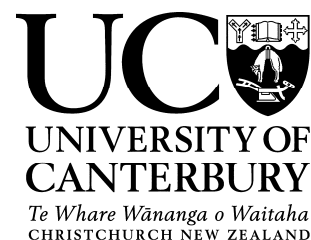


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Explaining British Refugee Policy, March 1938 – July 1940

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Fiona Horne

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Abstract

The twentieth century has aptly been referred to the century of the refugee.¹ In the twentieth century, refugees became an important international problem which seriously affected relations between states and refugee issues continue to play an important part in international relations in the twenty-first century. The refugee crisis created by the Nazis in the 1930s was without precedent and the British government was unsure how to respond. British refugee policy was still in a formative stage and was therefore susceptible to outside influences.

This dissertation aims to explain the key factors that drove British refugee policy in the period March 1938 to July 1940, and to evaluate their relative significance over time. I divided the period of study into three phases (March-September 1938, October 1938 to August 1939, September 1939 to July 1940), in order to explore how a range of factors varied in importance in a political and international environment that was rapidly changing. In considering how to respond to the refugee crisis, the British government was hugely influenced by concerns over its relations with other countries, especially Germany. There is little doubt that, during the entire period of this study, the primary influence on the formation and implementation of British refugee policy was the international situation. However, foreign policy did not by itself dictate the precise form taken by British refugee policy. The response of the British government was modulated by economic concerns, domestic political factors, humanitarianism, and by the habits, traditions and assumptions of British political culture. Some factors, like anti-Semitism became less important during the period of this study, while others like humanitarianism increased in importance.

¹ T. Kushner and K. Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide* (London, 1999), p. 1.

Preface

In 1996, Hugo Gryn, a Holocaust survivor, stated that he believed future historians would call “the twentieth century not only the century of great wars, but also the century of the refugee”.¹ Numerous refugee exoduses occurred throughout the twentieth century all over the globe. These include refugees caused by the two World Wars, people fleeing fascism, refugees from the Cold War and those seeking asylum towards the end of the century. Refugee movements are not new to the twentieth century, but as Claudena Skran mentions, “twentieth-century refugee movements significantly differ from earlier ones in this important respect: they attracted the attention of political leaders and became international issues.”² In the twentieth century, refugees became an important international problem which seriously affected relations between states and refugee issues continue to play an important part in international relations in the twenty-first century. “Despite the end of the Cold War”, as Claudena Skran comments, “the refugee issue shows no signs of disappearing”.³ By the end of 2006, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that the total population of concern to it was 32.9 million persons with the global number of refugees 9.9 million persons, excluding the 4.4 million Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.⁴ According to UNHCR estimates, by the end of 2006 there were some 2.1 million Afghan refugees “accounting for one fifth of the global refugee population. Iraq was the second largest country of origin of refugees (1.5 million), followed by Sudan (686,000), Somalia (460,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (402,000), and Burundi (397,000).⁵ Refugee issues are not simply problems calling for humanitarian concern. According to Gil Loescher: “They can be a potential threat to the social, economic, and political fabric of host states, and ultimately a threat to peace”.⁶ It is becoming evident, Loescher continues, that the notion that “refugee movements pose humanitarian problems marginal

¹ Quoted in T. Kushner and K. Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide* (London, 1999), p. 1.

² C. Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe* (Oxford, 1995), p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴ UNHCR, *Statistical Yearbook 2006* (Geneva, 2007), p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ G. Loescher, “Introduction: Refugees Issues in International Relations” in G. Loescher and L. Monahan, *Refugees and International Relations* (Oxford, 1989), p. 2.

to the central issues of war and peace, or that they are unique and isolated events, must be superseded by a serious consideration of refugee problems as an integral part of international politics and relations".⁷ This view is becoming more accepted and refugee issues are being given greater consideration in international relations, domestic politics and in media coverage.

1938-40 was an important period in the history of refugee movements. Sir Herbert Emerson, The League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, estimated in a report to the League of Nations Assembly in October 1939 that a total of 400,000 refugees had left Greater Germany since 1933.⁸ The British government had little experience dealing with the kind of refugee crisis generated by the Nazis. Refugee policy was still in a formative stage and was therefore susceptible to outside influences. During this period, British refugee policy underwent numerous changes in a very short period of time.

This dissertation aims to explain the key factors that drove British refugee policy in the period March 1938 to July 1940, and to evaluate their relative significance over time. I divided the period of study into three phases (March-September 1938, October 1938 to August 1939, September 1939 to July 1940), in order to explore how a range of factors varied in importance in a political and international environment that was rapidly changing.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A. Sherman, *Island Refuge* (Essex, 1994), p. 270.

Chapter 1

Background, context, historiography

This chapter is divided into three sections and is intended to establish the historical and historiographical context. It will also discuss the primary sources used and establish a methodology and analytical framework. The first section, which discusses the historical background, will deal with Britain's immigration policy in the first part of the twentieth century focusing on the four key pieces of legislation. Then it will give an overview of the chronological parameters of the study. The second section, which focuses on the historiography, will discuss both the wider literature on refugees as well as the specific historiography on refugees in Britain between 1938 and 1940. The third section will describe the key primary sources used by the main authors in this field as well as the sources used in this dissertation.

Historical background

The regulatory framework within which refugee issues were dealt with in the period 1938-40 was formed by a series of four government measures enacted between 1905 and 1920. This legislation remained in effect until after World War Two and controlled the immigration of refugees from Germany into Britain from 1933 to 1938. From 1826 to 1905 there was effectively total freedom of immigration to Britain, and although several regulations were passed they were never enforced.⁹ In 1905 The Aliens Act was introduced, largely in response to anti-immigrant reaction which opposed large-scale immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe. This act introduced a system of regulating aliens at the ports. It subjected the majority of the poorest class of immigrants to inspection by immigration officers, but placed no fundamental obstacles in front of the majority of alien visitors.¹⁰ The Aliens Act of 1905 empowered immigration officers to

⁹ B. Wasserstein, "The British Government and the German immigration 1933-1945" in G. Hirschfeld, *Exile in Great Britain* (London, 1984), p. 63.

¹⁰ L. London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 16.

deny entry to undesirables (such as the diseased, criminals, the insane) and if passengers could not establish that they were capable of supporting themselves and any dependents they were liable to be refused entry on the grounds of being undesirable immigrants.¹¹ A limited concession for refugees was included in this Act as a result of concern that Britain's tradition of granting asylum should not be forsaken. An exemption from refusal of leave to land was permitted on the grounds of poverty if immigrants could prove they faced "prosecution or punishment, on religious or political grounds or for an offence of a political character" or that they were fleeing from "persecution, involving danger of imprisonment or danger to life or limb, on account of religious belief".¹² This exception to the poverty test enabled many refugees who would otherwise have been refused entry to gain admission to Britain between 1906 and 1914. Nevertheless, this period saw a decrease in the numbers of aliens admitted to Britain; partly because of the deterrent effect of this new law.¹³

In 1914, with the outbreak of World War One the government passed the Aliens Restriction Act. This Act required all aliens to register with the police, it imposed restrictions, and it gave the Home Secretary the right to exclude or deport anyone without appeal.¹⁴ Britain also implemented a policy of internment for enemy aliens and it is estimated that 40,000 of the 50,000 Germans in Britain were interned in 1914.¹⁵

The third piece of government legislation, passed after the end of the war, was the Aliens Restriction Act of 1919. This was followed by the Aliens Order of 1920, the fourth government measure. These statutes provided, in addition to the restrictions of the 1914 Act, that no alien could enter Britain, other than temporarily, without either a means of support or a Ministry of Labour permit, and there was to be no appeal against the Home Secretary's decision.¹⁶ The exemption from a poverty test for refugees had disappeared

¹¹ B. Wasserstein, "The British Government and the German immigration 1933-1945", p. 64.

¹² Quoted in L. London, "British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees 1933-1939" in W. Mosse, *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tübingen, 1991), p. 488.

¹³ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 17.

¹⁴ B. Wasserstein, "The British Government and the German immigration 1933-1945", p. 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

and there was no right of asylum for refugees. No legal protection for refugees remained in the statute book; the only right was that of Britain to grant asylum when it saw fit. Nonetheless, as Louise London states, “in the rhetoric of debate on refugee questions, the tradition of asylum was accorded quasi-constitutional sanctity”.¹⁷

The period 1933 to 1937 saw an increase in the numbers of refugees seeking asylum in Britain as refugees from Nazi Germany started to arrive in Britain as early as January 1933. There were several issues that were extremely important during this period. The question of finance was regarded by the government as crucial because legislation detailed that no alien was allowed to enter Britain, other than temporarily, without either a means of support or a Ministry of Labour permit; this proved problematic since the Nazi regime stripped Jewish refugees of most of their wealth on emigration. As a result, the Jewish organisations such as Jews Temporary Shelter and Jewish Board of Deputies promised the British government they would finance the maintenance and emigration of refugees from Germany. This became known as the Jewish Guarantee and is examined in detail in chapter two. Another important issue was the duration of the refugees’ stay in Britain. The government frequently stressed that Britain was not a country of immigration or settlement but instead a country of temporary refuge and transit. According to a Foreign Office memorandum of 1938: “the United Kingdom is not of course an immigration country, being an old country which is highly industrialised, very densely populated and having serious unemployment problems of its own”.¹⁸ Both the British government and the refugee organisations believed the majority of refugees should reside in Britain for a short period of time, that is, their stay should be temporary and they should eventually re-emigrate to countries of permanent residence. From 1933 to 1937, an estimated 8,000 refugees found refuge in Britain.¹⁹ Despite the increase in the numbers of refugees seeking asylum in Britain during this period, there was no more major legislation until 1938.

¹⁷ L. London, “British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees 1933-1939”, p. 489.

¹⁸ PRO FO 371/22530, 13 March 1938.

¹⁹ Skran, p. 221.

The period March 1938 to July 1940 was a crucial period in the history of British refugee policy. Although the tradition of granting asylum to refugees was given quasi-constitutional status, there was no legislation specially covering refugees prior to 1938. Instead, refugees were treated as immigrants or trans-migrants who were expected to re-emigrate to countries of permanent settlement. For the first time in British history, the government during this period introduced legislation that specifically pertained to refugees. The government, however, was unsure how to deal with the unprecedented refugee crisis that had been provoked by events in Central Europe. Government policy to refugees underwent several significant modifications that affected the lives of thousands of refugees. Broadly speaking, it is possible to identify three distinct phases in the evolution of British refugee policy between March 1938 and July 1940. This dissertation will analyse each of these three phases in turn.

The first phase began in March 1938 with the Anschluss with Austria and ended with the Munich Agreement of September 1938. During these six months, there was a significant increase in the number of refugees seeking asylum in Britain. This led to a review of refugee policy which resulted in the introduction of passports for German and Austrian refugees. The second phase of British refugee policy, which lasted from October 1938 to August 1939, was shaped by a series of international events: the annexation of the Sudetenland, “Kristallnacht” and the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia. The Munich Agreement and “Kristallnacht” caused further substantial increases in the number of refugees seeking asylum in Britain and led to the liberalisation of refugee policy. In November, the Cabinet decided to speed up and simplify immigration procedures for refugees and to expand Britain’s role as a temporary refuge. Then, with the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, national security became increasingly important. The third and final phase comprised the period from September 1939 to July 1940. The outbreak of the Second World War and the catastrophic defeats that followed Hitler’s invasion of Western Europe in April 1940 initiated a number of changes in refugee policy. These include the implementation of wholesale internment which began in May 1940 and the deportation of some 8,000 internees to Canada and Australia. This third phase in the evolution of British refugee policy—the last dealt with in this dissertation—

ends in July 1940 with the publication of a White Paper detailing categories allegeable for release from the internment camps.

Historiography

Despite the magnitude of the refugee issue, academics have been slow to respond to the importance of refugees and the work that has been done has “for the most part ... existed on the periphery [rather than] the mainstream of academic enterprise”.²⁰ Until recently little attempt has been made to understand refugee issues within international and national political contexts. Gil Loescher believes that in international relations literature and in studies of refugees, the relationships between refugees and foreign policy have been and remain little explored. He continues that:

little systematic research has been done into either the political causes of different types of refugee movements or the political, strategic, and economic factors that determine the policy responses of states to refugee crises. Nor has any comprehensive theoretical framework been developed to explain and compare government policies, to analyse the policy-making process in individual countries, or to assess the relationship between international norms and national compliance with these legal standards.²¹

With that said, “refugee studies” are beginning to develop into a more mainstream area in history, with well known and highly regarded historians, such as Claudena Skran²², David Cesarani²³, Michael Marrus²⁴ and Tony Kushner²⁵ tackling the subject. The fall of the Soviet Union and the re-emergence of refugee flows within Europe in the 1990s fostered a revival of historical interest in the subject of refugees.²⁶ In particular, the collapse of the Yugoslav federation and the ensuing claims of independence by the republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia, caused the displacement of some

²⁰ Quoted in Kushner and Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, p.3.

²¹ G. Loescher, “Introduction: Refugee Issues in International Relations” p. 4.

²² *Refugees in Inter-War Europe*

²³ (Ed.) *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford, 1990), (Ed.) *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 1993), (Ed.) *‘Bystanders’ and the Holocaust* (London, 2002).

²⁴ *The Unwanted* (Philadelphia, 2002)

²⁵ *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*

²⁶ A. Zolberg, “Foreword” in M. Marrus, *The Unwanted*, p. xii.

two million people and led to ethnic cleansing. Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox discuss how some refugees “fled under their own initiative, while others left with the assistance of the UNHCR which attempted to coordinate international ‘burden sharing’ in Europe’s new and massive refugee crisis.”²⁷ Studying previous refugee movements can also assist in the understanding of contemporary refugee problems.²⁸

Prior to the opening of governmental archives many contemporaries wrote their accounts of immigration into Britain. As early as 1936 Norman Bentwich wrote *The Refugees from Germany, April 1933 to December 1935* which covered the first wave of arrivals. He followed this up with *They Found Refuge*, published in 1956, which was an account of British Jews work for the victims of Nazism. Norman Bentwich was an attorney-general in Palestine and a professor of international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. When the Nazi persecutions began, he became “one of the foremost fighters for the rescue of the oppressed. He travelled to all countries, pleading with governments and investigating possible places of refuge.”²⁹ Bentwich became the director of both the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees from Germany (1933-35) and of the Council for German Jewry.³⁰ Other contemporaries also wrote accounts on this subject, including *You and the Refugee* by Norman Angell and Dorothy Frances Buxton, published in 1939. *You and the Refugee* discusses the moral and economic issues pertaining to the refugee problem. The authors believed that Britain was “pursuing a policy which makes the solution of the refugee problem as a whole impossible, and renders private charity impotent to do more than touch its merest fringe”³¹. Norman Angell was an author, Labour MP and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.³² Dorothy Buxton was a humanitarian and social activist. During the 1930s she collected and circulated reports on Nazi concentration camps that she collected from refugees she helped only to have the Foreign Office “pigeon-hole” them until after the outbreak of war. She made an attempt to see Herman Goering in 1935 “to confront him with the

²⁷ T. Kushner and K. Knox, p. 355.

²⁸ Skran, p. 9.

²⁹ H. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds.) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), vol. 5, p. 311.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ N. Angell and D. Buxton, *You and the Refugee* (Harmondsworth, 1939), p. 12.

³² H. Matthew and B. Harrison, vol. 2, pp. 150-1.

abominations being perpetrated and so shame him out of Nazism. He of course only started shouting at her in fury”.³³ Sir John Hope Simpson wrote *The Refugee Problem*, published in 1939, which was the result of a survey of the refugee question undertaken under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. He followed this up with *Refugees: A Review of the Situation since September 1938*, published in 1939. Simpson was a Liberal MP, and vice-president of the Refugee Settlement Commission (a body established in Athens to settle Greek refugees after the Graeco-Turkish war). He subsequently wrote a report, which became known as the Hope Simpson report, on land settlement in Palestine.³⁴ *The Internment of Aliens* by François Lafitte and *Anderson’s Prisoners* by “Judex” were critical accounts of the internment and deportation policies. Yvonne Kapp and Margaret Mynatt wrote *British Policy and the Refugees 1933-1941*. These works were written and published between 1939 and 1941 (*British Policy and the Refugees 1933-1941* was written in 1940 but not published until 1997). Apart from Bentwich, these works are critical of Britain’s immigration policy and of the British government’s handling of the refugee crisis. Their purpose seems to have been educational and political. Angell and Buxton, for example, appealed for countries to change their alien admission policy to meet the crisis of refugees who were fighting the battles of democracies in Central Europe.

Government archives on this subject were opened for research purposes in the 1970s, which is when the in-depth historical investigation of refugees and immigration into Britain began. *Island Refuge* (1973) by A. J. Sherman was the first historical account of refugees who entered Britain which utilised the newly-opened governmental records. It describes Britain’s response to the exodus of refugees from the Third Reich between the years 1933 and 1939. Sherman contends that Britain was not ungenerous towards the refugees during this period. This work was followed by numerous books and articles which have studied the British immigration policy and the refugee crisis from a variety of angles. One of the most important was Bernard Wasserstein’s *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*. Wasserstein begins his study where Sherman’s finishes and describes

³³ Ibid., p. 283.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 702.

and explains the policy of the British government towards the Jews from Europe during World War Two. Wasserstein is more critical of British refugee policy than Sherman. Other influential scholars who have written on this topic include Tony Kushner³⁵, David Cesarani, William Rubinstein³⁶, Louise London³⁷, Tommie Sjöberg³⁸ and Claudena Skran. Louise London is the author of *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948* and several articles on British refugee policy in the 1930s and 1940s. In *Whitehall and the Jews*, London argues that British politicians placed, what they believed to be, the national interest above humanitarian concerns when formulating refugee policy. She makes a case that Britain could have saved many more Jews from Nazi genocide, without undermining British national interests. On the other hand, Claudena Skran's book examines the history of organised international efforts for refugees during the interwar period. She uses the "regime theory" approach when looking at refugees during this period. She defines a regime as "the formal or informal arrangements created by states to deal with a particular issue".³⁹ Skran argues that during the inter-war period, refugee assistance constituted a regime. When seen from this perspective, refugee aid was not only more significant and substantial than is generally appreciated, but it also helped shape global assistance to refugees today.

An important question that divides historians of the refugee issue in this period is whether the British government did enough to help the victims of Nazi aggression. The debate about this question has focused on the harshness or otherwise of British immigration policy, the British mandate over Palestine and proposals to rescue refugees from occupied Europe and Nazi concentration camps. On the one hand, historians such as Sherman and Rubinstein are broadly sympathetic to the British government, although they make specific criticisms. They believe that British refugee policy was relatively

³⁵ *The Persistence of Prejudice* (Manchester, 1989), *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination* (Oxford, 1994), *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*.

³⁶ *The Myth of Rescue* (London, 1997).

³⁷ "British Government Policy and Jewish Refugees 1933-45" *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1989), "Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940" in D. Cesarani, *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford, 1990), "British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees", "British reactions to the Jewish flight from Europe" in P. Catterall, *Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918-45* (London, 1993), *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948*.

³⁸ *The Powers and the Persecuted* (Lund, 1991).

³⁹ Skran, p. 7.

generous and that the British government responded as effectively as it could to a difficult problem. Given the fact that Britain was enduring a serious depression and unemployment was high, the immigration controls imposed by the British government were not unreasonable. In the wake of “Kristallnacht”, when the murderous intent of the Nazis became apparent, the British government duly relaxed refugee policies.

Other scholars take a much more critical view of Britain’s immigration policy during the period and of her handling of the refugee crisis. Historians in this group include: Bernard Wasserstein, Louise London, Tony Kushner, Peter and Leni Gillman⁴⁰, and Ronald Stent⁴¹. They believe Britain did not view the refugee crisis in a humanitarian light, but through the eyes of self-interest. More could have been done in trying to assist Jews and other refugees fleeing from Nazi Germany and also to permit survivors of the Holocaust to enter Britain after the end of World War Two.

The approach of the majority of these authors is largely narrative and descriptive, and does not focus enough on the underlying factors that drove the formation and implementation of refugee policy. In the introduction to *Whitehall and the Jews*, Louise London notes that the “leading scholarly monographs concentrate on the content of the British policy towards the Jews, to the comparative neglect of both the context of that policy and its administration”.⁴² *Whitehall and the Jews* is the most comprehensive examination of British refugee policy (from 1933 to 1948) to date. It places a far greater emphasis on the context in which the policy was formulated and implemented than previous studies have done. London focuses on the interplay between the various ministries, government departments, and officials involved in the evolution of refugee policy. Another aspect in historiography which is problematic is that by focusing so much on the question of whether Britain did enough for the Jews, the historiography rather loses sight of the domestic context of British refugee policy and its administration. While London’s work places a far greater emphasis on the context in which the policy was

⁴⁰ ‘*Collar the Lot!*’ (London, 1980).

