towards doing something to respond to the German treatment of Jews. Following *Kristallnacht* letters began to demand the government protest Hitler's persecution of Jews in Europe. Various suggestions as to how this could be done were forwarded. Some pleaded for a severance of relations with the German government, and others demanded an embargo on all German goods.

Among French-Canadians, both inside and outside of Quebec, anti-immigration sentiment remained strong. In English Canada, the sentiment remained divided concerning Jewish immigration. However, the number of letter and petitions received pushing the government to allow a limited number of Jews admission to Canada, both permanently and temporarily, began to greatly outnumber those opposed. This was due in large part to the work of pressure groups, such as the United Church Women's Missionary Societies, who began to inundate the government with petitions after the events of 1938.¹⁸⁹

Such a change in public opinion in English Canada was undoubtedly aided by the educational campaign of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Persecution (CNCR). Following the CNCR's meeting with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet in December of 1938 it was indicated by King that an educational campaign would be most helpful in changing public opinion.¹⁹⁰ However, it seems no pamphlet or speaking tour had more

¹⁸⁹ Library and Archives Canada, Mackenzie King Fonds, MG 26 J2 vol.147-148.

¹⁹⁰ See Chapter 2.

of an effect than Watson Thompson's radio address over the CBC on Easter Sunday of 1943. In the address, Thompson, who was the Director of Adult Education at the University of Manitoba, spoke of "events in our own day which constitute nothing less than the crucifixion of a whole people – the Jews of Europe." He continued, going into detail about the atrocities stating that "[s]ince the Nazi terror began, two million of the seven million Jews of Europe have died and the killing still goes on. Some have died of starvation or disease, the others by every form of execution". The speaker brought to the audience's attention the fact that just about nothing had been done by North America to help the Jews of Europe. He therefore urged "you and I and the other plain citizens of our democracies to start pressing hard upon our governments with our demands."¹⁹¹ This led many to write the Prime Minister pleading that Canada do more to help the Jews of Europe. However, by this time there was not much that could be done.

In addition to taking into account the public feeling within Canada, King and his Cabinet had to interpret the international situation as it was unfolding before them. When Hitler ascended to power in 1933, the condition of the Jews of Germany began to worsen. By the time Mackenzie King and his government took power in October of 1935, the Nuremberg Laws had already been in effect for a month. However, German Jews were not yet looking across the Atlantic in large numbers for safe haven. The majority of those who decided to leave Germany in Hitler's early years of power went to neighbouring countries due to familiarity with the language, culture, and family ties. In 1936 a larger portion began trickling into Canada. Then, following the events of *Kristallnacht* the number of Jews looking further afield for safety grew exponentially.

¹⁹¹ Watson Thomson, "*The Jews in Europe*", (Montreal: North American Printing Co. Limited, 1943) p.1-5.

As shown previously, the King government was hampered from allowing large numbers of Jews into the country due to the lack of jobs during this time, and the fear that public unrest would ensue if large-scale immigration was allowed. However, there was also the fear of a chain reaction occurring if large number of Jews were allowed into the country, or into any other country. King explained this view in a letter to John Farr Simmons, the Chargé d'Affaires for the United States Legation to Ottawa in June of 1938. The Prime Minister in this instance is writing in regards to the Evian conference which took place in July of that year. The conference was a meeting of 32 countries to discuss the plight of Jewish refugees and what their governments were willing to do on behalf of the Jews of Europe. In the letter, King wrote:

It would seem essential that the Committee should be careful to avoid doing anything that would encourage the German Government to adopt repressive measures against unwanted minorities in the hope or expectation of securing homes for them elsewhere. If such an idea should get abroad, it might, indeed, invite an enlargement of the problem and strengthen rather than allay the forces of intolerance¹⁹²

Noting that Jews were not the only victims of persecution in Europe at that time the Prime Minister continued with:

It would be neither practical nor just to discriminate in favour of refugees from Austria and Germany. Since the present enquiry is being undertaken on purely humanitarian grounds it would clearly be no less necessary to bear in mind the position of members of other persecuted groups from whatever country their cries for assistance come.¹⁹³

The plight of the Jewish refugees represented some serious difficulties for Mackenzie King and his government. As these letters show, the Prime Minister was aware that by allowing large numbers of Jews to leave Germany and Austria to settle in other countries, the governments of the world were possibly setting a precedent. It was feared that other dictators would potentially mistreat the unwanted segments of their society in the hopes that the international community, influenced by their humanitarian concerns, would receive the unfortunates with open arms. Likewise, the Prime Minister was aware that it would be unfair to have any policy in

¹⁹² King to Simmons, June 2 1938, Library and Archives Canada, Mackenzie King Fonds, MG 26 J1 vol.260.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

place that focused only on alleviating the plight of Jewish refugees, as there were other groups which were being persecuted at this time as well.

Following the invasion of Poland in September of 1939, mobile death squads, known as *Einsatzgruppen*, began killing various ethnic and political groups. When Canada entered the war, on September 10, 1939, immigration to the Dominion decreased significantly. In 1941, emigration from the Third Reich was restricted by Heinrich Himmler. Then, early in 1942 the Final Solution was implemented. This quickly came to the attention of the democracies of the world, and, in December of 1942, Canada associated itself to a declaration by the Allied governments condemning the Nazis for their persecution of the Jews of Europe.¹⁹⁴

So, by 1941 it had become nearly impossible for Jews to emigrate from the Third Reich. In addition, the fear of U-boat attacks limited all immigration. On August 26, 1940 King had received a letter from the Chief of Naval Staff stating that a convoy of 40 ships, which left Sidney Nova Scotia on the 15th of that month, had been attacked by a U-boat. It explained that one ship had been sunk, that five ships were missing and that it was likely that the enemy sub was on its way to operate off the coast of Canada.¹⁹⁵

Mackenzie King was undoubtedly aware of the limitations in transportation at this time. This is clearly demonstrated in a 1942 memorandum from the Prime Minister to Hume Wrong of

¹⁹⁴ A Press Statement from the Department of External Affairs, marked for immediate release, and dated December 17 1942 states:

"The Prime Minister announced today that the Canadian Government was glad to associate itself with a declaration issued in London by the Allied European Governments now in London, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, strongly condemning the Nazi policy of extermination of Jews in territories under German control. The Governments of freedom-loving nations have joined in this declaration in order to make it clear to Nazi leaders that their extermination policy, far from rendering the Nazi position in Europe more secure, is having the opposite effect of speeding Allied efforts to win an early victory and to bring closer the day of retribution." Library and Archives Canada, MG25 vol.3122 file 4637-40 pt.1; for copy of the declaration, see footnote on page 57.

¹⁹⁵ King Diaries, August 26, 1940.

the Department of External Affairs. King explains that F.C. Blair had informed him that Samuel Bronfman approached T.A. Crerar with a proposal. Bronfman wished that Canada would allow five thousand Jewish refugees from Unoccupied France, mostly women and children, entry to Canada. In the memorandum the Prime Minister explains “This is a large order which, even if we were willing, we could not meet, as there is next to no transportation available.”¹⁹⁶

In reality there was not much that Canada could have done to save the Jews who became victims of Nazi atrocities from 1942 on. This was due largely to the proceedings of the war; the Allies only began to gain ground in Europe from the summer of 1943 onwards. In August of 1942 there was the failed attempted landing at Dieppe. Then, in September of 1943, Canadians began to slowly break through German and Italian defences in Italy. During this period the Russians were repelling the Germans from the East; with the successful D-day landings in Normandy, Germany found itself in a two front war and was finally defeated in 1945.

Although the Allies steadily gained ground in Europe from 1943 to 1945, the majority of the German concentration camps were located in Eastern Europe, far from the Allied positions. Therefore, the Allies were never in a position to save the Jews from the clutches of the Nazis until the end of the war. Franklin Bialystok asserts, “[g]iven that Germany controlled transalpine Europe to the Soviet frontier without any Allied penetration until D-Day, it was extremely difficult to supply the trapped Jews with money, let alone find them refuge in North America.”¹⁹⁷ The surest option available to save the Jews of Europe was by winning the war. A sentiment

¹⁹⁶Memorandum from Mackenzie King to Hume Wrong, September 10, 1942, Library and Archives Canada, MG26 J4 Vol.284

¹⁹⁷ Bialystok, *Delayed Impact*. p.28.

expressed by Mackenzie King in his speech, concerning government policy regarding the refugees from Europe, of July 9, 1943 in the House of Commons.

Most of them, however, including those whose sufferings are greatest, are still contained within the ring of territories held by the axis armies. [...] The only escape from persecution lies in the victory of the armies of the united nations. [...] Indeed, in Eastern Europe especially, the signs are that the treatment of the Jews has grown even more pitiless, and Jews from the western European territories have been moved eastwards to share the fate of those from central and eastern Europe.

There is nothing that the allied governments can do to save these hapless people except to win the war as quickly and as completely as possible. They cannot be removed from axis territory. Efforts to aid them, even if aid was feasible, would prolong their agony if these efforts were to prolong the war.¹⁹⁸

In the final analysis, Mackenzie King was not the fanatical anti-Semite which some have been too quick to cast him as, nor was he an unwavering philo-Semite. Evidence from the Prime Minister's diaries and correspondence creates a much more complex picture, suggesting that although friendly with many Jews and sympathetic to the plight of European Jewry, King nonetheless shared prejudice which was prevalent amongst elite English Canadians, as well as wealthy member of the Jewish community, in the 1930s and 1940s; his reservations concerning the sale of property, in certain desirable neighbourhoods, to unassimilated and poor Jews, can be understood primarily as a social class issue, rather than a cultural issue alone.

This perception of Mackenzie King as an individual who often relayed notions and perceptions dominant in his time is shared by the well know Canadian historian J.L. Granatstein in his work *Canada's War*. According to Granatstein, "His thinking was embarrassingly simplistic, and he could refer to a Jew as 'a credit to his race', to a 'darky' servant to the 'masses' in his musings in his diary. There was prejudice in him, but no more than was commonplace in men of his class and upbringing."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, July 9, 1943. P.4558-4559.

¹⁹⁹ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada at War* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975) p.422-423.

At times Mackenzie King was frustrated with individual Jews, and voiced his distaste in ways which seem shocking to the modern reader. The use of such language was more widespread, and accepted, during King's lifetime. Even so, this does not discount the occasional use of clear anti-Semitic rhetoric, such as the comments concerning Frederick David Schloss, in his diaries. Furthermore, it was shown that, in the midst of the Gouzenko affair, King was quick to associate Jews with Communism. Although the Prime Minister sometimes used anti-Semitic rhetoric, and believed a large percentage of the Jewish community was attracted to Communism, it is important to note that he always maintained that there were good, as well as bad, Jews.

For the anti-Semite, Jews are part of a collective group from which they cannot disassociate. Had the Prime Minister been a virulent anti-Semite, he would likely not have had close ties with members of the Jewish community. However, his diary shows that he was close friends with many members of the community, particularly the Freimans, and one cannot discount the fact that his earliest biography was written by the Jewish biographer Emil Ludwig. This was not done for political expediency, and as the diaries demonstrate, there was a legitimately strong friendship which developed between the two.

Early on in his career, a young Mackenzie King shed light on the realities of the sweating system and tried to ameliorate the conditions of Jewish workers. Such humanitarian concerns were voiced again by the Prime Minister following *Kristallnacht* in 1938. A firm believer in government by consent, the Prime Minister was not willing to act as an autocrat and make decisions without the approval of his cabinet. Therefore, King tried to convince his Cabinet to act on humanitarian grounds to help Jewish refugees, and in December of 1938 European refugees were added to the list of admissible classes to Canada. He also explained to the CNCR that an educational campaign, allaying the popular fear of immigrants and informing the public

of the treatment of Jews in Germany, would help in allowing the government to further open Canada's doors to refugees.

Although Canada's policies never officially endorsed large-scale Jewish immigration, there was a significant increase in Jewish arrivals to Canada following the changes in policy. There is also evidence the Prime Minister attempted to pull some strings in order to allow individual Jews into the country. Furthermore, one cannot argue with the fact that the representation of Jews among all immigrants at this time was higher than it had been in previous periods. Although the role King played in such numbers reaching Canada is unknown, one can safely say that he would not have been an opponent of such results, as he was sympathetic to the plight of European Jews, and believed the government needed to take action.

