

Justice for the Jewish Refugee: The Development of British Refugee Policy, 1930-1945

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On June 20, 1939, two girls from Vienna, Austria boarded a train that would change their lives. After months of anticipation, Ingrid Jacoby and her cousin Lieselotte Jacoby would escape Nazi controlled Austria and travel to the far-off land of Great Britain. Their train buzzed with a nervous excitement preventing the children from falling asleep. As she travelled from Vienna, Austria to Holland to Britain, she, and the hundreds of other children who made this journey, could not have anticipated what waited for them in England.<sup>1</sup> When she and her cousin arrived, they experienced a period of adjustment to their new surroundings and life. The eyes of a child accentuated the slight differences between the familiarity of Austrian urban life and Ingrid's new English village life. Ultimately, Ingrid and Lieselotte adapted to their new situations and led successful lives.

Ingrid was one of the thousands of children who participated in the Kindertransport program and the experiences of Ingrid and her cousin were typical of other refugee children who came to Britain at this time. After the events of Kristallnacht, or "The Night of Broken Glass," on November 9, 1938 when Jewish businesses were vandalized, looted and German and Austrian citizens attacked their Jewish neighbors, Jewish committees in Britain appealed to the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and pleaded for the government to allow 10,000 children from Germany and Austria to come into Great Britain. The government supported program coordinated travel for Jewish children from Germany and Austria to Britain, where British families opened their homes to the children. The program lasted from December 1938 until Germany and Britain declared war in September 1940. Most of the children who participated in the Kindertransport program, like Ingrid and Lieselotte, found happy, safe placements with kind families who took them in and treated the children as their own. Children who hoped to reunite

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<sup>1</sup> Ingrid Jacoby, *My Darling Diary, Volume One: A Wartime Journal – Vienna 1937-39, Falmouth 1939-44*, (Cornwall: United Writers Publications Ltd, 2013), location 590, Kindle.

with their parents became orphans or lost contact with their families. Those expecting familiar cultural norms found themselves in new situations without the mastery of a new language.

The children who came to Britain in 1939 and 1940 represent only a portion of the people who took refuge in Britain during the 1930's and 1940's. Europe in the 1930s and early 1940s saw a large shift in population as different groups of people attempted to leave their homes to escape persecution. The dictators in Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union persecuted against people based on their religion, ability and sexual orientation. The German government, for example, encouraged the Jewish population of the country to emigrate in the early 1930s in an attempt to "purify" their country. Catholics and other political opponents of Hitler also left Germany to avoid persecution or punishment. Many of these refugees travelled to Britain, initially, to escape the harsh, Nazi rule. The British government attempted to provide alternate final destinations for the people escaping mainland-Europe, but many refugees had to make a life for themselves in Britain either temporarily or permanently.<sup>2</sup>

The forced migration from persecution in Austria, Germany, and later other regions in continental Europe and the role of the British government is a topic of debate for historians. On one side, some historians argue that the British government provided enough assistance to the refugees from Central and Eastern Europe. On the other side, historians argue that the government could have done more to make the transition easier.

Using memos, government meeting minutes, official documents, memoirs, and personal accounts, this paper will analyze the response of the British government to the influx of refugees from Central and Eastern Europe between 1930 and 1945, focusing on Jewish refugees. How did immigration policy progress with the rising tensions in Europe? How did events like the

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Hoare "Committee on the Refugee Problem: Interim Report" The National Archives reference CAB 24-288-1 (Memorandum, London, 1939), 2.

Anschluss and Kristallnacht influence British refugee policy? Overall, the immigration policies imposed by the British government were restrictive, but aimed to protect British subjects during a time of war. In the 1930's, the Cabinet primarily focused on recovering from the global economic crisis which had left thousands unemployed or underemployed. Between 1939 and 1945, the War Cabinet shifted their focus to a global war effort to defeat the Axis Powers. Parliament and the Cabinet responded to the call to accept refugees from continental Europe, but repeatedly placed more value on British lives than the lives of those escaping persecution and violence.

### **Historiography**

Historians have debated the impact of British immigration policies on the lives of those directly affected. Most historians agree that, while the government relaxed some of their immigration policies in the mid-1930s, this relaxation did little to make migration to Britain easier. Many people became stuck in the bureaucratic process, resulting in delayed responses and inefficient services. There are a few historians on the other side of this debate who argue that the British government provided more assistance, especially to Jewish refugees, than other nations, giving the country a more favorable analysis overall. Other historians argue local committees provided the most assistance to refugees as they entered the country and began to settle into English life.

Those historians who focus on the shortcomings of the immigration policies enacted by the British government interpret the motivations behind the policies. David Cesarani concludes that fear of rising popular anti-alien sentiments prior to the Second World War overpowered any

consideration for changing the strict pre-existing immigration regulations in Britain.<sup>3</sup> According to Cesarani, after the First World War, a majority of the anti-alien sentiments of English citizens focused on Jewish people, suggesting Fascist, anti-Semitism was not isolated to Central and Eastern Europe. The British government cited fear of anti-Semitism rising if they relaxed immigration regulations as justification for maintaining the status quo. Cesarani also argues that the agreement between the British government and the British Jewish community to help Jewish refugees resettle in English communities resulted in a “fatal bottleneck” after the Anschluss.<sup>4</sup> According to Cesarani, the massive number of applications for entrance into the country and the rapidly declining funds provided by the Jewish committees created this bottleneck. Louise London also finds fault in the justification for the immigration and refugee policies of the British government during the war. London concludes that Britain did not welcome Jewish refugees from Germany for humanitarian reasons. British policy makers viewed the refugee crisis as an immigration matter, rather than a responsibility to save them from their plight.<sup>5</sup> Instead of opening the doors to refugees escaping persecution and countries torn apart by war and providing assistance and supportive organizations to settle European refugees, British policy makers acted out of their own self-interest and failed to assist Jewish refugees adequately.<sup>6</sup> London criticized British politicians for limiting their perspective on this issue to only one that considered the needs of the British citizens and not those who tried to escape the areas experiencing direct

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<sup>3</sup> David Cesarani, “An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-alienism in British Society before 1940,” *Immigrants & Minorities* 11, no. 3 (2010), 25, doi: 10.1080/02619288.1992.9974788.

