

# Newfoundland and Refugees from the Third Reich, 1933-41

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[See table of contents](#)

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# Newfoundland and Refugees from the Third Reich, 1933-41

GERHARD P. BASSLER

In the case of an immigrant who proves that he is seeking admission to this Colony solely to avoid persecution or punishment on religious or political grounds, or for an offence of a political character, or persecution, involving danger of imprisonment or danger to life or limb, on account of religious belief, leave to land shall not be refused on the ground merely of want of means or the probability of his becoming a charge on the public funds.

Newfoundland Aliens Act, 1906

BECAUSE OF SECTION 1.1(d) of the 1906 Aliens Act (quoted above), Newfoundland's immigration laws are reputed to have been very liberal towards refugees from religious or political persecution.<sup>1</sup> However, while we are quite well informed about the record of Canada's refugee policy, we in fact know virtually nothing about Newfoundland's pre-Confederation immigration policy, as scholarly attention has to date focused on the far more obvious exodus of Newfoundlanders to the North American mainland.

Canada's pre-1948 immigration policy towards refugees from the Third Reich has been the subject of Irving Abella's and Harold Troper's 1983 *None Is Too Many*. The essence of Canada's attitude towards Jewish refugees has been captured neatly in Prime Minister Mackenzie King's statement that he wanted "sincerely to find them a home—anywhere but in Canada" (Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many* 50). While European countries bordering on the Nazi orbit were often unable to stem the tide of refugees crossing their borders, the overseas western democracies, and especially Canada, judiciously exploited their geographical advantage of distance. Applying unabashedly racial and anti-Semitic criteria of selection, Canada kept out all but a trickle of desirable refugees. Even Britain, half of

whose 65,000 refugees from the Third Reich were Austrian Jews, could not persuade its close ally and Commonwealth partner to take more than eighty-two of those Jews by November, 1941, or to accept a share of responsibility for the acute pre-World War II refugee problem commensurate with Canada's resources. Abella and Troper concluded that Canada's record of admitting refugees, especially Jewish ones, from 1933 to 1948 was "the worst of all possible refugee receiving states," and that Canada must therefore share some responsibility for the fate of Europe's Jews in the Third Reich (vi).

Unable to obtain sanctuary in the spacious and richly endowed North American nations of immigrants, central Europe's desperate refugees of the late 1930s had to scramble for survival to such faraway countries as China and Japan. Kobe (Japan), for instance, offered 1,500-2,000 European Jews a haven in 1940, and in Shanghai some 20,000 refugees from Nazi persecution were added to the 60,000 resident exiles from Russian Communism already there. Thus Shanghai, despite its political turmoil, economic instability, alien culture and hostile climate, became a primary haven for refugees from the Third Reich (Dicker 98 ff.; Tokayer and Swartz 182; Kneucker 14, 30). Among non-European refugee receiving countries, the United States ended up admitting an estimated 150,000, Palestine 100,000, Argentina 63,000, Brazil 27,000, South Africa 26,000 and Australia 15,000 of an estimated total of 400,000 refugees from Greater Germany between 1933 and 1940. Canada, by contrast, took fewer than 4,000 (Abella and Troper, " 'The line must be drawn somewhere' " 179), plus 2,290 internees from Britain who were transferred to Canadian custody as prisoners of war in 1940 (Koch i, xiv); Newfoundland took only twelve verifiable refugees between 1933 and 1945.

The historical literature contains no references to Newfoundland's role in the European refugee crisis of the 1930s. Yet the mere fact that between 1934 and 1941 the Newfoundland government received numerous requests from individuals and organizations from Europe, Canada, the United States and Asia, as well as from its own local Jewish community, for the settlement of thousands of refugees, indicates that this role was not a negligible one. Refugee interest peaked in the eight months before the outbreak of World War II, when a large number of Jews, Germans, Austrians, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians and Rumanians pleaded for the favour of temporary admission to Newfoundland. Some offered considerable material security; some had close personal connections to Newfoundlanders. It is significant that none of these received permission to enter Newfoundland.

Some proposals for group settlement with potentially far-reaching economic implications were given careful consideration. The prospect of starting new industries with the help of skilled refugees even influenced government economic policy on the eve of World War II, though without any concrete results.