Chapter 4

All the King's Men:

Examining Ernest Lapointe, Vincent Massey and F.C. Blair

Government policies decide what can and cannot be done regarding an international or domestic situation. These are often examined in the abstract, however equally important are the individuals who played a central role in creating and enforcing such policies. As concerns the Canadian immigration and refugee policies of the 1930s and 1940s there are three men who need to be closely examined. The individuals in question are Ernest Lapointe, Vincent Massey, and F.C. Blair. First examined in detail in *None is too Many*, all three of these men have since been viewed as the main obstructive force to increased Jewish immigration to Canada during this period. The pressure which these men exerted to keep Canada's doors closed to refugees has led many to question their motives and to beg an answer to the question: Were they anti-Semites? So far, researchers have tended to answer this question in the affirmative.

In the preceding chapter, it was argued that although Prime Minister Mackenzie King shared a mild form of prejudice which was popular among Canadians in the 1930s and 1940s, he was sympathetic to the plight of European Jews, and his policies were not dictated by a personal disdain of the Jews. This chapter will examine the three men aforementioned in detail in an attempt to determine how they personally affected Canadian policy during the Depression and the Second World War era, and whether any of the three can be considered an anti-Semite. Special attention will be given to the decision making processes surrounding the Sudeten refugees and the M.S. St. Louis, as these remain of central interest for those who condemn Canada's immigration record. Through a careful analysis, it will become evident that none of

the three men at hand harboured views which were uncommon among Canadians during the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, it will be apparent, with the materials brought forward, that any attempt to paint them as hardline anti-Semites is a gross misrepresentation of history.

Ernest Lapointe

Although he passed away on November 26, 1941, Ernest Lapointe is seen as a key character in the development of government policy regarding Jewish refugees from 1933 to 1945 due to his dominance within the Liberal caucus. Born in 1876 in St-Eloi, a small French-speaking village on the banks of the lower St-Lawrence, Lapointe was to become a long-serving member of parliament. A lawyer by profession, he began his career in federal politics in 1904 as the representative for Kamouraska and was re-elected in every federal election until his death in 1941. In 1919 he resigned from his riding in order to run in a by-election for the seat in Quebec East, which had previously belonged to Wilfrid Laurier. He played an important role in Mackenzie King's three Cabinets. From 1921 to 1924 he served as the Minister of Marine and Fisheries. Then, he became Minister of Justice from 1924 to 1925. Lapointe was once more appointed Minister of Justice when the Liberals returned to power in 1926 and again in 1935.

There is no doubt that Mackenzie King's Quebec Lieutenant held a position of prestige from which he was able to influence Canadian policy through the use of various political methods during his career, such as the threat of resignation. Lapointe's main goal was to make sure that the voice of francophone Quebec was heard by the Liberal government and he was successful in doing so. John MacFarlane, in his study of Ernest Lapointe's influence in external affairs, analyzed seventeen decisions taken by the Liberal government. The author found that in all cases Lapointe had succeeded in including a francophone Quebec voice. King would usually agree with Lapointe and both voices were co-dominant. However, in six of the decisions, the

Quebec Lieutenant's voice was stronger than the Prime Minister's.²⁰⁰ It seems MacFarlane's conclusions concerning Lapointe's voice in external affairs can be applied to immigration policy as well.

When examining what contemporaries had to say about Lapointe, it is quite obvious that Mackenzie King had a strong attachment to him and viewed him as an indispensable ally. Jack Pickersgill, King's Assistant Private Secretary from 1938 to 1945, noted that:

Lapointe was in all but name deputy prime minister; his position as first lieutenant did not depend on the portfolio he held. Lapointe's primacy was due to his position as the leading spokesman of French Canada in Parliament, the affection he inspired in the Liberal caucus, the respect accorded him by MPs of all parties and, above all, the degree of confidence the prime minister had in him.²⁰¹

To a certain extent, the confidence that Mackenzie King had in Ernest Lapointe dated from the Liberal convention of 1919, which saw King become leader of the party. Lapointe had played an important role in garnering Quebec support for Mackenzie King, which the future Prime Minister never forgot.

When the Liberals came to power in 1921, the new Prime Minister took steps to strengthen his relationship with Lapointe:

I told him I regarded him as nearest to me & wd. give him my confidence in full now & always. We would work out matters together. I regarded him as the real leader in Quebec, had sent for him first of all as promised. Asked which portfolio he wd. like & he said Justice [...] He is worthy of Justice, is just & honourable at heart – a beautiful Christian character – he shall have it.²⁰²

On January 20th 1948, King called the Liberal Party to hold a convention in order to choose a new leader. This was the first to be held since the death of Wilfrid Laurier in 1919. The convention took place in August. Upon his arrival, the first person Mackenzie King recognized was Hughes Lapointe, Ernest Lapointe's son. In his diary, the aging Prime Minister wrote: "[it] seemed to me most appropriate in relation to what took place at the last Convention. It was to

²⁰⁰ John A. MacFarlane, *Ernest Lapointe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) p.197

²⁰¹ J.W. Pickersgill, *Seeing Canada Whole* (Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1994) p.147

²⁰² King Diaries, December 10, 1921.

Lapointe more than anyone else that I owed my nomination and indeed much of the success of my career.”²⁰³ Lapointe was aware of his strength and King’s admiration for him. As MacFarlane’s analysis demonstrates, this was sometimes used to his advantage in the political arena in order to ensure his position held sway.

Even though the mentioned monograph examined Lapointe’s influence in external affairs, it did not look into the refugee question. Even so, there is evidence to suggest that he played a similarly influential role in regards to the refugee question as well. In *Through Narrow Gates*, Simon Belkin, who was a leading figure in the Jewish community’s attempts to gain admittance to Canada for refugees during the 1930s and 1940s, gives two very strong examples. According to the author, Sam Jacobs, a Jewish Liberal MP from 1917 to his death in 1938, had told him that the most powerful figure in the King Cabinet was Lapointe. “Mackenzie King, who generally kept aloof from local party leaders in Canada, was in questions relating to Jews and immigration, under the domination of Ernest Lapointe.”²⁰⁴ Likewise, Thomas Crerar, Minister of Mines and Resources, had an informal interview with influential individuals concerned with the plight of Jewish refugees on December 6, 1938, among those present were Senator Cairine Wilson, Reverend Claris Silcox and Dr. W.W. Judd. Crerar told the delegation that he was sympathetic and that “if widespread public support could be secured for the admission of refugees, the Government’s assent would be forthcoming.”²⁰⁵ The minister also revealed to the delegation that the main opponent to Jewish immigration in the Cabinet was Lapointe.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ King diaries, August 5, 1948.

²⁰⁴ Simon Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates* (Montreal: The Eagle Publishing Co., 1966) p.127.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p.176.

²⁰⁶ Minutes of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution, December 6, 1938, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Box 4 ZA1939 32-46A

The role of Ernest Lapointe in Canadian immigration policy is an important one for researchers. To date, the majority of scholars have concluded that Lapointe either was anti-Semitic himself, or bought into anti-Semitic arguments coming out of Quebec. Irving Abella and Harold Troper state that “Whatever Lapointe’s personal feelings on this matter – and there is no evidence that he otherwise favoured Jewish immigration – he felt justified for political reasons alone in taking a hard line with respect to refugees.”²⁰⁷ The authors continue with, “Lapointe corrected any backsliding, including that by the prime minister”.²⁰⁸ Lita-Rose Betcherman, in her biography of Lapointe, argues that although the Quebec MP preached tolerance and minority rights throughout his career, his speeches were only meant to motivate tolerance of the French Catholic minority by the English Protestant majority.²⁰⁹ The author also points that Lapointe, with his rural upbringing, likely “assimilated the religious anti-Semitism preached from the pulpit.”²¹⁰ Equally, Alan Mendelson in his study of anti-Semitism among Canada’s elite argues that “for Jewish concerns, Lapointe was illiberal, parochial, and totally lacking in human sympathy.”²¹¹ In academia to date there has been very little which has portrayed Ernest Lapointe as a friend of the Jews or as an individual who sympathized with their plight.

The evidence used to accuse Lapointe of anti-Semitism is often very similar. One such instance is the exclusion of Sam Jacobs from the coronation delegation in 1937. Arthur Beauchesne was Clerk of the House and secretary to the Canadian branch of the Empire Parliamentary Association while debate was taking place as to who would represent Quebec at the coronation. In 1957 he wrote a letter to Bernard Figler, who was writing Sam Jacob’s biography. Beauchesne recounted that Jacobs’ name had been suggested to Mackenzie King as

²⁰⁷ Abella and Troper, *None is too Many*, p.18.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p.50.

²⁰⁹ Lita-Rose Betcherman, *Ernest Lapointe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) p.241.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Alan Mendelson, *Exiles From Nowhere* (Montreal: Robin Brass Studio, 2008) p.80.

one of the two delegates to represent the province of Quebec. However, Ernest Lapointe and Pierre Casgrain argued that the province of Quebec could not be represented by a Jew.²¹² Jacobs was therefore turned down in favour of the French-Canadian Liberal, Jean-François Pouliot.

Pouliot was a veteran politician, having held the seat for the riding of Témiscouata since 1924, and Quebec could only send two representatives as part of the coronation delegation. The decision to replace Jacobs with Pouliot was due to the situation in Quebec during the 1930s. Lapointe and Casgrain realized that if Quebec was represented by a Jew, it could lead to increased tension in the province. Particularly amongst those who could see the selection of Jacobs as proof of the weakened demographic and political position of French-Canadians in the Dominion. Lapointe's decision in this instance was based solely on his understanding of the circumstances in Quebec and the uncertainty French-Canadians felt concerning their situation in Canada.

When it comes to the question of refugees, it is true that Lapointe continuously positioned himself against large-scale immigration. On several occasions, Mackenzie King mentions the position of Lapointe, along with his other Quebec colleagues, in his diary entries. When the Prime Minister told the Cabinet in November of 1938 that humanitarian considerations had to be taken into account, and that some aid would have to be given to those who were forced to flee their homelands following the pogroms in Germany and Austria, he found that Cardin, Lapointe and Rinfret "looked gloomy."²¹³ Then, when T.A. Crerar proposed the establishment of a quota, allowing for the admission of 10,000 refugees, the Quebec ministers were strongly against such an admission, and Cabinet felt other provinces would be unwilling to accept such a

²¹² Bernard Figler, *Sam Jacobs* (Gardenville: Harpell's Press, 1970) p.216-217.

²¹³ King Diaries, November 22, 1938.

number of refugees.²¹⁴ On June 8, 1939, while Mackenzie King was on tour with the royal couple in the United States, the Prime Minister received a telegram signed by sixty influential Torontonians suggesting that the 907 Jewish passengers of the German steamer St. Louis be allowed sanctuary in Canada. He had a copy of the telegram sent to the acting Prime Minister, Ernest Lapointe, and the director of immigration, F.C. Blair. Lapointe answered King's telegram by stating that he was "personally emphatically opposed" to the admission of the St. Louis passengers to Canada.²¹⁵

The first objective of a politician is to represent his or her constituents. Ernest Lapointe not only had to represent his constituents but also understand the mentality of Quebecers at the time in case he decided to push policies he knew would not be easily acceptable by a majority within the province. One of Lapointe's roles was to understand the current of opinion within the province and to bring it to the Prime Minister's attention, sometimes even forcing the issue.