<sup>4</sup> Cesarani, “An Alien Concept?” 44.

<sup>5</sup> Louise London, “Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940,” pp. 163-90, in *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, ed. David Cesarani, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 163.

<sup>6</sup> Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

conflict. Cesarani and London make some compelling arguments, but their conclusions fail to address the complexity of the wartime situation.

Despite the shortcomings of the British government, some argue that the assistance provided by the British government went above and beyond the protections and provisions implemented in other countries to make the refugees feel welcome. Many refugees originally viewed Britain as a stepping-stone to get to other countries. However, some people never made it to their final destination, and stayed in Britain. In a comparison of the treatment of refugees from the Third Reich in Britain and the U.S., A. J. Sherman concludes that Britain treated their refugees better. Proportionally, Britain accepted more refugees and provided more aid to those escaping persecution.<sup>7</sup> Anthony Grenville also praises British refugee policies because Britain was one of the only countries to put forth an effort to respond to the refugee emergency.<sup>8</sup>

Grenville came to this conclusion through an examination of the documentation of the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), recognizing the difficult circumstances already existing in Britain. Susan Tananbaum examined welfare and educational policies used by the British to assimilate Jewish immigrants. While the efforts to assimilate the Jewish refugees did not always encourage refugees to maintain their customs, they did make an effort to ease the transition into British culture. While the Jewish immigrants did not want to lose the traditions of their cultures, they accepted some efforts to anglicize.<sup>9</sup> While society discouraged speaking German or Austrian, Jewish refugees maintained some of their identity through the war.

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<sup>7</sup> A. J. Sherman, *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933-1939* (Essex: Routledge, 2013), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970: Their Image in AJR Information* (Londra: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Susan L. Tananbaum, "Making Good Little English Children: Infant Welfare and Anglicization Among Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939," *Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 12, no. 2 (1993), 178.

Another group of historians have also addressed the role of refugee organizations in acclimating refugees into British society. While discussing the history of the Birmingham Jewish Refugee Club, Zoë Josephs argues that local refugee organizations provided the vastly important resources to help incoming refugees become acclimated to British society. The Birmingham Jewish Refugee Club dissolved before the end of the war, not because members failed to meet their goal, but because refugees assimilated and settled into their new lives very quickly.<sup>10</sup> In a study of the experiences of the Jewish refugee children, Judith Baumel-Schwartz argued that the development of the Kindertransport program was “basically considered a Jewish issue” in the eyes of the public.<sup>11</sup> She claims that without the efforts of the Jewish Refugee Committee, the Kindertransport program would not have gained traction. According to these historians, refugees would have faced many more struggles without the assistance of the refugee committees.

The British government did offer relief services to those seeking refuge from the war-torn European continent, and formulated their own acclimation programs and guidelines for those who found refuge in Britain. However, the historians who argue for the success of the relief and resettlement programs put in place by the British government focus on the times of relative peace in Britain when the government had more resources to devote to various aid efforts. Those who argue Britain failed in their efforts to respond adequately to the refugee situation that arose in the 1930's criticize British officials for personal motivations and concerns that led to the lack of resources devoted to this issue. There may be a simpler explanation regarding why the British government placed more restrictions on immigrants and refugees from the 1930's through 1945.

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<sup>10</sup> Zoë Josephs, *Survivors: Jewish refugees in Birmingham, 1933-1945* (Oldbury: Meridian, 1988), 51.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938-1945* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2012), 66.

As the threat of war increased, and then revealed itself, the British government, like other wartime governments had to reevaluate their stance on non-natives and the distribution of resources. Acknowledging the rise in anti-alien and fascist groups in continental Europe, as well as within Britain, the government tightened immigration policies and devoted most of their resources to supplying and maintaining their military. The government relied on local communities and refugee committees to provide more immediate and individualized relief services to immigrants and refugees.

### **Demographics**

In order to gain a better understanding of immigration policies in Britain during the 1930's and 1940's, it is important to address the demographics of those who sought refuge in Britain during this time. After the First World War and prior to the enforcement of the Nuremburg Laws in Germany, most of the Jewish immigrants who came to Britain came from Southern and Eastern Europe. There was a shift in country of origin in the mid-1930s. After 1936, as Hitler's Nuremburg laws openly persecuted Jewish people, more people from Germany, and eventually Austria, sought refuge in Britain. With this shift in origin, there is also a shift in socio-economic status, education, traditions and culture.

The Jewish immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who arrived in Britain prior to the 1930s generally came from humble circumstances. They left their homes on farms and initially settled in urban areas, adding complexity to their culture adjustment. They generally struggled to make ends meet at home, coming to Britain with few resources. These early immigrants also often followed a more traditional, orthodox Jewish faith. This sometimes led to minor conflicts between the refugees and the Anglo-Jewry.<sup>12</sup> The Anglo-Jewish population

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<sup>12</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 5.

whose families arrived in Britain during the nineteenth century and had already assimilated to British culture attempted to separate themselves from the Jewish immigrants from Southeastern Europe. Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth century faced similar discrimination, but their descendants found ways to assimilate into British society, modernizing their faith along the way.<sup>13</sup> By the 1920s and 1930s, many of the Anglo-Jewry did not want to associate themselves with the new, orthodox, Jewish immigrants. To establish a support system in their new country, Jewish immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe settled near each other and created their own communities centered on common religious traditions and ethnic traditions.<sup>14</sup> The Jewish immigrants who arrived in Britain during the 1920's and early 1930's faced a considerably different situation compared to the Jewish refugees who arrived after the beginning of the Third Reich in 1933.