An appreciation of Newfoundland's response to the challenges of the European refugee crisis of the 1930s has to take into account the fact that Newfoundland was not a country of immigration like Canada and the United States. Emigration, Peter Neary asserts, had been a prominent feature of Newfoundland life for so long that in the 1930s American and Canadian census data showed 15% of the Newfoundland-born living on the mainland of North America (Neary, "Canadian Immigration" 69). David Alexander estimated that between 1884 and 1945 Newfoundland, with a population of 197,000 and 322,000 in the years cited, lost between 65,000 and 100,000 people through net migration, and that Newfoundland's infant mortality rate in the mid-1930s was 60% in excess of the Canadian level (Alexander 20). As Newfoundland's fishery-centered economy stagnated from the beginning of the twentieth century, the country became as unattractive to local and foreign investors as it was to immigrants. Growing economic and political dependence heightened the apprehensions of the small, ethnically rather homogeneous population towards foreign influences. Newfoundland had received most of its resident population in the 18th and 19th centuries from southwest England and southeast Ireland. According to John Mannion and Gordon Handcock, probably no other contemporary North American state or province drew such an overwhelming proportion of its settlers "from such localized source areas over so substantial a period of time" (Mannion 7). The arrival in the two decades preceding World War I of a small number of Chinese, Polish Jews, Syrians and Lebanese was therefore a highly visible event, although Newfoundland's nonnative ethnic communities of non-British descent never totalled more than .5% of the resident population. Concern for the economic self-reliance of the resident population as much as for its ethnic identity prompted Newfoundland's ruling elite to guard jealously the right to control immigration. Since the passage of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1906, the Newfoundland government looked to Canada for guidance in the development of an immigration policy that would enable it to restrict the influx of undesirable social, ethnic and racial groups.

Apart from its international ramifications, the topic under investigation is thus closely tied in with the virtually unexplored issues of New-

foundland's general immigration policy, its search for so-called "new industries," and the inter-ethnic relations between the host society of British descent and immigrants of non-British descent. In tracing the quest of these refugees of the 1930s for a home in Newfoundland, the focus will be on government policy, public opinion and the experience of some of the refugees themselves.

When Adolf Hitler took power in Germany on January 30, 1933, Newfoundland was in the midst of one of its most severe economic and political crises since the granting of Representative Government in 1832. Only the intervention of the British and Canadian governments in 1933 saved it from bankruptcy. The price, however, for their support was the suspension of democracy and the appointment by Britain of a Government by Commission for an undetermined period. Composed of three British and three Newfoundland Commissioners, with a British-appointed Governor presiding, the Commission, which had legislative as well as executive functions, assumed office on February 16, 1934. Its proceedings were subject to the supervision of the Dominions Office in London. The mandate of the Commission was to develop policies for immediate and long-range reconstruction. Differences in background, experience and outlook soon led to divisions among the Commissioners over priorities in economic policy, with the result that no long-range policy was adopted prior to World War II and economic issues tended to be decided on an ad hoc basis. According to S. J. R. Noel, the Commission "governed without purpose or ideas" prior to September, 1939. British Commissioners heading the key policy-making departments brought to their new jobs only the qualifications of skilled administrators and bureaucrats (224-5).

Until 1939, differences among Commissioners over economic strategy centered on the alternatives of either rehabilitating the codfishery or directing the unemployed to agriculture and land settlement. Consequently there was little sympathy among the Commissioners for any immigration. The conflict over priorities in economic reconstruction made it difficult to justify the admission of refugees and invited British intervention in favour of a more liberal refugee policy. The Commissioners gave their qualified support to a select immigration of refugees only in the spring of 1939, when the establishment of new industries became official government policy. In the end, initiatives to liberalize immigration in favour of refugees turned out to be unsuccessful. During its term in office the Commission of Government could muster neither the impetus nor the consensus to update Newfoundland's immigration laws. Instead it contrived ways of administering

the pre-1934 legislation in a manner that suited its purposes.