The importance of Quebec at this time for the Liberals cannot be underestimated. Throughout the early twentieth century, Quebec, with its 65 constituencies, was the Liberals' main support base. Therefore, winning Quebec became of paramount importance as it was nearly synonymous with winning an election. The results of the eight Federal elections which took place from 1917 to 1945 demonstrate this fact. In 1917, 82 Liberals were elected; of these, 62 were elected in Quebec. Then, in the 1921 election, 116 Liberals were elected; they swept Quebec taking all 65 seats. For 1925, 59 of the seats in Quebec went to the Liberals. In 1926, 60 seats were Liberal; in Ontario, which boasted the second-most Liberal seats, only 26 of the 82 seats available went to King's party. The 1930 elections saw a weak Liberal showing in Quebec, with 40 of the available seats being won. Even so, 91 Liberals had been elected Canada-wide,

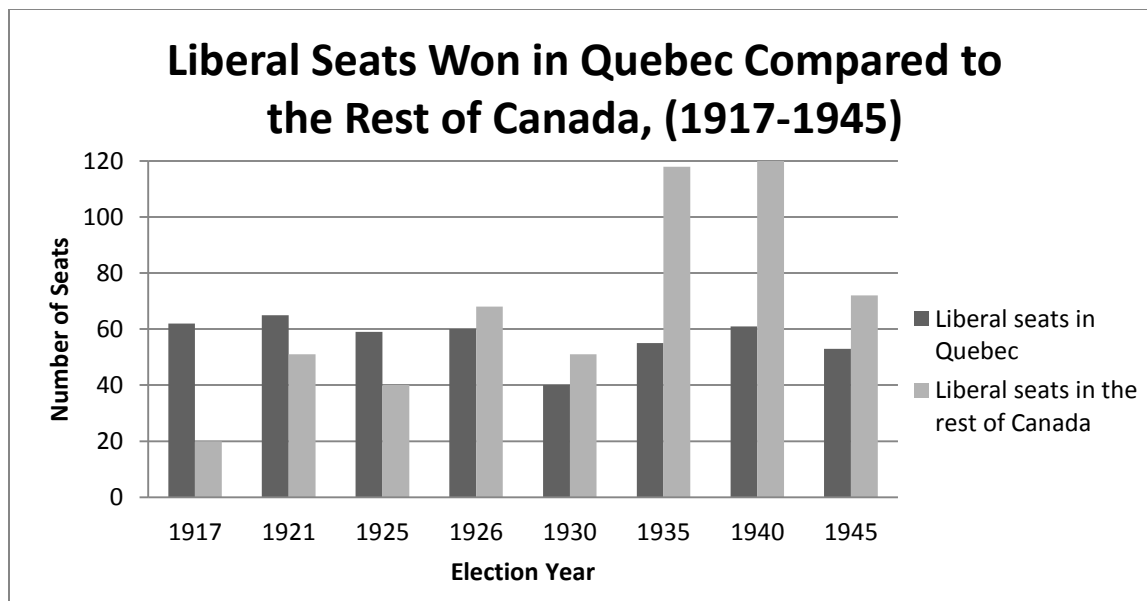
²¹⁴ Ibid, December 1, 1938.

²¹⁵ Cited in Betcherman. *Ernest Lapointe*, p.269-270.

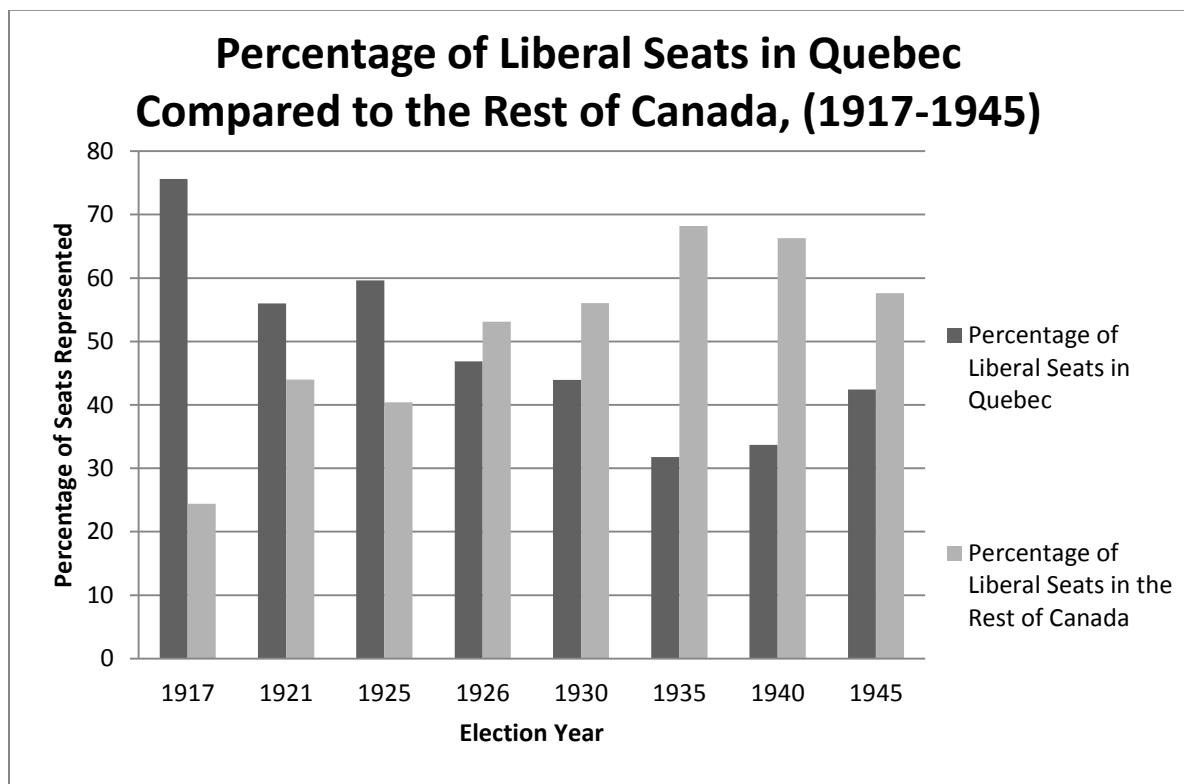
meaning Quebec still accounted for 43.96% of the Liberal seats. In 1935, there were 55 Liberals voted in from Quebec and 56 in Ontario. And in 1940, 61 Liberals were voted in from Quebec and 57 in Ontario. During this election the Liberals took 181 seats across Canada, Quebec accounted for 33.7% of these. Finally, in 1945, 53 Liberal seats were won in Quebec and 34 in Ontario.²¹⁶

Quebec remained the center of Liberal power in all Federal elections from 1917 to 1945. Interestingly, the year which saw the lowest percentage of seats in Quebec was 1935 with 31.79%. Yet, there were only 10 seats in Quebec that had not gone to the Liberals. The Liberals had won support across Canada and finished the election with a total of 173 seats. So, the low percentage in this case was not due to a lack of Liberal support in Quebec, but instead due to overwhelming Liberal support across Canada. So, Quebec was vital to the Liberal election in that year, but was no longer the dominant voice, a situation which led Quebec nationalists to complain the province had no influence in Federal politics. Nevertheless, one cannot discount the fact that for the elections from 1917 to 1945 Quebec won the Liberals, on average, 48.74% of their seats. King's Liberals would have been aware of this uninterrupted support in Quebec and would have played their cards to ensure continued success in future elections.

²¹⁶ Derek Black, *Winners and Losers* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984) p.64-73.



Source: Derek Black, *Winners and Losers* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984) p.64-73.



Source: Derek Black, *Winners and Losers* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984) p.64-73.

During the 1930s Quebec was in a period of transition. The industrial expansion within the province drew masses of Quebec's rural population to the cities where they worked in the

manufacturing industries. This migration from the rural countryside also led to the establishment of new cities, particularly in areas where natural resources were being exploited on a large scale, such as in the Saguenay Lac-Saint-Jean region.

This transition, assisted by the strong voice of the Catholic Church, led to a sharpening realization of alien influences within the province as the majority of the industries which the *pure laine* Quebecers worked in were either owned by Americans or the English. Consequently, there was a growing awareness of the cultural differences which existed within the province and there was the strong feeling that the province was no longer controlled by the French-Canadians, but was instead being usurped by English big business.²¹⁷ Such a view can be seen in a 1933 article from *L'Action Nationale* entitled “Nous ne serons maîtres chez nous que si nous devenons dignes de l’être” in which the anonymous author writes:

Cette question de l’industrie et du commerce pose un problème beaucoup plus grave et de plus grande ampleur. Les Canadiens français sont en train de devenir chez eux un vaste peuple de prolétaires. Nous demandons à nos politiques et à nos économistes de redresser cette situation. Nous n’entendons point que l’on se serve des richesses naturelles de notre province pour compromettre ou nous ravir notre patrimoine moral et nous imposer la pire des dictatures. Nous n’entendons point non plus qu’il soit indéfiniment loisible à des capitalistes étrangers, qui exploitent en définitive notre fonds national et la main-d’œuvre canadienne-française, de pratiquer contre nos ingénieurs et nos techniciens un véritable ostracisme et de nous réserver dans la vie économique de notre pays que des rôles de manœuvres et de domestiques.²¹⁸

Adding to French-Quebecer fears were the various groups of immigrants which were continuously arriving at the port of Montreal in the first part of the twentieth century. These groups were viewed as problematic because it was believed they would weaken the position of the French in Canada, politically, demographically, religiously and linguistically.²¹⁹

Furthermore, there was the natural tendency of members of newly arriving immigrant groups to align themselves with the dominant English-speakers, which only served to intensify the

²¹⁷ Everett C. Hughes, *French Canada in Transition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p.2-3.

²¹⁸ Full article cited in Georges Vincenthier, *Histoire des idées au Québec* (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 1983) p.140.

²¹⁹ See: “Est-ce une tour de Babel que le Canada bâtit ?” *Le Devoir*, March 18, 1939; “Les problèmes d’après guerre et la dénatalité anglo-saxonne” *Le Devoir*, September 3, 1943.

minority feeling of French-Canadians.²²⁰ However, in Quebec, public opinion was not only against Jewish immigration. Popular sentiment in Quebec was against all immigration as the population was aware Canadian policy favoured British immigrants, which French speaking Quebecers viewed, not without cause, as an attempt at assimilation.²²¹ Such was the case in a 1937 letter from Marcel Allard commenting on rumours of Polish Jews arriving in Canada, “At any rate, whether they are Jews, English, French, etc., this is of little importance, for we do not need anyone at the present time.”²²² Pushing this view further was a petition from the Société St. Jean Baptiste of the diocese of Quebec. Presented to the House of Commons in January of 1939, the document was signed by 127,364 people,

vigorously protesting against all immigration whatsoever and especially Jewish immigration; demanding with the instinct of self-preservation that [the Canadian government] maintain a vigorous policy of forbidding immigration; [...] and finally pleading that the Canadian government take all necessary precautions to prevent all immigration to this country.²²³

During the Depression there was a renewal of nationalism within the province of Quebec. However, the movement was not separatist in nature as it would become in the future. There were various ideologies which permeated the province. The nationalist movement at this time was opposed to foreign capitalists running Quebec and attempted to find ways to ameliorate the deteriorating living conditions within the province.²²⁴ There was an increasing focus on autonomy within Quebec and conservative socioeconomic ideals were promoted. Several remedies to the condition were suggested such as co-operatives, corporatism, forming Catholic

²²⁰ Robert Lahaise, *La fin d'un Québec traditionnel, 1914-1939* (Montreal: Éditions de l'Hexagone, 1994) p.154

²²¹ “Pas d’immigration” *Le Soleil*, October 5 1935, p.4.

²²² Marcel Allard to Department of Immigration, Library and Archives Canada, RG 76, Vol. 391.

²²³ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, January 30, 1939, p.428. It should be noted that the strong opposition to Jewish immigration was due largely to the situation in Europe, and the perceived pressure this group was putting on the Canadian government concerning immigration regulations. In this respect, this petition should not be seen only as an anti-Semitic document, but as proof of French-Canadian fears that increased immigration would ring the death knell for French-Canada.

²²⁴ Interview with Robert Comeau, In: Gilles Gougeon, *A History of Quebec Nationalism* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1994) p.67.

Unions, colonisation of new regions of the province, the *achat chez-nous* movement, and Catholic social doctrines.²²⁵ Nationalist feeling became so strong that in 1936, the Liberals, who had governed Quebec since the 1897 election, were defeated in the Quebec provincial elections by Maurice Duplessis, and the newly formed Union Nationale.