In the early years of Adolf Hitler's power, few members of the German Jewish population could predict the fate of those who had Jewish ancestry. Slowly, people began to realize the ultimate plan for the Jewish population under the Nazi regime. Between 1933 and 1938, only 10,000 Germans sought refugee status in Britain.<sup>15</sup> Those who successfully settled in Britain typically came from middle-class and upper class backgrounds. The wealthier German Jewry could afford to pay for a passport, visa and any other documentation required to enter Britain. They could afford to take time off from work to stand in line at the embassy in order to follow through with the refugee application process. The newer wave of immigrants and refugees came from the urban centers in their home countries.<sup>16</sup> While the refugees from central Europe experienced a culture shock when they arrived in the urban centers of Britain, they

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<sup>13</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 10.

typically had an easier transition into British urban society.<sup>17</sup> The refugees did not have to learn the culture of cities as well as the social norms of England, unlike the immigrants who arrived before the 1930s. The refugees who came during the Global Depression in the early 1930's experienced a rigorous application and screening process. Those allowed to enter the country often filled niche fields or could create jobs, preferably able to British workers. Entrepreneurs, along with Jewish academic and scientific experts received a warm welcome. This requirement allowed the government to justify the rise in immigration to the British people, many of whom continued to have difficulty finding work.<sup>18</sup> The British government attempted to ensure the flood of immigrants could lead to a benefit for the British public.

A number of non-Jewish refugees travelled to Britain during this time as well. Anyone who faced persecution or forced labor under the Third Reich attempted to escape in the mid and late 1930's. This included Catholics, leading academics from Germany and Austria, and political enemies of the Nazis and other fascist regimes in Europe. The Catholics and communists who immigrated to Britain at this time also came from middle class and upper class backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> While the academics faced unwanted circumstances in Germany, Austria and Italy, many did not also face religious persecution. British universities invited many leading scholars to fill teaching positions and the Allied forces recruited scientists from Germany, Austria and Italy to develop more efficient food distribution methods, modes of transportation, and new weapons to use against people in their homelands.<sup>20</sup> Again, the British government

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<sup>17</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970* 9.

<sup>18</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970* 11.

<sup>19</sup> Roland Hill, *A Time Out of Joint: A Journey from Nazi Germany to Post-War Britain* (New York: The Radcliffe Press, 2007), 101.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Medwar and David Pyke, *Hitler's Gift: The True Story of the Scientists Expelled by the Nazi Regime*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), 51.

made exceptions in circumstances that helped British society. These groups of refugees joined the tens of thousands of Jewish refugees trying to escape harsh conditions.

The demographics of the children who immigrated to Britain prior to the war also shifted between the early 1930s and the late 1930s. In the early 1930s, the number of children who came to Britain remained low. Children who did immigrate to Britain often came with their families. After 1936, some Jewish parents sent their children to school in Britain. This was a direct result of the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws, which legally segregated the Jewish population from the Aryan race, or Hitler's ideal German population. These laws legally allowed discrimination in the schools. As a result, prominent members of the Jewish community in Germany and Britain translocated and re-founded German schools in England to educate German and English children.<sup>21</sup> After 1938, with the creation of the Kindertransport program, Jewish children made up a larger portion of the population of immigrants into Britain from Germany and Austria.

### **Immigration Policy Prior to World War Two**

Before breaking down the immigration and refugee policies of the 1930's that directly influenced the refugees attempting to escape from the fascist regimes in Central Europe, it is essential to examine the policies leading up to this time period. Historians have done a substantial amount of research on this topic and have concluded that British immigration policies in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were nativist and anti-alien. As in America and France, Britain experienced a shift in immigration patterns in the early twentieth century. Britain saw a large influx of people migrating to the island from their colonial holdings

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<sup>21</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Great Britain and the Jewish Refugee Children 1933-1938*, 20.

in Africa and Asia.<sup>22</sup> These immigrants came to Britain to find jobs and different opportunities that were unique to Britain. Jewish immigrants from the Baltic region also sought new opportunities and wished to escape the persecution they faced in their home countries. The government in Russia and the Baltic region implemented harsh policies discriminating against and persecuting Jewish citizens at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Many saw the western nations as hubs of opportunity and progress in the light of the industrial revolution that took place throughout the nineteenth century.

Nativism shaped the immigration policies and social structures of many western nations in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Britain did not contradict this trend. After the First World War, Parliament passed the Aliens Restriction Amendments Act, which allowed the police to sweep establishments for alien residents and take them into custody for questioning about espionage or involvement in Communist groups. They later passed another law, which allowed law enforcement to stop anyone they believed to be foreign-born and question them about their involvement in illegal activities. This essentially legalized the racial profiling in Britain, as many immigrants from Asia faced the treat of being stopped and questioned about their connections to the rising opioid problem in Britain during the 1920's.<sup>24</sup> Even those who lived in the British Empire experienced systematic discrimination in the early twentieth century. Throughout the Empire, a person's race, class or gender could limit their access to certain benefits of being a British subject like access to education, employment and

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<sup>22</sup> Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?" 37-38.

<sup>23</sup> Gatrell, Peter. "Population Displacement in the Baltic Region in the Twentieth Century: From 'Refugee Studies' to Refugee History." *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007), 45.

<sup>24</sup> Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?" 41.

inheritance.<sup>25</sup> Nativist ideologies limited the support for accepting more refugees and immigrants.

Anti-Semitism was also rampant across Europe during this time. Citizens and governments all over Europe used the Jewish population as a scapegoat for economic and social issues. They became an easy target because they differed from the Christian norm in most European societies, and they often held well-paying jobs. Many people found Jewish professionals untrustworthy, especially during the Great Depression. Public opinion helped shape the policies on immigration, especially in times of economic struggle. British natives pressured their Members of Parliament to place restrictions on immigration, many of whom were Jewish, to limit an influx of workers into the marketplace.<sup>26</sup> They wanted to ensure that immigrants were not arriving in Britain and taking job opportunities away from the British workers, especially during a time of global depression.

The immigration policies for much of the 1930's did not differ too much from those implemented right after the First World War. Those wishing to enter Britain had to fill out a lengthy application. This included gaining permission to leave from a person's country of origin and applying to enter Britain.<sup>27</sup> Immigration officers had to approve every application, giving them a lot of power to decide who entered Britain. The government considered it essential that "the interests of [Britain] must predominate over all other considerations."<sup>28</sup> Once someone's application passed through the review process, the government would send a letter

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<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?" 46.

