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The Refugees from Nazism, 1933

The American public learned more of the situation facing Jews under the Nazi regime from new German immigrants than from the press or their government. In early 1933, they brought stories of random violence, the loss of employment and a pervasive fear in the face of Nazi anti-Semitism. A 'wave of indignation' swept through American opinion. Jewish and Christian organizations protested Nazi race policies and called for the intervention of foreign governments. Indignation grew into a call for direct action, and a boycott of trade with Germany gained momentum. By the end of March 1933, New York businesses had cancelled an estimated \$2 million worth of orders in Germany, and Jewish importers were moving to stop more than half of Germany's sales in the city. The protest spread. Around 8,000 Jewish war veterans took to New York's streets. The American Jewish Congress organized a rally at Madison Square Gardens on 28 March, coinciding with meetings and rallies across the United States, in London and in other European cities.¹ Jewish shops and factories in Warsaw closed as a first step towards a boycott of German trade in Poland. Trade Unions and socialists in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Britain also came out in favour of an economic boycott of Germany. Trade orders were cancelled in such diverse places as Tunisia, Vilnius and Antwerp.²

In Germany, however, international outrage fed Nazi propaganda of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. For Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, it justified a counter-reaction with a boycott of Jewish businesses and professions across Germany on 1 April.³ Protest abroad therefore hardened Nazi attitudes, and quickly lost its purpose and energy. Governments were half-hearted in expressing their concerns, deferring to Germany's insistence that it was free to manage its internal affairs without interference from abroad.

The boycott of Jewish businesses was as much an affront to international opinion as it was reason for a new wave of persecution in Germany. For

international opinion, it was further cause for indignation. But how could that now be expressed? Protest had backfired on the Jews in Germany, and national governments were reluctant to offend the new German regime by public criticisms of its policies. Jewish organizations in the United States were divided on what would be the best response, and Jewish communities in Europe worried that Nazi anti-Semitism could seep across borders into their own countries, in reaction to the arrival of Jews in flight from the Nazis.⁴

The unfolding of Nazi terror against the regime's racial and political enemies forced many to consider fleeing Germany for their personal safety and freedom.⁵ Marxists, pacifists and other anti-Nazis were being forced out of public life, arrested, and sent to concentration camps at Oranienburg outside Berlin and Dachau outside Munich.⁶ Jews were being purged from German arts and culture in Hitler's headlong rush to Aryanize his Reich. The Law for the Reconstruction of the Professional Civil Service of 7 April 1933 forced non-Aryans – anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent – from the German civil service. Later ordinances extended the law to remove Jewish university professors and schoolteachers, Jewish employees of national and municipal enterprises, the judiciary, the sciences and public health and welfare, among other occupations. A law to denationalize foreign-born residents who had been granted German citizenship by the Weimar Republic was adopted on 14 July 1933.⁷ Foreign-born but naturalized Jews and other unwanted foreigners lost German citizenship rights. The April boycott had left Jews in no doubt that they could not continue to live in Germany with security; the anti-Jewish legislation made it certain that they could not continue to live in Germany as Germans. All Jews were at risk under the Nazis, while communists, socialists and other anti-Nazis were at immediate risk of imprisonment.

But flight from Germany was not easy. Those who had reached the United States and informed the American public of conditions under Nazism were the fortunate ones with private wealth or family connections that had helped them secure an entry visa without undue delay. The less fortunate were left waiting in long queues at foreign consulates. Consular officials might have been sympathetic to their demands, but they were constrained by national legislation that imposed restrictions on the number of visas they could issue and the reasons for issuing them. The great economic depression of the 1930s had led all traditional countries of European immigration to deploy measures to restrict the number of new immigrants they would allow in. Only certain kinds were now considered acceptable and, indeed, desirable. Those who would be a burden – which, in the circumstances of the times could be any immigrant who would need to work to earn a living – were certainly undesirable.