The evolving situation in Quebec during the 1930s placed the Federal government in a difficult position, as they wished to establish policies which would be acceptable to both English and French Canada. This is where Lapointe's knowledge of the popular feeling in Quebec came into play. It is in this light that one must examine the stances taken during his political career. Lapointe was acutely aware of the difficulties present in the French province regarding anything which could be viewed as giving too much to a "competing" minority. This is evidenced in a meeting the minister had with Mackenzie King in November of 1938. As King records the meeting:

Lapointe began speaking first about himself. To my great surprise and delight he told me he intended to stay on through the next campaign but was doing so 'only for me'. [...] He then outlined the difficulties in Quebec. Said that he personally could not stand meeting with constituents; they got his nerves on edge. He had simply to keep away from Quebec altogether. Matters were very unpleasant with Duplessis Administration. The clergy were against most of the things that the rest of Canada seemed to stand for, as, for example, greater freedom of speech, etc. There was no organization. Defence was necessary. He realized the defence program would have to be enlarged; that too was not popular in Quebec. The Jewish question was anathema. Altogether the outlook was anything but pleasant.²²⁶

Alan Mendelson, who argues that Lapointe "practised a calculating ruthlessness" to keep Jews out of Canada, uses this conversation as his main proof. He claims that Lapointe used "public opinion" in Quebec to get what he wanted. In this case, Lapointe wished to prevent Jews from entering Canada. As the author puts it:

His promise to remain faithful to King was, he said, a personal favour, "only for you." Having put King in his debt, Lapointe then set forth his vision of Quebec. "the Jewish problem," he said was an "anathema"

²²⁵ Claude Bélanger, "Ultramontane nationalism: 1840-1960," [http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/events/natpart3.htm], August 2000.

²²⁶ King Diaries, November 29, 1938.

At that time King was debating the fate of the Jewish refugees in Europe. In effect, Lapointe offered to remain loyal provided that King would keep the Jews at bay.²²⁷

However, Mendelson completely misses the point with this statement, and is too selective in his use of the primary source. When looking at the source in full, the account which King leaves is very telling of Lapointe's true feelings. First Lapointe states that he will come back for King alone, which is evidence of the strong relationship which existed between the Prime Minister and his Quebec Lieutenant. Throughout the conversation it is evident that Lapointe finds himself in a difficult position and is venting his frustration with his constituents to the Prime Minister. When Lapointe alludes to the overall situation in Quebec he mentions it is challenging and there will doubtless be difficulties along the road, particularly in boosting defences along the Canadian coasts, as such expenditures met strong opposition in Quebec. The Jewish question is brought up last by the Minister, however this is not done in an attempt to dissuade the Prime Minister from opening Canada's doors to the Jewish refugees. It is, in effect, Lapointe voicing his feeling of hopelessness for the whole situation. Although the Minister harboured humanitarian concerns, he realized that he had to act in the interest of the province which he represented. The Minister of Justice often had to take stances that he did not fully agree with, and in this case the emotional strain, which it was causing, was being exhibited to the Prime Minister.

There is no evidence to state that Ernest Lapointe was anti-Semitic. For Chubby Power, "Lapointe was a man without any great prejudices."²²⁸ Like many of his contemporaries, his political views of immigration were based on the unemployment situation. In a speech in 1939 he stated "I am one of those who are of the opinion that we cannot consider further immigration as long as the existing conditions prevail."²²⁹ In his private life, it seems Lapointe was a friend of the Jewish community. Lapointe's daughter, Odette, in a 1992 interview, was incensed at the

²²⁷ Mendelson, *Exiles from Nowhere*, p.80-81.

²²⁸ Chubby Power, *A Party Politician* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966) p.77.

²²⁹ Library and Archives Canada. Ernest Lapointe Fond, MG27 III B10, vol.61

unfounded conclusions regarding her father in *None is too Many*. According to Odette, her father had many Jewish friends and would always reprimand his children, their friends, and anyone else in their household who spoke unkindly of others, including Jewish people.²³⁰

This judgement is supported by documentation found within the Ernest Lapointe Fonds. On May 12, 1930 Lapointe received a letter from Max Clavir, the President of the *Toronto Daily Hebrew Journal*. Along with the letter, Clavir enclosed copies of the *Journal* from May 6th and 7th. Lapointe was asked to “get one of your Jewish Ottawa friends to read them for you. I am sure you will have no trouble to obtain one as I know you have a great many friends of my race in your city.”²³¹ Apparently the Minister of Justice’s amicable relations with the Jewish population were also well known to nationalist groups in Quebec. Evidence of this is found in a 1938 newspaper clipping from *La Nation* which accuses him of Jewish sympathies in regards to immigration. Lapointe “s’était montré favorable à l’immigration juive [...] les sympathies de M.E. Lapointe pour le peuple d’Israël sont bien connues et ceux qui suivent la politique de près à Ottawa sont au courant des relations cordiales qu’entretient M. Lapointe avec la colonie juive de la capitale.”²³² One could argue the rantings of *La Nation* should generally not be taken at face value due to its extreme right leanings. Although a valid point, had Lapointe been a virulent anti-Semite, the contributors of *La Nation* would not have found it necessary to attack his views on Jews and immigration.

In May of 1936, Hughes Lapointe sent a letter to the Minister of Justice’s secretary, Louis-Philippe Picard, in which he asks if his father could intervene on behalf of Leo Abramovitz

²³⁰ Mrs. Roger Ouimet (daughter of Ernest Lapointe), in interview with John MacFarlane, May 2 1992. Record received via e-mail correspondence with John MacFarlane, August 29 2011.

²³¹ Max Clavir to Ernest Lapointe May 12, 1930. Library and Archives Canada. Ernest Lapointe Fonds, MG27 III B10 vol.5

²³² *La Nation*, September 1, 1938. Library and Archives Canada. Ernest Lapointe Fonds, Mg 27 III B10 vol.77

and his family. The Abramovitz family wished to go to Vancouver but were being detained by the Immigration Department for fear that they would attempt to stay in Canada.²³³

In response, Picard wrote to Hughes “Étant donné le sentiment général, à l’heure qu’il est, dans la province à ce sujet, tu comprendras qu’il serait fort difficile pour le ministre de faire une intervention personnelle. Il se fonde sur sa sympathie l’avocat en cause; seulement, il croit qu’il ne serait pas prudent de faire les représentations demandées.”²³⁴ Picard’s answer to Hughes in this instance demonstrates that Lapointe has sympathy for the Abramovitz family, but that it would not be prudent to heed to the request of his son due to the political climate in Quebec at the time, and Lapointe’s need to maintain the population’s view of him as their defender, “la muraille qui vous protège.”²³⁵ Even so, such a request provides still another strong indication that Lapointe was not anti-Semitic. Had he been the anti-Semite which some authors have implied, without strong evidence, it is unlikely that his son would have taken the time to bring this request to his attention.

There is no documentary evidence available which proves Ernest Lapointe was an anti-Semite, or that his actions were dictated by anti-Semitic beliefs. In fact, the historical material available tends to point to the contrary. Why then was Lapointe not a proponent of offering more aid to Jewish refugees?

Lapointe realized that he represented the voice of French Canada in King’s Cabinet. For a population which believed its language and culture were under attack, and which viewed itself as being in unending competition with other minority groups, it would have been unthinkable to allow increased immigration. The dynamic situation in Quebec, paired with the looming threat

²³³ Hughes Lapointe to Louis-Philippe Picard May 18, 1936. Library and Archives Canada. Ernest Lapointe Fond, MG27 III B10, vol.25

²³⁴ Louis-Philippe Picard to Hughes Lapointe May 19, 1936 Library and Archives Canada. Ernest Lapointe Fond, MG27 III B10, vol.25

²³⁵ Lapointe Speech, October 9, 1939. Cited in MacFarlane, *Ernest Lapointe*, p.155

of war, forced Lapointe to take an uncompromising stance in matters of immigration. This was not necessarily dictated by ethnic prejudice, but by political realism. In this sense, he was not very far from the political thinking expressed by the leader of his Party, William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Frederick Charles Blair

Unlike Ernest Lapointe, F.C. Blair was not an elected official. He was a lifelong civil servant. Blair was born in Carlisle, Ontario in 1874 and began his career in the civil service in 1901 when he joined the Department of Agriculture. Then, in 1903 he was transferred to Immigration. In February of 1919 he was appointed Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Colonization, a post which he held until 1924 when he became Assistant Deputy Minister. Finally, in 1936 he was appointed Director of Immigration following the reclassification of immigration as a branch of Mines and Resources. In 1943, Blair was conferred the Imperial Service Order for his years of dedicated work; he retired in 1944.²³⁶

In most government departments directors did not have much authority in regards to crafting Federal policy. However, the Department of Immigration was only one branch of the Department of Mines and Resources which also included: Mines and Geology; Lands, Parks, and Forests; Surveys and Engineering; and Indian Affairs. The Minister of Mines and Resources at this time was T.A. Crerar who preferred to allow Blair to manage immigration. However, the plight of Jewish refugees forced Crerar to sometimes take a direct hand in immigration affairs and he attempted to secure admission to Canada for 10,000 refugees following the attacks of *Kristallnacht* in November of 1938. Nevertheless, this scheme was not accepted. Crerar was

²³⁶ Library and Archives Canada, Historical Personnel Files Collection, Frederick Charles Blair, RG32-C-2 vol.21

“not uncaring, only powerless” when confronted by other Cabinet ministers and his own Director of Immigration.²³⁷

To date scholars have viewed F.C. Blair as the main cause of Canada’s failure to allow Jewish refugees within her borders. It has been a near unanimous conclusion that Blair was anti-Semitic. Irving Abella and Harold Troper write that when the Jews “most needed a friend at the gate, they had an enemy [...] an anti-Semite; instead of a humanitarian.”²³⁸ Lita-Rose Betcherman describes him as “rabidly anti-Semitic,”²³⁹ J.E. Reas similarly claims he was “consistently anti-semitic.”²⁴⁰ Then, there is the Baptist pastor Doug Blair, great nephew of F.C. Blair, who in the year 2000, addressing 25 survivors of the *St. Louis*, begged forgiveness for the role of his family in refusing sanctuary in Canada, saying “To the extent that my family was a part of that, I’m sorry. Will you forgive me and will you let me call you my friends?”²⁴¹

Sifting through the available documentation, a clear image of the Director of immigration can be discerned. As Saul Hayes, national Executive Director of the Canadian Jewish Congress from 1940 to 1959, explained, “The story of F.C. Blair requires an entire explanation of the man’s position as head of a branch of government whose sole purpose for so many years was to keep out immigrants. He was trained in this respect and his whole attitude illustrated his firm belief that this was his job.”²⁴²

Blair had a distrust of the Jewish people which stemmed from his experience in the Immigration Department. In his letters, Blair often made references to previous Canadian refugee schemes. The first schemes, organized in the autumn of 1923, seemed the most painful

²³⁷ Abella and Troper. *None is Too Many*, p.150.

²³⁸ Ibid, p.7.

²³⁹ Betcherman. *Ernest Lapointe*, p.255

²⁴⁰ J.E. Rea, *T.A. Crerar* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997) p.219.

²⁴¹ Kathy Kacer, *To Hope and Back* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2011) p.182

²⁴² Saul Hayes to Paula Draper, 16 March 1977. Cited in, Paula J. Draper, “The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees,” Part 2, *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 2.2. (1979) p.99-100.

for Blair. In this case Canada had agreed to take 5,000 Jewish refugees who had been driven out of Russia and were residing in Romania. However, once the doors were opened, between 7,000 and 8,000 Jews actually came to Canada.²⁴³ This lack of control at Canada's gates was an outrage for Blair and refugee schemes which came to the table beginning in 1933 seemed all too reminiscent of the first. It therefore became his personal goal to make sure that the refugee situation was correctly managed and that the number of refugees allowed was indeed the number that arrived. In 1938 Blair remarked with satisfaction that "Pressure on the part of Jewish people to get into Canada was never greater than it is now and I am glad to be able to add, after 35 years experience here, that it was never so carefully controlled."²⁴⁴ However, some contemporaries viewed the Director's interpretation of correct policy as ill-founded. As one noted in a 1940 letter to the Prime Minister "I gathered from Mr. Blair's words that he regards it somewhat as a matter of policy to prevent the entry of Jews into Canada."²⁴⁵

The director's hesitancy to allow large numbers of Jewish refugees into Canada was based on observations made by the Immigration Department over the years. The main reason that Blair could not justify Jewish refugee schemes was the fact that Jews were not agriculturalists, which meant they did not fall under the admissible classes of immigrants. The Director was actually surprised that there were so few Jews that were trained in agriculture,

It seems odd that it should be so but it is true that there is a smaller percentage of Jews engaged in the basic industry of agriculture in this country than of any other race or class of people we have [...] I am not finding fault with the Jew because he does not farm, but on the other hand it need not surprise these people that a country which since Confederation has encouraged the immigration of the agricultural class, should favour other races than those who never or seldom farm.²⁴⁶

So, when it came to the question of occupations, it was not due to the Director of Immigration that Jews were not allowed to enter. This decision was based on Canada's immigration policies

²⁴³ See Memorandum from Director of Immigration, January 21, 1943. In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 9, p.533

²⁴⁴ F.C. Blair to F.M. Sclanders, February 13, 1938. Library and Archives Canada, RG 76 vol.391

²⁴⁵ W.J.T. to Mackenzie King, October 14, 1940. Library and Archives Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, MG 26 J2 vol.147

²⁴⁶ F.C. Blair to F.M. Sclanders, September 13, 1939. Library and Archives Canada, RG 76 Vol.391.

which limited immigration to agriculturalists, thereby barring a large proportion of Jewish applicants, as well as applicants of other origins. During the Depression, focus on agriculturalists became more important as there was a fear that immigrants would move to the cities, where the majority of unemployed were congregated. Blair shared this view, and stated that as far as the Jews were concerned Canada need to be no bigger than Montreal or Toronto.²⁴⁷ History had shown that the majority of Jews who came to Canada ultimately wished to settle in the cities. In order to prevent increased unemployment in the cities the Immigration Department placed increasingly more importance on preventing city-dwellers from immigrating to the Dominion.