⁴¹ *A Bespattered Page?* (London, 1980).

⁴² London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 3.

formulated and implemented it neglects the role of issues that are not regarded as political.

I am not going to engage with the question of whether Britain did enough to help refugees during this period, but instead I am going to try and identify and analyse the underlying dynamic. The chronological period this study covers is concise for the reason that it allows me to examine in depth the factors that influenced refugee policy, how the influence changed during the period, and how the factors interacted with one another.

The factors I intend to explore can be divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors include fears about the impact of refugees on the economic situation, anti-Semitism, the influence of the press, general population, lobbyists, and voluntary organisations, and humanitarian considerations. External factors encompass the international situation and Britain's relations with other countries.

Primary sources for the study of British refugee policy, 1938-40

In this dissertation I have used a variety of primary sources, including government documents, parliamentary debates, contemporary newspapers and magazines and pamphlets, as well as documents from the Mass-Observation Archival at the University of Sussex. The government documents I have examined are housed at the Public Record Office in Kew and pertain to the Home Office and the Foreign Office. All of the documents I am using from the Home Office come from the file HO 213 Home Office: Aliens Department: General (GEN) Files and Aliens Naturalisation and Nationality (ALN and NTY Symbol series) Files, 1920-61. They cover numerous different topics including the Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees, the influx of Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria to the UK, and the international convention concerning status of refugees from Germany 1938. The documents from the Foreign Office come from the file FO 371 Foreign Office – General Correspondence: Political, 1906-60. Like the Home Office files they cover numerous aspects of the refugee issue dealt with by the Foreign Office

including the attitude of various countries to the refugee problem, international assistance to refugees and the conventions regarding status of refugees. When using these documents it is important to establish the original purpose of the document and who they were written for, for instance whether they were written for a superior or for another department, as this will have an impact on what was written and the way it was written.

Another important primary source is furnished by the House of Commons Parliamentary Debates (Hansard). These debates provide a valuable source of information about what was happening in the House of Commons, about the issues that were discussed regularly and any discontent among the political parties or individual members of parliament. Something historians have to be cautious about when using these debates is that in parliament politicians speak for effect, with a political purpose in mind; therefore historians have to be careful about attributing private attitudes to politicians on the basis of parliamentary statements.

Another collection of primary sources comes from the Mass-Observation Archive. “The Archive results from the work of the social research organisation, Mass Observation. This organisation was founded in 1937 by three young men, who aimed to create an “anthropology of ourselves”. They recruited a team of observers and a panel of volunteer writers to study the everyday lives of ordinary people in Britain.”⁴³ The files from this archive contain surveys and opinion polls about refugees and aliens and include information on attitudes of the population to other nationalities, public feeling about aliens and North London refugees. This is a great source of information regarding the attitudes of the public to certain issues, but historians have to be aware that the questions asked can be crude and “loaded”.

The London Times and *The Manchester Guardian* are the contemporary newspapers I have examined and *The Economist* is the contemporary magazine. These sources contain hundred of articles and they cover every aspect of the refugee question, and aliens and

⁴³ http://www.massobs.org.uk/a_brief_history.htm 20/01/08.

internment. The newspapers contain many letters to the editor from refugees and internees, members of the public, and members of parliament. There are a number of disadvantages of using newspapers as a primary source, these include that newspapers can be used for propaganda purposes, that they can feature articles which are exaggerated and sensationalist and they can face censorship.

Other contemporary publications have also provided a large amount of valuable information. *The Refugee Problem* by Sir John Hope Simpson⁴⁴ contains the results of a survey of the refugee question which was undertaken under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. *The Refugee Problem* explains the situation in countries of origin and reasons for the refugee problem there, details the specific private organisations that help refugees and the organisations' aims, and describes the international assistance offered to refugees by the League of Nations' organisations or agencies accredited by the League of Nations. This volume also describes how refugees fare in regards to both international and municipal law and it discusses the attitudes and practices of governments in countries of asylum. This volume also explains the existing and the potential problem and offers solutions, both immediate and long term. In addition it contains useful appendixes, including the 1933 and 1938 conventions. François Lafitte's *The Internment of Aliens* provides an in depth account of the government's policy and implementation of internment. Norman Angell and Dorothy Buxton discuss in *You and the Refugee* the moral and economic issues linked to the refugee problem. It focuses on issues like where a bad refugee policy will lead Britain, the problem in human terms, the economics of freer migration, and what British policy is and what it might be. These are just three examples of the numerous works that provide an insight into the thoughts of contemporary experts on a range of issues pertaining to refugees. A shortcoming of contemporary publications is that the authors often have an agenda when writing pieces and therefore their work can be biased.

There are several issues with which I would have liked to have dealt, but on which I was able to find little material. Although there is a lot of information about the experiences

⁴⁴ J. Simpson, *The Refugee Problem* (London, 1939)

refugees faced in the internment camps and when they were deported, the conditions encountered by refugees in Britain prior to internment are not discussed in either the primary or secondary sources. While there is a lot of data about the fund established for Czech refugees and the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, I could find little additional information about these refugees. The secondary sources do not have much to say about the “special” tribunals established to deal with these refugees and also about whether they were interned like German and Austrian refugees. Likewise, the majority of the secondary sources do not focus on what the political parties had to say about the refugee issue. Whether, for instance, it caused debate between the parties or if it was a matter that crossed party lines. One exception to this is *Island Refuge* by A. J. Sherman, which discusses the response of the Labour Party to the refugee issue, but which says little about the views and policies of the other main parties.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Refugee issues have played an important part in international relations in the twentieth century and will continue to have a significant role in domestic politics and foreign affairs in the twenty-first century. 1938-40 was a crucial period both internationally in regards to refugees as well as in the evolution and implementation of British refugee policy. The historiography which has until recently remained rather neglected and marginalised is expanding and becoming more mainstream. However, this historiography has so far been constrained by the overwhelming focus on British “guilt” as well as the narrative and descriptive approach of historians. In this dissertation I shall attempt to move beyond such constraints in order to identify and analyse the underlying geological forces that shaped the topography of British refugee policy during this key period.

⁴⁵ Sherman, pp. 143, 147, 179, 219, 233.

Chapter 2

Conflicting forces

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key factors that drove British refugee policy in the period between the Anschluss with Austria in March 1938 and the Munich Agreement of September 1938. I shall also attempt to evaluate the relative importance of these factors in shaping the formation and implementation of British refugee policy during the period in question. To this end, I shall look in turn at the impact on refugee policy of international relations, domestic political factors, economic issues and humanitarian considerations.

International relations: Germany

The single most important foreign policy objective of the British government in 1938 was to achieve a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Central Europe that had been provoked by the aggressive behaviour of Nazi Germany. In the belief that war with Germany should be avoided at almost any price, the British were willing to make numerous concessions to Germany in the hope of appeasing her and persuading her to honour her international agreements. Appeasement naturally had a huge impact on the formation and implementation of British refugee policy, for it was above all the Nazi government which had created the refugee crisis in the first place.⁴⁶ Immediately after their assumption of power in 1933, the Nazis launched their first wave of persecutions, the primary victims of which were the Communists, and Social Democrats. From the very beginning, however, people were also persecuted because they were considered to be racially undesirable or because they had unusual sexual or social habits that differed from the norm. According to Wolfgang Benz, the Nationalist Socialist state was “most merciless in its discrimination and persecution of minorities on the basis of its race ideology, its primary

⁴⁶ J. Hidden, *Germany and Europe 1919-1939* (London, 1993), p. 91.

target being the Jews.”⁴⁷ In April 1933, the Nazi government passed its first piece of discriminatory legislation against the Jews. The “Act for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service” was a professional ban placed on Jews in the public service.

“Complementary to the ‘Act for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service’, the ‘Aryan paragraphs’ served as a reason to exclude Jews from all areas of life”.⁴⁸ In September 1935, the “Nuremberg Laws” were passed. These laws degraded German Jews to inhabitants with reduced rights. This was followed by the “Act for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour” which forbade marriages between Jews and Aryans and made sexual relations between the two a punishable offence.⁴⁹ These forms of persecution made life increasingly difficult for Jews and non-Aryans in Germany and led many to believe that their only hope of a better life lay in emigration. Many of the people leaving Germany wanted to emigrate either to Britain itself or through Britain on their way to the United States or Palestine. This created a problem for the British government.

British refugee policy was formulated within the context of overall foreign policy toward Germany, but the relationship between overall foreign policy and refugee policy, though important, was not straightforward. Britain’s desire not to antagonise Germany co-existed with her distrust of Nazism and hostility towards it ideologically. Furthermore, the British government considered the discrimination and harassment of Jews as an obstacle to Anglo-German relations, but Chamberlain and his colleagues did not wish to dwell on this fact in public.⁵⁰

Germany, to a degree, did not want to antagonise Britain either. The Nationalist Socialist Regime initially wanted a good relationship with Britain and tried to secure Britain’s goodwill. Hitler’s primary goals, however, were to implement his racial agenda at the same time as pursuing his expansionist foreign policy agenda, but he hoped to achieve these goals without a confrontation with Britain. Hitler believed an alliance with Britain

⁴⁷ W. Benz, “Exclusion, Persecution, Expulsion: National Socialist Policy against Undesirables” in J. Steinert and I. Weber-Newth, *European Immigrants in Britain 1933-1950* (München, 2003), p. 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

⁵⁰ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 32.

would give him the freedom of movement he needed to carry out the first stage of German expansion into East Europe and Russia, his quest for *Lebensraum*.⁵¹ On the other hand, good relations with Britain, though desirable, were not the core of his foreign policy, in the same way that appeasement was to the British government. Thus German policy to the Jews was less influenced by concerns about relations with Britain than British policy to refugees was influenced by concerns about relations with Germany; the Anglo-German relationship vis-à-vis refugees was asymmetrical.

Consequently, British refugee policy was pulled in two directions. On the one hand, Britain was determined to limit official criticism on issues relating to Germany's internal affairs. For example when Lord Baldwin made a public appeal on behalf of German Jews in 1938, a Foreign Office document expressed concern that his appeal "shall not be capable of being represented as an attack on the Nazi regime".⁵² Further on in the same document it was noted that: "There is no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries."⁵³ Some officials even believed that criticism of Germany's treatment of Jews could in fact lead to still greater persecution.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the persecution of Jews and non-Aryans by the Nazi Regime was an issue that the British government could not be seen to condone. The same Foreign Office official who fretted about the impact of Lord Baldwin's appeal also noted that "the human suffering and misery that has been created by the unquestionably brutal treatment of men, women and children, whose only fault is membership of a particular race, is a matter of concern to all who value moral standards of conduct in human relationships."⁵⁵

The British government responded to the refugee crisis through diplomatic channels but also at the level of its internal refugee policy. At the diplomatic level, the British government took the position that it was the Germans who should bear the prime responsibility for finding a solution to the crisis. Since it was the German government that had created the refugee problem in the first place, Germany needed to play a central

⁵¹ Hidden, p. 85.

⁵² PRO FO 371/22539, 6 December 1938.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ PRO FO 371/22539, 6 December 1938.

role in resolving the crisis. The British government believed that it was imperative that it was seen to be taking a firm line with the German government rather than giving in to Nazi pressure by admitting destitute refugees.⁵⁶ The situation was exacerbated by the fact that Germany stripped refugees of most of their wealth on emigration from Germany so that these refugees arrived at countries of asylum penniless. The Foreign Office believed that since the Nationalist Socialist Regime was so determined to get rid of the Jews it would be prepared to make some concessions to expedite their departure.⁵⁷ Germany, it was hoped, could thus be pressured into letting the Jews depart with sufficient means to fund their own emigration and the cost of supporting themselves in the host country.⁵⁸

Another possible way of resolving the refugee crisis was through negotiations with other states, but the British government was reluctant to enter into any international commitments vis-à-vis the refugees. This was because “officials and ministers were united in the determination that Britain would not be dictated to by any external force—whether it be a foreign government, an international organisation or the sheer pressure of the refugee exodus—as to the numbers or the types of refugees it would admit or the terms on which it would accept them”.⁵⁹ However, British representatives did attend the Evian Conference, which was convened on the initiative of President Roosevelt to deal with the refugee problem. Convening at Evian-les-Bains in France in July 1938, the Evian Conference was attended by delegates from thirty-two countries, including Britain, Germany, the USA, France, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, Argentina, and Brazil. The Evian conference was viewed as unsuccessful because it failed to gain any “practical offers from any nation to take any large number of refugees”.⁶⁰ The main positive result of the conference was the establishment of the permanent Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR). Its brief was to use diplomatic pressure to persuade the German government to contribute to the cost of expelling its Jews by allowing emigrants to depart with at least some of their wealth. The objective was to achieve orderly migration in

⁵⁶ London, “British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees”, p. 512.

⁵⁷ PRO FO 371/24080, 17 December 1938.

⁵⁸ London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948*, p. 110.

⁵⁹ London, “British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees”, p. 512.

⁶⁰ *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 July 1938, p. 12.

place of a chaotic exodus.⁶¹ The British government entered the IGCR only with reluctance, and it sought to limit the scope of international action on the refugee problem for fear that it might reinforce Germany's isolation from the international community or lead it to withdraw from the League of Nations.⁶² The IGCR failed to achieve tangible improvements in emigration opportunities.⁶³

Though the British government did not play a particularly constructive role at Evian, the main reason why negotiations failed was the hard line stance taken by the Nazi government. Though the Germans would on balance have preferred a good relationship with Britain, they were determined to carry through their racial policies regardless of what the British, or any other government, had to say on the matter. In other words, ideology was more important to the Nazis than placating the British. Britain, for her part, was growing more concerned about aspects of German policy (especially the persecution of Jews and non-Aryans) that she could not be seen to condone and to which she could no longer turn a blind eye. However, the fact that the British government was prepared to accept refugees lacking independent means of support, who would be largely dependent on charity, reduced the pressure on Germany to cooperate with the British over letting Jews depart with enough capital if it wished to achieve Jewish emigration.⁶⁴ In the context of Anglo-German relations in general, the policy of admitting destitute refugees can be seen as part of the British policy of subordinating the refugee issue to the larger policy of appeasement. The British were reluctant to take too hard a line on the refugee issue lest it jeopardise the policy of appeasement as a whole. The Germans wanted good relations with Britain but regarded the "Jewish Question" as so important that they would carry through the expulsions even if that meant jeopardising their relationship with the British. The British, by contrast, wanted to resolve the refugee crisis, but not if it meant jeopardising their overall relationship with Nazi Germany.

⁶¹ London, "British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees", p. 512.

⁶² London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 33.

⁶³ London, "British reactions to the Jewish flight from Europe", p. 60.

⁶⁴ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 110.

In addition to responding to the refugee crisis at the diplomatic level, the British government also had to adapt its refugee policy to cope with the substantial increase in the number of refugees arriving from Germany and Austria. During this period, March 1938 to September 1938, Britain's refugee policy was quite restrictive. At the beginning of March 1938 the Home Office started to review the refugee policy and in particular its stance on passports for Germans and Austrians. The existing system of control was believed to be inadequate because there were increasing numbers of Germans admitted as visitors who would later apply to remain as refugees and it would become difficult for the authorities to get rid of them. It was believed the way to stop or at least check the flood was to prevent potential refugees from getting to Britain at all. Reinstating the visa system for Germans and Austrians would make it possible to select immigrants "at leisure and in advance".⁶⁵ Home Office officials initially did not consider the introduction of visas to be the answer and instead thought it would be better to strengthen control at the ports. Germany's annexation of Austria proved to be a turning point. On 11 March 1938 the Austrian state collapsed and the following morning the Jewish refugee organisations told the government that they could no longer automatically guarantee cover for all new refugees. This threw the Home Office's system of control "off balance". The Jewish organisations stated they could only guarantee newly admitted refugees if they were cleared by the organisation in advance. This meant future refugees risked becoming a charge on public funds. The Home Office now resolved that visas were needed to keep the numbers of Germans and Austrians, and especially stateless refugees, in check. The new procedure came into action on 2 May 1938 for Austrians and 21 May 1938 for Germans. These new procedures achieved greater control but at the price of efficiency. The burden of casework became unmanageable and major delays were inevitable.⁶⁶ This shows the importance of a change in the international situation in bringing about a change in the immigration policy. The change in British policy was provoked by the actions of the German government, but the precise nature of the British response was determined—at the diplomatic level—by Britain's reluctance to challenge

⁶⁵ London, "British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees", p. 500.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

German policy, and at the level of domestic refugee policy by the pressing concern with cost.

During this period the British government employed a policy of appeasement towards Germany. This involved the British making numerous concessions to Germany in the hope of appeasing her and persuading her to honour her international agreements but Britain's desire not to antagonise Germany co-existed with her distrust of Nazism and hostility towards it ideologically. The British government also considered the discrimination and harassment of Jews as an obstacle to Anglo-German relations, but they did not wish to exaggerate this in public. The policy of appeasement had a significant impact on the way the British government dealt with the refugee problem. The British government was extremely reluctant to criticise either Germany's internal affairs or her treatment of Jews and non-Aryans. Officials were also unwilling to enter in to any international agreements that would reinforce Germany's isolation from the international community. As a result of appeasement, British policy to refugees was reasonably severe and unsympathetic. Persecution of Jews and non-Aryans was not condemned as could have easily been done and the numbers of refugees admitted to Britain was insignificant.

International relations: East-Central Europe

During this period, March 1938 to September 1938, Britain did not place a high importance on her relations with the countries of East-Central Europe, such as Poland, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. This was because she did not regard them as part of her traditional sphere of influence but instead part of the Franco-German sphere. Consequently political relations between Britain and East-Central Europe were low key. For most of the inter-war period Britain did not have a well-defined political strategy for this region but Britain did have some economic interests in this area. In contrast, these countries were extremely worried by the German threat and repeatedly tried to build alliances with both the British and the French, but London was not interested.

The British government was, however, concerned by the deteriorating situation of Jewish minorities in the states of East-Central Europe. All of these countries had introduced anti-Semitic legislation in the inter-war period and German propaganda encouraged the persecution of Jews and non-Aryans. In *Refugees: Anarchy or Organization?* Dorothy Thompson, who is credited with motivating the Roosevelt administration to convene the Evian Conference, discussed the situation faced by millions in Central Europe.⁶⁷ Thompson believed there was a strong anti-Semitic feeling in Hungary that increased due to the strength of violent Nazi propaganda. Discriminatory anti-Jewish legislation was introduced modelled on Germany's example.⁶⁸ In Romania, Thompson credited the passionate anti-Semitism which flared up in the late 1930s to the "Iron Guard" the Romanian Fascist Group who she believed envied the Jews' financial success. In addition, she argued the Romanian King Carol "does not make a secret of his conviction that there are too many Jews in Rumania and that the world should help him get rid of at least a few hundred thousand of them".⁶⁹ The British government was extremely worried about the threat of more refugees or as officials called them "potential" refugees originating from these countries. Walter Adams, general secretary of the Academic Assistance Council (Society for the Protection of Science and Learning) and secretary of the Survey of Refugee Problems, expressed concern over "ominous statements" made by the governments and officials in East-Central Europe concerning their desire to see a mass emigration of their Jewish populations. According to Adams:

Already Jews have begun to flee from Hungary and Poland. If Eastern Jewry begins to move on any large scale, Europe will be faced with a refugee catastrophe greater than any that has confronted it in modern history. This is the essence of the German refugee problem; in itself it is a minor disaster, but in its implications it is terrifying.⁷⁰

For Adams, the most worrying problem was not the thousands of existing refugees from Germany and Austria, but the millions of refugees that would result if governments in countries such as Poland and Hungary decided to emulate the Nazis. Germany had a

⁶⁷ H. Armstrong, "Introduction" in D. Thompson, *Refugees: Anarchy or Organization?* (New York, 1938), p. xi.

⁶⁸ D. Thompson, *Refugees: Anarchy or Organization?* p. 65.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷⁰ W. Adams, "Extent and Nature of the World Refugee Problem" *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 203, May 1939, p. 35.

relatively small Jewish population, whereas East-Central Europe had a large percentage of Jews. In Hungary, after the re-annexations between 1938 and 1941, the Jewish population numbered over 800,000⁷¹, while in Poland there were some 3.5 million Jews.⁷²

In deciding how to respond to this situation the British government had to take account of several conflicting factors which sometimes pulled British policy in different directions. Because Britain regarded East-Central Europe as part of the Franco-German sphere of influence, the British government wanted France to take a leading role in guaranteeing the security of these states and acting as a counter-balance to Germany. Yet the British were also anxious to avoid antagonising the Germans by meddling in their sphere of influence. Nor did they want to give the impression that they were challenging German economic supremacy in East-Central Europe. On the other hand, the British government was worried that increasing German influence in the region would encourage countries such as Romania and Bulgaria to adopt harsher policies towards Jewish minorities, which in turn would be likely to exacerbate the refugee crisis. In *The Refugee Problem* (1939) Sir John Hope Simpson discussed how the German government's policy of discrimination against its Jewish population had increased the difficulties of Jews in Eastern Europe. He continued that these Eastern European countries:

have seen the success and impunity with which Germany has carried through a persecution of Jews which has included the substantial confiscation of their property and of their employment. They have seen other countries both separately and in co-operation assist this emigration of a section of the population arbitrarily described as 'undesirable'.⁷³

A further factor of which the British needed to take account was the belief that, if British refugee policy was too liberal, it would encourage these states to produce yet more refugees. The British government was worried that improving the situation of refugees coming from Germany and Austria would only encourage the states of East-Central Europe to escalate their persecution of Jewish minorities or even expel them. The key

⁷¹ L. Kontler, *A History of Hungary* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 374.