The United States' Immigration Act of 1924 had already disrupted enduring patterns of European emigration. A reaction against the shifting demographic and cultural currents that the high levels of immigration from southern and eastern Europe had brought into American society since the end of the nineteenth century, the Immigration Act imposed restrictive quotas of 2 per cent for each country of origin, based on the ethnic composition of the American population in 1890. The intention was nothing less than to reconfigure migration patterns away from the recent predominance of Italian Catholics and East European Jews, towards the more traditional 'nordic' ethnic roots of the American people. The quotas, in short, aimed to restore the demographic status quo ante. Immigration from all sources consequently fell dramatically, from 706,896 in 1924 to 294,314 in 1925, the lowest level since 1898, with the exception of the years of the First World War.⁸

With the shattering impact of the Great Depression on the American economy and its labour market, immigration was cut back even further to protect American workers. In 1930, President Herbert Hoover approved a more rigorous application of the 'No Public Charge' test of the Immigration Act, which authorized consular officials abroad to refuse visas to those who, for reasons of age, physical incapacity, conditions of health or other reasons, could not support themselves and would therefore impose a burden on the American public. The policy change assumed that no immigrant could be assured of work and would therefore become a public charge. Entry visas henceforth would only be issued to intending immigrants who could demonstrate that they had sufficient private means to support themselves and their families, or whose family connections in the United States could guarantee their support.

In November 1930, therefore, the number of visas issued was a meagre 15 per cent of the total immigration quota.⁹ Only 23,068 new immigrants from all countries of origin arrived in 1933, less than the entire quota for German nationals, which was set at 27,370 per year.¹⁰ By the end of 1933, only 1,450 immigrants had arrived from Germany. There was no distinction between refugees in flight from Nazi persecution and common migrants – those who had left voluntarily for personal or professional reasons – although in the circumstances the different motives of those forced to flee and those who chose to leave were no doubt of little importance. They fled for their personal well-being as well as that of their families. Significantly, the figure also includes those German immigrants who were exempted from the quota schedule: artists, writers, musicians, composers, scientists, university professors and students, who were among the first victims of the Nazi Aryanization of German arts and culture.¹¹

The documentary requirements to satisfy consular officials of one's acceptability as an immigrant added to the difficulties of obtaining a visa. The issue or renewal of a valid passport, evidence of good moral character and police clearances and, in some cases, evidence of not having engaged in left-wing political activities, all forced intending emigrants to approach various Reich ministries and police. The queues at foreign consulates grew as delays in the provision of documents slowed visa processing. The US consulates in Germany could issue visas totalling no more than 10 per cent of the quota in any one calendar month. The queue awaiting a visa consequently grew, so much so that later in the 1930s it could take a matter of years before one was issued.¹² Many could not wait for even a short time, however, and decided to leave without valid papers; they fled mostly to France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Czechoslovakia. They still hoped to get to the United States, and tried to bypass the long queues in Germany by leaving. They still had to present valid documents and a current passport, and to demonstrate their acceptability as immigrants. The queues in these countries also grew, while the governments there were eager to see them move on without delay.

Canada was not a viable alternative. The Canadian government also justified restricting immigration by citing the harshness of the economic conditions, having made an order in 1930 to permit only those immigrants with enough capital to establish themselves on farms. By this order, critics of Canadian policy argue, Canada had effectively cut itself off from the world. Moreover, it would remain deaf to requests to open its borders even slightly to Jews from Germany. Canadian policy had always been ethnically selective, and Jews were classified among 'non-preferred' immigrants, best kept out of sight in the marginal lands of the west and north. They drifted into the cities all the same, and in 1928, Jewish immigration was cut back to two-thirds its previous low number.¹³ Still, it was not yet entirely closed despite appearances. One estimate has put the number of Jewish immigrants to Canada in 1933 from all source countries at 943.¹⁴

The situation elsewhere in South and Central America is much less certain, but the available evidence shows that they were also turning their backs on new immigrants. Statistics are vague and sometimes contradictory, and it does not seem possible to make a clear breakdown of the ebb and flow of migration during the 1930s.¹⁵ Diplomatic sources in Europe and the United States in the early 1930s insisted that the largest immigrant nations in Latin America, Brazil and Argentina, would only admit new immigrants prepared to settle on the land. They were not wanted in the cities, and Jews, of the urban middle class, were unwanted most of all. Even so, one source at least shows that the intake

of Jews from all source countries was higher in Latin America in 1933 than in the United States, with 1,962 settling in Argentina, another 3,317 in Brazil and 500 in Uruguay. This compares to 2,372 who settled in the United States in the same year.¹⁶