However, F.C. Blair did have a prejudiced view of the Jews and believed that they were the cause of their own troubles. In his mind, if Jews would assimilate and stand for the same causes as the majority groups they would become popular. He even went so far as to suggest to three Jewish acquaintances of his that “it might be a very good thing if they could call a conference and have a day of humiliation and prayer which might profitably be extended for a week or more, when they would honestly try to answer the question of why they are so unpopular almost everywhere.”²⁴⁸

In September of 1939, Blair received a letter from F. MacLure Sclanders, of the Saint John Board of Trade in New Brunswick, who was worried about reports he had heard that the Jewish population of Canada was materially increasing. The Director remarked that although the Jews were not a popular group there were “some very fine people amongst them.” He then continued by stating, “instead of persecution it would be far better if we more often told them frankly why many of them were so unpopular, if they would divest themselves of certain of their

²⁴⁷ F.C. Blair to W.R. Little, June 14, 1939. Library and Archive Canada, RG 76 Vol.391.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

habits I am sure they would be just as popular in Canada as our Scandinavians.”²⁴⁹ So, for Blair, Jews needed to be re-educated and to change their cultural habits in order to become respectable citizens.

Although he did not list exactly what habits he found deplorable, Blair’s letters allow the historian to reconstruct what these likely were. For one, he saw the Jewish masses as having complete disregard for Canada’s immigration policies, as well as the management of the Immigration Department. He related this to the Prime Minister in a letter stating

It is a curious fact that so many of our Jewish applicants are utterly selfish in their attempts to force through a permit for the admission of relatives or friends. They do not believe ‘No’ means more than ‘Perhaps’ and they keep appealing and appealing in the belief that the merit of the case lies in the applicant rather than in the circumstances.²⁵⁰

Furthermore, Jews were seen as being unappreciative of what was being done for them as they stated that Canada was not doing anything for refugees. However, hundreds were being admitted through compliance with immigration regulations and by being approved through special Orders-in-Council.²⁵¹ With the increasing numbers of applications and appeals, Blair became ever more frustrated with Jews applying for refuge in Canada, “their psychological eyesight is so short as not to be able to distinguish between one case and another.”²⁵² He also viewed their constant push as a ploy to force the immigration doors open, as had been done in 1923.

Another factor which bothered Blair was the urgency with which able-bodied Jewish refugees wished to leave the European countries in which they had found safe-haven, following the commencement of the Second World War. He believed that those who had reached France or Britain should see if their services were wanted there before looking overseas. Blair’s opinion on the matter was, “the Empire is fighting battles for the liberty of these people, they at least

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ F.C. Blair to Prime Minister’s Office, January 30, 1939. Library and Archives Canada, Mackenzie King Papers MG 26 J1 Vol.263.

²⁵¹ F.C. Blair to W.R. Little, June 14, 1939. Library and Archives Canada, RG 76 Vol.391.

²⁵² Ibid.

ought to have enough red blood in their veins to find out before running away from the area of the conflict, whether their services will be of any value to the country which has given them shelter.”²⁵³

F.C. Blair, like many of his contemporaries had a certain distaste for Jews in general. However, he realized that there were undoubtedly good, as well as bad Jews, as in any other group. Blair could influence Canadian policy to a limited extent by adding his input to discussions concerning immigration. Still, his power would have been very limited. In the end, Blair was but a life-long bureaucrat. His years of experience shaped his views concerning the refugee situation and he sought to prevent Jews from taking advantage of the system in place. Although he was not an overwhelming supporter of Jewish immigration, he was sympathetic to their plight in Europe and worked within the stringent government frameworks to allow acceptable refugees into the country. In so doing, he even developed strong relationships with members of the Jewish community who were most adamant in their attempts to convince the government to allow a larger number of refugees into the country. When A.J. Paull, the executive director of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada, announced his withdrawal from his post, the Director sent him a letter in which he stated:

I very sincerely regret that you will no longer be the medium through which the Society deals with the Department. You have long and honourably filled the post – a post involving difficulties that probably we more than any person else living know how to appreciate. Speaking from our side I can say very frankly that you have always had our confidence and I do not think the Society will be able to provide a successor with the same qualifications to take up the task you are now laying down.²⁵⁴

A very interesting letter which gives a glimpse into the Director's personal views

regarding his post and the difficulties of such a position is demonstrated in a letter written to Sam Jacobs in June of 1938,

I have missed you for some time and have been inquiring as to your whereabouts and was told that you are not feeling up to the mark and are staying at home. I am sure this is a new experience for you and one not altogether congenial for a man who has been active for many years and whose broad shoulders have carried

²⁵³ F.C. Blair to W.R. Little, October 24, 1939. Library and Archives Canada, RG 76 Vol. 391.

²⁵⁴ Blair to A.J. Paull, September 25, 1937, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Sam Jacobs Fonds, MC 16 Box 2.

a lot of other folks troubles in addition to his own. And so I am writing you this little note to tell you that we miss you and that we sincerely hope you will soon be better. The world is full of troubles and the clouds grow darker for Jewish people in Europe. What a strange world when we have so far departed from the idea of a common brotherhood. Here we are doing what we can but you know we work within well defined limits and what we are able to do seems to me very much like the Disciples' question to the Master when faced with feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, "What are they among so many?"²⁵⁵

This illustrates that Blair respected Sam Jacobs and felt uneasy about the situation in Europe for the Jews. For the Director, the idea of a "common brotherhood" had been lost as the Jews became subject to increasing discrimination and maltreatment in Germany. Furthermore, he alludes to the fact that he has very little decision making power as he must work within the well-defined limits of his post. A situation in which he feels that no matter what is done it will not be enough.

As pertains to his influence on Canadian immigration policy, it should be noted that he was not a Member of Parliament, nor a Cabinet member. Consequently, he could make suggestions concerning policy, but in no way could he put them in place without government approval. Any influence he had on immigration policy was therefore indirect. This was a limitation which he understood as is demonstrated in 1938 when he wrote, "The first important matter is to decide whether Canada can afford to open the door to more Jewish people than we are now receiving. That of course is a matter of policy to be decided by the Government."²⁵⁶ In the end, the Director of Immigration was only following and implementing the accepted government practices of his time, he was not creating them.

As mentioned, Canadian immigration policy only allowed for certain designated groups to immigrate to Canada. Immigration was therefore limited mainly to agriculturalists, domestics, and to family members of individuals already residing in Canada. Such restrictions were seen as necessary during the Depression era. A fourteen page Privy Council Office document entitled

²⁵⁵ Blair to Sam Jacobs, June 30, 1938, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Sam Jacobs Fonds, MC 16 Box 2.

²⁵⁶ Blair to Crerar, March 28, 1938, Library and Archives Canada, Mackenzie King Papers MG 26 J4 Vol.173.

Memorandum on Canadian Immigration Backgrounds and Policy gives a most in depth explanation of Canadian immigration practices at the time of its publication in October of 1938. At that time, immigration was viewed as directly harmful due to the economic depression. Canada's absorptive capacity was believed to be around 120,000 annually. This capacity was calculated by subtracting population decreases from emigration from population increases due to natural increase, immigration and returning Canadians. If the total exceeded 120,000 in any high degree, it meant that increased emigration could be expected within two or three years. Therefore, the document concluded that increased immigration led to increased emigration of Canadians in search of work.

However, there was a catch; during the 1930s, due to administrative restrictions and the economic depression, the United States was admitting minimal numbers of immigrants of non-Canadian origin emigrating from Canada.²⁵⁷ Therefore, if Canada allowed in too many immigrants, there was no safety valve, and the Dominion would have had to deal with the surplus. Furthermore, there was the fact that the majority of Jewish applicants were considered stateless persons, as they did not have a passport. This presented a problem to immigration officials, as it had been government policy not to accept immigrants without valid passports. The reason for this was simple, with a passport, if the individual became a public charge, he or she could be deported. However, without a passport, it was nearly impossible to deport the individual back to their country of birth. Blair explains this reality in a 1938 memorandum prepared for T.A. Crerar,

we have fought all along to protect ourselves against the admission of stateless persons without passports for the reason that coming out of the maelstrom of War some of them are likely to go on the rocks and when they become public charges in Canada we have to keep them for the balance of their lives. It is not

²⁵⁷ *Memorandum on Canadian Immigration Backgrounds and Policy*, Library and Archives Canada, RG2-B-2 Vol.82.

likely that either Germany or Austria, or any other country for that matter, will take political refugees back once they are admitted to this country.²⁵⁸

Realizing there was no way to get rid of a surplus of immigrants, either through emigration to the United States, or forced deportation, it became increasingly important to make sure that immigration did not exceed what was believed to be the absorptive capacity of the Dominion. Immigration officials had to make sure there was enough work in Canada to employ the native population, as well as the immigrants they were allowing to enter.²⁵⁹ In order to allow for flexibility in regards to immigration Canada never imposed quotas. Instead, the Governor General in Council could impose restrictions and vary the requirements of admission of immigrants in order to meet the changing conditions of the country and ensure that the absorptive capacity was not exceeded.

Just because Canada had space for immigrants did not mean the country could accept immigrants. Immigration had to be planned, and could not overwhelm the weakened job market. This view was forwarded in a 1938 memorandum entitled *Canada and the Refugee Problem* which explains “this country’s capacity to absorb immigrants is grossly exaggerated by Mercator’s map [...] settlement should be gradual and steady, and adapted to actual opportunities for employment whether on the land or in industry.”²⁶⁰ However, another factor which was not mentioned in this memorandum was the cultural absorptive capacity of the Dominion.

This leads to another key objective for the Canadian immigration policy during the period, assimilation. In the above-mentioned memorandum, it was noted that certain immigrant groups were nearly unassimilable due to the fact that they resisted intermarriage, which was one of the key instruments of assimilation. The Jews fell into this group, and were therefore viewed

²⁵⁸ Memorandum to Hon. Mr. Crerar, March 28, 1938. In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.792-793.

²⁵⁹ Memorandum on Canadian Immigration Backgrounds and Policy, Library and Archives Canada, RG2-B-2 Vol.82.