⁷² Thompson, p. 98.

⁷³ Simpson, *The Refugee Problem*, p. 520.

issue for the British was whether or not to get involved in this region, and if Britain was to become involved, how should it proceed? The British government was faced with two alternatives. On the one hand, they could do nothing, and see East-Central Europe fall further under German influence which in turn would exacerbate the refugee crisis. Alternatively, if they did become involved it could antagonise the Germans for the sake of a region in which the British were not particularly interested.

As a result of these deliberations, Britain developed a two-fold solution for dealing with this situation. Firstly, Britain refused to grant asylum for refugees coming from East-Central Europe but sent them back to their country of origin.⁷⁴ The British government did not believe these refugees suffered the same persecution as Jews and non-Aryans in Germany and saw nothing wrong with returning them to their countries of origin. It is significant that, in taking this position, the government was turning a deaf ear to the views of experts such as Dorothy Thompson and Walter Adams, both of whom argued that Jewish minorities in East-Central Europe were not substantially better off than the Jews and non-Aryans of Germany. Jews in East-Central Europe were generally much poorer than their fellow Jews in Germany; hunger, malnutrition and poverty were serious problems for them. Sir John Hope Simpson even regarded the situation in East-Central Europe as more serious than that faced by Jews in Austria and Germany. Though a number of Foreign Office officials shared Simpson's views, they also believed that any action to relieve the position of Jews in the region would provide a cue for further persecution.⁷⁵ Secondly, Britain refused officially to acknowledge these states as refugee-producing, thereby refusing to even accept there was a problem. For example, even though countries of East-Central Europe had not been invited to the Evian conference, Poland and Romania volunteered to attend as “refugee producer” countries and indicated their desire to assist the departure of their own Jewish populations.⁷⁶

During March to September 1938 Britain's relations with East-Central Europe were not as important as Germany in influencing the evolution and implementation of refugee

⁷⁴ London, “Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940”, p. 171.

⁷⁵ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ Skran, p. 209.

policy. In any case, the British viewed refugee issues in Central Europe in the context of relations with Germany. It was Germany's influence in this region that led to increased anti-Semitism and caused alarm, among British officials and refugee experts, about an increase in the numbers of refugees should persecution of Jews become too great or refugee policy towards German Jews be seen as too liberal.

International relations: Palestine

The British governed Palestine through the Mandate of Palestine from 1922 until 1948. After an economic slump in the 1920s, Palestine became a booming, lively place in the mid-1930s. During this period, Palestine had a Jewish population of about 400,000, about one-third of the total.⁷⁷ Jewish immigration increased rapidly during this period and, in reaction to this, Palestinian Arabs launched a national strike in 1936. The purpose of this strike was to obtain a ban on further Jewish immigration, the prohibition of land transfers from Arabs to Jews and the replacement of the mandate by a national government. The strike gradually developed from intermittent acts of violence and sabotage into open revolt.⁷⁸ Drastic regulations were introduced by the British to try to calm the situation. The mandatory authority began to reconsider its position on the issues of a Jewish national homeland and Jewish immigration to Palestine. From 1936 the British substantially reduced Jewish immigration to Palestine.⁷⁹ Meanwhile in the summer of 1937 a British Royal Commission, under Lord Peel, decided that the Arab claim of self-government and the secure establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine were incompatible. It reported that the mandate was unworkable, and recommended the partition of Palestine into sovereign Arab and Jewish states.⁸⁰ Jewish officials were divided on the merits of partition but the Arabs were strongly against partition and the publication of the Commission's report led to a renewal of the Arab rebellion. The revolt represented a major challenge to British authority and diverted British military resources

⁷⁷ Marrus, p. 152.

⁷⁸ J. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (New York, 1974), pp. 68-9.

⁷⁹ Marrus, p. 152.

⁸⁰ B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe* (London, 1999), p. 12.

on a large scale. The Arab Revolt continued into 1939. Although the British government had initially accepted the Peel Report's findings, by 1938 its enthusiasm was beginning to wane. In November 1938, the British government released a White Paper in which a partition of Palestine was rejected.⁸¹

Palestine's link to the refugee crisis is that it was seen as a possible destination for Jewish refugees. Some officials believed that Jewish refugees saw Britain "less as the holder of the keys to Britain than as the guardian at the gates of Palestine."⁸² Michael Marrus argues that up until the mid-1930s the problem for the Zionists was not immigration restrictions placed by the British but rather the shortage of Jews willing to go to Palestine. However, things had changed by the mid-1930s and just as the Jews needed to find a place of refuge and were beginning to press seriously on official immigration quotas, the British began to restrict immigration to Palestine.⁸³

In formulating their response, British policy makers were once again influenced by conflicting factors and faced a dilemma. On the one hand, the British were conscious of Arab discontent; they did not want to spark off a major conflict in with the Arab population or inflame the situation in Palestine and the rest of the Middle East. In an international atmosphere dominated by the fear of war and the need to prepare for it, the British repeatedly sought to pacify the Arabs in order to ensure their support should a war break out with Germany. One way to placate the Arabs was to restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine. Dorothy Thompson believed that the growing Arab opposition in Palestine meant that "all hopes of anything like Jewish mass emigration to Palestine have to be buried. We must face the fact that the fiery nationalism of the Arabs is growing more and more aggressive".⁸⁴ On the other hand, Palestine could provide a convenient asylum for Jewish refugees, especially since many Jews actually wanted to go there. In addition, the British had incurred obligations to the Jews by pledging to provide them with a national homeland in Palestine. The formation of a Jewish national homeland

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸² London, "Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940", p. 168.

⁸³ Marrus, p. 152.

⁸⁴ Thompson, p. 78.

was seen as especially crucial in light of the escalating persecution the Jews were facing in Germany and East-Central Europe. When the House of Commons discussed the situation in Palestine, one MP argued that: “The door of hope in Palestine must not be closed to these poor refugees. Wave upon wave of human misery is spreading from Central Europe in different directions, and it ought to be our duty to do what we can to help these sufferers”.⁸⁵ The restrictive immigration policies the Western democracies had implemented during this period were seen as a further reason for the need of the Jews to have freer immigration to Palestine. The British were under pressure from Jews in Britain and from the United States to allow Palestine to become a major solution to the refugee problem. In May 1938, *The Manchester Guardian* reported on The Zionist Federation of Great Britain’s conference in which it “urged the Government to facilitate the entry into Palestine of Jewish refugees from Austria and expressed grave concern that a ‘policy of an arbitrary high-level of Jewish immigration into Palestine contrary to the mandate’ had taken the place of one of economic absorptive capacity”.⁸⁶ British officials, however, argued that Palestine could not provide a home for a large number of refugees. At the Evian Conference, Lord Winterton—a member of the British delegation—quashed any suggestion that a solution to the refugee crisis could be found through large-scale immigration to Palestine.⁸⁷

Between March and September 1938, the issue of Palestine, like the issue of East-Central Europe, was overshadowed by the key issue of Germany. Palestine’s link to the refugee crisis was that it was seen as a possible destination for Jewish refugees but discontent and rebellion amongst the Arabs made the British reluctant to allow extensive Jewish immigration to Palestine. Although policy tilted towards the Arabs, the British response lacked clarity.

⁸⁵ Hansard, 8 November 1938, p. 89.

⁸⁶ *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 May 1938, p. 13.

⁸⁷ E. Estorick, “The Evian Conference and the Intergovernmental Committee”, *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 203, May 1939, p. 137.

International Relations: America

Anglo-American relations during the period March 1938 to September 1938 were initially cordial but improved steadily throughout the period of this study. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the American government pursued a policy of isolationism from Europe; the Act of 1937 was the high-water mark of isolationist neutrality legislation.⁸⁸ This Act tightened restrictions on American businesses and private individuals assisting belligerent states or parties. However, this policy of isolation and neutrality was slowly abandoned and relations between America and Britain became stronger. The British government knew that, if war should break out with Germany, Britain would need the support and resources of the United States. As a result, the British government was keen to develop the closest possible relationship with the Americans. As the situation in Europe deteriorated and war became more probable, the British government, and especially the Foreign Office, was watchful for signs that the isolationism of the Americans might be giving way to a readiness to become involved in European problems. Therefore, when President Roosevelt suggested the Evian Conference, the appealing possibility of improving Anglo-American relations led to the agreement within the British government that, “on political grounds alone” it was desirable to accept the American suggestion in principle.⁸⁹ Whitehall believed the United States government’s departure from its policy of non-intervention in European matters should in itself be welcomed and encouraged. The primary objective of the Foreign Office in relation to the Evian proposal was maximising the opportunities it offered for developing closer Anglo-American relations.⁹⁰ British officials were reluctant to attend the Evian Conference but the British desire for positive relations with America and the need for American support in a potential war was more important to officials than the desire retain control over the refugee policy thus Britain attended the Evian Conference.

The decision to participate in the Evian Conference was not the only example of how British refugee policy was influenced by the desire to please the Americans. The British

⁸⁸ H. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States* (London, 1954), p. 773.

⁸⁹ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 86.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

government, for instance, was not enthusiastic about joining the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, which it was believed would undermine the autonomy of British refugee policy. Officials and ministers were united in their belief that it was up to the British government to decide how many refugees it would admit and under what terms. British policy should not be dictated by any outside force, whether foreign government, international organisation or the sheer pressure of the refugee exodus.⁹¹ But because Roosevelt and the American government were in favour of the IGCR and because of the high priority given to developing Anglo-American relations, officials believed it was desirable to be involved in any international association on refugees with which the American government was associated.⁹² Consequently, the British government joined the IGCR but employed a policy of limited participation. As Louise London, states the British “government could not avoid playing an active role on the international stage if it wished to exert a restraining influence on the scope of any internationally agreed action”.⁹³ Additionally, British policy makers intended to promote—through diplomacy and example—a greater commitment to helping refugees on the part of other nations, and in particular the United States.⁹⁴ Although the main purpose of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees was to initiate negotiations with the Germans in order to improve emigration from Germany, it also ought to “promote Anglo-American cooperation and assist oppressed peoples”.⁹⁵ Washington also frequently urged the British government to do more in helping refugees. The British government realised that the refugee issue could become a significant irritant in Anglo-American relations and this lent urgency to the search for places of settlement.⁹⁶ The British government, aware of American criticism over restrictions on immigration to Palestine, looked within the British Empire for places of mass settlement.⁹⁷ British Guiana, for example, was seen as a potential place for large-scale settlement and a Commission of Inquiry was held to determine the validity of the area.⁹⁸

⁹¹ London, “British Immigration Control Protocols and Jewish Refugees”, p. 512.

⁹² London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 96.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Sherman, p. 121.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Hansard, 23 February 1938, pp. 611-4.

Between March and September 1938 Britain's relations with America, while significant, were not as important as Britain's relations with Germany in influencing the evolution and implementation of refugee policy. Britain became involved in international efforts to solve the refugee crisis with the aim of improving Anglo-American relations. This desire for good relations also led the British to seriously look for countries of large-scale settlement within the British Empire. There were, however, clear limits to the degree to which the British were prepared to bend their policies to please the Americans. For instance, the Americans were critical of the stance taken by the British government on the issue of Jewish emigration to Palestine. Yet the British resisted American pressure to adopt a policy that was more favourable to the Jews.

Domestic factors: Fears about the impact of refugees on the economic situation

The economic situation in the late 1930s was bad and Britain was only just beginning to emerge from recession. The global depression led to an economic and political crisis in Britain in 1931. There was mass unemployment, widespread poverty and a government deficit of £120,000,000 in 1931. 40 percent of the government deficit was directly due to unemployment payments.⁹⁹ In 1932, at the peak of the depression, unemployment reached 3.4 million or 17 percent of the labour force.¹⁰⁰ During this period the British government was still, however, committed to traditional ideas of the balancing books. Though the economic situation had improved by the later 1930s, it remained very fragile. As Clement Atlee, leader of the opposition, pointed out in the House of Commons in November 1938, unemployment in the previous year had actually increased by 459,000 to 1.8 million. Under these circumstances, the government was naturally anxious to avoid incurring any unnecessary expenses or doing anything that might jeopardise Britain's economic recovery.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ D. Baines, "The Onset of Depression" in P. Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 1994), p. 184.

¹⁰⁰ D. Baines, "Recovery from Depression" in P. Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, p. 188.

¹⁰¹ Hansard, 1 November 1938, p. 69.

What made the financial situation of the government even more difficult was the fact that it was having to spend ever greater sums on rearmament. In 1938, the British government spent £254,977,438 on rearmament.¹⁰² As a result, the government was even less willing to spend public money on supporting refugees in Britain or on funding their re-emigration. Instead, the government considered it was the duty of Jewish organisations to provide the funds for the financing of refugees. As Louise London argues, “Jews were seen as the responsibility, above all the financial responsibility, of the Jewish community rather than the British people”.¹⁰³ As a result of this, Anglo-Jewish leaders played a crucial role in the development and implementation of British refugee policy during this period.

When looking at the financial side of this issue, the British government was influenced by two fears. Firstly, the government was extremely worried that refugees would compete with Britons for jobs. As Sir John Hope Simpson stated: “England has a chronic post-war problem of native unemployment and all classes tend to fear competition in their labour market”.¹⁰⁴ So great was the fear of the British population about competition for jobs that it continued even after the outbreak of war, when there was actually a shortage of labour. In April 1940, for example, a survey of public attitudes to aliens revealed that many people were worried that refugees would take British jobs. According to one respondent: “Well, I don't think they should take our jobs – we've a million unemployed.”¹⁰⁵

As a result of such fears, the government decided that refugees would not be given general permission to work. If refugees wanted to seek employment they would need permission, in the form of a permit, granted after both the Ministry of Labour and the Home Office had approved their request. Permits would only be issued if this would not take a job from a British resident. There were some occupations open to refugees without a permit: domestic service, nursing, and a limited number of places in agriculture. Furthermore, special permission to work was available for persons who could supply a

¹⁰² H. Hyde, *British air policy between the wars, 1918-1939* (London, 1976), p. 516.

¹⁰³ London, “Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940”, pp. 163-4.

¹⁰⁴ J. Simpson, *Refugees: A Review of the Situation since September 1938* (London, 1939), p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Mass-Observation FR 79, 25 April 1940, p. 4.

kind of skill or trade that was not readily available in Britain. The limitations were very strict, and permission to follow trades and professions was usually subject to consultation with trade unions and professional associations.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, government ministers were keen to allow refugees who had already achieved distinction in their profession or field—those eminent in science, technology, art, music—to enter Britain and continue their careers. The fur trade was a prime example of this. British officials discreetly encouraged the selective immigration of refugees involved in this trade and, as was reported in Sir John Simpson’s survey:

there are about sixty refugee firms in Great Britain working as commission agents and brokers which were formerly established in Leipzig or Berlin. In addition, there are some three or four manufacturing furriers now in London employing fifty or sixty workers who previously carried on business in Germany.¹⁰⁷

Louise London states that by 1939 the contribution of these refugees had transformed London into the most important fur market in the world.¹⁰⁸ Britain’s refugee employment policy was designed to bestow benefits on Britain while displacing the financial risks onto the Jewish community.¹⁰⁹

The second economic fear the government faced when dealing with the refugee issue was that refugees would become a drain on public finances. This was heightened by the fact that the Nazis stripped Jewish refugees of up to 90 percent of their wealth on emigration from Germany. Thus refugees arrived in the countries of asylum penniless and destitute and in need of financial aid. Despite the enforced penury of refugees from Germany, the British government insisted that they receive no public money nor be allowed in any way to become a burden on the public purse. Public funds would not be spent on maintaining refugees in Britain, the costs of re-migration to countries of permanent settlement, or covering the administrative expenses of the charitable organisations. The Treasury maintained that government financial assistance to refugees was “almost out of the question” as it would create a precedent and might lead to more demands.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ J. Simpson, *Refugees: A Review of the Situation since September 1938*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ J. Simpson, *The Refugee Problem*, p. 343.

¹⁰⁸ London, “Jewish Refugees and British Government Policy, 1930-1940”, footnote 43.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Sherman, p. 103.

Additionally, government officials were concerned that maintaining refugees out of public funds might provoke anti-alien feelings in the British population.

There was much public debate about the economic aspects of this issue. One view was that Britain already had an unemployment problem without letting thousands of impoverished refugees enter Britain and compete on the labour market. There were already enough British people facing poverty and many believed that charity should begin at home. This was certainly a sentiment on which the British Union of Fascists was eager to capitalise. According to one BUF leaflet:

Why support a fund to give relief to aliens when poverty and unemployment are rife in Britain? We have been asked in the past four years to support Abyssinians, Basques, Chinese, Czechs, Austrians, Spaniards, and now Jews. MOSLEY SAYS ... CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME.¹¹¹

Some, on the other hand, argued that refugees could become an economic benefit and that it was a fallacy to regard immigrants as competitors in the labour market. Work, it was argued, was not a static lump to be parcelled out but was created by the additional numbers of consumers who would absorb consumer goods. Norman Angell and Dorothy Buxton wrote and published *You and the Refugee* about the economic side of the refugee issue in the hope of achieving a change in policy. They believed that British refugee policy was based on “the assumption that admission of more than a tiny number would have bad economic results, particularly in respect of unemployment. That assumption is pronounced fallacious by an overwhelming consensus of expert opinion”.¹¹² They argued that greater freedom of migration in England and throughout the British Empire would add wealth to the country, improve the general economic situation and reduce unemployment.¹¹³ And they believed that the government should spend some state finances on the refugee problem. Even the small amount of about one or two percent of the money spent on armaments annually would provide much needed finances for the refugee problem.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Quoted in Kushner and Knox, p. 149.

¹¹² N. Angell and D. Buxton, p. 11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

These financial dilemmas faced by the British government were partially resolved by the Jewish Guarantee. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, the Jewish organisations in Britain formally undertook that “all expense, whether in respect of temporary or permanent accommodation or maintenance will be borne by the Jewish community without ultimate charge to the State”.¹¹⁵ The Jewish Guarantee was designed to help refugees meet the condition of the Aliens Order to demonstrate that they could support themselves and their dependents.¹¹⁶ At the time of this pledge, the Jewish organisations estimated that between 3,000 and 4,000 refugees would immigrate to Britain.¹¹⁷ It should be noted that, in making this guarantee, the Chairman of the Jewish Refugees Committee, Otto Schiff, and his co-workers did not ask that refugees be permitted to work. The guarantee became the cornerstone of British refugee policy. In March 1938, with the German annexation of Austria, the Jewish organisations told the British government that they would only guarantee to finance refugees from Germany and Austria if they were cleared by the organisations in advance, that is, automatic cover for new refugee admissions could no longer continue. This did not mean the Jewish organisations stopped financing refugees; it simply meant that they wanted to approve the refugees they were to finance in advance. As we have seen, this prompted the government to introduce a system of visa controls.¹¹⁸ Since the Jewish organisations were financing the maintenance and remigration of German (and then Austrian) Jewish refugees in Britain, the immediate pressure was partially removed from the government to step up and fund the refugees in Britain during the period March to September 1938.

Economic considerations had a significant impact on government policy to refugees at a time when the economic situation was bad and Britain was only just beginning to emerge from mass unemployment and recession. The guarantee by the Jewish organisations to cover all expenses of Jewish refugees meant refugees did not become a drain on public finances or compete with Britons for jobs. The Jewish Guarantee was a crucial aspect of

¹¹⁵ PRO HO 213/1627.

¹¹⁶ London, “Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940”, p. 70.

¹¹⁷ Sherman, p. 30.

¹¹⁸ London, “British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees”, p. 502.

refugee policy during this period and it took the immediate pressure off the government to finance refugees and allow them to work which were both highly contentious issues.

Domestic factors: Anti-Semitism

When refugees were arriving at British ports or applying for visas at British consulates throughout Europe they were not asked to supply information on their religion or race. Refugees and immigrants were classed solely on their nationality—their race and religion were never recorded. In theory, the decision to grant or deny a petition for asylum took no account of the race or religion of the applicant. In the House of Commons debates, members of parliament regularly asked ministers questions like: how many Jewish refugees have been given asylum in Britain? What percentage of German refugees in Britain are Jewish? The ministers answering these questions repeatedly stated, as Samuel Hoare did on 2 May 1938, that it is “not policy to inquire as to religion or race of foreign person seeking permission to enter Britain”.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, with Jews and non-Aryans being the main victims of the Nationalist Socialist Regime, it was inevitable that they would constitute the majority of people fleeing Nazi Germany and seeking asylum in other countries. In Britain it was estimated that 85-90 percent of refugees from Germany and Austria were Jewish or of Jewish descent.¹²⁰ In reality the government and the wider political community were conscious of the Jewishness of the refugee problem. This explains why in House of Commons debates the race and religion of refugees was frequently mentioned.