After 1934, Newfoundland's immigration policy was based on a system of restrictions that had been introduced, step by step, between 1906 and 1929. Since 1906, Chinese immigrants had been subject to a head tax of \$300 per person, and it had become the practice, though no authorization for this existed in the Act, to exclude Chinese women altogether. By the Aliens Act of 1906, persons without "the means of decently supporting [themselves] and [their] dependents," as well as lunatics, idiots and criminals, were declared undesirable. A 1924 Amendment to the Disembarking of Paupers Act provided for the deportation of immigrants, at the expense of the shipmaster responsible, on the following grounds: insufficient means of support, mental or physical disease, conviction for a criminal offense and being an undesirable person in the opinion of the Minister of Justice. To these restrictions the Immigration Act of 1926 added the right of the government to prescribe by regulation the minimum amount of money, depending on race, occupation or destination, that immigrants must possess upon landing. It also empowered the government to prohibit "the landing of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of the Colony, or immigrants of any specified class, occupation or character."<sup>2</sup>

Based on this authority, a Proclamation was issued in January, 1932, which prohibited the entry for two years of all central and east Europeans (excluding natives of countries to which Newfoundland was selling fish), persons belonging by race to any country in Asia or Africa, and all non-Newfoundlanders who were of the labouring classes. The Dominions Office objected to this discriminatory Proclamation as one that would probably lead to retaliatory action. In 1934 the newly installed Commission of Government allowed this Proclamation to lapse. However, its spirit as well as the general provisions and procedures of the 1926 Act remained in effect for the following twenty-three years. This Act stipulated that, prior to landing, any immigrant was to be scrutinized by an immigration or customs officer. From this the practice evolved of granting permits to those eligible to land. In the 1930s, permits issued by the Chief Commissioner of Immigration became a prerequisite for anyone intending to enter Newfoundland for a period of more than six weeks. Criteria of eligibility were at first based on literal compliance with the state of law. This meant that in 1934 a German citizen was not admissible "unless he shall show to the satisfaction of the Chief Commissioner of Immigration . . . that he will be in a position to support himself and those dependent on him, if any, and that neither he nor

they is or are likely at any future time to become a public charge.”<sup>3</sup> As the danger of an undesirable influx of refugees mounted, the Commissioners of Finance and Justice redefined eligibility more narrowly and refused permits on a variety of other grounds.

Soon after the Commissioners took office they confronted their first major immigration issue. In mid-March, 1934, an opportunity for acquiring immigrants with the necessary capital and select skills for economic development presented itself when Simon Belkin, Secretary of the Jewish Colonization Association, came to St. John's at the request of the Association's headquarters in Paris. He had a letter of introduction from S. W. Jacobs, Canadian Liberal Member of Parliament and representative of the Association's Canadian Committee, to the former Premier of Newfoundland and then Commissioner for Home Affairs, F. C. Alderdice. Belkin's mission was to explore the possibilities for the immigration of German Jews who had been forced to leave Germany as a result of the first anti-Semitic measures of the Nazi regime in April, 1933.<sup>4</sup>

After studying the local situation carefully and interviewing leading personalities in government, business and industry, as well as in the local Jewish community, Belkin proposed that some forty Jewish families be placed in Newfoundland at the Jewish Association's expense. These would include the following: five doctors in outposts that had lost their medical services; five doctors with two nurses each in five travelling clinics; two specialists for the Grace Hospital in St. John's; and dentists for Grand Falls and Corner Brook. Two German scientists would be employed at the Memorial University College, an idea to which the President of the College, A. G. Hatcher, had reacted quite favourably. There were also provisions for agricultural and industrial development. Since only one modern poultry farm operated near St. John's and Belkin found farming conditions in the most deplorable state, he felt there was room for ten to fifteen new poultry farmers to produce eggs and broilers, engaging in truck gardening on the side. The remaining refugees would come with capital to start factories for items which were imported but could be produced locally, such as spring beds, stoves and castings, toilet articles, brushes, paints, soaps, washing powders, fish meal, condensed milk and flour (Belkin 184 ff.).

Belkin had a one-hour conference with Sir John Hope Simpson, Commissioner for Natural Resources, one of the most influential Commissioners at the time. Hope Simpson was moved by the idea of the travelling clinics and impressed on Belkin his willingness to be of assistance. In a memorandum prepared for the Commission's deliberations, Hope Simpson brought out

the positive aspects of the proposal and underlined the absence of any risk for the government. "I know the Association," he concluded; "It has spent millions in settling Jews in the Argentine and in Russia and is a very wealthy foundation" (GN38/S2-1-1, NR19).