²⁶⁰ Memorandum, November 29, 1938. In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.837-843.

as unassimilable for the remainder of the war.²⁶¹ Proof is seen in two Privy Council Office Documents spaced three years apart, one published in 1942 and the other in 1945. The first document, *Assimilation as a Factor to be Considered in Immigration Policy*, argues that immigration policy should take into account how easily a group is assimilated, and it is stated that one can determine which groups are readily assimilable. This can be done by examining certain aspects of the group such as the ability to speak an official language, the number who served in the Canadian armed forces, the percentage within the group who have applied for naturalization etc. However, the document also explains that “It is possible [...] that certain ethnic groups may display one or more of these ‘symptoms’ of assimilation but suffer from distinct handicaps of a physical, religious or prejudicial nature. It is obviously more difficult to assimilate a Chinese than it is a Dutchman; a Jew than a German.”²⁶²

Likewise, the 1945 memorandum on immigration legitimized Canada’s discriminatory immigration practices. It reads,

The claim is sometimes made that Canada’s immigration laws reflect class and race discrimination: they do, and necessarily so. Some form of discrimination cannot be avoided if immigration is to be effectively controlled. In order to prevent the creation in Canada of expanding non assimilable racial groups, the prohibiting of entry of immigrants of non assimilable races is necessary.²⁶³

Canada was not the only country whose immigration policy was focused on assimilation. Even in Australia, where 15,000 Jews found refuge it was believed that in order to find a solution to the problem of Jewish refugees “countries must be prepared to receive a proportion of those to be expatriated in relation to their capacity to assimilate them.”²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Memorandum on Canadian Immigration Backgrounds and Policy, Library and Archives Canada, RG2-B-2 Vol.82.

²⁶² Assimilation as a Factor to be Considered in Immigration Policy, Library and Archives Canada, RG2-B-2 Vol.82.

²⁶³ Library and Archives Canada, RG2-B-2 Vol.82.

²⁶⁴ Confidential Letter from Foreign Office in London, January 13, 1939, Library and Archives Canada, MG26 J1 Vol.280.

So, the immigration policy of the 1930s and 1940s had many obstacles which hindered large-scale immigration of Jewish refugees, as well as other immigrant groups. This was due to a focus on assimilation, as well as a push for agriculturalists and domestics. However, there was still the possibility of entering through a special Order in Council and many of these were given from 1933 to 1945 to refugees with significant capital, the ability to setup new industries, or who possessed valuable knowledge or experience in needed trades. In fact, from 1933 to 1944 there were 9,191 individuals authorized to enter Canada by Order-in-Council.²⁶⁵ Of these, a large percentage were of Jewish descent, as can be deduced from a 1938 document from the desk of F.C. Blair, which shows the number of Jewish immigrants admitted by special Orders-in-Council in regards to the total of admissions.

Total of Special Orders-in-Council Passed from 1933 to 1937			
Year	Total	Jewish	Proportion of Jewish to Non-Jewish Authorizations
1933	1,357	637	46.94
1934	520	152	29.23
1935	1,059	525	49.58
1936	819	284	34.68
1937	759	197	25.96

Source: F.C. Blair to Little, June 6, 1938. In, Department of External Affairs, *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 6, p.796-800.

When all these facts are taken into account, it becomes clear the F.C. Blair's actions as the Director of the Immigration Branch, were not dictated by anti-Semitism. Although there is strong evidence to suggest Blair found certain faults with Jews, and made comments which had anti-Semitic underpinnings, it is important to note that this illustrates he shared the prejudice of his times. His views concerning Jews were no different than a large portion of his English-speaking contemporaries. Furthermore, the documents examined show that Blair did not view

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

the Jews as a generic group, as he maintained that there were very fine people among them, he was close with certain members of the community, and he was sympathetic of their plight.

In the end, Blair's frustration with the Jewish community stemmed from his years of service in the Department of Immigration. Having worked in immigration matters for thirty years by the time Hitler came to power, Blair had been exposed to many of the ploys which immigrants employed in their attempts to gain access to Canada. In addition, he was well aware of instances where the Canadian immigration system had failed to correctly manage the flow of immigrants to the country.

The aid Blair's Department could offer to Jewish refugees was limited due to the potential ramifications of allowing large numbers of refugees asylum. The democracies of the world realized that if they allowed Jewish refugees fleeing Germany into their countries it set a precedent which could lead to a domino effect in Europe. There was the possibility that other countries would begin to oppress unwanted segments of their population in the hopes of forcing them to find new homelands elsewhere. Blair alluded to this numerous times in his letters, as did many others in government circles, "a concerted effort to solve the refugee problem of Germany and Italy may move other European States to treat their Jewish population horribly in the expectation that the democratic countries will also find a solution for them."²⁶⁶ Furthermore, like his contemporaries, he would not have known of the atrocities taking place in Europe until the end of 1942. However, by this time he was aware of the difficulties in shipping, stating that "There are practically no Jewish or other refugees in German occupied territory who are now able to move."²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Blair to Major Dray, December 19, 1938, Library and Archives Canada, RG 76 Vol.391.

²⁶⁷ Blair to J.N. Stephenson, May 24, 1943 Library and Archives Canada, RG76 Vol.391

As Director of the Immigration Branch, Blair attempted to follow the Canadian immigration regulations as strictly as possible. He was aware that regardless of the work he put in there was no way to prevent all unauthorized immigrants from entering as there was the known practice that Jewish immigrants would often profess another faith.²⁶⁸ However, he was proud to be able to say that the situation was being controlled better than the case of the Romanian refugees a decade earlier, and that the flow of immigrants had never been so well managed.

Vincent Massey

Vincent Massey was born in Toronto in 1887. In 1925 he began his political career when he was invited to become a minister without portfolio by Mackenzie King. Then, from 1926 to 1930 he served as Canadian representative to the United States. In 1935 he became the Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, a post which he held until 1946. Upon return to Canada he took the position as chancellor of the University of Toronto, and from 1952 to 1959 was the governor-general of Canada. On December 30, 1967 Massey passed away at the age of eighty.

Many historians have taken Massey's actions out of context, and looked at them from a modern perspective. This has led many to false conclusions. Like Lapointe and Blair, Vincent Massey has been accused of standing guard at the gates of Canada and denying entry to the Jews of Europe while they were led to the gas chambers of Europe. Irving Abella and Harold Troper argue that he "worked through External Affairs as best he could to keep Jews out of Canada."²⁶⁹ Alan Mendelson devotes a whole chapter of his work *Exiles from Nowhere* to Vincent Massey's perceived anti-Semitism. In the small section of the chapter concerning the immigration of

²⁶⁸ Telegram, March 1, 1940, Library and Archives Canada, RG 25 Vol.1661 part 1-2 file 1933-342

²⁶⁹ Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*. p.50.

European Jews, the author's arguments against Massey are based primarily on the fact that he supported Neville Chamberlain's appeasement program, that he did not put his career on the line in an attempt to save the Jews of Europe, and that he was one of the main architects of the plan to allow 3,000 Sudeten Germans to immigrate to Canada in 1939.²⁷⁰ Claude Bissell, a biographer of Vincent Massey takes a more nuanced approach and through an analysis of the High Commissioner's personal life and friends concludes that his policies were not dictated by anti-Semitism but by his times.²⁷¹

It is important to understand that until war erupted in 1939, Canadian external policy developed in spite of its high commissioners. Both King and his Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, O.D. Skelton, did not fully trust Massey. He was viewed as an anglophile whose allegiance was with Britain before Canada. For King, this was unacceptable as he believed Canada should act autonomously in her own interests while keeping ties with London. So, King continuously tried to limit the role of his High Commissioner and in June of 1937 accused Massey of trying to displace the Prime Minister in foreign affairs and succumbing to "sinister British influence."²⁷² Nevertheless, with the outbreak of war things began to change and the Prime Minister began to have more trust in Massey. As Bissell notes, "King's other attitudes towards Massey prevailed – an almost cloying assertion of deep personal friendship, coupled with official declarations of support."²⁷³

As concerns Neville Chamberlain's appeasement program, Massey should not be criticized. Appeasement was a popular policy as the horror of the First World War still loomed over the civilized world. Also, as Gerhart Weinberger has shown, the appeasement policy was

²⁷⁰ Mendelson, *Exiles From Nowhere*. p.136-141.

²⁷¹ Claude Bissell, *The Imperial Canadian*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986)p.102-106.

²⁷² Ibid, p.118-119.

²⁷³ Ibid, p.120.

not a German victory as many have argued; Hitler viewed the 1938 Munich agreements as the biggest setback of his career.²⁷⁴ Massey, like many others, was willing to make concessions in order to prevent a second conflagration, and he realized that groups which stated that war was inevitable made such efforts more difficult to put in place. It was in this light that he wrote “Jewish opinion is not helpful. The Jew, to-day, not unnaturally, feels very passionately about the sufferings of his own race in Nazi Germany [...] This keeps him from sympathizing with Chamberlain’s efforts [...] and Jewish influence is now noticeable in certain sections of the press.”²⁷⁵ Massey is not finding fault with the Jews for protesting against the treatment of their co-religionists in this instance and views it as a natural course to take. However, he was only too aware of the detrimental effects opposition to appeasement in the press could have on Chamberlain’s efforts to prevent a war and for this reason voiced his concerns.

As concerns the Sudeten refugees, historians to date have been fairly critical of the whole ordeal making the argument that the government was anti-Semitic for allowing in these 3,000 refugees. It seems that in the minds of many, Canada should have allowed Jewish refugees as opposed to the Sudeten Germans. However, such a conclusion is only reached when taking the decision to allow the Sudeten Germans asylum in Canada out of context.

Following the conclusion of the Munich agreements, on September 29, 1938, the Sudetenland, an area on the German and Czechoslovakian border, became part of the Third Reich in an attempt to appease Hitler and to prevent war. The population of the area was composed of Czechs as well as ethnic Germans. However, the ethnic Germans were not all in support of Hitler’s takeover of the Sudetenland and the lives of many Social Democratic Germans were in jeopardy following the seizure of the territory in October of 1938. The

²⁷⁴ Gerhard Weinberger, “Munich After 50 Years,” *Foreign Affairs* 67, no.1 (1988) p.172

²⁷⁵ Massey to King, February 3, 1939, Library and Archives Canada. Mackenzie King Papers, Vol.274.

Canadian government was aware of this, and in an interim report on the refugee problem, dated October 24, 1938 mentioned that the refugee problem, as of October 11, involved 30,000 Czechoslovakians, 15,000 Social Democrat Germans and 6,000 German Jews. It was pointed out that the Czechoslovakian government would take care of her own refugees; however, German refugees could not opt for Czechoslovakia and were to be expelled to Germany. In fact, 20,000 Social Democratic refugees had been sent back from the Czechoslovakian government, 10,000 of whom “were marked men and if returned to Germany would be exposed to suffering or worse.” Canada was willing to play her part and stated her focus would be on the Social Democrats and the German Sudeten Jews.²⁷⁶

By October 25, 1938 it was noted that the initial estimate of Sudeten German refugees had been high. There were still 10,000 to 20,000 who were unable to return to their homes. However, it was now stated that “only about 3,000 could be described as marked men.” It was also indicated that those “for whom immigration [is] most urgent are mostly Sudeten German Social Democrats, almost all of whom are it is stated Roman Catholics.” Furthermore, the majority of these refugees were particularly skilled workers in glass or had some experience in agriculture.²⁷⁷ It will be remembered that Canadian immigration promoted the movement of agriculturalists and skilled workers in industries which Canada lacked. Canada lacked highly skilled glass workers and in an October 20, 1938 telegram F.C. Blair inquired whether there were any among the refugees as “Canada has abundance raw material suitable for manufacture of high grade glass.”²⁷⁸ Finally, Vincent Massey sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, which read:

²⁷⁶ Memorandum, October 24, 1938 In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.829-831.

²⁷⁷ Telegram from High Commissioner in Britain to Secretary of State for External Affairs, October 25, 1938 In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.831.

²⁷⁸ Memorandum, October 24, 1938 In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.829-831.

I feel personally that as a matter of tactics it might be wise for us to make generous gesture in regard to acceptance of as many as possible Aryan Sudeten Germans from the 3,000 or so now in Czechoslovakia. On the whole these appear to be more desirable settlers than any other refugees and if we could take a substantial number of them it would put us in a much stronger position in relation to later appeals from and on behalf of non Aryans.²⁷⁹

Canada was not willing to cover the cost of transportation and settlement. Sudeten refugees had to demonstrate proof of having sufficient funds to be settled in Canada. In addition, railway company agents were sent to Europe to choose which refugee families were suitable with the immigration policy that insisted that only complete family units qualified. The Canadian government did not act as quickly as the refugees would have hoped, as they focused on ensuring that all arrangements were in place. Originally 1,200 families were to be established in Canada. However, in the end only 303 refugee families and 72 single men were admitted to Canada because when Czechoslovakia was brought under German control in March of 1939 it was no longer possible to resettle the refugees elsewhere.²⁸⁰

Could Massey's comment in this case can be characterized as anti-Semitic? The simple answer is no. As mentioned, the Sudeten Germans which were brought to Canada were in danger if they remained in Europe; many had been referred to as "marked men" in previous dispatches. This was therefore a humanitarian action. Even so, Canada was not willing to cover the cost of transportation, the refugees had to have a certain amount of capital with them in order to qualify for entry to the Dominion, and the whole scheme proceeded at a slow pace. When Massey mentioned that it would be wise tactically to accept 3,000 Sudeten Germans as they were more desirable he was speaking in an official tone, not a personal one. Massey was undoubtedly aware of Canadian immigration policy and realized that there was a need for new industry, particularly of glass manufacture, as well as farmers. Both of these occupations could be found

²⁷⁹ Telegram from High Commissioner to Britain to Secretary of State for External Affairs, November 29, 1938 In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.837.