During the period in question there was an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in British society. Anti-Semitic feeling in Britain usually manifested itself in forms that fell short of political extremism and could co-exist with liberal convictions.¹²¹ This anti-Semitism was partly as a result of general distrust of foreigners. Tony Kushner believes that anti-

¹¹⁹ Hansard, 2 May 1938, p. 530.

¹²⁰ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 11.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Semitism in Britain was inseparable from anti-alien feeling.¹²² Although certain members of the government were anti-Semitic, it seems that the government in itself was not particularly anti-Semitic. The cabinet included at least one Jew, namely Leslie Hore-Belisha, Secretary of State for War.¹²³ Many government officials' opinions of Judaism and Jewish people seem to be rather ambiguous. On the one hand, some Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers displayed or made anti-Semitic comments but were also proponents of a more liberal refugee policy and spoke out against the Nazi Regime. Harold Nicolson is a prime example of a MP with ambivalent feelings towards Jews. Nicolson was a member of Oswald Mosley's "New Party" and edited his paper *Action*. It was not until 1932 that he severed ties with Mosley. As a National Labour MP, he sat on Eleanor Rathbone's Refugees Committee and supported numerous refugees' cases. Just a few days after he heard Anthony Eden's statement on the extermination of Jews in Europe he told his son that a Jewish officer was stationed on the grounds of his home, but "recalling how but three days before I had stood in tribute to the martyred Jews of Poland, I was polite to Captain Rubinstein."¹²⁴ This comment implies Nicolson was not always "polite" to Jews.

Instead, it was the fear of stimulating anti-Semitism in the general public that led officials to argue that the refugee policy should not be liberalised, and that there should be no increase in the numbers of refugees granted asylum in Britain. The secondary literature stresses that it was more the fear of anti-Semitism and the wish to avoid stimulating anti-Semitism than anti-Semitism itself or anti-Semitic displays that caused the government extreme anxiety. Tony Kushner believes that it was fear of domestic anti-Semitism that "was at the bottom of the government's refusal to allow anything other than a trickle of refugees into Britain."¹²⁵ Fear of increasing anti-Semitism was also used as a reason for denying government aid to refugee organisations. Lord Winterton met with Mrs Ormerod, Secretary of the Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees, Mr Schiff, the

¹²² T. Kushner, "British Anti-semitism, 1918-1945" in D. Cesarani, *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, p. 198.

¹²³ There were allegations that the resignation of Leslie Hore-Belisha (in 1940) was in part a result by anti-Semitic prejudice against him.

¹²⁴ D. Cesarani, "Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Towards a Taxonomy of Rescuers" in D. Cesarani and P. Levine, *'Bystanders' to the Holocaust*, p. 42.

¹²⁵ T. Kushner, "British Anti-semitism, 1918-1945", p. 205.

Chairman of the German Jewish Aid Committee, and Lord Bearsted, of the Council for German Jewry to discuss an application for government aid. Lord Winterton stated that the question of the government providing a grant for the Co-ordinating Committee was a “political impossibility”. He went on to say that if a:

grant were made Parliament would have to approve it, the matter would become public, and there would be an immediate outcry from all anti-alien and anti-semitic elements in this country that the Government were subsidising the admission of aliens at a time when there was widespread unemployment and economic distress among our own people.¹²⁶

The fear of stoking anti-Semitism and ethnic strife was linked to the concern about political stability in Britain. Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, was concerned that mass immigration was likely to encourage the growth of fascism in Britain, necessitating careful selection of those who were allowed entry.¹²⁷ Hoare’s concern was not without foundation, for the British Union of Fascists (BUF) had indeed been increasing in popularity. Anti-Semitism had the greatest impact in areas of Jewish concentration, like the East End of London, Manchester and Leeds, and the BUF did well in the London County Council elections in East London in 1937. The anti-Semitic campaigns of the BUF and other extreme right-wing organisations terrorised the Jewish population in places like the East End of London. The threat of violence was a major feature of Jewish life, particularly for working-class Jews, in the later 1930s.¹²⁸ Politicians were concerned about the present reality of fascist violence, and about the possibility that the BUF could grow in popularity. In the event, however, the BUF turned out not to be such a great threat. But we only know this with the benefit of hindsight. Given that the National Socialists had also started out as a violent and peripheral group, the concern of the British politicians about the BUF was reasonable. Jewish organisations were also worried about provoking anti-Semitism among the population. They produced and distributed to refugees in their care a pamphlet detailing “the sensitivity of the Anglo-Jewish community to the growth of anti-Semitic feeling which accompanied the influx of refugees”. Refugees were to start to learn English immediately, refrain from

¹²⁶ PRO HO 213/1636.

¹²⁷ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 104.

¹²⁸ T. Kushner, “British Anti-semitism, 1918-1945”, pp. 193-4.

speaking German or reading German newspapers in public, avoid criticising the government or the way things were done in Britain, and, lastly, not to make themselves conspicuous by their manner or dress.¹²⁹

The fear that the influx of Jews would stoke anti-Semitism had two main impacts on the refugee policy during this period. Firstly, it made the government even more reluctant to allow large numbers of refugees in to Britain. Louise London notes that the government and Anglo-Jewish leaders restricted the number of refugees admitted to Britain on the principle that this was essential to avoid stimulating anti-Semitism.¹³⁰ Secondly, it made the government more selective of the refugees (and to be more precise the Jews) to whom it granted asylum. Several British policy makers believed that anti-Semitism was to some extent caused by the Jews themselves and if they were noticeably foreign and unassimilated the problem was greater.¹³¹ Officials were more likely to let Jews in to Britain if they thought they would be easily assimilated into the British population. This was one of the reasons why the government favoured pre-selection of refugees abroad.

Fear of stimulating anti-Semitism had a considerable impact on the evolution and implementation of British policy towards refugees during this period. It is one of the factors that explain why policy to refugees was restrictive between March and September 1938. The government was extremely anxious about stirring up anti-Semitism amongst the British population. As a result, the government limited the number and type of refugees to whom they granted asylum. Additionally, fear of stimulating anti-Semitism was a reason why the government would not finance refugees.

Domestic factors: Influence of press, population, lobbyists, voluntary organisations

There were numerous organisations that were concerned with the refugee situation and with helping refugees when they were in Britain. The most important distinction that

¹²⁹ Quoted in Sherman, pp. 218-9.

¹³⁰ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 38.

¹³¹ London, "Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940", p. 165.

needs to be made is between Jewish and non-Jewish organisations. Jewish organisations concentrated their efforts and finance on Jewish refugees. There were other organisations, both religious and secular, that helped non-Jewish refugees. In the category of non-Jewish refugees people labelled as ‘non-Aryans’ were also included. These were often Jews who had converted to Christianity. Some scholars have argued that it was easier for refugees to receive aid once they were in Britain if they were Jewish. These scholars believe that Christian groups did not do as much for non-Jewish refugees as Jewish organisations did for Jewish refugees and assistance for these and other Christian refugees was not well organised. As Claudena Skran notes:

it was not until January 1936 that an International Christian Committee for German Refugees was formed. An exception to the generally slow approach on the part of Christian organisations was that of the Society of Friends (Quakers). Shortly after refugees began to flee Germany, the Quakers set up an Emergency Committee to help all types of refugees, including Jews, Christians, Social Democrats and Communists.¹³²

The Quakers were unique in that they tried to help all refugees and did not focus on a specific group or religion.

Jewish organisations were seen by the British government as very important to solving the refugee crisis. There were numerous Jewish organisations in Britain that were involved in various aspects of the refugee situation both in Britain and overseas. Some of the most significant Jewish organisations were the Jews’ Temporary Shelter (JTS), the Jewish Refugees Committee (JRC), the Central British Fund for Germany Jewry (CBF) and the Jewish Board of Deputies. The Jews’ Temporary Shelter had been established in London’s East End prior to World War One. It specialised in helping Jewish immigrants from Europe as they passed through Britain on their way to permanent settlement overseas. Refugees were met at ports and railway stations by JTS representatives and were offered short-term accommodation and financial support.¹³³ François Lafitte notes that when it became evident that the refugee problem caused by Nazi Germany was likely to increase and become a long-term problem, it was decided that it was sensible to

¹³² Skran, p. 204.

¹³³ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 23.

segregate the help for German refugees from the regular work of the JTS. Consequently, the Jewish Refugees Committee was created in March 1933 and Otto Schiff, president of the JTS, was its chairman.¹³⁴ The Jewish Refugees Committee's funds were provided by the Central British Fund for Germany Jewry which was established a few weeks later. The JRC's activities were limited to helping refugees in Britain; it assumed the management of the refugee influx and underwrote its costs. Between 1938 and 1940 the JRC was known as the German Jewish Aid Committee. This was because of the idea that these people should not be regarded as refugees forever but in 1940 it reverted back to the JRC in order to avoid the word "German" which could provoke prejudice during the war.¹³⁵ Otto Schiff believed "that a genuine refugee in need should be helped by the Committee without regard to the fact whether he or she was a member of the Jewish community, 'confessionlos', or baptized". The Jewish organisations had larger funds than their Christian counterparts and were often called upon to help them.¹³⁶ The JRC and its associated funding organisations were the most significant Jewish organisations involved in solving the refugee crisis in Britain.

Other Jewish organisations in Britain focused their efforts on emigration. The Central British Fund for Germany Jewry, as opposed to the JRC, had a broad outlook which fostered reconstruction rather than relief. Assistance in Britain was only one of the CBF's commitments and the sums allocated to the JRC were relatively small compared with large-scale expenditure on emigration to Palestine.¹³⁷ The Council for Germany Jewry (CGJ) was another organisation that focused its efforts on permanent emigration overseas but in the case of the CGJ to places other than Palestine.¹³⁸ The Board of Deputies of British Jews was the main organisation that represented organised Anglo-Jewry. It did not engage formally in refugee work but had links with all the Jewish refugee organisations. Board leaders preferred to represent Anglo-Jewry as a whole and for them the admission of refugees to Britain was an auxiliary aspect of the Nazi crisis.¹³⁹ The

¹³⁴ F. Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (London, 1940), p. 42.

¹³⁵ N. Bentwich, *They Found Refuge* (London, 1956), p. 50.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

¹³⁷ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 39.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

Jewish leaders intended that Britain's role should be on the periphery, as a country of transit, and they gave a high priority to limiting the numbers of refugees in Britain.¹⁴⁰

The government wanted to have good relations with these voluntary organisations, for it saw them as crucial to the solution of the refugee crisis. British officials believed the Jewish organisations played a very important role because they not only financed Jewish refugees but provided practical administrative assistance, such as investigating visa applications and dealing with incoming correspondence, that government organisations could not deal with. Therefore, these organisations had a degree of leverage. But, although the government wanted the goodwill of these organisations, it was not prepared to grant them full autonomy in respect to dealing with the refugee situation. For example, the Jewish representatives asked the government to grant temporary asylum to all refugees coming from Germany in return for their pledge to finance and manage the influx of refugees. They asked that those refugees arriving at the ports should be admitted without distinction and that those already in Britain should be allowed to prolong their stay indefinitely. The government rejected these requests.¹⁴¹

There was increasingly close cooperation between the Home Office and the voluntary organisations. In many cases government departments passed on to the voluntary organisations work that they did not have the time or staff to deal with. Louise London notes that the larger voluntary organisations “attained a quasi-official status, which reflected the scale of their operations and their ability to influence an individual's immigration prospects.”¹⁴² However, there was the concern about confusion and overlapping between the numerous organisations dealing with refugee issues. So, in April 1938, the Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees was established. This committee was formed at the initiative of the Home Office to form a link between the numerous refugee organisations. It was designed to “represent the collective interests of the refugee organisations vis-à-vis the British Government, especially in questions of residence, training facilities, and official approaches to Dominion, colonial or foreign governments

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁴¹ London, “Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940”, pp. 170-1.

¹⁴² London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 54.

on emigration matters”.¹⁴³ Due to the fact that these organisations wanted to keep the influence they held over the government, they initially tried to avoid constantly criticising refugee policy. However, the Co-ordinating Committee became increasingly critical of the Home Office. On 18 October 1938, the Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees addressed a memorandum to the Home Office stating: “in recent months it has been absolutely clear to all the bodies doing case work that there has been a complete breakdown, on the official side, of the policy of selected immigration through the approved voluntary organisations”.¹⁴⁴ The Co-ordinating Committee warned that it could no longer perform its functions unless given a government grant – which the government said was out of the question.¹⁴⁵ To solve this crisis the Co-ordinating Committee formally restricted the activities it undertook, leaving the government departments to take up these tasks. It further declared the committee could not take any responsibility for the refugees from Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁶

It is important to mention a contradiction in the government policy. Policy clearly stated that a person’s race or religion was not important when deciding their claim on asylum. Statistics on refugees’ race and religion were not recorded. Alternatively, the pledge given by the Jewish organisations to finance and manage specifically the Jewish refugees in Britain was accepted by the government and became the cornerstone of British refugee policy.

There were also numerous non-Jewish organisations interested in the refugee issue in Britain. The Society of Friends (Quakers) set up the German Emergency Committee (GEC) to include refugees who did not come within the scope of the Jewish organisations. Members of the Society of Friends worked in numerous cities and were regarded by the German government as the main bodies for assisting in the emigration of non-Jewish refugees.¹⁴⁷ There were other Christian groups involved in work for refugees including the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, the Church of England Committee

¹⁴³ Sherman, p. 99.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

¹⁴⁷ Lafitte, p. 44.

for “non-Aryan” Christians and the Catholic Committee for Refugees. François Lafitte noted that overlapping in the case-work of these organisations “was overcome by increasing co-operation between the various case-working committees and the German Emergency Committee, until the latter body came to be recognised as the Christian counterpart of the Jewish Refugee Committee.”¹⁴⁸

Some groups tried to help refugees or lobby in their favour. The Society for the Protection for Science and Learning (SPSL) was established in April 1933 under its former name, the Academic Assistance Council. It was made up of prominent academics, scientists and politicians. The SPSL devoted its efforts to finding placements for academic exiles in universities, industry and research institutions.¹⁴⁹ The final destination of most refugee academics, however, was the United States, and Britain was no more than a country of temporary refuge.¹⁵⁰

The Left, the Labour Party and trades unions were particularly concerned with political refugees. These groups responded sympathetically to the plight of left-wing opposition in Austria and Germany, and social democratic opposition in Sudetenland.¹⁵¹ François Lafitte notes that the International Solidarity Fund which was controlled by the Labour Movement was devoted to helping Socialists and trade union officials who had to flee from Germany.¹⁵²

Not all the pressure groups and organisations which had an interest in the refugee issue were primarily concerned with the welfare of refugees. Some organisations tried to persuade the government to adopt an even more restrictive policy to refugees. Two prominent examples of specific groups that successfully lobbied against the admission of refugees were doctors and dentists. Both groups effectively lobbied the government to prevent large numbers of their foreign colleagues being allowed to enter Britain.¹⁵³ For

¹⁴⁸ Lafitte, p. 44.

¹⁴⁹ Sherman, p. 26.

¹⁵⁰ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, pp. 48-9.

¹⁵¹ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 130.

¹⁵² Lafitte, p. 48.

¹⁵³ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 51.

instance, the Home Secretary wished to admit 500 Austrian doctors but felt unable to override the doctors' opposition. A Medical Advisory Committee, composed of doctors and representatives of the refugee organisations, asserted that the numbers should not exceed fifty, to be selected from about 1000 applicants, who would be allowed to re-qualify in Britain.¹⁵⁴

Far Right groups, like the British Union of Fascists and the Imperial Fascist League, were also against a more liberal refugee policy. Tony Kushner believes the most blatant opposition to refugees was from the BUF.¹⁵⁵ The British Union of Fascists was vocal and consistent in its harassment of refugees throughout the 1930s until it was banned by the government in May 1940. The BUF viciously campaigned against refugees labelling them "refujews".¹⁵⁶ There was also a great deal of hostility from the right-wing press, particularly the Beaverbrook, Rothermere, and Kemsley empires. Most of this opposition was on economic grounds.¹⁵⁷

Overall, voluntary organisations, especially Jewish ones, had major influence on policy on the formation and implementation of the refugee policy during the period March to September 1938. They worked alongside government officials and were even given "quasi-official status". The major influence of the voluntary organisations had on refugee policy also led the government, in some instances, to place the responsibility for refugee policy on these organisations. On 1 November 1938, in a statement to the Inter-governmental Committee on Refugees, Lord Winterton announced that "the only limit in fact to the number of refugees who can be admitted is constituted by the ability of the voluntary organisations to provide means for their maintenance and opportunities for their employment."¹⁵⁸ Some groups campaigned on behalf of refugees and others against them. This was another example of government policy being pulled in two directions by contradictory forces. Jewish organisations had an impact on government policy, but so did the doctors and dentists.

¹⁵⁴ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 80.

¹⁵⁵ Kushner, "British Anti-semitism, 1918-1945", p. 199.

¹⁵⁶ Kushner and Knox, p. 149.

¹⁵⁷ Kushner, "British Anti-semitism, 1918-1945", p. 199.

¹⁵⁸ B. Wasserstein, "The British Government and the German immigration 1933-1945", p. 76.

Domestic factors: Humanitarian Considerations

Britain had an established tradition of granting asylum to political and religious refugees that had achieved an almost semi-constitutional status. At the Evian Conference, the British delegate, Lord Winterton, invoked this tradition:

It has been the traditional policy of successive British Governments to offer asylum to persons who, for political, racial or religious reasons, have had to leave their own countries. The United Kingdom has never had cause to regret this policy, and refugees have often enriched the life and contributed to the prosperity of the British people.¹⁵⁹

However, this tradition coexisted with the belief that refugees should be able to support themselves and their dependents. The British government classed Jewish refugees principally as immigrants and only secondarily as refugees. It believed the plight of Jewish refugees to be a problem of immigration rather than a duty of rescue.¹⁶⁰ Louise London argues that:

refugees stood low on the national agenda, regarded as a mere humanitarian problem. Home Office officials frequently reminded enquirers that there was no such thing as a legal claim to asylum for refugees.... What qualified people for entry was not the persecution they were leaving behind, but what they could bring with them. The principles of selection emphasised the needs of Britain, the country of refuge, rather than the plight of the refugee.¹⁶¹

The position of the government in 1938 was, from the point of view of ministers, not a result of their indifference to human suffering. They just did not see it as being the role of the government to get involved in purely humanitarian issues.

Humanitarian considerations were rarely mentioned in either parliament or the press in this period. In the House of Commons debates regarding refugees, Members of Parliament seldom referred to humanitarian aspects of the refugee problem. It was the same in the press. Instead, there was a great emphasis on economic considerations like

¹⁵⁹ Estorick, p. 137.

¹⁶⁰ London, "Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940", p. 163.

¹⁶¹ London, "British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees", p. 515.

concern that refugees would become a drain on public finances or compete with Britons for jobs, and on fear of increasing anti-Semitism amongst the general population.

Humanitarian rhetoric was occasionally used by government officials when discussing Britain's contribution to the refugee problem. For example: at the Evian Conference, the British delegate, Lord Winterton, claimed that humanitarian considerations had led the British government to approve an even more liberal policy, but despite this no additions to the existing categories for admission were presented.¹⁶² It seems that the main purpose of humanitarian rhetoric, during this period, was to deflect criticism from existing policy.

Humanitarian considerations did not have an important impact on refugee policy during this period. The government had a policy of not admitting refugees to Britain on humanitarian grounds alone and it seems that, during this period, this was respected by Members of parliament and the press because humanitarian issues were very seldom referred between March and September 1938. The only time humanitarianism was mentioned by the government was when it was discussing how "liberal" the government's policy to refugees was. In contrast, pro-refugee activists frequently evoked humanitarian principles when trying to gain sympathy for refugees and when campaigning for a more liberal policy.

Conclusion

The refugee crisis being created by the Nazis was without precedent and the British government was unsure how to respond. British refugee policy was still in a formative stage and was therefore susceptible to outside influences of which there were many during the period March to September 1938. Some factors were pulling policy in a more lenient and interventionist direction. For instance, the American government wanted the British government to do more to help find a solution to the refugee problem. As a result of American pressure, the British reluctantly participated in international initiatives to

¹⁶² London, "British reactions to the Jewish flight from Europe", pp. 64-5.

resolve the refugee crisis. Jewish organisations, on which the government was increasingly reliant, also wanted the British authorities to do more to help refugees from Central Europe. However, the majority of factors influencing refugee policy pushed the government to adopt harsher policies on the refugee issue. The economic situation in the late 1930s was bad and Britain was only just beginning to emerge from mass unemployment and recession. In this atmosphere the government was loath to allow thousands of destitute refugees into Britain to become a burden on public funds and, as the government and the Jewish organisations believed, stimulate anti-Semitism. The situation in East-Central Europe with these countries becoming increasingly anti-Semitic and openly voicing their desire to reduce their Jewish populations led the British government to believe that if refugee policy was liberalised these countries would escalate persecution and this would create even more refugees. The desire not to antagonise either the Nazis or the Arabs in Palestine and the Middle East was another factor driving refugee policy to be more restrictive.