Hope Simpson was a man of vision and cosmopolitan experience. A former Member of Parliament in Britain and long-time member of the Indian civil service, he had acquired "a world-wide reputation for his works of reconstruction" in China from 1931 to 1933. As Vice-president of the League of Nations' Refugee Settlement Commission from 1926 to 1930, he had been involved in refugee resettlement in Greece, and in 1930 had gone on a special mission for the British government to Palestine. His white paper on Palestine was condemned by leading Jews for the opinion advanced in it that Palestine was too overcrowded for further Jewish immigration. Thus, perhaps, his indication to Belkin of his desire to prove his goodwill towards the Jewish people.<sup>5</sup> By the late 1930s, Hope Simpson would become recognized as an international authority on the refugee question. As early as the summer of 1933 he is reported to have expressed to the General Secretary of the League of Nations' High Commission for Refugees his concern with the fate of the victims of racial and political persecution in Germany (GN38/S2-1-12, file 7). In St. John's he had a reputation for being quick to seize upon new ideas, talking rapidly and "working far too hard" (*OW* 10 Dec. 1935), but Governor Sir Murray Anderson considered him "too impulsive and sometimes carried away by people who are not too reliable" (Noel 241). As spokesman of the five Commissioners who believed that the codfishery must continue to be the mainstay of the island, he was opposed by the Commissioner for Public Utilities, Thomas Lodge, who maintained that Newfoundland was suffering from overpopulation, which had to be remedied by government-sponsored schemes of cooperative land settlement (Noel 231).

The Minutes of the tenth meeting of the Commission of Government, held on March 31, 1934, record that it was decided to refer Belkin's plan to the editors of the city's daily newspapers, with a view to sounding out public opinion. However, no publicity was given to the plan in any of the papers. Instead Belkin received a letter dated April 16, 1934, from Hope Simpson, informing him that "after careful investigation of the whole question, the Commission . . . could not see its way to accepting the proposal you made." The Commission, he admitted, realized quite clearly that there was no chance the immigrants could become a charge on the state and that Belkin's foundation would perform a badly needed public service in the outports.



But after considering the matter in all its aspects, the Commission decided "that at the present time it would not be desirable that we should allow immigration and settlement of any kind" (GN 38/S2-1-12, NR 39-'36; Belkin 186 ff.). No doubt the views of Lodge prevailed on this occasion. Lodge believed that resettling the urban poor and impoverished outport fishermen into agricultural cooperatives should be the Commission's primary goal, and any Jewish immigration of the kind proposed might ruin his plan for the social reorganization of the Newfoundland people.

Another powerful influence that evidently was at work to kill this proposal came from the local Medical Board, whose secretary-treasurer Belkin had interviewed. The Board immediately became alarmed and succeeded in blocking the plan before the newspapers had a chance to publicize it. Word of the Board's opposition to this proposal even reached Burgeo, where one of the refugee doctors was expected to fill a vacancy. An angry letter to the editor of *Observer's Weekly* wondered whether it was right for Newfoundland's eighty-three doctors "to prevent thousands of other Newfoundlanders from receiving medical care." The Registrar of the Newfoundland Medical Board was obliged to explain that these new doctors and professors would ultimately be left to fend for themselves, that they might leave their assigned places to seek practices where medical men were already established, and that they would end up competing actively with local professional men. Furthermore, there was no adequate means "to check upon these German doctors' qualifications" (OW 11 May, 14 July, 11 Aug. 1934).

It is difficult to gauge the public support Belkin's proposal did have or might have had in Newfoundland. Support might have been expected from those who believed that the recruiting of needed skills was beneficial to the economic development of the country, and from the local Jewish community which had manifested its solidarity with Germany's persecuted Jews as early as April 2, 1934, by declaring a boycott on German-made goods (Zlatin). However, neither group was free from antiforeign sentiments. Among the leaders of the small Jewish community, Belkin noted that some he conferred with were "worried over the prospect of Jewish immigration. It was the usual fear that the increase in the number of Jews would prejudice the position of the older residents in the Jewish community" (Belkin 183).