<sup>27</sup> Herbert Morrison, "Admission to the United Kingdom of a Limited Number of Jewish Refugees from Unoccupied France," The National Archives reference CAB 66-29-7, (Memorandum, London, 1942), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Sherman, *Island of Refuge*, 30.

acknowledging the approval of the applicant and that they could enter Britain legally.<sup>29</sup> Since Britain was experiencing a depression, immigrants could not legally work without gaining permission from the Ministry of Labor.<sup>30</sup> Parliament created this restriction to protect British workers and to counteract the concern voiced by many anti-immigrant groups that alien workers would take the already limited job opportunities from the British people. As a result, many immigrant women who wanted to work became domestic servants through backdoor and under-the-table deals.<sup>31</sup> Men who wanted to work had to prove that they had some unique skill or could create a business that would then create jobs for British workers.<sup>32</sup> Refugee organizations also guaranteed that Jewish refugees would not become dependent on taxpayer money when they settled in Britain.<sup>33</sup> Local committees attempted to fulfill this promise through fundraisers and collections in the community to provide refugees with resources to assist them in their first months. Despite these guarantees, the Home Office used the depression to justify their decisions to restrict the number of refugees and immigrants they allowed into the country.

Throughout the 1930's, organizations such as Central British Fund for German Jewry, Council for German Jewry, The Jew's Temporary Shelter in London and the Jewish Refugee Committee provided assistance to Jewish refugees fleeing persecution. Created in 1933, the Jewish Refugee Committee sought to make the refugee experience easier for refugees and the British government. The committee made a promise to the Home Office that any Jewish refugee

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<sup>29</sup> Jacoby, *My Darling Diary, Volume One*, location 276.

<sup>30</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Morrison, "Admission to the United Kingdom of a Limited Number of Jewish Refugees from Unoccupied France," 2.

admitted into Britain would not be dependent on any public funds for survival.<sup>34</sup> The Anglo-Jewish community vowed to support any Jewish refugee financially until they settled into their new lives. Local synagogues and community leaders created local branches to provide direct support to the refugees who settled in the area.<sup>35</sup> Local refugee organizations helped refugees learn English and adapt to the new Culture. Community leaders also invited new refugees to social gatherings like weddings, Sabbath dinners, Passover meals and Hanukah celebrations.<sup>36</sup> These organizations provided refugees with the social and economic support needed when moving to a new country.

Similar to the Jewish refugee committees, other groups created committees to assist non-Jewish refugees. These groups included the Church of England Committee, the Catholic Committee, the Business Advisory Committee and the Emergency Council of the Society of Friends. These groups predominantly collected money from members in the community to redistribute to the refugees. All of the Refugee organizations reported to the Central Office of Refugees, which worked with the Home Office.<sup>37</sup> These organizations helped make the transition to Britain easier for the refugees and took some pressure off the government.

The British government was grateful for this financial weight to shift, but by 1939, it was obvious that the committees vastly underestimated the cost of supporting the thousands of refugees who flooded into Britain just before the outbreak of the Second World War. In the spring of 1939, the Jewish Refugee Committee appealed to Cabinet to obtain some government assistance in supporting 13,000 refugees. While Britain had not yet declared war with Germany,

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<sup>34</sup> Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler's Germany*, ed, Gerhard Hirschfeld (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1984), 14.

<sup>35</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 45-46.

<sup>37</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 38.

the government was building up their military in preparation for the outbreak of war. The Home Office realized the Central Fund resources were low, but they also recognized the British people had not yet fully recovered from the global depression of the 1930s. The Home Office believed it to be “impracticable to allow the 13,000 refugees to come on to Public Assistance,” fearing a rise in support for organizations like the British Union of Fascists, a far-right, nativist group, if the government provided monetary support to immigrants.<sup>38</sup> As a result, refugee organizations had continue to collect dues from the community and focused more resources on helping families become self-sufficient or finding somewhere else to settle.

While historians criticize the British government for doing too little in the early 1930’s to help Jewish refugees directly, the British government showed concern for the plight of the Spanish people who wished to escape direct military conflict in the early 1930s. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the British government sent aid to Spain in the midst of the Spanish Civil War. This war between the supporters of Francisco Franco and the nationalists ripped Spain apart, dividing families and friends. Despite Britain’s official policy of non-intervention, the British government opened their doors to 2,500 refugees between 1936 and the end of 1937.<sup>39</sup> The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden, made a successful plea to the Cabinet in December 1937 to contribute to an international fund organized by the Society of Friends. The Society of Friends, a Quaker organization in Britain, proposed the creation of an international relief organization to provide a hot meal to each of the 250,000 Spanish children who “have been driven from their homes as a result of the civil war.”<sup>40</sup> Eden proposed the

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<sup>38</sup> Malcolm MacDonald, “Refugees in the United Kingdom,” The National Archives reference CAB 67-3-26, (Memorandum, London, 1939), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Anthony Eden, “Questions Arising from the Refugee Problem in Spain,” The National Archives reference CAB 24-273-27, (Memorandum, London, 1937), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Eden, “Questions Arising from the Refugee Problem in Spain,” 2.

British government authorize a £25,000 contribution to help form the international organization. Without the resource restraint of fighting their own war, the British government directly participated in the relief efforts associated with the Spanish Civil War.

### **The Development of Wartime Refugee Policies**

The British government was hesitant to allow thousands of German and Austrian refugees into the country, even after events such as the Anschluss and Kristallnacht. Public opinion influenced many of the refugee policies enforced immediately before and during the Second World War. The requirements and programs developed between 1938 and 1945 show how public pressure shaped how the British government handled the influx of people who wanted to escape oppression in Central Europe. While Britain did not declare war on Germany until 1939, the year 1938 is included in this section because the acts of German aggression during this year directly influenced the public perception of the refugee crisis.

#### *Visa Requirements*

As a European war became more apparent, the British government started to impose more restrictions in an attempt to screen and limit the people who came into the country. They wanted to reduce the risk of an enemy alien entering the country as a refugee and then passing information back to their home country. By 1938, the British government could predict that the number of people applying to immigrate to Great Britain would skyrocket in the coming years. By requiring every person who wished to enter the country to have a government issued visa, the British Cabinet believed they could have more control over preventing a breach in security, protecting the war effort. Officials also feared that an influx of refugees, particularly Jewish refugees, would fuel the anti-semitic, anti-immigrant, pro-fascist groups already present in Britain because these groups would have more people to target. In order to curb the tide of

refugee migration, the Home Office began to require immigrants and refugees to have visas as part of the application process.<sup>41</sup> The visa process took longer, required more paperwork and was more expensive, further limiting the possibilities for poorer Jewish people to escape persecution.