During this period, March to September 1938, the factors that commanded a hard line policy on refugees were dominant. This can be seen in the fact that the number of refugees permitted asylum in Britain was relatively small, especially when compared with the second period of this study. The single most important factor that influenced government refugee policy was concern over the relationship with Germany, partly because Germany was creating the problem in the first place, but mainly because improving relations with Germany and avoiding war was the over-riding goal of British foreign policy. Having said that, the relationship between Anglo-German diplomacy and the refugee issue was not straightforward. No matter how badly the British wanted good relations with Germany, there were limits to what the British government could be seen to condone. Government refugee policy, though greatly influenced by external forces, was also shaped by the assumptions and traditions that it had inherited from the past, and which are outlined in this chapter. In particular, it was not part of the British political tradition for government to play a proactive role in refugee policy, or to accept that it should be swayed by purely humanitarian considerations. These traditions came under pressure as a result of the unprecedented situation created by the Nazi persecution of the

Jews. As a result of all these factors, government refugee policy during the period March-September 1938 was full of contradictions. The government claimed to be blind to race and religion, yet made Jewish organisations a cornerstone of the implementation of its policies. It claimed no refugee could be admitted for humanitarian reasons, yet under pressure it used the language of humanitarianism to justify its policies. It asserted the autonomy of British refugee policy, yet participated in international initiatives—however reluctantly—thereby conceding implicitly that the refugee crisis was not just a matter for national governments or bilateral diplomacy. The decisions made by the government help us to make inferences about the relative importance of the factors that influenced refugee policy. For example, in Palestine the desire to please the Americans was trumped by the desire to avoid making enemies of the Arabs. The desire of the government to maintain good relations with Jewish organisations was nothing like as important as the desire to achieve good relations with the Nazi regime.

Chapter 3

The primacy of international events

This third chapter covers the period October 1938 to August 1939. Like the previous chapter, it will focus on three key questions: What factors influenced the evolution and implementation of British policy to refugees?; In what ways did these factors influence British policy?; What was the relative importance of these factors during the period in question?

Whereas the previous chapter was structured around the various factors that influenced refugee policy, this chapter will explore the impact of these factors by discussing in turn the international events that dominated the political agenda of the British government between the Sudetenland crisis and the outbreak of World War Two. The German annexation of the Sudetenland in October 1938, the "Kristallnacht" purge of Germany's Jews in November 1938, and the German invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, all had a huge impact on British refugee policy. British refugee policy during this period was thus driven by the need to respond to actions taken by the German government. Nevertheless, British responses were modulated by domestic factors and concerns, and by the traditions of British political culture.

In particular, this chapter will discuss the changes that occurred between October 1938 and August 1939 and the relative importance of the factors that influenced British refugee policy. Some factors, such as popular anti-Semitism, become rather less important during this period than they had been between March and September 1938. Other factors, which had hitherto been of peripheral importance, such as humanitarianism, became much more important in the aftermath of the Sudeten crisis. Some factors, in particular the focus of the British government on Anglo-German relations, remained just as important after the Munich Agreement as they had been before it.

The annexation of the Sudetenland and Czech refugees

The Munich Agreement had a significant impact on British refugee policy. In September 1938, Germany's demand that the Sudetenland be incorporated in the Reich brought Europe to the brink of war. The British and French governments pressured the Czechs to concede the Sudetenland to Hitler; all the Czech government could do was to comply. A relieved Neville Chamberlain returned from his trip to Munich to declare that he had secured "peace for our time".

Though the concessions made by the British government at Munich had resolved the international crisis and postponed the outbreak of war, it immediately worsened the refugee situation in Czechoslovakia.¹⁶³ During September, thousands of people had fled from the Sudeten areas. After the agreement, the Sudeten areas were surrendered to Germany and occupied from 1 October 1938. But the refugee exodus continued; refugees continued to flee from the Sudetenland into what remained of Czechoslovakia. This crisis was exacerbated by provisions in the Munich Agreement in which exchanges and transfers of population were to occur between the Sudetenland and the rest of Czechoslovakia.¹⁶⁴ The refugees fell into three distinct groups, the first of which comprised anti-Nazi Sudeten Germans, most of whom were members of the German Social Democratic Party. They had lived in the Sudetenland and were of German origin. The second group consisted of refugees from Germany and Austria, the majority of whom were Jews who had come to Czechoslovakia in the wake of Anschluss. Jews from the Sudetenland itself constituted the third group. Taken together, these three groups comprised the bulk of refugees who needed to be resettled outside Czechoslovakia. But there were also concerns about the position of some 300,000 Jews who lived in Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia and Czech Ruthenia. Although they were not refugees their position looked more and more uncertain.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 142.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Although the degree of the financial and strategic loss caused by the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia was vaguely perceived at Munich the impact on the refugee problem was not considered.¹⁶⁶ However, because the refugee crisis that was unfolding was clearly a result of the Munich Agreement, the British government recognised that it needed to respond. As Louise London notes, the British Foreign Office “tried to stave off further Czech expulsions and emphasised the need to respect the refugees’ rights under the Munich Agreement to a guaranteed future” in the rump of Czechoslovakia. But it became obvious that rights to Czech nationality were irrelevant compared to the immediate plight and difficulties faced by thousands of refugees, many of whom were seeking urgent assistance from foreign governments.¹⁶⁷

There were a number of reasons why the British felt they could not wash their hands of the refugee crisis that was developing in Czechoslovakia. To begin with, there was cross-party agreement that it was in Britain’s national interests to try to help stabilise the situation in Czechoslovakia in order to prevent it falling further under German influence. Clement Attlee, for example, argued at the time that:

if we can have an independent Czechoslovakia, I think we should support it in every possible way. We owe so much to Czechoslovakia. If, on the other hand, Czechoslovakia is to become a mere vassal State of Germany, very different conditions will apply.¹⁶⁸

Many British politicians also felt a degree of moral responsibility towards these refugees and a certain amount of guilt for the plight they now faced. One Member of Parliament stated: “We owe these people a great debt, and I hope that the Government will feel that they have the public opinion of the country behind them in every effort that they may make on their behalf”.¹⁶⁹ According to A. J. Sherman, “as the dimensions of the problem began to be grasped the Government was to find it increasingly difficult to reject this notion”.¹⁷⁰ The view that the British (and French) governments had a moral responsibility to help these refugees was also asserted by virtually every group and association that had

¹⁶⁶ Sherman, p. 138.

¹⁶⁷ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 143.

¹⁶⁸ Hansard, 1 November 1938, p. 66.

¹⁶⁹ Hansard, 8 November 1938, p. 89.

¹⁷⁰ Sherman, p. 145.

an interest in refugee affairs. Refugee advocate, Eleanor Rathbone, declared in the *Manchester Guardian* “his [Chamberlain’s] action may depend on how far public opinion at home is aroused on behalf of these victims—these scapegoats by whose sacrifice some hope to obtain immunity from the tragedy of war. May that public opinion manifest itself in sufficient volume and quickly”.¹⁷¹ Her hope was that, by provoking public sympathy for the Czech refugees, the government could be pressed into liberalising its refugee policy.

Much of the general population also believed the Munich Agreement had spared them the horrors of war but at the expense of the Czechs. Thousands contributed to funds set up for these refugees. Two important such funds were “The Lord Mayor’s Fund for Refugees from Czecho-slovakia”, which raised proceeds amounting to £360,000, and the “*News Chronicle* Fund for Czech refugees”, which raised £44,420.¹⁷² Atlee stated that he believed there to be:

enormous sympathy in this country for the plight of the refugees from Sudetenland. Many thousands of people have been placed in a terrible position. The people of this country have subscribed a great sum of money, and I think we ought to pay tribute here to the Lord Mayor of London for his courage and activity in this matter.¹⁷³

Members of the public wrote “many letters expressing their deepest concern at the immediate fate and future of the dispossessed people from the occupied regions of Czechoslovakia.”¹⁷⁴

The British government offered the Czech government £10 million in early October; this was a counter-offer to the Czech request for £30 million immediately after the Munich settlement. Officials at Whitehall believed that they would be able to insist the money be used for purposes they regarded as “permanent and constructive”.¹⁷⁵ Of the total sum, £4 million was “designated as a gift for the relief and resettlement of refugees within

¹⁷¹ *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 October 1938, p. 16.

¹⁷² J. Simpson, *Refugees: A Review of the Situation since September 1938*, p. 77.

¹⁷³ Hansard, 1 November 1938, p. 66.

¹⁷⁴ *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 October 1938, p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ Sherman, p. 145.

Czechoslovakia and overseas”.¹⁷⁶ The government also established the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (BCRC) in October 1938 to administer to the £4 million fund. The money was to help resettle refugees who had fled from the portions of Czech territory ceded to Germany at Munich. Although the British government stressed the point that the money was to be available on a non-discriminatory basis, not all refugees were eligible for financial assistance from this fund. Political refugees, like the Sudeten Social Democrats, were favoured over non-political Jews. This was due to the belief shared by the Home Office and the BCRC, that if the mass emigration of non-political Jews was assisted it would be playing into the hands of the Gestapo and would be likely to encourage further persecution. Louise London, believes this demonstrates the importance which British officials assigned to resisting pressure for the forced expulsion of Jews throughout Europe.¹⁷⁷ The British government reluctantly allocated a limited number of visas to BCRC cases, but it was intended that the greater part of the Czech refugee problem should be controlled in the remains of Czechoslovakia, or dealt with by direct re-emigration overseas.¹⁷⁸ The BCRC brought the relief work for these refugees directly under Home Office and Treasury control. This was at a time when all other refugees were still supported by voluntary contributions and cared for by voluntary organisations.¹⁷⁹ British officials repeatedly stated the uniqueness of the situation in regards to Czech refugees but it became increasingly difficult to maintain the distinction between refugees from Germany and Austria and those from Czechoslovakia.¹⁸⁰

Given the government’s refusal to finance other refugees,¹⁸¹ the establishment of the Czech Fund was a remarkable breakthrough and can be seen as the first liberalisation of Britain’s refugee policy. This liberalisation was instigated by public pressure. Individual members of parliament seem to have felt a degree of guilt and a responsibility for Czech refugees but it was public opinion, or the potential of public opinion, that pressed the

¹⁷⁶ London, p. 146.

¹⁷⁷ London, “British reactions to the Jewish flight from Europe”, p. 67.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁷⁹ Y. Kapp and M. Mynatt, *British Policy and the Refugees, 1933-1941* (London, 1997) p. 58.

¹⁸⁰ Sherman, p. 262.

¹⁸¹ The government would not even consider providing funds for German and Austrian refugees until July 1939 when it became clear the Jewish organisations could no longer maintain their guarantee.

government into action on behalf of these refugees. There is a clear causal relationship between Munich and the liberalisation. It demonstrates how potent the international situation could be in affecting refugee policy, especially when it interacted with the pangs of conscience. The contrast with the toughening of restrictions on German and Austrian refugees is apparent, but that can be explained by the fact that Britain felt no equivalent guilt about the Anschluss. It is important to note that refugee policy took a decisive step in a new direction *before* foreign policy. This means that refugee policy had a degree of autonomy and was not completely subordinate to international relations and that it was not just the slave of appeasement. Rather, it was a response to guilt—or at least a sense of responsibility—brought about by appeasement.

“Kristallnacht” and German and Austrian refugees

Within weeks of the annexation of the Sudetenland, the Nazi government created a fresh challenge for British refugee policy with a sudden and dramatic escalation in its persecution of the Jewish population in Germany. On the night of 9-10 November 1938, organised bands of SA thugs attacked and plundered Jewish shops, schools, homes and synagogues. Ninety-one people were killed on “Kristallnacht”, thousands were assaulted and 20,000 individuals were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Several hundred million Reichsmarks worth of damage was done. This was followed by increased anti-Jewish legislation.¹⁸²

These ghastly events provoked a wave of public sympathy for German and Austrian Jews among the British public. Much was written in the press describing the violence and destruction that occurred on “Kristallnacht” and numerous letters were published that testified to the outrage felt by ordinary British people. For example, a letter was published in *The Times* on 22 November with the blunt message: “Sir,—We wish to record our solemn protest, before the conscience of civilization, against the persecution of

¹⁸² Sherman, p.167.

the Jews in Germany.”¹⁸³ This letter was signed by some hundred individuals, many of whom, like Violet Bonham Carter, J. B. Priestley, and R. Stafford Cripps were prominent public figures. Neville Chamberlain, aware of the British public’s outrage over the “Kristallnacht” pogrom, announced in the House of Commons that “there will be deep and widespread sympathy here for those who are being made to suffer so severely.”¹⁸⁴ The more sympathetic public attitude to Jewish refugees created by the events of 9-10 November prevailed in Britain until late spring 1940. However, the fact that many people were sympathetic to Jews did not mean that anti-Semitism completely disappeared. It is significant, however, that anti-Semitism is much less prominent in the primary sources after “Kristallnacht”. While anti-Semitism cannot explain the liberalisation of refugee policy that occurred in this period, anti-Semitism was one factor that can potentially explain why the liberalisation did not go further. It can account for why the government still wanted refugees’ stay in Britain to be temporary and wanted them to settle overseas. So, while anti-Semitism does not explain why policies changed, it explains why in some instances they changed very little or even remained the same. The importance of international events in moulding public opinion in regards to “Kristallnacht” is clear. Nevertheless, the reason that “Kristallnacht” had this effect on opinion was because of the moral values held by the majority of the British population. If most Britons shared the values of many Poles, Rumanian or members of the British Union of Fascists, they would have felt little sympathy for the victims of the Nazi regime.

“Kristallnacht” also aroused great sympathy for German and Austrian refugees in government circles. Numerous Members of Parliament were concerned that the British government made it “known to the German Government the deep feeling of horror aroused in this country among all sections of the people by the action which has been taken against the Jews.”¹⁸⁵ As well as acknowledging British outrage, MPs wanted some concrete action to be taken to help persecuted Jews. Colonel Wedgwood, Labour member for Newcastle under Lyme, asked: “Cannot His Majesty’s Government show the feeling of this country by attempting to do something for the victims of this oppression in

¹⁸³ *The Times*, 22 November 1938, p. 10.

¹⁸⁴ Hansard, 14 November 1938, p. 503.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

Germany?”¹⁸⁶ Mr Lipson wanted “an urgent and immediate meeting of the committee, which was appointed after the Evian Conference in order to see whether more rigorous and prompt measures can be taken to find a home for these persecuted Jews”.¹⁸⁷ Another MP, Mr Alexander, wanted “the possibility of consultation with the President, or other representatives of the United States of America, with a view to a joint representation being made” to the German government to show unified outrage at “Kristallnacht”.¹⁸⁸

The liberalisation of Britain’s refugee policy, which had begun in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, was given significant new impetus by public and government sympathy for the plight of Germany’s Jews. As Louise London notes, the Cabinet decided to speed up and simplify immigration procedures for refugees; Britain’s role as a temporary refuge was also expanded.¹⁸⁹ Procedural changes were introduced to reduce some of the delay that was caused by the investigation of visa cases overseas. The process of approval was simplified and the mechanics of entry were speeded up. Voluntary organisations were allowed to select refugees for admission to Britain.¹⁹⁰ These nominal roles largely replaced the process of individual visas and made possible the use of block visas. Other new developments included the admission of large numbers of male refugees as trans-migrants and transports of unaccompanied children. Following the government decision to facilitate the entry of child refugees, The Movement for the Care of Children from Germany (which became known as the Refugee Children’s Movement) was established under the joint chairmanship of Sir Wyndham Deedes and Viscount Samuel. This organisation supervised the “emigration and allocation of children in cooperation with over 100 local committees throughout Britain which made themselves responsible for maintenance of the children in hostels pending their placement with families.”¹⁹¹ The Refugee Children’s Movement is credited with bringing 9,354 children to Britain before the outbreak of war.¹⁹² However, the principle of restriction through pre-selection remained unchanged. What qualified people for entry

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 505.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ London, “British reactions to the Jewish flight from Europe”, p. 65.

¹⁹⁰ London, “British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees”, p. 506.

¹⁹¹ Sherman, pp. 183-4.

¹⁹² Knox and Kushner, p. 155.

into Britain was not the degree of persecution they faced but what they could bring to Britain. For some refugees their wealth was the key to their admission, while for others it was their youth.¹⁹³ In other words, whilst humanitarian concerns were important in shaping the response of British *public opinion* to events in Germany, neither humanitarianism nor public opinion were paramount in the formulation of British refugee policy. The gap between the public response to “Kristallnacht”, which made no distinction between old and young, healthy and sick, rich and poor, and the government response, which did, is telling.

“Kristallnacht” and the consequent liberalisation of refugee policy led to such a dramatic increase of refugees that the voluntary organisations were no longer able to cope. Historians have found it difficult to determine the exact numbers of refugees who received asylum in Britain. However, they do agree that the time after “Kristallnacht” and before the outbreak of World War Two was the period of major immigration. By the time of the Evian Conference the German refugee population in Britain was 8,000.¹⁹⁴ However, by September 1939 the number of refugees in Germany had reached about 80,000.¹⁹⁵ The Jewish organisations had been under increasing financial strains since 1938. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Jewish organisations told the government in the wake of Anschluss that they could no longer automatically guarantee cover for all new refugees. Instead, refugees needed to be approved by the Jewish organisations before they arrived in Britain. The Jewish organisations stated they could only guarantee newly admitted refugees if they were cleared by the organisation in advance. Then, by July 1939, it became clear to the government that the Jewish organisations and refugee bodies were unable to finance settlement schemes. The final collapse of the Jewish bodies’ efforts to honour the guarantee came in September 1939.

The government began to realise the dire situation the voluntary organisations were facing, and reluctantly and gradually softened the official line on financing the refugee situation. In July 1939, the government agreed to commit public funds but solely to

¹⁹³ London, “British reactions to the Jewish flight from Europe”, p. 68.

¹⁹⁴ Skran, p. 221.

¹⁹⁵ M. Proudfoot, *European Refugees, 1939-1952* (London, 1957), p. 27.

finance the costs of re-emigration of refugees from Britain to countries of permanent settlement.¹⁹⁶ Britain had a stagnant pool of refugees, many of whom had been allowed into the country as trans-migrants and had yet to leave. The government agreed to finance re-emigration of these refugees as it would decrease the numbers of refugees in Britain and lower the costs faced by the voluntary organisations as they would have fewer refugees to maintain. In August 1939, the government was “contemplating departing from their original attitude that there could be no Government money devoted to refugees.”¹⁹⁷ But the government only agreed to fund the refugee policy when it became evident that there was no other body that could finance it. Up until this point the government had refused to finance the maintenance of refugees, re-emigration and even the administrative costs of refugee policy because there were voluntary organisations (particularly Jewish ones) with money that were prepared to take up this responsibility.¹⁹⁸ With the funds of these organisations exhausted and no other financial alternative apart from government finance, Whitehall realised the time had come when it had to take responsibility for the refugee situation. In December 1939, ministers accepted a proposal from the Home Office that governmental funding was necessary since the funds of the Jewish organisations were exhausted. From December on, Whitehall subsidised the:

costs of refugee maintenance and re-emigration and the Jewish organisation’s administrative expenses. A monthly grant was paid by the Central Committee for Refugees (CCR), a new non-sectarian body approved by the Home Office, which distributed money among the various refugee organisations.¹⁹⁹

The government’s financing of refugee policy was a result of the flood of refugees caused by developments in Europe. However, that the international situation led to change only because the voluntary organisations could not cope and because letting the situation deteriorate would create a scandal and offend the British (and American) conscience. Clearly, then, whatever the government said in public about its humanitarian concern for the victims of Nazism, its refugee policy was still under the influence of more pragmatic concerns. Though the liberalisation of refugee policy which had begun in October 1938

¹⁹⁶ London, “Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940”, p. 183.

¹⁹⁷ Hansard, 4 August 1939, p. 2896.

¹⁹⁸ The one exception to this rule was refugees from Czechoslovakia.

¹⁹⁹ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, pp. 169-70.

was greatly accelerated by public and governmental sympathy for the plight of the persecuted, it was still being constrained by economic considerations.