A number of factors explain this uncertainty about German Jewish refugee settlement in Latin America.¹⁷ Immigration regulations in some countries included ethnic restrictions and limits on occupational categories. An entry visa might then have been sought for a less desirable country of settlement with the intention upon arrival of crossing the border to a preferred country. The grant of entry visas in Europe also did not always equate to migrant entry, as port authorities had the power to exclude arrivals. Immigrants arriving by first class or with a sum of cash in their possession entered without hindrance. Those of lesser means, however, could have been barred entry even if they carried a valid visa.¹⁸ The prospects of Latin America were inviting for refugee resettlement all the same. These were young countries in need of people to develop large undeveloped lands, which seemed ideal for the resettlement of so many of Europe's unwanted.

Just as in the Americas, European states responded to the impact of the economic depression by restricting entry and employment for immigrants. Protected by its sea borders, Britain had regulated immigration since the First World War through its Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 and the Aliens Order of 1920. These stipulated that only immigrants who could demonstrate that they had the means to support themselves and their families would be given leave to land.¹⁹ Immigration officers at British ports had the power to refuse admission to anyone without apparent means of support. They could also apply tests to evaluate the moral and physical character of prospective immigrants to determine their desirability. The Aliens Order proved such a protective shield, it was observed in one important contemporary report, that the numbers of refugees admitted to the United Kingdom bore little relation to the scale of the refugee problem.²⁰ Initial responses to the refugees from Germany in the Parliament, by the government, and in the British Foreign Ministry, affirmed the intent of the Aliens Order: the settlement of an immigrant would only be allowed when it was 'consonant with the interests' of Britain. With some 3 million unemployed British workers, the settlement of 'hundreds of thousands of Jews' could in no way be contemplated.²¹

Yet, the deepening crisis in Germany forced the British authorities to give ground. Ministers faced urgent representations from British Jews about the surge in anti-Jewish repression in Germany after the 1 April boycott of Jewish

businesses, and the British Passport Control Office in Berlin was overwhelmed with applications from German Jews seeking to enter England, to go to Palestine or to 'anywhere in the British Empire'. As the number of Jews arriving at British ports increased sharply, the Home Office relented. Jewish refugees would be admitted without distinction, on the condition that they did not become a public charge. The expense of their accommodation and maintenance therefore fell on to the British Jewish community through its various agencies. Best estimates put the number of refugees in the care of these agencies at something between 3,000 and 4,000 during the early 1930s.²²

Land borders presented entirely different problems on the Continent. By the end of 1933, France, with some 25,000 refugees from Germany, hosted by far the largest number. Of these, 85 per cent were Jewish. They had entered a country in deep economic and political crisis, with growing xenophobia against all foreign workers, and expressions of acute anti-Semitism at the appearance of German Jews.²³ To be sure, the xenophobic turn was evident well before the crises of the 1930s. France had begun expelling immigrant workers from certain industries at the first signs of economic troubles in the mid-1920s.²⁴ They worked in industries that had a large number of unemployed French workers. There were also national security considerations at play in the new policy directions. The expulsions were aimed also at relatively recent immigrants who had yet to set their roots in France. At the same time, in 1927, a new nationality law was adopted with the clear intention of tying established immigrants to France by reducing from ten to three the number of years of residence for eligibility for naturalization into French citizenship. By this one move, the number of young men available for military service increased dramatically. Still, the campaign against foreign workers continued. The conditions for the renewal of residence and work permits were tightened in 1926, and in August 1932 the government adopted a Law for the Protection of National Labour, which introduced quotas on the employment of foreigners in any one industry. Those eligible for naturalization were thus compelled to seek it.²⁵