The St. John's Jewish community, according to its biographer Alison Joanne Kahn, was not the type of autonomous ethnic neighbourhood characteristic of the larger North American cities. Its core consisted of Polish Jews who had immigrated in the two decades before World War I

from the Lithuanian-Polish borderlands, the so-called Jewish Pale of Tsarist Russia. In Newfoundland's ethnically and culturally rather homogeneous society of English, Irish and Scottish extraction, the founders of a Yiddish-speaking Jewish community of East European origin were "cultural pioneers," a "strange race never before encountered" (Kahn 59, 178). Entering a rural society that was economically and socially sharply polarized between the masses of poor fishermen and a small ruling class of wealthy merchants, lawyers, clergy and officials, the Jewish immigrants had to eke out a precarious existence as peddlers, tailors and small storekeepers. Cultural and economic survival meant keeping a low profile and compromising their religion. Newfoundland's Jews consequently cultivated an unobtrusive image and shunned public life, especially politics. Their social life was narrowly circumscribed and the temptations and pressure to assimilate were enormous. Typical of the local Jewish community's dilemma was what Kahn termed "the irony and the agony" of the Perlin story. Venerated as the founder of the Hebrew congregation in St. John's and its honorary President for Life, Israel Perlin, whose immigration to Newfoundland in 1891 from Russia via London and New York marked the birth of Newfoundland's Jewish community, is also remembered for dissociating himself socially from local Jews. As an astute and successful wholesale dealer in St. John's, Perlin aspired from the beginning to upward social mobility. All his children married gentiles and were eager to assimilate (Kahn 238 ff.).

The maturing of a locally-born second generation and the addition of Jewish newcomers from Germany, England and Canada after World War I tripled the size of the Jewish community between 1914 and 1934<sup>6</sup> and compounded its problems. Prominent second-generation Newfoundland Jews, such as Albert Perlin, together with such post-World War I newcomers as Frank Banikhin, "wouldn't mix" socially with the Jewish community (Kahn 239 *passim*). Others, like Rabbi Max Katz, encountered difficulties communicating with the congregation. The son of a German rabbi and himself a German war veteran decorated with the Iron Cross, Katz decided to leave Germany in April, 1937, at the age of forty-one to look for a position in the United States, because he foresaw the possibility of war and feared he would be one of the first to be drafted. In Montreal he was referred to the congregation in St. John's, where he arrived on August 31, 1937, for a three-week trial period. In St. John's Israel Perlin arranged to provide Katz with the security of a three- (later five-) year contract, enabling him to travel to Germany in March, 1938, to rescue his wife and two sons. After their

return, his and his family's passports were confiscated by the German Consulate General in Ottawa and not replaced. In spite of having been stripped of his German nationality by the German government, Rabbi Katz was suspected of collaborating with Nazi Germany in August, 1940, and his movements were put under police surveillance. A weekly report of his activities went to the Newfoundland Department of Justice until his emigration to the United States in December, 1940 (GN 13, box 38, file 88, statement of Max Katz, 8 Oct. 1940; Zlatin 11). The St. John's Hebrew congregation also appears to have been unhappy with the choice of Katz as their rabbi, for he was not fluent in English and his background and training did not suit the local situation. Without Israel Perlin's intercession in 1937, Rabbi Katz might not have been asked to come to St. John's. Again in 1934, Israel Perlin and his son Albert were two of four local Jews who indicated to Belkin their willingness to welcome German-Jewish refugees (Belkin 187).

Albert Perlin had established himself in the 1930s as one of Newfoundland's most prominent journalists and its most articulate public affairs critic and news commentator. By 1935 he had emerged as the leading spokesman of a small but vociferous and growing segment of the public which expected from the appointed Commission of Government entirely new initiatives in economic development. Perlin wanted to see not only more efficient government and a reform of the crisis-ridden fishing industry on the agenda of the Commission, but also the development of new industries as well as selective immigration. Although a convert to Protestantism, he acknowledged and appreciated his Jewish roots; the combination enabled him to view Newfoundland society from the perspective of an insider as well as that of an outsider. This background gave his comments a refreshingly unconventional and often provocative quality. In his 1933 testimony to the Amulree Commission's inquiry into the reasons for Newfoundland's economic collapse, he urged the soliciting of foreign manufacturers and more reliance on experts for the local industries. Perlin denounced what he termed "the small mind" that is opposed to experts. Experts provide "the progressive brain that our people do not have," he said. Since in Perlin's view the lack of immigration had led to a certain degeneration, he favoured an infusion of fresh blood. This would "improve the stock" and have other fringe benefits.<sup>7</sup>