Negotiating with Germany: the Schacht Plan and the Rublee Plan

The disgust aroused by “Kristallnacht” was not allowed to interfere with appeasement. According to Louise London, Chamberlain “believed that decent relations with Nazi Germany would be possible if extremes of persecution could be avoided. His horror at Nazi atrocities was therefore combined with frustration at the damage they caused to Anglo-German relations.” Chamberlain’s hope that the Nazi regime would moderate its anti-Jewish actions was linked to his desire to strive for friendly relations with Germany.²⁰⁰ Accordingly, the British government during the period in question continued efforts to find negotiated solutions to the refugee problem, above all in the so-called Schacht and Rublee Plans. German emigration policy, in which Jews and non-Aryans were stripped of up to 90 percent of their wealth on departure from Germany, was one of the main obstacles to improved Anglo-German relations. Britain, along with other nations of asylum, believed the Nazi Regime should be held accountable for the refugees fleeing Germany as she was the refugee producing state. The British hoped to pressure Germany into cooperating over letting Jews depart with sufficient means to fund their own emigration and maintenance in the host country if they wished to achieve Jewish emigration.²⁰¹ The Foreign Office believed that since the Nationalist Socialist Regime was so determined to get rid of the Jews they would be prepared to make some concessions to expedite their departure.²⁰² There were attempts on the part of both the British and the Germans to find solutions to this problem, though the British entered into these negotiations with more good faith than their Nazi negotiating partners.

The Schacht Plan was initiated by the president of the Reichsbank, Hjalmer Schacht, who travelled to London in December 1938 to present a plan to facilitate Jewish emigration. His plan envisaged the financing of Jewish emigration by the means of an international refugee loan which was to be raised by Jewish contributors, but it also stipulated that

²⁰⁰ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 33.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁰² PRO FO 371/24080, 2 February 1939.

there had to be an increase in the export of German goods.²⁰³ From the German point of view, the Schacht Plan, which had been approved by Hitler, had the advantage that it still allowed the German government to confiscate Jewish wealth without compensation whilst at the same time boosting German exports. The detained Jewish assets would be kept by German authorities as a trust fund; a quarter of these funds could be used by emigrants to purchase supplies and facilities from German companies. However, the majority of the resettlements costs would have to be financed by outside Jewish sources through a bond which the trust fund would be the collateral.²⁰⁴ Reaction to the Schacht Plan was hostile. Jewish leaders in Britain and other countries refused to meet to consider the plan because they did not want to lend weight to the idea that an “international Jewry” existed. Nonetheless, George Rublee and the IGCR saw some merit in the proposal and wanted to continue negotiations. By this time, Schacht had resigned because of disagreements with Hitler over management of the German economy and Hermann Goering had replaced him as chief negotiator. Goering made it clear he considered the Jews to be exports with which to raise foreign exchange. Rublee’s efforts produced a revised agreement, known as the Rublee Plan, which he presented at the IGCR meeting in February 1939.²⁰⁵

The Rublee Plan involved the ordered emigration of those who fell into the category of wage earners (Jewish men and single women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five who were individually capable of earning a living and fit for emigration) over a period of five years. Those who were classed in the dependent category would be allowed to emigrate once the wage earners were established and able to receive them. Under the Rublee Plan, Germany agreed to allow dependents to “live tranquilly, unless some extraordinary circumstances should occur”.²⁰⁶ Emigration would be partly financed by a trust fund which was to be set up in Germany; it was to be equal to about one quarter of all Jewish property in Germany. The fund could then be used for travel and to purchase German-made equipment. The German-made equipment could only be used for

²⁰³ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 110.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Skran, pp. 251-2.

²⁰⁶ PRO FO 371/24080, 2 February 1939.

colonisation and not for sale overseas. Emigrants would not be subject to special flight taxes and would be allowed to take all their personal belongings, except jewellery, with them. The 200,000 elderly Jews not covered by this agreement would be allowed to live out their old age in Germany without persecution. This was an improvement on the Schacht Plan as it allowed refugees to leave Germany with significantly more of their capital.²⁰⁷ The German authorities refused to allow the plan to be extended to non-Jewish refugees. The United States government strongly supported this plan and the IGCR quickly approved it. In Britain, Jewish leaders supported it but other non-governmental organisations were divided about the merits of this plan. The American Jewish community, in particular the Jewish Labour Committee and the American Jewish Congress, was opposed to the plan because it disturbed their boycott of German-made goods. Negotiations progressed very slowly and an independent settlement corporation was established (the Coordinating Foundation) on 20 July 1939. Less than two months after the formulation of the Coordinating Foundation, World War Two broke out and the Rublee Plan became null and void, having achieved nothing.²⁰⁸

These plans can be seen as part of the policy of appeasement, but they also met some of Britain's objectives to existing arrangements. The Rublee Plan would at least have meant that Jewish refugees were better off than before, which is why it gained the support of the Jewish organisations and the Americans. Nevertheless, both plans demonstrate that the international situation was crucial in the determination of refugee policy. They were a response to the crisis caused by the ever-increasing numbers of refugees from Germany and Austria and they conceded numerous German demands. However, the plans also reflected the values and concerns of the British: their conviction that international problems were best resolved by negotiation and compromise and their desire to reduce the costs of receiving large numbers of penniless refugees. If the British had not placed such importance on negotiation and had not been so determined to reduce the costs of dealing with these destitute refugees, these plans would never have been considered. That these plans were never put into effect was primarily a result of the outbreak of war,

²⁰⁷ Skran, p. 252.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 252-4.

but fundamental differences between Britain and Germany were also a factor. The Third Reich's Nazi ideology was more important to Germany than its desire to placate Britain. Britain, for her part, was growing more concerned about aspects of German policy (especially the persecution of Jews and non-Aryans) that she could neither condone nor ignore. On the other hand, that the British government was prepared to accept refugees lacking independent means of support, and who would be largely dependent on charity, reduced the pressure on Germany to cooperate over letting Jews depart with sufficient means if it wished to achieve Jewish emigration. As has been established before, it was not just the international situation that was important, but the context that guides the interpretation of the situation and the response to it.

The impact of the invasion of Bohemian and Moravia on refugee policy

With the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, appeasement suffered a decisive setback. Hitler had shown the world that Germany would not settle just to have her "reasonable" demands met but wanted to make territorial gains as well. For the first time, German troops had seized territory the population of which was largely non-German. Those in favour of appeasement still hoped for peace, but they realised their hopes were slim. They started to prepare with greater urgency for a war against Germany. This view, that war was now likely, perhaps inevitable, had a significant impact on refugee policy.

Poland, which would be the obvious target of any further German aggression, was now courted as an ally. After Germany's occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, Britain and France became more active in trying to block any further German expansion in this area.²⁰⁹ On 30 March 1939, Neville Chamberlain announced the British government's decision to give Poland "a unilateral and unconditional guarantee" against any German threat or aggression.²¹⁰ This guarantee of Poland was only of Polish

²⁰⁹ K. Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947* (London, 1994), p. 442.

²¹⁰ S. Newman, *March 1939* (Oxford, 1976), p. 157.

independence, and explicitly excluded Polish territorial integrity. This was transformed by the agreement of 6 April into a virtual alliance.²¹¹

All these developments had major implications for British refugee policy, for roughly 10 percent of Poland's thirty-five million inhabitants were Jewish. The position of Jews in Poland was deteriorating, partly as a result of increasing German influence, but also on account of a sharpening of the anti-Semitic mood in Poland itself. Estimates were made by the Polish government according to which one third of the Polish population was surplus. Experts believed there were three possible solutions to the situation: one, mass industrialisation; two, mass starvation; three, mass migration.²¹² Since mass industrialisation in a short period of time was not feasible, whilst starvation was undesirable, mass migration was the preferred choice and Poland's Jews were placed under increasing pressure in the hope that they would leave. Accordingly to Dorothy Thompson, a contemporary expert on the refugee situation:

Many Jews have suffered violence – and many more live in constant fear of physical danger. While the Polish government officially maintains the equality of the Jews with all other Polish citizens, it sets about – in its quiet way – to squeeze the Jews out of economic life, mainly by means of tax and credit policies directed against commerce and trade, which especially hit the Jews.²¹³

Added to the existing anti-Jewish feeling in Poland, Polish anti-Semites were emboldened by the German example. These factors caused an increase in the numbers of Polish refugees. Hitherto, the British had been unsympathetic and uncooperative towards Poland's attempts to get rid of her Jews. Britain had refused to acknowledge Poland as a "refugee producing state" and the United States prevented her from attending the Evian Conference as a "refugee producer".²¹⁴ Polish refugees, and refugees from East-Central Europe, were refused asylum in Britain and sent them back to their country of origin. This was because Britain did not consider that these refugees suffered the same persecution as Jews and non-Aryans in Germany and saw nothing wrong with returning them to East-Central Europe. After the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia, however, this

²¹¹ A. Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939* (Oxford, 1972), p. 478.

²¹² Thompson, p. 67.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

²¹⁴ Skran, p. 209.

policy was reversed and the admission of refugees from Poland was prioritised, even over those from Czechoslovakia. Additionally, Herbert Emerson, Director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, had assured Polish authorities that the BCRC would take responsibility for a large number of families in Poland.²¹⁵ So eager was the British government to facilitate the migration of Jews from Poland that it continued to prioritise such refugees even after the outbreak of the war. A Foreign Office memorandum of 10 November 1939 mentions a government grant of £100,000 for the relief of Polish refugees and notes that: “All the departments concerned are now most willingly assisting in the co-ordinated handling of the Polish refugee problem”.²¹⁶ Once more, the crucial role of the international situation in shaping refugee policy can be seen. However, as before, the situation produced its effect only through its interaction with the values that guided the way in which the situation was interpreted. These were values that placed a premium on national survival, with Poland being cultivated as an ally against Hitler.

The invasion of Bohemia and Moravia also had an impact on the situation in Palestine specifically with regard to refugees. Britain was being pressed by Jewish organisations and the Americans to turn Palestine into a haven for Jewish refugees. At the same time, the Arab states and the Palestinian Arabs, who had been in revolt since 1936, were pressuring the British government to prevent any further Jewish immigration to Palestine. Up until this point, Britain’s response had tilted towards the Arabs, but satisfied neither side. It was only after the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia that British policy further tilted towards the Arabs and ruled out both a Jewish Palestine and the partition of Palestine. The British government’s desire to find a negotiated solution to the worsening situation in Palestine led it to organise the London Conferences. This series of formal meetings between Palestinian Arabs, Jews, Whitehall, and neighbouring Arab States was intended to solve the problems in Palestine and bring an end to the Arab Revolt; the May 1939 White Paper was the result of these meetings.²¹⁷ The 1939 White Paper consisted of three sections which dealt with the constitution of the projected Palestinian State,

²¹⁵ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 157.

²¹⁶ PRO FO 371/24106, 10 November 1939.

²¹⁷ Hurewitz, pp. 96-8.

immigration and land. In the first section the British government declared that it was not part of its policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State and Partition was dismissed. The new objective of the government was to establish “a State in which the two peoples in Palestine, Arabs and Jews, share authority in government in such a way that the essential interests of each is secured”.²¹⁸ In regards to Jewish immigration, a ceiling was set of 75,000 admissions over the next five years, after which Jewish immigration would be permitted only with Arab consent. Additional preventative measures to check illegal immigration would be taken.²¹⁹ The High Commissioner was given powers “to prohibit and regulate the transfers of land” between Arabs and Jews in Palestine.²²⁰

The White Paper was very controversial and satisfied neither the Arabs nor the Jews. It was of little concern to the general British population, who were far more interested in international affairs in Europe. Some Arab spokesmen acknowledged that it went a substantial way towards recognising the basic claims of the Arab nationalists. Otherwise, Arab reactions to the paper varied but the majority of neighbouring Arab states did not support it.²²¹ The Jewish quasi-government did not hesitate to proclaim that it would resist the implementation of the White Paper.²²² The Zionists were strongly against it and used numerous means to encourage opposition to the government’s policy.²²³ The Zionists undermined the White Paper by illegal action in the form of encouraging and even organising illegal immigration. From late 1938 onwards, illegal immigration was organised on an increasing scale. In 1939, 11,156 out of 27,561 were illegal immigrants.²²⁴ Approximately 1,300 illegal immigrants entered Palestine between 1 April 1939 and 24 May 1939.²²⁵ At one point legal migration was stopped completely because of the numbers of illegal immigrants. In July 1939, the Colonial Secretary announced to the House that due to large numbers of illegal immigrants landing in Palestine in the

²¹⁸ Quoted in Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 16.

²¹⁹ Hurewitz, p. 102.

²²⁰ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 17.

²²¹ Hurewitz, p. 102.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²²³ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 20.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²²⁵ *The Economist*, 29 July 1939, p. 209.

previous months that no immigration quota would be issued for the following quota period, which was from 1 October 1939 to 31 March 1940.²²⁶

The main reason why the British made more concessions to the Arabs than to the Zionists was that the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia forced the British to prioritise their preparations for war. If war should break out in Europe, which now seemed much more likely, the British knew that they could not afford to keep large numbers of troops in Palestine for internal security purposes.²²⁷ In the view of J. C. Hurewitz, Britain was compelled by the pressure of European events to seek swift and decisive results. The underlying purpose of the London Conferences was the strengthening of Britain's imperial defences.²²⁸ Hurewitz asserts that the drawn out Arab Revolt had undermined Britain's "prestige throughout a pivotal region of the Empire's defence system".²²⁹ Britain could also not afford to alienate the oil-producing Arab states whose oil she would need for the war effort and would surely be courted by Germany. Indeed, Germany (and Italy) had begun actively to intervene in the internal affairs of the Middle East and especially in Palestine where they had provided Palestinian rebels with material and moral aid.²³⁰ The British were acutely aware that they could not compete with Germany when making promises to the Arabs because Germany could always offer more.²³¹ So the May 1939 White Paper, coming two months after the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia, put at least one leg off the fence and on the Arab side. It rejected outright the sort of "Palestinian solution" to the refugee problem supported by both the Americans and Jewish organisations. Although it is difficult to show definitively that this change of policy was directly linked with security considerations prompted by the destruction of Czechoslovakia and the looming threat of war, the circumstantial evidence is very strong. The changed international situation brought about by Hitler's dismemberment of Czechoslovakia is the crucial variable that explains why Britain's policy changed when it did. However, the international situation produced this outcome only because it was

²²⁶ Sherman, p. 239.

²²⁷ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 26.

²²⁸ Hurewitz, p. 99.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-88.

²³¹ M. Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat from Mandate* (New York, 1978), p. 96.

interpreted through a set of assumptions and values that placed an overwhelming importance on Britain's survival in any upcoming war.

The invasion of Bohemia and Moravia also had an impact on British relations with the United States, particularly in regards to refugee issues. The British were aware that, if war broke out, they would be reliant on the financial and economic support of the Americans, so had to be careful not to alienate them. There was therefore an element of risk in rejecting the type of "Palestinian solution" that the Americans favoured. The Zionists tried to gain the support of the Americans in their opposition to the White Paper. As Bernard Wasserstein points out, the British were extremely conscious of the capacity of American Jews to influence the United States government and American public opinion. President Roosevelt informed the British of his interests in the matter and, on the publication of the White Paper, he expressed "a good deal of dismay". But, fortunately for His Majesty's Government, British officials had judged the situation correctly. The Americans understood why the British had made the decision to incline towards the Arabs and limit Jewish immigration. While publicly criticising the British policy to satisfy American Jewish opinion they reassured them in private that they would not allow the matter to affect the British-American relationship. Joseph Kennedy, the American Ambassador in London, was instructed to advise the Foreign Office "that there was widespread disappointment in the U.S.A. with the White Paper, and in particular with its immigration provisions."²³² But Ambassador Kennedy also privately assured Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary for Colonies that, "while the American Jews might cause public commotion over the White Paper, the policy of the Administration would not be affected."²³³ The very dangerous situation introduced by the destruction of Czechoslovakia was appreciated by the Roosevelt administration. Though the Americans disliked the way the British were handling the Palestinian situation, they had no desire to see the British defeated by a German regime that it detested.

The invasion of Bohemia and Moravia was hugely significant in overall diplomatic history because appeasement was seen to have failed. The Polish guarantee signified a

²³² Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, pp. 22-3.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

change of government policy to Germany. War became a real possibility and the British began to focus on the security of the empire. This had a significant impact on refugee policy. Poland was courted as an ally and as a result priority was given to Polish refugees. The Middle East was seen as pivotal region of the empire and the British needed calm in this area so Britain sided further with the Arabs in Palestine. The invasion of Bohemia and Moravia also had an impact on the Americans who became much more understanding of Britain's position in terms of Palestine.

Conclusion

In the first period that we examined, March to September 1938, the formulation and implementation of British policy to refugees were shaped by a contradictory set of factors, some of which pushed Britain towards a harsher policy to refugees, and some of which pulled the British government towards more lenient policies. Overall, however, the combined influence of the former was greater than that of the latter. As a result, refugee policy was restrictive and the number of refugees permitted asylum in Britain was relatively small. One of the most important factors during this period was Britain's desire to establish a positive relationship with Germany and to avoid antagonising the Nazi regime. In this first phase, Germany's policies towards the Jews and towards her neighbours were a major influence on refugee policy, but other issues had their own independent importance as influences on the formation of policy

Between October 1938 and August 1939, government policy to Germany was in a state of flux. Where the Munich Agreement of September 1938 had represented the high point of appeasement, the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 forced the British government finally to take a stronger stance against German aggression. During the whole of this second phase of refugee policy, foreign policy, especially in terms of Germany, was clearly the driving force of refugee policy. Every major change in Britain's refugee policy during this period was a response to changes in the international situation. But although the international situation was the variable that explained how policy changed over time, policy was not just affected by international developments;

each British response depended on either British assumptions or the circumstances in Britain during this period. The Munich settlement led to the first significant liberalisation of refugee policy because the public (and to a lesser degree the government) felt a sense of guilt over the treatment of the Czechs in the wake of the settlement. The liberalisation, which had begun in October with the Munich Agreement, was greatly accelerated by “Kristallnacht” as a result of the outrage and sympathy felt by the British public and the government to this persecution. Yet, for all its moral indignation at events in Germany, the British government did not allow “Kristallnacht” to interfere with appeasement and its efforts to find a negotiated settlement. Nor did the British government stop worrying about the economic impact of refugees. With the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia, the over-riding importance of national security was highlighted. For refugee policy it meant priority was given to Polish refugees because Britain wanted Poland as an ally. In Palestine, the British sided further with the Arabs to ensure calm in the Middle East and access to Arab oil for any upcoming war. The invasion of Bohemia and Moravia also had an impact on the Americans who became more understanding of British policy in regards to Palestine and respected that national security had become paramount.

In chapter two, Germany’s policies towards the Jews and towards her neighbours were a major influence on refugee policy, but other issues had their own independent importance as influences on the formation of policy. From October 1938, and especially from March 1939, they played a less independent role. Increasingly, they were inspired by revulsion at German outrages or by fear of German aggression. In particular, it was the concession to German demands over the Sudetenland that led the rather guilt-ridden British to decide to accept Czech refugees, it was outrage at “Kristallnacht” that led to greater sympathy for German and Austrian refugees; and it was the threat of German aggression that led Britain to accommodate the Polish demands that Britain help solve Poland’s self-created refugee problem. So policy with regard to Central Europe changed, but it did so because of what Germany did, not because of what Czechoslovakia or Poland did. So East-Central Europe no longer had an independent influence on the formulation of policy. Similarly, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, it was fear of Germany that prompted changes in British policy towards the use of Palestine as a dumping ground for refugees,

and that led Britain to disregard American views on the issue. So again, it was the fear of German aggression, not what the Arabs or Jews or Americans did, that led to the change of policy. Although the attitude of the Arabs was important, it achieved this importance only because the threat of Germany meant that Britain had to keep the Arabs onside and edge away from the Zionists and the Americans.

With regard to the economic concerns and anti-Semitism, these cannot explain the changes in policy that occurred in this period, which were all in the direction of liberalisation and were all instigated by changes in German policy. However, both factors explain some of the continuities in British policy—in particular the facts that Britain still wanted to limit expenditure as far as possible, and to provide only temporary asylum in Britain before the refugees were sent to permanent homes overseas.

In this period, the press, public opinion and voluntary organisations tended to align more strongly with the humanitarian cause, which was correspondingly strengthened. All this happened as a reaction to Germany's actions, or to appeasing actions that were a response to German threats. So the press, public opinion, voluntary organisations and humanitarianism were very important in this period. However, they owed this boost in their importance to Germany's actions, which created great (and guilty) sympathy for the Czechs and created for the Jews who suffered so terribly as a result of the "Kristallnacht" outrages and escalating persecution in Germany and Austria. In other words, the press, public opinion and voluntary organisations were important as influences on policy, but the more pro-refugee stand that they took was a response to German actions not something that developed independently of those actions. Similarly, the much more frequent expressions of humanitarian sympathy for refugees that were heard in this period did not develop independently, but were a response to German actions.