French responses to the refugees from Germany were generous at first. From March up to 11 April 1933, some 4,000 visa applications had been received at French diplomatic posts in Germany.²⁶ For the refugees trying to flee Germany, any legitimate means would do. Most applications were for short-stay or transit visas, because obligations on documentary evidence and proof of the financial means were less onerous. For consular and Foreign Ministry staff, however, these strategies raised grave questions of national security and professional competition. The Foreign Ministry had no doubt that these applications for short-stay

or transit visas were a ruse to get to France, with every intention of settling. Most visa applications, it was also noted, were from 'an intellectual elite, doctors and lawyers for the most part'. The consular officers who received their applications found themselves 'in the presence of delicate questions of professional competition' that they did not have the competence to judge.²⁷ Foreign Minister Joseph Paul-Boncour consequently instructed his consuls in Germany to assess visa applications more rigorously and only approve them when they were certain a refugee had the means of living independently and would not prejudice French public order and security. Even so, it does seem that consular officials were moved by the plight of those approaching them as complaints continued that visas were still being issued far too readily.

Many, however, could not provide the documentary proof to satisfy consular officials, or they simply did not have the means to live independently. For some, circumstances were so pressing that the delay to obtain a visa was unendurable. Others simply could not obtain a German passport. There was no choice but to leave without one. Border guards were instructed to admit those who were truly refugees in flight from persecution, but admission to France was no guarantee of asylum.²⁸ Other barriers awaited the refugees. A residence permit required a work permit, but they were all but impossible to obtain because of the restrictions on the employment of foreigners due to the protection of French labour and the professions. Both work and residence permits were out of the question for most of the refugees. Their visas authorized only temporary residence, usually for twenty days. Onward travel was expected but seldom possible because of the difficulty in obtaining a visa to enter another country.²⁹

Although the situation was grave and difficult, France nevertheless maintained an open border for much of 1933. This changed dramatically towards the end of October. When the League of Nations announced that it was appointing a High Commissioner to assume responsibility for assisting the refugees from Nazi Germany, the French government decided immediately to admit no more refugees. They would now be the responsibility of the new High Commissioner. And the first of his responsibilities, the French government insisted, was to help relieve France of its already heavy refugee burden.

The Netherlands too had a long tradition of offering asylum to refugees, but unlike France it did not consider itself a country of immigration. Rather, until the First World War, when it was home to hundreds of thousands of Belgian war refugees, its history was one of emigration and transit. Only later, under the pressure of unemployment, was there a need for visa requirements and immigration controls.³⁰ The refugees arriving from Germany who could demonstrate

that they had the finances to live independently faced few obstacles in coming to the Netherlands. Tighter controls were only evident from May 1934, when the Netherlands, as was the case elsewhere, sought to keep out those without sufficient means of supporting themselves and their families. Until then, the Dutch government considered refugees from Nazi Germany as visitors and assumed no responsibility for their welfare. In the first months of 1933, some 1,500 refugees arrived, nominally as visitors, but with few restrictions many settled for the longer term. By the end of 1933, a total of 4,078 refugees had registered with the Dutch Jewish Refugee Committee.³¹

In Belgium, on the other hand, the Depression had already led to limits on immigration before the arrival of refugees from Germany. Border guards were instructed to bar the admission of immigrant workers.³² Just as in other countries, refugees faced few obstacles if they arrived with ample funds to support themselves, or if they had assets to invest in a productive enterprise, a feature peculiar to policy in Belgium. Political refugees, whose lives or freedom were endangered because of their political activities, could benefit from asylum. Jews, on the other hand, were not considered to be political refugees, and furthermore were not considered to be victims of socio-economic deprivation under Nazi racial legislation. They consequently had no right to work and were forced to live off their savings. They were tolerated only so long as necessary to arrange their onward travels. Even those considered useful to the Belgian economy because they had brought with them assets and a willingness to contribute were granted only temporary residence, which was extended only so long as they satisfied the Belgian government of their usefulness.³³ Germans who arrived without proper authorization were assuredly not welcome. They were pressured to leave before they had a chance to settle down: France and the Netherlands were consequently obliged to receive the refugees that Belgium rejected.³⁴