While the purpose of requiring immigrants and refugees to have visas was to limit the number of people who entered the country, the effort was unsuccessful. In the five years prior to 1938, roughly 10,000 refugees entered Britain. Between 1938 and 1940, over 60,000 refugees entered Britain.<sup>42</sup> This influx coincided with the events of Kristallnacht and other violent attacks on Jewish communities in Germany and Austria.

### *Colonial Effort*

The British government believed the refugee committees ran out of money because refugees stayed in Britain longer than initially planned. When Britain began to accept refugees attempting to escape persecution under the Nazi regime, the government expected refugees to use Britain as a stepping-stone to other countries.<sup>43</sup> Officials expected refugees to continue to the United States, Canada, Brazil, Mexico or Australia. However, very few countries opened their doors wider for the people attempting to escape the violence. Even after the Evian Conference in 1938, in which representatives from more than 20 countries met in France to discuss how the international community would react to the Jewish refugee crisis in Europe, Britain remained one of the only countries to increase their immigration quota for Germans, Italians and Austrians.<sup>44</sup> Faced with a lack of options, many refugees settled in British towns,

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<sup>41</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Hoare "Committee on the Refugee Problem," 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> Winston S. Churchill, "Admission of Refugees to British Territory," The National Archives reference CAB 66-35-13, (Memorandum, London, 1943), 2; Sherman, *Island Refuge*, 169.

making connections with their neighbors and getting involved in refugee committee events.<sup>45</sup>

The Cabinet Committee on the Refugee Problem found this situation unfair since other countries had agreed to develop their own refugee policies and alleviate some of the pressure on Britain. They believed “it would be wrong to take any action which suggested that this country ought to carry the major responsibility for the solution of the refugee problem,” urging other countries to accept more refugees.<sup>46</sup> The British government saw the Jewish refugee crisis as an international issue, which required international cooperation and agreement. While Britain was farther removed from the situation in Germany, officials knew that Great Britain had a limited amount of available space for immigrants and refugees.

One attempt made by the British government to aid the flow of refugees leaving the island included sending refugees to the British colonies. Parliament sent requests to colonial offices throughout the British Empire asking if the colonies could accept a few hundred refugees. However, their attempts were unsuccessful. Colonial officials replied to these requests stating that they could only accept limited numbers of people who could fill specific roles, i.e. one podiatrist, two nurses, three engineers. The colonies claimed they could not support the families of these specialized workers either.<sup>47</sup> If families broke up, there was no guarantee that there would be a reunion. This effort shows that the British government did attempt to find other solutions to the refugee crisis despite the lack of success.

The British government also worked with Jewish communities to organize groups of Jewish refugees to send to Palestine. The Jewish Refugee Committee and other Zionist groups worked together to raise money and interest in the program. This effort saw limited success due

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<sup>45</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Hoare “Committee on the Refugee Problem,” 10

<sup>47</sup> Hirschfeld, *Exile in Great Britain*, 18.

to the expense and lack of interest among refugees.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, this effort acted as a stepping block to the creation of Israel in 1948 because, by that time, a small Jewish community had already settled in the region.

### *Kindertransport*

Of the 60,000 refugees who entered Europe between 1938 and 1940, about 10,000 of those people were children. In 1938, the Jewish Refugee Committee, the British government and the German government worked out a deal in which Britain agreed to take in 10,000 Jewish children between 1938 and 1940. The Anglo-Jewish community had to place a cap at 10,000 because they promised to find families for each child who could care for the child financially and physically for the duration of their stay in England.<sup>49</sup> While 10,000 barely scratched the surface of the millions of Jewish children who lived under the Nazi regime, it does represent 10,000 opportunities for Jewish children to escape oppression.

Since there were a limited number of spots available for the Kindertransport program, many parents found the application process stressful. Parents needed to fill out a formal immigration application for their child or children as well as the application for the program. It could take hours for parents to collect all of the necessary documentation required for the application process. Once they sent the paperwork to the proper recipients, they had to wait for a response. During this time, immigration officers had to review the immigration application, and then send it on to the Jewish Refugee Committee. The committee took the responsibility of finding a family that was willing and able to take in a child or two for an unknown amount of time. In order to gain support for the program, the Jewish Refugee Committee had promised the British government that these children would not become a drain on the taxpayer's money, so

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<sup>48</sup> Hirschfeld, *Exile in Great Britain*, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 59.

they had to be able to ensure that they found a family who could take care of another child. Once the committee found a match for the child, they would send a confirmation notice and travel details to the family in Germany or Austria.<sup>50</sup> This whole process could take as long as a couple months to complete and many families found it very difficult and uncertain.<sup>51</sup> However, the experience ensured the committees placed the children in safe homes away from the threat of Nazi rule.

Most children selected for the Kindertransport program had a good experience in Britain. The Jewish Refugee Committee placed children in appropriate homes. Most of the families participating were Jewish and respected the cultural traditions of the children.<sup>52</sup> However, some children still had experiences that caused a negative psychological effect. The children were under a tremendous amount of stress. Children did not always know the fate of the rest of their families. They had to adjust immediately to a new culture and language. Some host families expected the children to have more orthodox or traditional beliefs, but the children often had a more modern Jewish upbringing. The children also often came from more affluent backgrounds than their host families. This caused some class clashes within homes as the children were not always accustomed to completing chores or expected a servant to assist them.<sup>53</sup> In journals and diaries, some children even remark on the differences in the structure of the buildings. One girl commented on the low temperature of the rooms in the English country home compared to the

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<sup>50</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Jacoby, *My Darling Diary Volume One*, 27.

<sup>52</sup> Vera K. Fast, *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2011), 19.

<sup>53</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 24.

warm rooms in her family's urban home.<sup>54</sup> The expectations of the children did not always match the reality of their situation.