Chapter 4

National security versus humanitarianism

From the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, concerns with national security had become increasingly important to the British government. With the outbreak of war in September 1939 and the German invasion of Western Europe in April/May 1940, national security became paramount and played a huge role in the evolution and implementation of refugee policy. This chapter covers the period beginning in September 1939 until the settlement of refugee policy in July 1940 with the publication of a White Paper detailing categories eligible for release from the internment camps. It will focus on three key questions. What factors influenced the evolution and implementation of British policy to refugees? In what ways did these factors influence British policy? And what were the relative strengths of these factors during the period September 1939 to July 1940? Instead of being ordered around international events like the previous, this chapter will focus on five key issues that affected refugee policy during this period.

Solving the refugee problem by eradicating its cause

The outbreak of war put an end to any need to appease or negotiate with Germany on the refugee question. From September 1939, the British government's guiding principle was very simple: Britain's contribution to solving the refugee problem would be to eradicate its cause—Nazi Germany itself. The government made its position clear on 25 September 1939 when the Cabinet Committee, established to deal with the refugee problem, announced that from now on Britain's contribution to the refugee problem would be to concentrate her energy “upon the eradication of the root cause of the refugee problem ... namely the existing regime in Germany”.²³⁴ Government officials suspected that the Germans would only allow refugees to immigrate who would be “persons whose entry into other countries was desired for reasons connected to the war”. Consequently, Britain could not “‘assist in any way’ the exodus of enemy nationals nor could it admit persons

²³⁴ Quoted in London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 172.

who had been in German-controlled territory subsequent to the outbreak of war, even should they later reach neutral territory.”²³⁵ This was the argument used to justify the government’s refusal to let large numbers of refugees from the Reich into Britain or to help those suffering in concentration camps in Europe.

Nevertheless, in the period before the German invasion of Western Europe, the government did grant some visas in neutral territory to certain categories of alien refugees, even if they had left enemy territory after the outbreak of war. This policy was not publicised from late 1939 onwards. Louise London reveals that in April 1940 “the Home Office published details of categories of family members eligible to join close relatives in the United Kingdom provided there was no risk to public funds: wives joining husbands; minor children joining parents or a sole surviving parent, or, in the case of orphans, other close relatives; and, in very exceptional circumstances, elderly mothers without relatives abroad joining children”.²³⁶ However, the German advance westwards led to a severe tightening up of these categories and entry became confined to cases of children joining parents. By the winter of 1940-41 the Home Office and security services had implemented a policy of refusing to admit any more refugees.²³⁷ Despite this, no refugee who reached Britain was denied asylum or returned to Europe.

After the outbreak of war, the British gave up on negotiating with Germany and they would not allow the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to negotiate either. When war broke out the Rublee Plan became invalid, having achieved nothing. British government ministers wanted the IGCR’s wartime role to be confined to encouraging the re-emigration of refugees who had found temporary asylum prior to the outbreak of war.²³⁸ If the IGCR proposed to do anything additional the British government would withdraw. The government assumed that the IGCR would be left in a state of semi-suspension for the duration of the war.²³⁹

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., pp. 175-6.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

²³⁹ Ibid.

Now that there was no question of negotiating with Germany, the British government felt no need restrain criticism about the treatment of Jews and other persecuted nationalities. The publication of the White Paper on the Treatment of German Nationals in Germany²⁴⁰ finally made public the horrors endured by the victims of Nazism. This was the only time when the British government issued a statement designed to excite sympathy with the German victims of Nazism. It is significant that the statement was withheld until after the outbreak of the war. By then the British were no longer worried about the state of the Anglo-German relationship or of offending the Nazi regime but by this stage nothing more could be done to rescue the victims of the atrocities described.²⁴¹

Allied nationals: refugees from Belgium and the Netherlands

The outbreak of war led to a liberalisation of policy towards some refugees: Britain welcomed refugees from countries that were fighting Germany. When Belgium and the Netherlands were attacked in April 1940 the government declared that it would accept up to 300,000 refugees from these countries. Official arrangements were made “to receive in this country up to 300,000 Dutch and Belgians ... after the invasion of these countries has taken place”.²⁴² The plight of these war refugees was discussed in “news reels, photographs, and the dispatches of war correspondence”.²⁴³ The *Manchester Guardian* cited the arrangements being made for Dutch and Belgian refugees and appeals for clothing and offers of accommodation. These refugees:

would go first to a central receiving depot, where a medical officer would be in attendance. They would then be moved to provisional billets in public halls and club premises ... finally they would be transferred as soon as possible to the private houses whose occupiers had volunteered to receive them.²⁴⁴

Manchester was asked to prepare for 5,000 refugees.

²⁴⁰ I can not find the exact date for this White Paper but it was published 1939 after the outbreak of war.

²⁴¹ Kapp and Mynatt, p. 77.

²⁴² Quoted in Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 118.

²⁴³ *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1940, p. 4.

²⁴⁴ *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 May 1940, p. 4.

Only a small fraction of the expected refugees from these countries actually arrived in Britain and the empty places were not taken up by other refugees. Nevertheless, 300,000 was a huge number of refugees for the government to consider allowing to enter Britain, especially as it is estimated that during the period 1933-1939 only 80,000 refugees in total had been granted asylum in Britain.²⁴⁵ This willingness to accept refugees from allied nations, irrespective of religion or race, was linked to the view that nationality was the most reliable indicator of loyalties in a time of war. These refugees were regarded as allies who could safely be admitted.

Enemy nationals: refugees from the German Reich

While the emphasis on nationality helped refugees from Britain's allies, once war broke out it worked against refugees from Britain's enemy—Germany. From September 1939, suspicion fell increasingly on all Germans—even Jewish ones. On 4 September 1939, Sir John Anderson, the Home Secretary, announced there was to be an immediate review of Germans and Austrians in Britain. The main task of these one-man tribunals was to separate enemy aliens into three categories: "A" (to be interned), "B" (exempt from internment but subject to certain restrictions) and "C" (exempt from internment and from restrictions).²⁴⁶ The restrictions placed on those aliens who fell into category "B" included not being permitted to possess certain items such as cameras, maps, arms or to travel more than five miles from their home without police permission.²⁴⁷ Some 74,000 "enemy" aliens were examined by the tribunals, with 569 were classed in category "A", 6,782 in category "B" and the rest (some 66,000) in category "C".²⁴⁸ These measures were seen for the time being as sufficient. Sir John Anderson announced in March 1940 in the House of Commons that "the majority of Germans and Austrians in this country are refugees from Nazi oppression." He went on to point out that while some 74,000

²⁴⁵ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 11.

²⁴⁶ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, pp. 76-7.

²⁴⁷ R. Stent, *A Bespattered Page?* (London, 1980), p. 36.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Germans and Austrians were registered with the police, only 1,959 were interned.²⁴⁹ The Home Secretary was reminding Members of Parliament that the vast majority were refugees and should be treated accordingly. A “special” tribunal was also set up to examine the cases of Czech refugees. These refugees were regarded as “friendly” aliens and were not the subject of public hostility. Consequently, their examination, which did not require personal attendance, was “soft-pedalled”.²⁵⁰

The public was initially sympathetic to German and Austrian refugees because they were aware that they had fled the Third Reich victims of Nazi persecution. In a Mass-Observation survey from April 1940, sympathy for German and Austrian refugees was repeatedly mentioned. Comments like: “You can’t help feeling sorry for the poor things”, “This is a free country kind of thing. They have to go somewhere” and “I feel sorry for them. What would it be like for us if we was to ‘ave nowhere like them” were common.²⁵¹ A. J. P. Taylor argued that “Nazi Treatment of the Jews” before the outbreak of the war “did more than anything else to turn English moral feeling against Germany”.²⁵² François Lafitte believed this sentiment continued until May 1940.²⁵³ Additionally, it seems that a large section of the population was uncertain about official policy towards refugees, and in particular the number of refugees in Britain. The public was also becoming increasingly worried about the deteriorating situation in Europe.

In January 1940, some newspapers, such as the *Sunday Express* and the *Daily Sketch*, began a campaign fanning suspicions that some refugees’ loyalty was dubious. There was a great deal of information in the press during the first few months of 1940 about a potential fifth column, enemy aliens, and internment. The press was charged with provoking fear and inducing panic during this period, even accusing refugees of acting as spies and saboteurs. In the *Manchester Guardian* in March 1940, there was an article about refugees as smoke screen for spies. It argued that:

²⁴⁹ Hansard, 21 March 1940, p. 2107.

²⁵⁰ Kapp and Mynatt, p. 92.

²⁵¹ Mass-Observation FR 79, 25 April 1940, p. 6.

²⁵² Quoted in Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 9.

²⁵³ Lafitte, p. 67.

the danger in this war is that there are such a large number of so-called refugees. A large percentage of them are no doubt quite genuine and perfectly harmless, but it has provided the enemy with a most marvellous smoke screen for insinuating enemy agents into the country.²⁵⁴

In *The Internment of Aliens*, published in 1940, François Lafitte stated that generally the opinion of the public was friendly towards refugees until “a campaign against refugees which began quite suddenly in the third week of January in several newspapers”.²⁵⁵ This campaign continued in the following months but it was not until May that it gained support from the public and in government circles.²⁵⁶

In addition to the anti-refugee campaign in the press, in March 1940 the government established revision tribunals. These tribunals were set up to review cases examined by the previous tribunals, especially category “C” cases that were in doubt, and to consider the position of refugees living in the “protected areas”.²⁵⁷ These tribunals ordered the internment of some 300 people classified in categories “B” and “C” by the former tribunals.²⁵⁸ However, after having reviewed only 25 percent of their cases, indiscriminate internment was implemented and the programme was abandoned. Contemporary scholars, Yvonne Kapp and Margaret Mynatt, were extremely critical of these tribunals and asked “What exactly they existed for, except as a sop to anti-refugee opinion in the War Office”.²⁵⁹

By April/May 1940, there were signs that this suspicion was increasingly shared by a significant section of the general public. A Mass-Observation survey on public feeling about aliens from April 1940 stated that “it would seem that among the masses a sort of paranoia about this enemy in our midst exists in embryo and has recently been fanned by the press”.²⁶⁰ Tom Harrison, the author of this report and founder of Mass-Observation, believed it was a shortage of factual information on the alien policy and number of aliens

²⁵⁴ *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 March 1940, p. 7.

²⁵⁵ Lafitte, p. 67.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

²⁵⁷ Kapp and Mynatt, p. 94.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁶⁰ Mass-Observation FR 79, 25 April 1940, p. 8. Stress in the original.

in Britain which “left a situation of vagueness and bewilderment which fulfils all the necessities for a work-up of feeling into something which might easily border on temporary hysteria”.²⁶¹ This same survey concluded that many people questioned believed there were too many refugees in Britain, some saying “they’re getting far too much lately” or “Too many let in – we won’t ever get them out again”, without knowing the actual number of refugees in Britain.²⁶² The campaign in the press encouraged feelings of paranoia and hysteria.

The government was also very concerned about a potential fifth column, enemy aliens and internment. The House of Commons spent much time discussing these issues. Some members of parliament believed that the measures categorising aliens at the tribunals were sufficient, that the majority of Germans and Austrians in Britain were in fact refugees and that there was no reason why people should become hysterical about a potential fifth column. On the other hand, some members of the parliament shared the public’s fears and felt uneasy about the numbers of aliens left at large in Britain. An article in *The Times* stated that “there have been recently some signs of uneasiness even in the House of Commons at the number of technically enemy aliens in our midst whose activities are alleged to be uncontrolled”.²⁶³ Political circles were thus divided on these issues before the situation in Europe deteriorated in April 1940.

The invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, and the Low Countries and France in May, along with reports of a “fifth column” that had assisted in Germany’s astonishing victories in Western Europe increased suspicion towards “enemy” aliens and made the previous measures seem insufficient. These reports from the Netherlands suggested that the German victory could in part be explained by the subversive activities of a German “fifth column” which had paved the way for the advancing forces intensified mistrust and doubt towards enemy aliens.²⁶⁴ This notion was given credibility by the memorandum on the “Fifth Column Menace” written by Sir Neville Bland, the British Minister at The

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 2.

²⁶³ *The Times*, 23 March 1940, p. 7.

²⁶⁴ B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 79.

Hague, which was circulated in government circles. He cited a number of examples of fifth column activity in the Netherlands and believed that:

when the signal is given, as it will scarcely fail to be when Hitler so decides, there will be satellites of the monster *all over the country* who will at once embark on widespread sabotage and attacks on civilians and the military indiscriminately. We cannot afford to take this risk. *All* Germans and Austrians, at least, ought to be interned at once.²⁶⁵

In addition, the German occupation of the Channel ports laid Britain open to the direct threat of invasion.²⁶⁶ Thus the security of the nation was the most important concern at this time.

The result of this anti-alien feeling was the adoption of policy of internment and subsequently deportation. Wholesale internment began in May 1940. Aliens and refugees who had been categorised in class “C” who were not seen as a threat and whose loyalty was not in question were interned in camps along with category “A” and “B” aliens. On 11 May 1940, a protected area along the southern and eastern coasts was established by Churchill. All male aliens of German and Austrian nationality between the ages of sixteen to sixty living in this area were rounded up and interned.²⁶⁷ Five days later, this was extended to “all enemy aliens, both male and female, between the ages 16 and 70” throughout the country. The majority of internees were taken to a series of camps on the Isle of Man. The conditions in these camps varied. *Anderson’s Prisoners*, published in 1940, was a critical account of the government’s policies of internment and deportation. The author was said to be “Judex” but H. D. Hughes was credited with being the person behind it. In *Anderson’s Prisoners*, the worst conditions were attributed to the camp at Worst Mills in Bury. These conditions included “disused machinery and the floors ... covered in filth, the buildings ... infested with rats and bugs”.²⁶⁸ Internees were housed in tents, houses, and sometimes premises such as stables and factories. In Hutchinsons Camp internees set up a camp university called the “University of Liberal Arts” and a

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, pp. 79-80.

²⁶⁶ “Judex”, *Anderson’s Prisoners* (London, 1940), p. 103.

²⁶⁷ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 79.

²⁶⁸ “Judex”, p. 68.

technical school to teach fellow internees.²⁶⁹ There were numerous criticisms from internees and advocates which include the mixing of anti-Nazi refugees with Nazis and Fascists in the same camps, the lack of communications internees had with family and friends, the separation of husbands and wives, and the internment of the elderly and infirm. However, the main criticism by internees was that they were forced to remain idle and were not allowed to help in the war effort.

About 8,000 internees were then deported to Canada and Australia in terrible conditions. Internees on the *Dunera* troopship faced especially horrific conditions. The ship left Liverpool and journeyed to Melbourne and Sydney and the voyage lasted two months. When internees embarked the *Dunera* they had their luggage and personal items searched and belongings taken off them by the crew. Ronald Stent came to Britain as a refugee from Berlin in 1934. He was interned on the Island of Man and he was released to enlist in the Pioneer Corps. After the war, in which he gained a commission and ended up on the GHQ India, he studied history and became a lecturer. Stent described how prisoners were then sent down to the bottom of the ship where they were shut up in the holds in appalling conditions:

these long dark and cavernous holds were bare of everything except for a few benches and some trestle tables. Eventually they were supplied some hammocks, but there were only enough of them for the elderly and for the invalids; the great majority throughout the eight weeks journey slept either on the tables or benches or on straw palliasses on the floor.²⁷⁰

Ablutions proved difficult, water mostly came from the sea, soap was rarely available and internees had had toothbrushes, shaving kits, and changes of clothes taken off them on embarkation.²⁷¹ When these internees arrived in Australia they were “physically and mentally exhausted”, then “Beaten and sworn-at” as they left the ship.²⁷²

The policies of indiscriminate internment and deportations were very controversial amongst the general public and in government circles. Members of the public wrote

²⁶⁹ Stent, pp. 174-6.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 117-8.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 133.

hundreds of letters to the editor, variously expressing either support for general internment²⁷³ or advocating more lenient policies.²⁷⁴ A majority of these letters wanted a review of the internment and deportation policy. One was by Gilbert Murray who believed “much of the deplorable mismanagement of the refugee question is due to haste and lack of thought”. While he believed that this could “be excused in a nation faced by imminent peril”, he urged his compatriots not to “become so blinded by the emotions of war as to be unable to distinguish between friends and enemies”²⁷⁵. Others called for a complete reversal of policy.²⁷⁶ The House of Commons spent much time discussing these issues and even allocated time for discussion in two adjournment debates in July and August 1940.²⁷⁷ In these debates, it was not indiscriminate internment itself that was criticised but the way it was carried out. Members of Parliament repeatedly stated that they believed it was right that the safety of the nation should come first and that they were not questioning the policy of internment but instead the way it was implemented.²⁷⁸ Several Members of Parliament mentioned that the policies of internment and deportation had “done us great harm in the eyes of some Americans”.²⁷⁹

The real turning-point in attitudes to internment came in July 1940 as a result of the *Arandora Star* catastrophe. This liner sailed for Canada on 30 June 1940 with approximately 1,100 “enemy” aliens onboard. The estimates of those onboard and who they actually were varies as no accurate list seems to have survived. The *Arandora Star* was hit by a German torpedo and sank off the west coast of Ireland on 2 July 1940. Over 650 internees drowned and there were numerous allegations of anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist refugees having been mistakenly selected for deportation.²⁸⁰ This disaster provoked outspoken criticism of the internment and deportation policy by the press and the public and in Parliament. A swift reversal of policy was implemented. The government set up two bodies: the Lytton Committee and the Asquith Committee. The Lytton Committee

²⁷³ *The Manchester Guardian*, 1 July 1940, p. 8.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 June 1940, p. 10; *ibid.* 1 July 1940, p. 8; *ibid.*, 3 July 1940, p. 10, *The Times*, 2 July 1940, p. 9.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 July 1940, p. 5.

²⁷⁶ *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 July 1940, p. 8.

²⁷⁷ Hansard, 10 July 1940 Adjournment and the Summer Adjournment 22 August 1940.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1940, p. 1224.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1265.

²⁸⁰ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, pp. 89-90.

pressed for a quick reversal of the general internment policy and its report was published as a White Paper at the end of July.²⁸¹ The White Paper specified certain classes who were eligible for release, they included:

persons under 16 and over 70 years of age; the invalid or the infirm; persons who occupied key positions in industries engaged in work of national importance; scientists, research workers and persons of academic distinction for whom work of national importance in their special fields is available; doctors of medicine and dentists; internees who are accepted for enlistment in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps; persons about to embark for emigration overseas; and special cases of extreme hardship, e.g. where a parent, wife or child is dangerously ill.²⁸²

Deportations also ceased. Most internees seeking freedom had to prove not only that they were not a threat to security but also that they could help in the war effort, whether that took the form of being engaged in work of “national importance” or enlisting. The White Paper also made it clear that the release of persons within any category could be refused on grounds of security.²⁸³ Releases were slow and this was criticised. By August 1941 only approximately 1,300 refugees were still interned in Britain and in 1941 some deportees were permitted to return to Britain.²⁸⁴ Although some policies took time to be implemented, July 1940 saw the last significant change in refugee policy.

The reversal in policy was due to combination of factors. The policies of wholesale internment and deportation were controversial to begin with. When the public and members of parliament learnt about the hasty way in which policy was implemented, the horrific conditions in the camps, the disastrous deportations, and the sinking of the *Arandora Star* liner there was an outcry for a change of policy. John Maynard Keynes claimed he had “not met a single soul, inside or outside government departments, who is not furious at what is going on”. Several civil servants also helped François Lafitte compile his condemnatory study, *The Internment of Aliens*.²⁸⁵ Some members of parliament were also concerned about the impact these policies would have on their prestige and were especially anxious about American criticism of these policies. But it

²⁸¹ T. Kushner and K. Knox, p. 177.

²⁸² Quoted in Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 96.

²⁸³ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 96.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁸⁵ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 171.

was public outcry and genuine remorse in government circles that pressed for the u-turn in policy.

The period September 1939 to July 1940, then, saw two major changes implemented for refugees from the German Reich. The first change of policy (internment and deportation) was brought about by “international events” in the context of an overriding concern for national security brought about by the Nazi invasion of Western Europe. However, the second change was a result of domestic criticism, genuine remorse and fear of losing American sympathy.

Employment of refugees

With the outbreak of war, restrictions on the employment of refugees were initially removed. The order forbidding aliens to work was revoked in November 1939 which resulted in the employment of some 17,000 refugees between that date and May 1940.²⁸⁶ The order applied only to refugees who had been classified by the tribunals as category “C” (exempt from internment and from restrictions) and to Czech refugees.²⁸⁷ The decision to allow selected refugees to work was probably due to two concerns. First the economic situation was greatly improved and there was no longer an unemployment problem. On the contrary, there was a labour shortage caused by mobilisation which refugee labour could help to alleviate. By freeing British workers to enlist or work in war industries, refugee workers assisted in the war effort. Second, by November the government was aware of the dire financial situation of the voluntary organisations, and it most likely hoped that by allowing refugees to work it would take some of the strain off these organisations. Moreover, in December the government committed public funds to the maintenance of refugees, and if some refugees were self-supporting then there would be fewer people that the state would have to maintain.