In 1934 Albert Perlin launched his newsmagazine *Observer's Weekly* as the advocate of a more open, progressive and industrially diversified Newfoundland. It aimed at influencing government policy as well as overcoming

a widespread general resentment to foreign expertise. This resentment was succinctly captured in a letter to the *Observer's Weekly* of June 24, 1936, criticizing the English Commissioners:

Better mediocre Newfoundlanders who will actually do something for the main population of this country, and *do it at once*, than a whole body of experts, who will wish to see things done perfectly and according to plan . . . Let Newfoundlanders take conditions *as they are*, not as they ought to be and try small improvements first. Later, when things are gradually improved will be the time to call in the experts.

Perlin's editorials called on the government and the public to face the challenge of Newfoundland's handicaps. What was needed was less respect for tradition, he asserted, and more courage to take appropriate and prompt action in emergencies. The government, he charged in April, 1936, lacked coordinated and progressive policies for the prompt rehabilitation of the country. Decrying Commissioner Lodge's promotion of schemes of agricultural cooperation, Perlin demanded that the Commission should be chaired by a business executive. "What," he asked, "is keeping this country alive today? Four great industrial enterprises, employing perhaps no more than a total of 10,000 men" (*OW* 17 Dec. 1935; 28 Apr., 9 June 1936). While Perlin's *Observer's Weekly* never openly espoused the cause of admitting Jewish or other refugees to Newfoundland, he acted on the correct premise that with a quarter of the population on the dole and tuberculosis rampant in the outports, a campaign for industrial diversification and hence new employment opportunities would have a greater chance of convincing Newfoundlanders to open their doors to skilled refugees than would outright appeals for charity.

It was in an anonymous letter published in the *Observer's Weekly* of August 18, 1934, that the proposal was first advanced for the colonization of the interior of Labrador, in combination with some industrial development, as "the salvation of many of those now on the dole." The letter may have been intended merely to sound out public opinion, since the interior of Labrador was considered impossible to develop—even by Albert Perlin as late as June, 1933. After the British Privy Council's judgment of 1927 had confirmed Newfoundland's historic claims over those of Canada to Labrador, the Newfoundland government on several occasions, the last time in 1932, had considered selling Labrador to Canada (Noel 205, 220; Browne 138 ff.). In March, 1936, Frank Banikhin, a member of the St. John's Jewish community and a close friend of Israel Perlin and Hope

Simpson, came forward with a grandiose scheme of industrializing the country by settling skilled Jewish refugees in Labrador "on a considerable scale."

Banikhin had come with his family to Newfoundland in 1917 at the age of twenty-nine after having first emigrated from his native Ukraine via Germany to Saint John, New Brunswick, in 1907. Considering himself a Reform Jew, in St. John's he remained an outsider in the Jewish community and, like the Perlins, had no intimate social contact with it. His Ukrainian background and his education—he spoke seven European languages—his cosmopolitan interests and secular frame of mind separated Banikhin from the Polish roots, the liturgical orthodoxy and the total integration into the local economy that the inner core of Newfoundland's Jewish community shared. A shipowner and world trader in various commodities, such as hides, metals and fish, and with eighteen commercial establishments all over the island and in Labrador, Banikhin had business connections with Canada, the United States and Germany. As an exporter of pit props to Germany, he had frequent dealings with German sea captains, who from their voyages to the Lake Melville area in Labrador brought back ore samples given to them by natives and prospectors. On his business trips to the United States, Banikhin used to take these ore samples with him for assay. He became intrigued by the economic potential of Labrador and by the possibility of exploring these deposits. When his American contacts verified the high iron ore content of the samples, but refused to consider investing capital in such a distant and inaccessible region, Banikhin decided to tackle the job himself with the help of refugees from the Third Reich (Cyril Banikhin interview, 19 Nov. 1984). According to the recollections of his son Cyril, Banikhin had no personal connections with German Jews; however, he was quite familiar with Germany, where he had lived briefly and had once intended to settle. But he knew that among the growing volume of refugees there was a high percentage of "skilled workmen, craftsmen, engineers, manufacturers, mechanics, etc.," and that there were Jewish agencies providing financial aid for their resettlement. There is some evidence that Banikhin may have been encouraged by Hope Simpson to submit a proposal to enable the latter to prove that he cared for the Jews (GN 38/S2-1-12, Banikhin to Hope Simpson, 5 Mar. 1936).