Even after the Kindertransport program ended, the government worked with refugee organizations to assist child refugees. In 1942, with the guaranteed assistance of the Jewish Refugee Committee, the Home Office agreed to accept refugee children from France who had a close relative in Britain.<sup>55</sup> The next year, The British government re-examined the European refugee situation to determine how the government should proceed. The Foreign Office noted that a growing number of non-Jewish refugees existed in Europe, many of whom wanted to enter the United Kingdom or the United States.<sup>56</sup> The British government continued to uphold its stance that they would not accept more refugees if those refugees would need to depend on public funds, refusing to accept more male refugees from enemy countries. However, they did vow to continue to work with refugee organizations "to facilitate the admission of children within the limits imposed by the 1939 White Paper," which listed the qualities exempting a foreign national from internment.<sup>57</sup> Child refugee programs faced less opposition from the British government because the Jewish Refugee Committee had vowed to accommodate the children without public assistance.

### *Internment camps*

Interment is one policy implemented by the British that has faced a lot of criticism. However, it was not a new policy. During the First World War, Britain passed the Alien

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), 195.

<sup>55</sup> Morrison, "Admission to the United Kingdom of a Limited Number of Jewish Refugees from Unoccupied France," 3.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Eden, "Reception and Accommodation of Refugees," The National Archives reference CAB 66-33-13, Memorandum, London, 1943), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Eden, "Reception and Accommodation of Refugees," 3.

Registration Act in 1914, which required all those aged sixteen or older who had not been born in Great Britain to register with their local police department.<sup>58</sup> This registry gave the Home Office a nearly complete list of all Germans and Austrians living in Britain, who they referred to as “enemy aliens.” The Home Office set up tribunals to review each case and give each enemy alien a classification based on their perceived connection to their country of origin. The government saw British Germans and Austrians grouped in Class A as the greatest threat and immediately interned in them camps set up along the south of England. Those in Class B did not face internment, but did have to live under restrictions such as a curfew and censored communication. Those in the third group, Class C, did not face internment or live under restrictions, but the government did know that they had registered as an enemy alien.<sup>59</sup> The Alien Registration Act was still in effect in the 1930’s, and the British government took advantage of past precedent.

Even though the Second World War began in 1939, the British wartime immigration policy did not begin to change until 1940. Britain and France had declared war with Germany, but for the first few months, there was little direct military interaction between the two sides. During this period, known as the “Phony” war, Britain began to classify the 73,000 people on the alien resident registry. Again, tribunals set up by the Home Office reviewed each case to classify those considered enemy aliens between the ages of 16 and 60. The government classified less than 600 people as Class A, about 6,700 as Class B and almost 65,000 people as Class C. Refugees from Germany and Austria composed a majority of the 73,000 enemy aliens living in the country at the beginning of the Second World War, and the tribunals placed most of the refugees in Class C. The War Office began to intern all of the Class A enemy aliens

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<sup>58</sup> Cesarani, “An Alien Concept?” 38.

<sup>59</sup> Cesarani, “An Alien Concept?” 45.

immediately, but those placed in Class B or C had to live with some minor limitations to daily life, at most.<sup>60</sup> At this time, the government and the public were not concerned about Class B and Class C enemy aliens since very little conflict had taken place.

As Britain and Germany began to engage in direct military conflicts, government officials began to fear that enemy spies could infiltrate the country by immigrating or claiming to be refugees. The British public opinion began to change as well. There was a rising fear of a fifth column gaining influence in British society and working to undermine the war effort. Groups like the British Union of Fascists, led by Sir Oswald Mosley, capitalized on this fear, gained some support and spread their pro-fascist, anti-immigrant, anti-semitic message.<sup>61</sup> The media also sensationalized concern regarding the rise of a fifth column in Britain, and as a result, the public called for a more restrictive policy. When Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940, he instructed Cabinet to intern more than just the few hundred people in Class A. He ordered officials to round up and intern all German and Austrian men and women between the ages of 16 and 60 in class B, the Class C men who lived on the southern and eastern coast as well as those in Class A. After Britain declared war on Italy in June 1940, officials interned Italian nationals as well.<sup>62</sup> In total, the government interned about 27,000 people from Germany, Austria and Italy.<sup>63</sup> The combination of direct conflict with the German forces and the sensationalized fear of a fifth column arising pushed the Government to intern more people.

The British government did not differentiate between refugees and non-refugees when making their classifications and interning those born in enemy countries, suggesting that they

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<sup>60</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Hirschfeld, *Exile in Great Britain*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 183.

<sup>63</sup> Herbert Morrison, "Internment of Aliens of Enemy Nationality," The National Archives Reference CAB 67-8-109 (Memorandum, London, 1940), 1.

considered protecting the country from the threat of spies more important than the liberties of Jewish refugees. The government faced some backlash when the public found out that internees included some refugees along with known Nazi sympathizers. In response, the Home Office released four reasons why they had interned refugees as well. They justified their actions by saying many of the refugees were unemployed and a drain on public resources, internment camps provided refugees protection from attacks by anti-alien groups, refugees had requested to be included and the government acted on military advisement.<sup>64</sup> These explanations contained some flaws. The first argument that unemployed refugees drained public funds disregards the fact that the internment camps received funding from the War Office. The government had to buy the food the internees ate and pay the soldiers to guard the camps.<sup>65</sup> The second reason for internment stretched the truth as well. It was common to have Jewish refugees and Nazi sympathizers interned in the same camp. Guards also did not always know the reason for internment for each person, so they sometimes assumed refugees were Nazis.<sup>66</sup> It is difficult to know how many refugees made requests for internment, but it is possible since there are many accounts of refugee internees commenting that they understood why it was necessary for the British government to intern them.<sup>67</sup> However, military advisement was the biggest reason for the internment of refugees. “The security and military needs of the country” were the primary

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<sup>64</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 184.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Seyfert, “His Majesty’s Most Loyal Internees: The Internment and Deportation of German and Austrian Refugees as ‘Enemy Aliens.’ Historical, Cultural and Literary Aspects,” in *Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler’s Germany*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press Inc., 1984), 164-165.