Switzerland provides an altogether different example. Some 8,000 to 9,000 German Jews, socialists and communists fled there in the first months of 1933, according to French diplomatic sources.³⁵ Between March and May 1933, some 7,631 Jewish refugees had passed through Basel railway station, but few remained for any length of time. For most, then, Switzerland was one stop on a longer journey. By the end of 1933, no more than 2,500 German refugees remained. There were no impediments in their way, so long as they had no intention other than visiting. Unemployment and economic protection again warranted border controls and the strict regulation of work and residence entitlements.³⁶ A decree of the Swiss government on 31 March 1933 formally excluded refugees fleeing racial persecution from permanent settlement. Jews, then, were German

emigrants in transit, allowed no more than six months residence under a special 'tolerance permit'.³⁷

The histories of the flight from Nazism have been so focused on responses in those countries with long traditions of immigration and asylum that comparative little is known of the conditions that faced refugees in Central and Eastern Europe. These were countries whose historical traditions were of the emigration of their populations to the West, especially to the Americas. Jews from the Pale of Settlement abandoned the old world of anti-Semitic persecution and resettled in important diasporas in France, Britain and above all the United States. Czech, Slovakian, Polish, Hungarian and the nationalities of the Balkans made up large numbers of the 'new immigration' to the United States from 1890. The reformation of Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the First World War saw many nationalities dispersed across new national boundaries. One solution to dislocation was naturalization into the nationality of the country of residence. Therefore, many Poles, Czechs and other nationalities of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, who were living in Germany after 1918, chose German nationality under the Weimar nationality laws. So too did many thousands of White Russians who settled there as refugees after the 1917 Russian Revolution.

The German denationalization law of 14 July 1933, however, stripped those naturalized during the Weimar years of their German citizenship. Eastern Jews were a particular target of Nazi anti-Semitism.³⁸ Therefore German-Polish, -Czech and -Russian Jews could either flee or reclaim their former nationality and contemplate return to their 'homelands', even though they might not ever have lived there, or had any comprehension of their national languages.

To be sure, denationalized Poles, Russians and East European Jews from Germany, had few difficulties in gaining admission to countries in the West in early 1933. Attitudes hardened over the year, however, as the refugee numbers showed no sign of abating.³⁹ The consular officials who refused them visas could comfort themselves in the knowledge that these refugees had another nationality to fall back on. Russian Jews who had settled in Germany as refugees from Bolshevism could fall back on the protection of the Nansen International Office for Refugees, a bureau of the League of Nations responsible for refugees under intergovernmental agreements of 1921, 1924 and 1928. The Nansen Office could see to their welfare and resettlement where places were available for them.

Recent work on asylum in Czechoslovakia has shed some light on the gap in our historical knowledge of the conditions facing refugees in Central and Eastern Europe at this time. Czechoslovakia was an attractive destination for

the refugees from Nazism because the German language was spoken widely and because its long border with Germany offered many unguarded places to cross. Communists and socialists were particularly prominent among the German refugees there. The one requirement of the Czechoslovakian government was that the refugees refrain from political activity. There was however no specific policy for their support and maintenance, and they faced the general rules relating to the entry and residence of all foreigners.⁴⁰

The reception of German refugees in Poland in the early 1930s is still a largely unknown subject, however. In 1934, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee reported that, although the refugees arriving there from Germany were themselves Polish by nationality and experienced no restrictions on employment, the Jewish population as a whole suffered under extreme economic deprivation. The arrival of the refugees only exacerbated their circumstances.⁴¹ The High Commissioner's own inquiries in Poland in 1934 found also that Polish Jewish organizations were ill at ease with the arrival of Jews of Polish origin from Germany, who had never lived in Poland and who had no knowledge of either Polish or Yiddish.⁴² They upset the delicate state of Polish-Jewish relations, and Polish Jews were already feeling the impact of a rise in native Polish anti-Semitism.

In summary, the figures published by the High Commissioner for the Refugees from Germany in his first report, published in December 1933, showed that there were some 11,000 German refugees in Czechoslovakia and Poland. All of the 6,000 refugees in Poland were Jewish. Altogether, there was a total of 59,300 German refugees in Europe (including the British protectorate of Palestine, over which the British government regulated immigration), 86 per cent of them Jewish. France accommodated by far the largest proportion, at 42 per cent of the total (Table 1.1).