Banikhin formally submitted his proposal "that Jewish refugees from Germany should be encouraged to settle on the Labrador and there to found an industrial centre" to Hope Simpson on March 5, 1936. It suggested that if a concession were given enabling Jewish immigrants to

develop the water power of the Grand Falls (now called Churchill Falls) on the Hamilton (now Churchill) River in Labrador, it would be possible to organize a settlement in the vicinity, entirely financed by international Jewish funds. There would thus be established in an area hitherto unpopulated by Europeans "a manufacturing centre which might conceivably grow to proportions almost beyond belief." Once the not insuperable difficulties of contact with the coast were surmounted, the proposed site would be accessible to the United States and Canada, including western Canada, for which the Hudson's Bay route was available for part of the year. It would also be nearer Europe than either Canada or the United States. Such a development would bring out "millions of dollars worth of hidden resources," and it "would necessarily use up our unemployed population and would in addition provide a market for a great deal of our produce as it would be purely a manufacturing centre." Banikhin expressed the conviction that if German Jews, who had a reputation for industriousness and self-reliance and a gift for manufacturing and invention, were brought to Labrador, "the results would be almost staggering."

Hope Simpson warmly recommended the scheme to his fellow Commissioners as a proposal that "may sound fantastic" but in reality was not "so fantastic as it would appear to be on the surface." The Commission decided to request the views of the British government on the political aspects of the proposal before taking any further action. In a memorandum of March 25, 1936, to Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, the Governor of Newfoundland, Sir Humphrey Walwyn, stressed that Banikhin's proposal was "of an entirely different nature" from other plans for settling Jewish refugees that had been proposed earlier. In Banikhin's proposal, Jewish professional refugees would not compete with professional groups on the island but "would have as its object industrial development in a country which is vacant at present." Walwyn pointed out that the Grand Falls on the Hamilton River in Labrador was believed to be the most important reserve of waterpower on the North American continent and was available for hydroelectric development. Such development would be financed entirely by funds subscribed by Jews in other countries. The Commission, he added, would be prepared to give serious consideration "to the settlement of Jews on the Labrador on a considerable scale" on three conditions: first, that the British government raise no political objection; second, that it be endorsed by public opinion; and, third, that no financial burden would fall on the Newfoundland government.<sup>8</sup>

Dominions Secretary MacDonald saw no objection in principle to the set-

tlement of Jews in Labrador. But in his reply of July 10, 1936, he let it be known that on a recent visit to London Commissioner Lodge had considered the scheme as being "not a practical one, since the Grand Falls on the Hamilton River are very inaccessible and at present there is nothing to which the power obtainable from the Falls could be applied." In addition, a concurrent application for rights in Labrador by Weaver (Minerals) Ltd. covered waterpower rights which included the Grand Falls (GN 38/S2-1-12, MacDonald to Walwyn, 10 July 1936).

Cyril Banikhin did not attribute the failure of his father's scheme to any lack of approval from the British or Newfoundland governments, but to the refusal of Zionist organizations in New York to raise funds for the project. The Zionists, he suggested, made a living from sending Jewish refugees to Palestine, and they were not willing to support any alternative places of settlement. "Dad went to New York full of hope and optimism," Cyril Banikhin recalled, "but they [the Zionists] were not very receptive and wouldn't budge. They called him a traitor to the Jewish people. So he came back very disappointed and disillusioned, and forgot the whole matter" (Cyril Banikhin interview, 19 Nov. 1984). In June, 1936, Hope Simpson resigned suddenly as Commissioner and returned to England. It appears that he was tired of operating, to quote David Alexander, "in the shadow of the Amulree Royal Commission's reflections on the unwisdom of a small and poor country attempting to become anything else" (19).