<sup>66</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 30

<sup>67</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 3; Freddy Godshaw, “Internment Camp 1940-41,” WW2 People’s War, BBC, last modified November 24, 2004, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/11/a3332611.shtml>.

focuses when the tribunals reviewed each case.<sup>68</sup> The members of Cabinet had to evaluate their priorities, and, ultimately, they placed the security of the country above the freedoms of the individuals.

The government set up internment camps all over the country, but the largest camp was located on the Isle of Man, a popular holiday destination. The government used the Isle of Man to intern enemy aliens during the First World War as well, so they already had accommodations for the internees.<sup>69</sup> The accommodations were adequate, but not comfortable. The internees received enough food, but many complained about the taste and the camp did not always keep a kosher kitchen according to the Jewish faith.<sup>70</sup> Those interned often had to sleep two people to a bed and four people to a room. The government censored communication between the camps and the outside world. Internees could not have personal radios, public radios only transmitted government approved reports, and officials censored letters between internees and loved ones.<sup>71</sup> While one cannot compare the conditions of the internment camps to the conditions in the Nazi concentration and death camps, the British government did remove many liberties from these enemy aliens.

The camps did not provide amusement for those interned, but the people found their own ways to entertain themselves. Internees, many of whom came from middle and upper class backgrounds, could not hold jobs while in the camps, leading to many hours of boredom.<sup>72</sup> To counteract this boredom, internees took it upon themselves to organize lessons, concerts, religious ceremonies and intellectual discussions. Among the internees there were leading

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<sup>68</sup> Morrison, "Internment of Aliens of Enemy Nationality," 5.

<sup>69</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 183.

<sup>70</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 191.

<sup>71</sup> Grenville, *Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933-1970*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 185.

academics, professional musicians, rabbis, priests and entrepreneurs. These people needed to do something to occupy their time, and they took the opportunity to educate and entertain the other men and women in the camps.<sup>73</sup> Academics took particular interest in designing classes for the younger internees, some of whom were as young as 16, and sparked interest in their young minds. Freddy Godshaw, a young internee at the time, reports of a friend who assisted a professor in a project on the statistics of those in the camp and later became the Government Chief Statistician.<sup>74</sup> Internees worked together to find ways to make the best out of an undesirable situation, similarly to how organizations assisted refugees upon their arrival.

After Churchill ordered the internment of additional immigrants from Germany and Austria, the number of internees skyrocketed. Overcrowding became an issue in internment camps across the country. As a solution to this problem, Britain took advantage of the vast British Empire and made plans to deport enemy aliens to camps in Canada and Australia. The War Office coordinated with the Canadian and Australian governments to set up camps to intern additional German, Austrian, and eventually Italian immigrants who lived in England. Roland Hill, a German refugee who came to Britain as a young man, was one of the refugees who experienced internment in Britain and internment in Canada. He found the conditions in his internment camp in New Brunswick more favorable than the conditions in the camp on the Isle of Man.<sup>75</sup> However, when the Canadian officials realized the internees included Jewish refugees they reportedly refused to support the internment program.<sup>76</sup>

While people generally liked the conditions in the Canadian and Australian camps more than the conditions of those in Britain, the journey was uncertain. The ships carrying the

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<sup>73</sup> Hill, *A Time Out of Joint*, 118.

<sup>74</sup> Godshaw, "Internment Camp, 1940-41."

<sup>75</sup> Hill, *A Time Out of Joint*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 189.

internees across had to navigate open water under the threat of German U-boat attacks. Out of the five vessels that transported enemy aliens, the fates of those aboard the Arandora Star and the Dunera helped change the public outlook on British internment policy. On only her second day on the journey to Canada, a German U-boat attacked the Arandora Star. Over half of the people onboard lost their lives, including German refugees.<sup>77</sup> The Dunera made a safe journey to Australia, but during the journey, the internees experienced serious mistreatment. Guards and officers treated the enemy aliens terribly, stealing from them, beating them and refusing to “let [the internees] come on deck for days at the time.”<sup>78</sup> Shortly after these events, the British government began to revise the internment policy.

When the devastating news from the Arandora Star reached the British people, public opinion on the British internment policy shifted. In September 1940, the immediate threat of invasion had subsided and people began to assess the internment situation through a humanitarian perspective. The public put pressure on the government to release many interned aliens, especially those who had come to Britain to escape persecution under the Nazi regime.<sup>79</sup> The government listened to public and, at the beginning of August, began to release eligible individuals. The government did not release people automatically, in that they had to fit certain qualifications. In September 1940, the British government released a list of 22 categories in which a person could fall as grounds for release, known as the White Papers.<sup>80</sup> By late November, the Home Office had released 7,200 people, and Herbert Morrison, the Home

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<sup>77</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 188.

<sup>78</sup> Godshaw, “Internment Camp, 1940-41.”

<sup>79</sup> Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 193.

<sup>80</sup> Home Office, “Civilian Internees of Enemy Nationality: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release from Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release (Revised October, 1940),” The National Archives Reference CAB 67-8-109 (Memorandum, London, 1940), 5.

Secretary, laid out the process for more releases. However, Morrison urged the Home Office not to disregard the original reasons for internment because it was still a matter of national security. He cautioned, “The release on an extensive scale of these aliens may be regarded as prejudicial to security.”<sup>81</sup> Throughout the early months of 1941, the British government released all but about 5,000 people. Historians often cite the internment policy as the biggest downfall of Britain’s refugee policy during the Second World War. It supports the argument that government primarily considered the well-being of British citizens when developed the British immigration and refugee policies instead of the immigrants and refugees themselves.

### *Refugee Acceptance*

Coinciding with the Nazi invasion of France, Britain stopped accepting new refugees. It was the general policy of the British government to close their borders during a time of war unless, in very rare cases, when someone could prove that “the admission of the refugee will be directly advantageous to [the British] War effort.”<sup>82</sup> The government enforced this policy throughout the early years of the war because they already operated with limited resources and could not justify bringing in more people who would need rations, employment and a place to live. When responding to pleas from refugees in Europe, the Home Office and the Foreign Office generally agreed to uphold this policy. However, as the war progressed, they strayed from the policy when outside organizations offered assistance.

In May 1940, after the Nazi invasion of France, an organization devoted to assisting refugees from the Netherlands and Belgium asked the government for assistance. The organization wanted to raise money to cover expenses refugees faced after arriving in Britain.