²⁸⁶ Kapp and Maynatt, p. 80.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

Many members of the general public were more concerned about labour market competition than security. In a Mass-Observation survey of April 1940 economic issues were a chief concern. Those questioned about their feelings towards aliens said things like “I think as they’re getting jobs underhanded”, “There’s too many. We must look to our own unemployed first” and “They’re taking our men’s jobs away from them”.²⁸⁸ None of the people questioned were worried about security concerns in regards to aliens working, instead they were anxious about them taking British jobs.

The politicians, however, were worried about security and it was this concern that motivated the re-imposition of restrictions in July 1940. It is strange that restrictions on employment were not reintroduced until July 1940 when wholesale internment had begun in May 1940. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the policy of general internment was implemented hastily and it was in July when releases had begun that officials considered employment of aliens and decided that they would pose a security concern hence the re-imposition of the order forbidding aliens to work. While pre-war restrictions had been driven by self-interested pressure groups that feared competition, economic issues, and by worries about arousing anti-refugee feeling, the re-imposition of restrictions in 1940 was driven by security concerns on the part of the government. Security concerns were paramount at this time. The government was deeply concerned about aliens being employed in protected areas, near air fields and ammunition plants, and as domestic servants for military personal.²⁸⁹ For instance, in March 1940, Sir Gifford Fox asked in the House of Commons whether “any enemy aliens are employed in military hospitals in this country”.²⁹⁰ Members of Parliament felt that for security reasons restrictions forbidding aliens from working needed to be re-imposed due to Germany’s victories in Europe and the threat of a German invasion of Britain.

The outbreak of war led to restrictions on the employment of aliens being removed due to a labour shortage and the hope of making refugees self-supporting but eight months later the government felt bound to re-impose these restrictions. After the catastrophic defeats

²⁸⁸ Mass-Observation, FR 79, 25 April 1940, p. 4.

²⁸⁹ *The Times* 21 June 1940, p. 4.

²⁹⁰ Hansard, 12 March 1940, p. 983.

that followed Hitler's invasion of Western Europe in April 1940, the British government's overwhelming concern was for the security of Britain and this trumped all economic issues, including public concerns over labour market competition.

Palestine

At the very least, the outbreak of war reinforced the May 1939 White Paper's decision to rule out the use of Palestine as a solution to the Jewish refugee problem. Despite its controversial nature, the 1939 White Paper remained the basis for the British government's policy on Palestine throughout the war. During this period, the British government once more tried to conciliate the interests of Zionist Jews, Palestinian Arabs, and various Arab states. However, the need for Arab cooperation during the war tilted government policy towards the Arabs, ruling out a "Palestinian solution" to the refugee problem while the conflict lasted. As indeed it had since the invasion of Czechoslovakia when it was made clear that war was likely in March 1939. Bernard Wasserstein argues the White Paper was "intended to 'appease' the Arab population in Palestine, and thereby to help prevent outbreaks of anti-British feeling in the Middle East at a time when Britain could ill afford to keep large numbers of troops there for internal security duties".²⁹¹ The British managed to achieve a degree of calm in the Middle East during this period. Discontent in Egypt was contained and the anti-British coup d'état in Iraq was repressed. By the spring of 1939, the Palestinian Arab Revolt had been crushed and the White Paper had achieved the assent of some nationalists. Furthermore, the Arab nationalists in Palestine were in a state of disarray by this time.²⁹² In Palestine, the British were confronted with the problem of gaining the loyalty of the nationalist Palestinian leaders—or at least rendering them neutral for the duration of the war—without alienating the Arab opposition or causing the Jews to rebel. From the outbreak of war until October 1942, the Britain solved this problem by keeping the Arab nationalists in disarray and by rigidly adhering to the White Paper's immigration and land provisions which placated the

²⁹¹ Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, p. 26.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

nationalist Palestinian population. British officials abandoned the projected constitutional reform in Palestine so as to pacify the Jews.²⁹³

Conclusion

From the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, concerns with national security had become increasingly important in refugee policy. With the outbreak of war, they acquired an overriding importance in nearly every decision pertaining to refugee policy; this was especially accurate after the invasion of Western Europe in April/May 1940. This means that the international context that influenced refugee policy was greatly simplified. It also means that the complex values and assumptions that guided the response to changes in the international context were also greatly simplified. Many values and assumptions continued to be relevant to decisions on refugees, but almost every one of them was subordinated to and structured by the imperative of national survival. Public opinion continued to influence the government's decisions regarding refugees, especially with respect to internment and deportation policies, but public opinion was obsessed with questions of national security and the winning of the war. The internment and deportation policies were overturned because of public outcry and moral concern on the part of the government but the classes of internees who were released were carefully vetted so they did not pose a threat to security and the termination of the deportation policy likewise was not a threat to security. Moral concerns and public pressure had driven the government to look more closely at what national security required, then modify its stance accordingly. So morality played a part, but not at any significant expense to national security. Humanitarian sentiment was still an influence, but when it conflicted with security considerations it usually took second place. This was because members of the British public knew that a victory for Hitler meant death to every humanitarian cause they believed in. Economic considerations continued to influence debates about whether to let German and Austrian aliens work, but decisions on this issue now hinged principally on a judgement about whether their contribution to the war effort

²⁹³ Hurewitz, p. 115.

would outweigh the possibility that some of them would sabotage production or pass information on to German spies. Keeping government expenditure on refugees to a minimum remained important, but not nearly as important as national security. The government therefore committed itself to the costly exercise of internment. Arab views continued to influence British policy on Palestine, as they had since the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. However, we have seen that this was because, in the second and third periods, Britain desperately needed Arab cooperation if it were to prevent the Middle East's oil supplies from falling into German hands. These points all indicate elements of continuity in the influence on British decision-making about refugee issues. Nonetheless, these influences no longer operated relatively independently of national security issues as they had in pre-war times. They were now informed by the imperative of national survival and they operated within limits that it set.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to identify the key factors that drove British refugee policy in the period March 1938 to July 1940, and to evaluate their relative significance over time. I divided the period of study into three phases (March-September 1938, October 1938 to August 1939, September 1939 to July 1940), in order to explore how a range of factors varied in importance in a political and international environment that was rapidly changing. Having looked in turn at the significance of these factors during each of the three phases, I will now venture to make some general observations about the overall impact on British refugee policy of foreign policy, economic concerns, domestic British politics, and humanitarianism.

There can be little doubt that, during the whole of the period between the Anschluss and the summer of 1940, the primary influence on the formation and implementation of British refugee policy was the international situation. Developments on the international stage were the motor that drove British refugee policy. It was above all as a result of events in Central and East-Central Europe that the refugee crisis existed in the first place. In considering how to respond to the refugee crisis, the British government was hugely influenced by concerns over its relations with other countries. However, though refugee policy was the handmaiden of foreign policy, it was not its slave. Foreign policy did not by itself dictate the precise form taken by British refugee policy. The response of the British government to the refugee crisis was modulated by economic concerns, domestic political factors, humanitarianism, and by the habits, traditions and assumptions of British political culture.

Of fundamental importance was Britain's relationship with Germany. The evolution of refugee policy broadly reflected the rise and fall of appeasement. The key turning points of British refugee policy – the Anschluss with Austria, the annexation of the Sudetenland, the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia, and the outbreak of World War Two – all occurred as a direct result of decisions made in Berlin. Between March and September 1938, when appeasement was at its zenith, British policy to refugees was relatively severe and

unsympathetic. Continued German aggression in Central Europe, however, discredited appeasement and led to a worsening of Anglo-German relations. At the same time, the persecution of Jews and other “unwanted” groups in Germany and Austria became so barbaric that even the appeasers in the British government could no longer look the other way. As a result, the British not only became more critical of Nazi racial persecution, they also became increasingly sympathetic to the plight of the Nazis' victims. The invasion of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 demonstrated the bankruptcy of appeasement and transformed the influence of the “German Question” on British refugee policy. Before March 1939, the overriding goal of British foreign policy was to find a negotiated and peaceful resolution of the diplomatic crisis in Central Europe, and refugee policy was formulated and implemented in the light of this prime consideration. After March 1939, though the British government still hoped for peace, it began to prepare for a war that now looked increasingly likely. The “German Question” remained important, but from March 1939 its importance was evaluated above all in terms of national security. This had a knock-on impact on refugee policy. Decisions about—for instance—Jewish migration to Palestine, were evaluated in the light of the likely impact of those decisions on Britain's ability to defend itself. Once war had actually broken out in September 1939, the issue of national security acquired an overriding importance and influenced nearly every decision pertaining to refugee policy. Concerns about national security became even more intense after the Nazi conquest of Western Europe in April and May 1940. In an atmosphere of panic about an imminent invasion of Britain, a policy was adopted towards refugees—internment—that made no sense at all in neither economic nor humanitarian terms.

Though the key international relationship that influenced refugee policy was with Germany, the British government was also aware that its refugee policy had implications for its relations with other foreign countries and ethnic groups. Concern about its relationship with the Arab world, for example, had a significant impact on the refugee policies of the British government. At the start of our period, the British, although tilting towards the Arabs, were unsure whether to favour the Arab or the Jewish view on the issue of Jewish migration to Palestine. With the German invasion of Bohemia and

Moravia, however, the security interests of the British state—above all in terms of Britain's access to oil—demanded peace in the Middle East and a friendly relationship with Arab states. As a direct consequence, British policy in Palestine became rather more favourable to the Arab point of view (though not to the extent that all the Arabs' grievances were satisfied). The relationship with the Americans, by contrast, exerted surprisingly little influence on British refugee policy. The British government knew that, if war should break out with Germany, Britain would need the support and resources of the United States. As a result, the British government was keen to develop the closest possible relationship with the Americans. That the British agreed, reluctantly, to attend the Evian Conference and become a member of the IGCR was largely a result of American pressure. On the other hand, the Americans also wanted Britain to allow large-scale Jewish immigration into Palestine. Yet on this issue the British chose to appease Arab rather than American opinion. Had the Americans asserted themselves more vigorously on this issue, the British might well have responded differently. But so concerned were the Americans by the threat of Germany that—at least in private—they conceded that the issue of Palestine must be allowed to cast a shadow on Anglo-American relations.

Economic considerations during the period in question were not a motor of refugee policy, but they did significantly inform the specific responses of the British government to a refugee crisis that had been created by developments at the level of international relations. For a combination of reasons, the British government was extremely reluctant to fund refugee policy and it constantly strove to minimise the impact of the refugees on the public purse and on the British economy. First, the government was concerned that spending public on the refugees, or allowing refugees to work, would generate discontent and anti-refugee feeling amongst the British population. This concern was exacerbated by the difficult economic environment of the late 1930s and by the high levels of unemployment that still plagued many parts of Britain. The government believed the cost of financing refugee policy should instead be the responsibility of the voluntary organisations. A second reason for the government's reluctance to fund refugee policy was that it might set a dangerous precedent. If it became widely known that the British

were willing to foot the bill, the governments of Germany and of other countries might well respond by ratcheting up the level of persecution of their Jewish and other minorities. When the British government, for the first time, established a major fund to help refugees—the Czech Fund—British officials repeatedly stressed that the Czech refugees were a special case, and that the Czech Fund was a “once off” act of generosity that would not be repeated. In the end, however, the government was eventually compelled—with great reluctance—to accept a share of the burden of dealing with refugees from countries other than Czechoslovakia. In part this was because it proved, in practice, increasingly difficult to maintain the distinction between refugees from Germany and Austria and those from Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the huge increase in the numbers of refugees in the final months before the outbreak of war created a situation with which the Jewish and other voluntary organisations simply could not cope.

Another factor that mediated the government's response to the refugee crisis was concern about the impact of refugee policy on the domestic political situation. At the outset of our period, for example, government ministers and officials were worried that allowing too many Jewish refugees to settle in Britain might provoke an escalation of anti-Semitism, which in turn might pose a threat to public order and foster the growth of extreme right-wing political movements such as the BUF and the Nordic League. Officials used this fear as a reason to limit the number and types of refugees they allowed into Britain. Anti-Semitism, or rather the government's fear of anti-Semitism, became somewhat less important from “Kristallnacht”, when Germany's true intentions concerning the Jews became evident. The brutality of "Kristallnacht" discredited both the Nazi government and organisations such as the BUF in the eyes of all but the most hardened anti-Semites. The vast majority of politicians, officials and members of the public, including many who had hitherto harboured anti-Semitic sentiments, were horrified by the bestial actions of the Nazis. Accordingly, it became less acceptable to express anti-Semitic views in public, for to do so was by implication to condone what the Nazis were doing. Once war had broken out, public anti-Semitism became not just “bad form”, but unpatriotic. Those most closely associated with anti-Semitism, such as Oswald Mosley and William Joyce, were now widely regarded as traitors. Though anti-Semitism did not disappear, and no doubt

continued to exert an influence on British policy at a covert level, it largely disappeared from public discourse of the refugee issue.

Political debate about the refugee issue seems to have cut across party lines. There was no clear correlation between views on refugee issue and party affiliation. There were pro-refugee politicians in all the major parties: Victor Cazalet was a Conservative MP, Norman Angell a Labour MP, Eleanor Rathbone an Independent MP, Sir John Hope Simpson a Liberal. It is perhaps not surprising that the refugee issue was not subordinated to party politics, for the refugee issue was itself in large part a component part of the larger controversy about appeasement. All the main parties were divided on appeasement. Since one's views on the refugee issue were likely to be coloured by one's views on appeasement, it follows that views on the refugee issue were equally divided. One possibility is that the more hostile somebody was to appeasement, the more likely they were to favour a more generous refugee policy. But this was not always the case; Victor Cazalet was an advocate of a more liberal refugee policy and a supporter of appeasement.²⁹⁴ After the outbreak of war, as before, no party wanted to be obviously anti-humanitarian. At the same time, no party wanted to be seen as indifferent to the security issues raised by the presence of German nationals in Britain. So the tension between humanitarianism and national security, which was the key to understanding refugee policy during the war, was felt keenly in all parties.

Another domestic political factor that exerted an influence on refugee policy was public opinion, in particular as mediated through press opinion and the lobbying of pressure groups. Public opinion, however, could cut both ways. For instance some pressure groups wanted a more lenient immigration policy, while others a more restrictive policy. Press opinion could swing from being extremely sympathetic to the plight of refugees to hostile, and then to sympathetic again. This can be seen in the compassionate response to "Kristallnacht", the panic over the "fifth column" scare in 1940 and then the backlash against internment.

²⁹⁴ H. Matthew and B. Harrison, vol. 10, p. 711.

Unlike anti-Semitism, the importance of humanitarianism increased during the period March 1938 to July 1940. At first, humanitarianism took the form of a latent British tradition of welcoming refugees. But there was a contradiction between policy and discourse. Government discourse on refugees referred to Britain's refugee policy as being humanitarian, whereas in practise policy was relatively severe and unsympathetic to refugees. At the Evian Conference, for instance, the government claimed that humanitarian considerations had led it to adopt an even more liberal policy, yet no additions to the previous categories for admission were offered. While Britain had a tradition of welcoming refugees, the government believed it was not its place to get involved in internal matters of other nations or to fund refugees. This was not because government ministers and officials were unsympathetic at an individual level to the plight of refugees. But, during the 1930s and early 1940s, intervention for purely humanitarian reasons did not occur. Yet from "Kristallnacht" refugees were admitted to Britain for purely humanitarian reasons. With the outbreak of war, when national security acquired an overriding importance in nearly every decision pertaining to refugee policy, humanitarian sentiment was the only factor that challenged the supremacy of national security. The internment and deportation policies were overturned because of moral concern on the behalf of both the public and government. The classes of internees who were released were carefully vetted so they did not pose a threat to security and the termination of the deportation policy likewise was not a threat to security. But it was humanitarian concern that drove the government to look more closely at what national security required, then modify its stance accordingly. It was not until after the conclusion of World War Two and knowledge of Holocaust, according to Claudena Skran, that human rights received "widespread recognition as a legitimate international concern". "Before then a government's treatment of its citizens within its own territory was deemed to be purely a domestic affair."²⁹⁵

The British government had little experience of dealing with the kind of refugee crisis generated by the Nazis. The initial British responses were governed by the traditions and political culture inherited from the past, and with a traditional focus on bilateral foreign

²⁹⁵ Skran, p. 8.

relations—in this case with Germany. However, British policy was beset from the outset by a series of fundamental contradictions. The British government insisted that the refugees could not be a burden on the public purse, yet it also—by preventing the refugees from taking up employment—denied them of the means of supporting themselves. The government claimed to be blind, in its refugee policy, to issues of race and religion, but in reality it made the Jewish organisations a cornerstone of refugee policy and it was clear in public discourse that everybody knew that the refugee crisis had a strong racial aspect. The government—for political purposes—used the language of humanitarianism and harped on the British tradition of welcoming refugees, whilst at the same time arguing that humanitarianism should not dictate refugee policy.

To a degree, the story of the evolution of refugee policy in the period 1938-40 is the story of the problems caused by these contradictions and the way these contradictions were—at least partially—resolved. By the end of this period, the government had accepted a degree of responsibility for providing economic support to refugees, it had accepted to a greater degree the racialised nature of the refugee crisis (for example the internment of Jewish Germans implied they were seen first as Germans and only then as Jews; their subsequent release implied the opposite), and it had accepted, at least to a degree, that government did have a humanitarian responsibility to refugees.

In addition to being internally inconsistent, refugee policy was formulated and implemented under the influence of a range of external forces (relations with Germany, the countries of East-Central Europe, the Arabs, the Americans, domestic political pressures). Some of these pushed government towards a harsher stance. Some of these pulled refugee policy towards greater lenience. Precisely because government was unsure how to respond to an unprecedented situation, and because government policy was in itself inconsistent, refugee policy between 1938 and 1940 was susceptible to outside pressures, and vacillated like a boat being pushed in one direction by the wind and in another direction by the current.

To a degree, the story of the evolution of refugee policy is the story of how these outside pressures on refugee policy became simplified by the dynamic of international and domestic developments. Pleasing the Nazis became far less important after March 1939 and irrelevant after September 1939. Concerns about East-Central Europe were no longer relevant once the Germans had established a decisive domination of the region. Concerns about the Americans became—ironically—rather less important in terms of refugee policy, primarily because the Americans themselves were becoming increasingly focused on events in Europe than events in Palestine. Concerns about the impact of admitting refugees on anti-Semitism became less pronounced because public anti-Semitism became less socially acceptable. Concerns about the popularity of British fascism became less once Mosley and his colleges discredited themselves and once the BUF had been broken by internment. Concerns about the impact of refugees on unemployment became less and less relevant as unemployment decreased (in part as a result of rearmament) during the later period of this study, and disappeared altogether during the war. Even the government concern about the impact of refugees on the public purse became less relevant once the government had been compelled—albeit reluctantly—to shoulder a degree of financial responsibility.

As a result of this process of simplification, by the third period of this study there were only two players left in the game—national security and humanitarianism. Though the former was dominant (the policy of indiscriminate internment is an example of this) it was not all powerful (this can be seen in the relaxation of internment). Perhaps this reflected the nature of the war itself, which the British the government fought in the name of universal values of freedom and human rights. One of the greatest weapons of the British in the war was their sense that they occupied the moral high ground. Being horrid to refugees, the victims of the very evil they were fighting, would have been inconsistent with the moralistic tone of the British discourse of war.

The period 1938-40 had a substantial significance in the overall evolution of British refugee policy. Nowadays government has a humanitarian responsibility to victims of persecution that transcends their race, religion, nationality and political affiliations. In the

sixteenth century the British had admitted Huguenots because of their Protestant religion, French refugees in the 1790s because they were enemies of the Revolution, and Belgians in World War One because they were members of an allied nationality. But Jews were admitted not because of their religion, political affiliation, or nationality but despite their religion (Britain had strong anti-Semitic trends), their political affiliations (many refugees were Social Democrats and Communists) and nationality (many were Germans). Because of its humanitarian responsibility, government also has a responsibility—if necessary—to provide economic assistance to refugees.

Dealing with refugee issues necessitates a multilateral response. The British were most reluctant to get involved in Evian and the IGCR, fearing it would erode the autonomy of British refugee policy. They only got involved because of American pressure. But their very involvement established a precedent, and paved the way for the subsequent acceptance of the key role of organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in dealing with refugee issues.

Another key feature of the way governments deal with refugee issues today that was prefigured in the period 1938-40 is the importance of domestic political considerations. Then, as now, public and press opinion could cut both ways. There are two types of discourse of refugees: anti-refugee discourse that describes refugees as a mass, sees them as a threat, perhaps as a Fifth Column, and uses terms such as “swarm”, “wave”, “swamped”; the second type is pro-refugee discourse that focuses on the sufferings of refugees as human beings just like us, their helplessness, often with a focus on the miserable circumstances of individual refugees. Both types of discourse were clearly visible in the period 1938-40.

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