²⁸⁰ Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) p.276-268.

amongst the Sudeten refugees. So, in reality, they more fully satisfied the Canadian immigration requirements of the period and were therefore viewed as more suitable to Canadian needs than other refugees. It is in this light that Massey's words should be interpreted.

Massey expressed this sentiment in an explanatory letter which he sent to King along with his recommendation that Canada allow entry to 3,000 Sudeten refugees. In the letter he mentions that there are two major refugee problems that confront Canada at the moment, the Sudeten Germans and the German Jews of the greater German Reich. In the letter he went over the fact that the Sudetens mostly had agricultural experience and would normally qualify for admission to Canada. However,

The Jewish problem, of course, bristles with difficulties. There are, I gather, very few Jewish refugees who have been following agricultural pursuits and they would naturally swell the already substantial Jewish population of our larger cities, with the inevitable risks of an anti-Semitic feeling developing.²⁸¹

Furthermore, there was the sad truth that the Sudetens were viewed as the more assimilable of the two groups, and for this reason more advantageous to Canada as well.

In addition, there was a case when Massey did advocate for the immigration of Jewish refugees to Canada. For example in 1936 he forwarded a letter from Otto M. Schiff, a prominent member of the Jewish community in London, England and the Joint Chairmen of the Jewish Refugees Committee there. In his introductory remarks, Massey explains that he told Mr. Schiff that he merely promised he would forward the letter to the authorities in Ottawa as it was a subject for them to consider. However, he does continue adding that "among the German refugees in Great Britain there are persons with very high academic qualifications as well as others with valuable experience as scientists in different branches of industry."²⁸² In so doing, Massey makes sure that the reader understands the merits of these refugees. There is no record

²⁸¹ Letter from Massey to King, December 8, 1938 cited in Bissell, *The Imperial Canadian*. p.105.

²⁸² Letter from Massey to Secretary of State for External Affairs, February 12, 1936. Library and Archives Canada, RG 25-G-2 Vol. 2883 file 2155-40.

of a response to Massey concerning the letter. What is known is that the letter was forwarded to the Department of Immigration and subsequently brought to the attention of T.A. Crerar. Even so, it is quite possible that Massey was made aware that the unemployment situation made it difficult to accept refugees and limited the number which could be admitted. Whatever the case may be, Massey would have been aware of immigration policy by the end of 1938 and knew of the limitations regarding refugees.

At any rate, when Massey had written to the Prime Minister advocating the immigration of Sudeten refugees in lieu of Jewish refugees he could not have been aware of future Nazi policies of extermination, nor of the fact that within a year most of Europe would be within Hitler's grasp. At the time, allowing Sudetens to immigrate to Canada seemed both most humanitarian and most acceptable to the Dominion. Their lives were in danger due to the fact that they were not allowed refuge in Czechoslovakia and were "marked men" if they were sent to Germany. Massey being aware of all these factors forwarded his position to External Affairs stating that he personally was strongly of the opinion that the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia "should be considered quite separately from that of other refugees" because "their situation is such an urgent one." He continued, declaring that he was of the opinion "that they include among their numbers many persons who would be much more desirable as Canadian settlers and much more likely to succeed in our country."²⁸³

So, in the political setting Massey could not push very hard for Jewish immigration as he had to accept the immigration policy of the day, and he did not want to fall back into a position of half-trust, as he had before the war. Although he accepted government policy and did not risk his political career in order to lobby for Jewish refugees through his position, this does not mean

²⁸³ High Commissioner to Britain to Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 1, 1938 In, Department of External Affairs, Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 6, p.845.

that Massey had a lack of moral courage. It could mean that he understood the limitations of his position and realized that such actions in the end would have proven futile. As has been shown, he supported the transfer of Sudeten refugees to Canada because he understood them to be in a more precarious position, as well as more desirable immigrants. However, was this conclusion driven by anti-Semitism?

In order to answer this question, it is essential to analyse Massey's personal and political life. Claude Bissell, speaking of Massey's personal life, remarks that the High Commissioner was attracted to Jewish intellectuals and artists. He mentions the strong ties which existed between Massey and Walter Lippman²⁸⁴, who the author concedes was accused, although a Jew, of being anti-Semitic, Felix Frankfurter²⁸⁵ and Louis Brandeis.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, the High Commissioner and his wife were very close with the Hart house quartet²⁸⁷, which was formed in majority by Jewish musicians. Likewise, Bissell reminds the reader that Massey had actively supported a young Jewish Rhodes scholar from Toronto by the name of Lionel Gelber. When Gelber was having difficulty obtaining a Canadian appointment, Massey realized that this was likely due to anti-Semitism. Therefore, he took it upon himself to write a letter to the Minister of Labour, Norman Rogers to the affect that "Gelber is a Jew, and no doubt anti-Semitic prejudice has been one of the factors responsible for his failure to find an opening but he is far too generous to admit this, which makes me all the more anxious to help him."²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ An American public intellectual and newspaper columnist, he is famous for popularizing the term Cold War in his 1947 book of the same title.

²⁸⁵ A legal advisor to President Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference; he became associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States in 1939.

²⁸⁶ Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States from 1916 to 1939.

²⁸⁷ The Hart String Quartet, formed in 1923, was Canada's most well-known chamber ensemble in the first half of the twentieth-century, and was composed completely of non-Canadian born musicians. The ensemble was fully subsidized by the Massey Foundation.

²⁸⁸ Bissell, *The Imperial Canadian*. p.105-106.

Bissell's evidence loses force however when he argues that close friends of Massey in Canada, such as: George Wrong, Sir Robert Falconer and B.K. Sandwell all protested against Canadian restrictions on Jewish immigration. This leads him to stipulate that if Massey had remained in Canada he would have joined the ranks of his friends and would also have criticized government policy.²⁸⁹ However, such an argument is based on assumption alone and is rightly attacked by Alan Mendelson who argues that Massey upheld Canadian immigration restrictions through his position as Canadian High Commissioner to London. Furthermore, the author argues that Massey's upper-class Anglo-Protestant family background had introduced him to anti-Semitic rhetoric and beliefs which he held throughout his career. For Mendelson, this can be seen most clearly in Massey's push to allow 3,000 Sudeten German refugees into Canada, to the supposed detriment of Jewish refugees.²⁹⁰

In the end, there is a lack of definitive evidence when attempting to determine whether Massey was anti-Semitic or not. Some have taken the position that, as there is nothing to prove that he was not anti-Semitic, it can be concluded that he was. However, anti-Semitism is a serious accusation which should not be thrown around so lightly. When analyzing the High Commissioner's decision to push for the allowance of 3,000 Sudeten Germans into Canada, as has been done here, it becomes clear that this was not done for anti-Semitic purposes, but was instead due to humanitarian concerns. Furthermore, in his personal life Massey had strong relationships with many individuals of Jewish descent and even fought for just treatment for them within Canada, as evidenced in the case of Lionel Gelber. In the end, when all the evidence is put into context it is nearly impossible to characterise Massey as a virulent anti-

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Mendelson, *Exiles From Nowhere*. p.136-137.

Semite. He was merely a man who followed the policies of his time, and held the prejudices of his times.

The M.S. St. Louis

For Canada, there is one event, involving both F.C. Blair and Ernest Lapointe which has become synonymous with Canada's supposed intolerance to Jewish refugees. The incident in question concerns the M.S. St. Louis, a German passenger ship which sailed from Hamburg, Germany to Havana, Cuba in May of 1939 and remains in the moral consciousness of many Canadians. So much so that in January of 2011 a monument by Daniel Libeskind was unveiled at the Canadian Museum of Immigration housed at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Oliver Moore of *The Globe and Mail* described the monument as such:

a series of gears marked Hatred, Racism, Xenophobia and Antisemitism. As one turns the next, they slowly disassemble and remake the image of the ship, bringing in mind the fragility of modern civilization. Around the rim of the monument, which offers a haunting reflection to viewers, is the story of the voyage. On the reverse is a complete list of the passengers.²⁹¹

The memorial project was financed by the Canadian Jewish Congress and the justification of its placement at Pier 21 was that it is where the ship likely would have taken port had it been granted permission to do so.

The ship had 937 Jewish refugees as passengers, most of whom had Cuban landing certificates and transit visas. However, a week prior to their departure, the Cuban president, Frederico Laredo Bru, issued a decree which invalidated all recently issued landing certificates. This was in response to the fact that the Director-General of the Cuban immigration office, Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, had been taking advantage of a loophole in the Cuban immigration regulations by selling "tourist" landing permits to refugees. Even so, one cannot discount the

²⁹¹ Oliver Moore, "From Daniel Libeskind, a machine of shame," *The Globe and Mail*, 19 January 2011

fact that like most countries, Cuba was also affected by the Depression and Bru was under pressure to limit immigration in order to secure jobs for the Cuban population.

Upon arrival in Havana Harbor, in June, only 28 passengers, who had secured valid Cuban visas, were allowed to disembark. The rest of the passengers were prevented from doing so due to the change in Cuban landing regulations and the fact that their permits were invalidated. The ship therefore left Havana harbor on June 2, 1939 and sailed slowly towards Miami, Florida. Cables were sent to the President of the United States, and his wife, but these went unanswered. The ship therefore continued sailing and returned to Europe. During this time, the American Joint Distribution Committee worked frantically to secure refuge for the remaining passengers outside of Germany. In the end, 288 went to the United Kingdom. The remaining 620 were taken in by France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Of these, 254 died during the Holocaust.²⁹²

This story would have no Canadian connection if it were not for the fact that on June 8, 1939 the Prime Minister received a telegram from George Wrong and several other important Torontonians, including B.K. Sandwell of *Saturday Night*. The telegram stated:

As a mark of gratitude to Almighty God for the pleasure and gratification which has been vouchsafed the Canadian people through the visit of their Gracious Majesties King George and Queen Elizabeth and as evidence of the true Christian charity of the people of this most fortunate and blessed country, we, the undersigned as Christian citizens of Canada respectfully suggest that under the power vested in you as Premier of our country you forthwith offer to the 907 homeless exiles on board the Hamburg American ship St. Louis sanctuary in Canada.²⁹³

As indicated in the telegram, Mackenzie King was not in Ottawa when this cable was received. He was in the United States accompanying King George and Queen Elizabeth on their royal visit. Consequently, he wired a verbatim copy of the telegram to O.D. Skelton and asked him to

²⁹² Sarah Ogilvie and Scott Miller. *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) p.174.