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<sup>81</sup> Morrison, “Internment of Aliens of Enemy Nationality,” 317.

<sup>82</sup> Morrison, “Admission to the United Kingdom of a Limited Number of Refugees from Unoccupied France,” 3.

The British government typically covered the cost their transportation to Britain and the refugee's room and board for a few months. Organizations had run out down their money quickly trying to provide all other services for the refugees.<sup>83</sup> Initially, the Cabinet, specifically the Minister of Health, showed interest in creating a central committee to distribute money in the National Fund. Unfortunately, as the month of May 1940 progressed, the cabinet offered less assistance, taking the stance that it was impossible to accept new refugees, but they were "ready to give the French immediate material assistance in dealing with the refugee problem."<sup>84</sup> By the end of May, the Cabinet had already started to round up those classified as enemy aliens for internment.

After the initial fear of invasion and infiltration sub-sided, the British government faced another plea to accept more refugees. In 1942 the League of Nation contacted the Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary to request Britain admit 1,000 Jewish refugee children. The Jewish Refugee Committee suggested the British government accept refugees under the age of 15 or over 60 years old who have immediate relatives already living in Britain. This, and a promise from the Jewish Refugee Committee to raise money for unique circumstances, would minimize the chance of the refugees relying on government assistance.<sup>85</sup> At this point in the war, British policy recommended that Britain close her doors to additional refugees, unless under special circumstances. Morrison warns of the risk that a "relaxations of United Kingdom policy will facilitate the deportation policy of the Vichy Government," and public opinion turning

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<sup>83</sup> "Organization of Voluntary Committees for the Care and Assistance of Dutch and Belgian Refugees," The National Archives reference CAB 63-133, (Open document, London, 1940), 2.

<sup>84</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Despatch of Food Supplies for Belgian and French Refugees," The National Archives reference CAB 63-133, (Report, London, 1940), 32.

<sup>85</sup> Morrison, "Admission to the United Kingdom of a Limited Number of Jewish Refugees from Unoccupied France," 1.

against the refugees already in Britain.<sup>86</sup> Hesitantly, Morrison voices his support for the plan to accept the very limited number of Jewish refugees from France who are under the age of 15 or over the age of 60 and have an immediate relative living in Britain. Since the Jewish Refugee Committee and the families would guarantee these refugees financially, Morrison believed the plan would be less likely to face public criticism.<sup>87</sup> While the number of refugees accepted under this plan did not meet the 1,000 refugees initially suggested, this instance shows that the government relied on assistance provided by the refugee organizations when developing refugee policy.

### *Refugee Committees*

There is a connection between the development of refugee and immigration policy and the success of refugee organizations. In the early 1930's, few organizations existed to help refugees.<sup>88</sup> This coincided with more restrictive immigration policies, when nativism and anti-Semitism had a stronger foothold in Britain.<sup>89</sup> Towards the end of the 1930's and into the 1940's more refugee assistance organization had formed, but they were low on money. This was when the Jewish Refugee Committee requested money from the government to supplement their quickly decreasing funds, making the government nervous to accept more refugees.<sup>90</sup> However, when the Jewish Refugee Committee guaranteed they could find families to support 10,000 child refugees from Germany and Austria, the government approved the Kindertransport program. By the early 1940's the refugee organizations had enough resources to support additional refugees.

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<sup>86</sup> Morrison, "Admission to the United Kingdom of a Limited Number of Jewish Refugees from Unoccupied France," 2.

<sup>87</sup> Morrison, "Admission to the United Kingdom of a Limited Number of Jewish Refugees from Unoccupied France," 3.

<sup>88</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?" 39.

<sup>90</sup> MacDonald, "Refugees in the United Kingdom," 1.

The main reason the government hesitated to accept more refugees by 1942 and 1943 was that they had to devote any excess resources to defeating the Axis powers. When organizations had the funds, they provided an alternative to government assistance, allowing the government to justify relaxing their policies slightly to the British public.

While the official policies of the British government changed from the early 1930s to the end of the Second World War, there was a constant source of assistance for refugees arriving in Britain. Refugee committees organized at the local level provided resources and programs, which the British government did not have the time, resources or labor resources to develop during a global depression and a World War. Even when the British government interned thousands of refugees, the regional committees continued to provide services to those who needed them.<sup>91</sup> These people picked up where government policy ended providing refugees with the assistance they needed to make a life for themselves in Britain.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to 1938, few refugees from continental Europe requested entrance to Britain. Those who did come into the country needed a guarantee they would not become a drain on public funds. Historians who harshly criticize the lack of assistance provided by the British government in the 1930's fail to consider the economic factors. British policy makers did not want to encourage refugees and other immigrants living below the poverty line while many of their own people struggled to make ends meet.

After 1938, the need to escape Germany and Austria grew, and Britain was one of the safest options for refugees. However, by 1939, Britain had declared war on Germany and had to divert surplus resources to the war effort. The memorandums of the War Cabinet frequently

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<sup>91</sup> Josephs, *Survivors*, 49.

mention concern for the possibility that refugees would drain public resources, indicating this was still a major concern for the government. However, when refugee organizations vowed to offer support, officials tended to relax, approving policies to allow more refugees into the country. The backing of refugee committees made programs like Kindertransport, the acceptance of additional refugee children from France, and continued assistance for child refugees possible.

Overall, the British government accepted as many refugees as they could in the time leading up to and during the Second World War, given the circumstances. The memorandums from Cabinet members during these years show that the British government had to consider public opinion in the midst of a global depression and a World War. The British people had to live with limited resources during these years. The government believed admitting large numbers of refugees without a thorough screening process would afford fascist groups in Britain with more supporters and fuel the spread of anti-Semitic messages.<sup>92</sup> The British government was very careful to avoid inciting discord amongst the public, attempting to prevent a rise in fascism in Britain. While the British government could have accepted more refugees, or provided more government funded programs to help refugees establish themselves in Britain, the government deemed it more important to focus on tackling a global depression and a global war between 1930 and 1945 to ensure the health and safety of British citizens.

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<sup>92</sup> MacDonald, "Refugees in the United Kingdom," 5.

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