The true history of the refugees from Nazi Germany, however, is not one of their numbers. Indeed, the numbers were comparatively minor in comparison to the refugees in Europe in the 1920s, when there were in some estimations between one and two million refugees from the Russian Empire after the 1917 Revolution, and upwards of 320,000 Armenian and other refugees from Turkey.⁴⁴ Rather, the true history of the refugees from Nazism lies in the responses to them. They were all at risk if they remained in Germany, but no government was prepared to admit them as refugees, and no government took responsibility for their personal welfare and legal protection. The application of 'no public charge' tests, and the insistence that they had sufficient money in hand to support themselves without working and without recourse to public welfare absolved their host governments of responsibility for them. They were received

Table 1.1 Estimated distribution of refugees from Germany, December 1933⁴³

Country	Refugees	Jewish		Non-Jewish	
		Number	%	Number	%
France	25,000	21,250	85	3,750	15
Palestine	6,500	6,500	100		
Poland	6,000	6,000	100		
Czechoslovakia	5,000	3,750	75	1,250	25
Holland	5,000	4,000	80	1,000	20
England	3,000	2,500	83	500	17
Belgium	2,500	2,000	80	500	20
Switzerland	2,500	2,125	85	375	15
Scandinavia	1,500	1,125	75	375	25
Austria	800	640	80	160	20
Saar and Luxembourg	500	375	75	125	25
Other Countries	1,000	800	80	200	20
Totals	59,300	51,065	86	8,235	14

instead as immigrants, usually on short-term or transit visas, and had to fend for themselves from what little they were able to take with them from Germany.

The Russian and Armenian refugees of the 1920s in contrast, had the benefit of more prosperous economic conditions and politically supportive governments. Post-war recovery and reconstruction created a demand for workers that helped absorb them into the economies and workforces of those countries that took them in. These refugees were also the beneficiaries of humanitarian cooperation among the member states of the League of Nations, and represented for a short while the great hope of the League as an agent of peace and international accord. There was international agreement on the legal protection of these refugees in the special Arrangements of 1921, 1924 and 1928, and finally, through the first ever international convention for the protection of refugees of October 1933. By these accords, the Russians and Armenians had a distinct legal status as 'refugees', protected under the terms of these arrangements, with special travel permits that allowed them to enter and settle in countries where they could find employment or rejoin families and community members from whom they had been separated during their flight into exile.

The refugees from Germany, on the other hand, emerged in a period of great economic stress and political uncertainty. There was no place for them in the economies of Europe or the Americas. Labour markets suffering acute unemployment could not absorb them and public opinion had turned against all immigrants, whatever their origin, unless they could fend for themselves and posed no problems for the public order. Anti-foreign sentiments were aimed

specifically at immigrant workers and professionals who could be competition in the labour markets, who would make claims for scarce resources of public welfare and housing but who would make no contribution in return. Marxist refugees stirred anxieties because of fears about their political militancy in exile, which might well jeopardize harmonious international relations. The large number of Jewish refugees especially incited anti-foreign responses, rekindling dormant anti-Semitism, or stirring up an anti-Jewish hostility that was seeping across the German border as sympathetic political extremists looked approvingly upon the rise of Nazism. In Switzerland, German Jews bore the brunt of a new wave of native anti-Semitism as the Swiss complained that their country was being progressively Judaized.⁴⁵ Middle-class Catholic organizations in Belgium went so far as to call for the expulsion of all Jews. Meanwhile, Belgian labour organizations demanded an end to all 'foreign' participation in the workforce, when by 'foreigner' they meant 'Jews'.⁴⁶ In Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, local Jewish communities looked apprehensively upon the arrival of Jews from Germany lest they stir up native anti-Semitism.⁴⁷ French Jews also sensed the escalation of French anti-Semitism with the arrival of so many German Jews, compromising their loyalties to France and their co-religionists in need of protection.⁴⁸