²⁹³ Cited in Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975) p.269-270

show it to the acting Prime Minister, Ernest Lapointe, and the Director of Immigration, F.C. Blair. After doing this Skelton wired back with an answer. Blair claimed that the passengers did not fall within the allowances of the Canadian immigration policy and Lapointe, for his part, claimed that he was “personally emphatically opposed” to admitting the passengers of the St. Louis to Canada.²⁹⁴

Although a telegram was received from this influential group of Torontonians, the reality is that the Canadian government never received anything from the M.S. St. Louis itself asking for refuge. Barring Cuba, the main goal of the passengers was to gain entry into the United States. Proof that Canada was not asked to intercede by the passengers of the ship, nor the captain is found in a June 16, 1939 letter from F.C. Blair to O.D. Skelton wherein the former states that “no request was made by the ship and so far as we know, by the passengers, for their landing in Canada.”²⁹⁵ In October of 1939 Hugh E. Arnold, a concerned Canadian citizen, sent a letter to F.C. Blair relating to the passengers of the St. Louis. Arnold had seen many of the passengers during a visit to Europe and believed that Canada had missed out on an opportunity to receive some desirable Jewish citizens. Blair responded to the letter stating that “There was no proposal these people would come to Canada until every effort had failed to get them landed elsewhere and as a matter of fact it was not until after the ship was two days east of Cuba that an appeal was made to this country.” The Director explained that the Immigration Department was receiving hundreds of applications a week from Canadian Jewish residents who hoped to secure admission to Canada for their friends and relatives. Finally, he noted that the Department was “unable to meet many of these requests and a moment’s reflection will show the position in

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Letter from F.C. Blair to O.D. Skelton. June 16, 1939. Library and Archives Canada, RG76, vol.440.

which we could place ourselves had we granted the admission of upwards of 1,000 people who could have been interested in the country only as a sort of last resort.²⁹⁶”

Likewise, one cannot discount the prospect of copycat ships attempting the same. As Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore explain: “the Gestapo organized numerous other steamship voyages containing Jews with dubious or non –existent travel documents to land refugees wherever the authorities might permit. The *St. Louis* was the most famous of these voyages, but it was by no means the only example.”²⁹⁷ Had the ships’ passengers been allowed to disembark it is likely that other ships, filled with refugees, would have arrived at Canadian ports expecting the same treatment.

Though the comment made by Ernest Lapointe has been shown as a sign of his lack of sympathy towards Jews leaving Germany, this is not the case. As seen in the previous chapter Lapointe was sympathetic to the plight of European Jews, but had to be reserved in order to best represent his constituents. The case of the *St. Louis* was no different. By June of 1939 the prospect of war was increasingly becoming a reality and Mackenzie King’s trusted Quebec Lieutenant realized it was a strong possibility that Canada would find itself dragged into an extended conflict. It was vital not to enrage the population of Quebec as a united Canada was needed for the war effort. Furthermore, it was necessary for the Liberals to keep good ties in the province as there was a strong possibility that there would be a need to resort to conscription, as had been done during the First World War.

Lapointe may have felt sympathy for the Jews aboard the M.S. *St. Louis*. However, he knew he needed to maintain the French-Canadian population’s view of him as their defender. In

²⁹⁶ Letter from F.C. Blair to Hugh Arnold. October, 20, 1939. Library and Archives Canada, RG 76, vol.440.

²⁹⁷ Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore, *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States* p.278

order to do so he made a conscious decision to avoid taking stances that risked alienating Quebec. The case of the St. Louis was not the first time the minister had to leave his personal opinion aside in order to maintain Liberal support in his province. Following the Padlock Law of 1937, which gave Quebec's Attorney General the right to padlock the premises of any organization which promoted communism or bolshevism within Quebec, Lapointe urged the Liberal government not to revoke the act. To do so, he reasoned, would weaken the Liberal party in Quebec and threatened to estrange the province.

Conclusion

As mentioned in previous chapters, one cannot examine the language used by these individuals with current notions of right and wrong. Sometimes the language used in personal correspondence seems offensive at first, yet was the norm during the period under review. Although this may demonstrate a lack of sensitivity to a community that was vulnerable at the time and under stress, the information available to researchers does not provide enough evidence to conclude that Ernest Lapointe, F.C. Blair, or Vincent Massey were convinced anti-Semites. Therefore, it becomes highly unlikely that Canada's refugee policy was dictated by personal anti-Semitic tendencies among policy makers.

It seems as though Ernest Lapointe, F.C. Blair, Vincent Massey and Mackenzie King have become scapegoats for a society trying to come to terms with its supposed lack of humanitarian concern for Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. While six million died in Europe, Canada allowed a little less than 9,000 Jews into the country. Such a realization was a shock for Canadians and it was perhaps easier to agree with the assessment that Canada was unwilling to open her doors to refugees due to the work of a group of conniving politicians and bureaucrats than to suggest that Canada as a whole was guilty of inaction.

However, one must realize that Canada's politicians were not guilty of inaction. The truth of this statement is found in the fact that there was no need for action until 1938 when Jews began to emigrate from Germany *en masse*. Many looked to Canada as a safe-haven at this time and the doors were slowly opened to refugees as Canadians were shocked by *Kristallnacht*.²⁹⁸

Some historians have wondered whether the stances taken by Canadian officials were morally right. However, such questions are tainted by the hindsight of historians. Canadian officials did not know in 1933, when Hitler came to power, or even in 1935, following the Nuremburg Laws, that a mass extermination program would be put in place in order to murder the Jews of Europe. Had such information been known, it is conceivable Canadian immigration restrictions would have been loosened earlier than 1938. Had they not been, there would be reason to question their morality in allowing so few Jews refuge in Canada.

Nevertheless, this is not a study of what should have been or what could have been, nor is it a study in morality. These men, like other government officials, were unaware of the extent of persecutions in Europe until the end of 1942, by which time immigration from Germany and German held territory was closed off. In the end, their decisions concerning immigration were based on the policies which they deemed necessary at the time to maintain Canadian unity, prevent a worsening of the Depression, protect Canada from infiltration by enemy saboteurs, and maintain the integrity of the Canadian immigration system.

²⁹⁸ See Chapter 2.

Conclusion

This study has given a review of Canada's immigration records and policies from 1933 to 1945. At the outset, it was noted that this work was a review of the conclusions which Irving Abella and Harold Troper arrived at in their 1982 publication *None is too Many*. The author has attempted to remain as objective as possible. To do so, he had set out to examine the period under question in a chronological fashion, without recourse to preconceived notions and hindsight. At times, indeed it was difficult to write about. Admittedly, due to the place which the plight of the Jewish refugees now holds in modern Canadian society, and the fact that Abella and Troper's conclusions have been relatively unchallenged for thirty years, there was some speculation. This was particularly the case, when examining William Lyon Mackenzie King, Ernest Lapointe, Frederick Charles Blair, and Vincent Massey. Therefore, this thesis attempted to allow the primary documents, as much as possible, to persuade the reader and speak for themselves, and to bring forward new data when obtainable. By proceeding in this manner, it was shown that the Canadian immigration record was not as unfortunate as previously maintained and that the main actors in Canadian immigration policy were not driven by personal anti-Semitic leanings.

Chapter 2 gave an overview of Canada's immigration policies from the early nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War. Particular focus was given to the context of the period. During the 1930s, Canada was in the midst of the Depression. As Canadians were desperately looking to secure jobs, the fear of immigrants, which had always been present, began to gain intensity as it was believed they would steal the few occupations available. When Mackenzie King and his Liberal government were voted into office in 1935, the main goal was to maintain Canadian unity. An objective which became progressively more important as war was seen on the horizon.

The increasingly hostile persecution of the Jews in German held territories, beginning with Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, led thousands to search for homes outside of the Reich. Focus was first on neighbouring countries as it allowed prospective emigrants to keep in touch with family members, and they often understood the spoken language. However, by 1935 emigrants began to look further afield towards countries overseas.

Nevertheless, the number of Jews leaving Germany remained fairly steady until 1938. The pogrom of November 1938, now known as *Kristallnacht*, was the final straw for Jews within German held territories. Prior to this it was believed that the situation in Germany would calm, and Jews could continue to live there in peace. The night of November 9-10, 1938 shattered this dream and consequently, the number of Jews wishing to leave Germany grew exponentially.

Canadian officials were not deaf to the cries of European Jewry and measures were put in place to ease immigration to Canada following *Kristallnacht*. In December of 1938, an Order-in-Council was passed which added refugees to the list of admissible groups to the Dominion, and there is a noticeable increase in Jewish immigrants arriving in Canada from 1938 to the close of 1941. Himmler had ordered an end to all Jewish emigration from the Reich in October of that year. This, along with the strong German U-boat presence in the Atlantic, effectively ended efforts to save the Jews of Europe through immigration. Military victory became the only option available to save those in Nazi occupied territory.

From 1933 to 1945 Canada allowed 8,787 Jews into the country. However, all immigration to the country was slowed during this phase. Because of this, the Jews actually represented a higher percentage of Canada's immigrants at this time than in the ten year period prior.

Chapters 3 and 4 moved on to the individual actors in Canada's immigration policies. Anti-Semitism was existent in Canada during the 1930s and 1940s, and manifested itself in

various forms throughout the provinces. Canadian officials, from Mackenzie King down, had to deal with this reality when developing and implementing government policies. The politician's role is first and foremost to represent his or her constituents. Likewise, the bureaucrats and the diplomats follow the directions given to them by the government in place. The fact that political officials took the views of the Canadian population into account does not mean that they subscribed to them. Often, politicians did not agree with Canadian popular opinion, but followed it nonetheless, as that was the cost of maintaining Canadian unity.

Following such a path had led many authors to accuse Canadian government officials of anti-Semitic tendencies. However, accusations that William Lyon Mackenzie King, Ernest Lapointe, Frederick Charles Blair, and Vincent Massey were hardline anti-Semites suffer from a lack of systematic evidence. Although sometimes the language used by these men in their correspondence and letters can be shocking to the modern reader, it is necessary to keep in mind that this was the colloquial language during their lives. Furthermore, one cannot discount the evidence of sincere sympathy for the Jews of Europe, and frustration with Canadian popular opinion which is often found in the available documents.

Prior to *Kristallnacht*, it remained difficult to justify an increase in Jewish immigration. Public opinion did not allow it, and there was the constant fear that other dictators would follow Hitler in persecuting unwanted ethnic groups within their territories. However, following this event public opinion began to change, and Ottawa took advantage of the situation, allowing 3,139 Jews entry from 1939 to 1941. This number seems all the more impressive when taking into consideration the government's fear of Nazi agents entering the country by pretending to be Jewish refugees.

When the Jews were forbidden from leaving Germany in October of 1941, there was nothing the Canadian government could do. The same statement applies to late 1942, when the

realities of the Holocaust began to leak out. The main focus for Ottawa was attempting to maintain Canadian unity and win the war, these goals were understood by these men, and they followed the road which they believed had the greatest likelihood of success. It should be noted that the question of European Jewry was never at the center of Canada's wartime policies. Even so, it came up in the House of Commons on several occasions. When it was discussed in detail it became evident that the only option was that which Canada had already set-out to fulfil, an Allied victory.

When the war was finally over, immigration began to increase once again. In the first four years following the war, when Canada was attempting to bring all of her ex-servicemen and their dependents home, an additional 16,329 Jews were permitted entry. The Canadian public at this time, increasingly aware of the economic benefits of immigration and touched by humanitarian concerns, began to push the government for changes to immigration regulations. In 1947, this change occurred, and Mackenzie King put a new and more egalitarian immigration policy into effect.

This study is not, nor does it attempt to be the defining study of Canadian wartime refugee policy. It cannot be. Like most works on the subject this paper focuses only on Jewish refugees. As of yet, there has been no conclusive research which examines Canada's treatment of other ethnic groups during the same period. There has been work done on the internment camps existing in Canada during the war, which held Canadians of Japanese, German, and Italian descent, as well as many fascists and communists whose political views led them to be labelled as potential subversives. However, a study of the information the Canadian government was receiving concerning the treatment of ethnic Poles would be enlightening. An examination of Canadian reaction to the persecution of Christian Orthodox Serbs under the Croatian Ustasha regime, during the Second World War, would be equally interesting. Did the government know?

If so, when did it know? Did the public know? Were there demonstrations and protests? Did the Canadian Polish or Serbian communities organize in an attempt to provoke government action? Were there any efforts made to aid these refugees? These questions would allow a fascinating comparison between what the government and public knew concerning the treatment of Jews in Europe, in relation to other ethnic groups. Such work would undoubtedly be beneficial in attempting to better understand Canada's refugee policy.

When it comes to shaping collective memory, museums, the media and school textbooks each play a dominant role. Each of these have concurrently suggested that Canada was closed to Jewish refugees during the Depression and the Second World War. One need only look at the case of the M.S. St. Louis to see the dominant presence it has had in these realms. Pier 21, Canada's premier immigration museum, now exhibits a monument bringing attention to the event. The media often reflects on Canada's wartime immigration policy, regularly using anti-Semitism in the title for shock value. Given the conclusions arrived at in this study concerning Canada's immigration record, one can only hope that Canadians begin to rethink the way their history has been presented, and realize there were many factors which influenced immigration policies during the 1930s and 1940s.

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