The conditions the refugees faced abroad were made all the worse by some of the terms imposed on their departure from Germany. Many could not satisfy the demands of foreign governments that they have sufficient funds for their own support in order to obtain an immigration visa because the Nazi government would not allow emigrants to leave Germany with anything but a small fraction of their wealth. They were required in fact to dispose of their business, property and personal assets, receiving in return only a portion of their true worth. From what was left, they had to meet the costs of visas, travel and shipping, and pay the 'Reich flight tax', the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*. This tax, introduced in 1931, was a means of conserving Germany's foreign exchange reserves and to retain German wealth in Germany. For the Nazis, it was a means of appropriating wealth from Jews intent on leaving. The amount payable to the Reich upon departure was 25 per cent of the value of the property of emigrants with an income of 20,000 Reichsmarks (\$8,000) or more, or resources over 200,000 Reichsmarks (\$80,000). The remainder was retained in a special blocked account, with limited access. The tax was increased over time as the German government sought to increase its foreign exchange holdings. By May 1934, the maximum an emigrant could take was 10,000 Reichsmarks (\$4,000); by June, this was reduced further to 2,000 Reichsmarks (\$800).⁴⁹

These constraints – the appropriation of property and assets on an emigrant's departure, the bar to employment abroad, and the obligation to leave the country they had first entered when their temporary visas had expired – all contributed to illegality and clandestine behaviour. Illegality, with the use of forged papers, the refusal to surrender personal items or the use of unlawful means to save a part of their property, Herbert A. Strauss observes, was part of the process by which German Jews asserted their legal rights against the illegalities imposed upon them by the Nazi regime. Bribery was also one means of progressing along the queues for visas.⁵⁰ Those who had managed to take some portion of their wealth with them often found it quickly exhausted by the costs of travel and resettlement. The question of illegality therefore also arose to meet the challenges of survival abroad. Clandestine employment was often the only means refugees had of avoiding poverty, and an underground, clandestine existence was forced upon them in order to avoid forced expulsion or repatriation after the expiration of a visa.

When governments failed to protect the refugees, aid organizations stepped forward. Charitable organizations such as the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Save the Children Fund mobilized volunteers and supporters to assist both Jewish and non-Jewish refugees. Jewish organizations were highly active in calling for philanthropic donations to assist in the emigration and resettlement of Jewish refugees. The Central British Fund for Germany Jewry, later known as the Council for Germany Jewry, was established in Britain in early 1933 as a representative agency for all sections of the Anglo-Jewish community. It took upon itself the organization and administration of relief and retraining of Jewish refugees in Britain, and organized a programme to help the emigration of Jews from Germany.⁵¹ Across Europe, national committees were formed to raise and distribute funds for refugee relief. In France, the National Refugee Aid Committee (*Comité National de secours aux réfugiés*) established by Robert de Rothschild, of the Rothschild banking dynasty, and Jacques Helbronner, president of the *Consistoire central Israélite de France* (Central Jewish Consistory of France), the official organ of French Judaism, provided relief for new refugees who could not obtain work. However, as more refugees arrived and found themselves in need of its assistance the Committee's funds were almost exhausted by the end of 1933 and new contributions were hard to come by. The Dutch Committee for Jewish Refugees (*Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen*) and a Czech refugee aid committee assumed similar responsibilities for Jewish relief in the Netherlands and Czechoslovakia, and would play important roles in refugee protection in their countries.⁵²

These committees raised and distributed funds in their own countries. There was yet no international coordination of relief efforts. The major Jewish relief

agency that operated across national boundaries, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, was at first divided about how best to use its resources for the aid of German Jews. Founded during the First World War to raise money from the American public for relief efforts, it channelled funds to agencies assisting Jews in Poland, Russia and the Ukraine. After the war, it continued its operations for reconstruction and rehabilitation in Eastern Europe through its European Office in Berlin. When the Nazis came the power, it relocated to Paris, and opinion among its leaders gradually shifted towards helping the emigration and resettlement of German Jews. Its policy was subsequently founded on the view that, under Nazism, there was no hope for the younger generation of Jews in Germany, and that they had to be retrained for productive 'vocations of agriculture, handicraft, and the like' so that they could resettle abroad.⁵³

The possibility of resettlement in Palestine promised the best solution for these young German Jews. As elsewhere, however, practical and political impediments stood in the way. Extensive planning and investment was required for long-term occupational training, and for the development of locations for settlement and industry. Even then, Zionist ambitions to relocate German Jews to Palestine faced the barrier of Britain's regulation of Jewish settlement. Since the beginning of its mandate of Palestine, British policy was determined by Palestine's capacity to absorb new settlers. Judgements of occupational demand, age qualification, and the interests of the Arab peoples determined the 'suitable conditions' that favoured settlement.⁵⁴

The Zionist Jewish Agency for Palestine capitalized on the political developments inside Germany to further its plans for Jewish settlement. It struck an accord with the German government to facilitate Jewish emigration to Palestine. The Ha'avara (Hebrew for 'transfer') agreement provided the capital the Jewish Agency for Palestine required for occupational retraining and agricultural and industrial development. German Jews intending to go to Palestine could retain part of their assets by providing payment in Reichsmarks to German exporters, and obtain in return Palestinian currency from importers in Palestine. In short, German goods were to be sold, and immigrants were to be reimbursed from the proceeds of the sales.⁵⁵ The Ha'avara effectively amounted to a monopoly on the sale of German goods in Palestine with the help of Jewish capital. But it alienated the Jewish Agency from other Jewish organizations that were promoting a boycott of German trade. The Ha'avara undermined the international boycott and instead contributed to the recovery of German industry. On the other hand, it also brought about the importation of capital and goods for agricultural and industrial development in Palestine and held out promise for the future for

young German Jews. Politically, it helped build a momentum for Jewish emigration that would challenge British control over Palestine resettlement.⁵⁶

During the first months of 1933 the refugees from Nazism garnered international attention in two ways: one elicited expressions of indignation at the Nazis' treatment of the Jews and their political opponents, the other mobilized philanthropic responses for the aid and welfare of the refugees. These were both responses of an outraged public. No government could seriously protest against German anti-Semitism, since anti-Semitic sentiments were all too evident in their own countries. Partly for this reason, governments held themselves aloof from the root causes of the emigration from Germany.

Those states to which the refugees turned were in the precarious position of balancing the pressures of economic depression, unemployment and the anxieties these caused. As restrictions on new immigrants were applied, the pressure from refugees also grew. And as refugee numbers increased, so did doubts about the capacity of national economies to absorb them. Even harsher restrictions were introduced, first to exclude refugees from the workforce, then to exclude them from the country altogether. In better times, the unwanted of Europe would have moved on to the Americas. This was no longer possible. Refugees therefore found themselves in overcrowded European labour markets, where trade unions, professional organizations, and political parties demanded the protection of national workers from foreign competitors. Welfare services for refugees were strained almost to exhaustion, and by the end of 1933 new sources of funds to continue their relief efforts were hard to come by.

Governments absolved themselves of this responsibility. Most of those in flight were received as temporary immigrants – visitors, or foreigners in transit to another country. There was some recognition that Jews, communists, socialists, pacifists and other enemies of Nazism, were indeed in need of protection for political or racial reasons. France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia in particular extended protection in the first months of 1933, when refugees could not produce valid identity or travel documents. But they were admitted only for a limited time, under special sufferance, and denied the right to work. Illegality among the refugees was therefore common; it was forced upon them by the need to survive. By working without an authorized permit, they risked expulsion or repatriation. Their employers could also fall foul of the law for hiring them without a work permit. Failure to leave upon the expiry of the entry visa forced many into a clandestine existence.

The refugees from Nazism were consequently a greatly disruptive influence on the societies and labour markets of Europe and the need for a coordinated

response to alleviate the problems was apparent as the International Labour Conference convened for its Seventeenth Session in Geneva in June 1933. This annual conference, which brought together governments, employers and trade union organizations of the International Labour Organization member countries, addressed matters of common concern to their economies and labour markets. Worker delegates from the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Switzerland presented a motion to its June 1933 session calling on the International Labour Organization to undertake all 'necessary studies with a view to placing German refugees in different countries without detriment to the economic welfare of those countries'.⁵⁷ The motion recognized the refugees from Germany as a matter of concern across Europe, and through their national labour movements, member governments came under pressure to raise it as a matter of international concern at the September 1933 Session of the League of Nations Assembly.