Hope Simpson's resignation removed from the scene Newfoundland's most influential spokesman for accepting refugees from the Third Reich. This became clear when the Commission received a request on June 12, 1936, from A. L. Wurfain, General Secretary of the League of Nations' High Commission for Refugees from Germany, asking that Newfoundland accept "for settlement on the land" a small number of non-Jewish refugees from Germany. The government rejected it outright, even though the League's High Commissioner's office offered financial support as the result of a successful special international appeal (GN 38/S2-1-12, file 7, Natural Resources 1936 L). At the same time, the Commission responded encouragingly to an inquiry from Malcolm MacDonald, who asked whether a Dutch family of five persons would be able to immigrate as farmers. The only condition imposed was that they arrive in Newfoundland with funds of at least \$5,000 (GN 1/3/A, 1934, nos. 303-23; MacDonald to Walwyn, 12 May 1936; Walwyn to MacDonald, 30 June 1936).

In 1938 a new act opened in the European refugee drama. The number of refugees began to soar as Nazi rule was extended to Austria on March 13,

1938, and to the Sudetenland on September 29, 1938. Moreover, the bloody *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9-10, 1938, triggered the complete expropriation of Jewish property in the enlarged Third Reich and the exclusion of Jews from social and cultural life. Prior to 1938, Nazi policies had aimed at a gradual removal of Germany's 600,000 Jews from important positions in public and economic life and the creation of a special status for Jews. Up to 1938 organized emigration was still possible and actually encouraged by the Nazi regime, and even a rabbi like Max Katz could declare that in 1937 "I was not actually forced to leave Germany" (GN 13, box 38, file 88, statement of Max Katz, 8 Oct. 1940). The new climate of terror against Jews that began in November, 1938, coupled with complete disenfranchisement, expropriation and social segregation, removed the last illusions of those who had stayed, and triggered a spontaneous mass flight of 120,000 Germans for the year preceding June, 1939, compared to an estimated 150,000 to 170,000 between 1933 and November, 1938 (Hope Simpson, *Refugees: A Review* 24; Krausnick et al. 30).

In the annexed parts of the Reich, Jews were more violently persecuted from the beginning. The *Anschluss* of Austria, which added 190,000 Jews to those of Germany, resulted in an officially estimated exodus of 135,000 from Vienna alone by September, 1939 (Fraenkel 467, 474). Prague counted 130,000 refugees from its annexed provinces in the spring of 1939 (Marrus 174 ff.); and of Britain's total number of 65,000 Jewish refugees from central Europe who had managed to flee from 1933 to 1942, more than half arrived between August, 1938, and September, 1939 (Sherman 204 ff.; Rosenkranz 270). At the very moment, however, when the need was greatest, the few existing escape hatches began to close. Among other reasons, the governments of many potential receiving countries, including Newfoundland, feared that by accepting refugees they would encourage more persecutions and more expulsions, not only from the Third Reich, but also from the allies of Nazi Germany and from countries eager to emulate Nazi anti-Semitic policies.

In response to this new situation, the Commission of Government sought to tighten Newfoundland's hatches in three ways: by compelling its German nationals to register with the German consul, so that they could be deported if desirable; by enacting more discriminatory immigration legislation; and by refusing to issue permits to land on any grounds. The first measure was a reaction to a German law of February 3, 1938, which provided that German nationals abroad who failed to register with the appropriate German consul could be deprived of German nationality. In order to keep Newfoundland's



twenty German nationals, including the family of Rabbi Katz, deportable, Commissioner of Justice L. E. Emerson proposed legislation in April, 1938, "compelling German nationals residing here to register with a view to avoiding or limiting [the] number likely to become stateless." This course of action was abandoned on the recommendation of the Dominions Secretary, who urged the Governor of Newfoundland to allow aliens affected by the German law complete freedom to comply with it or not (GN 1/3/A, 1938, nos. 111-302A, file "Passports—Abolition of Visas, Austria").

A similar fate befell the draft legislation of April, 1938, "covering immigration and deportation" and designed to stem the growing tide of applications from refugees. Emerson stressed that under the current state of law the criterion of holding undesirable political opinions or of belonging to an economically or racially undesirable class of persons was not covered. The provision of the 1906 Aliens Act "that a political or religious refugee is not to be refused leave to land merely on the ground of the probability of his becoming a charge on public funds" was for Emerson "too liberal in present circumstances" (GN 38/S4-1-5, "Memorandum on Immigration and Deportation," 11 Apr. 1938). Cabling to London at the end of October, and again on November 26, 1938, that the Department of Customs was "flooded with applications mainly from Continental Jews who desire to settle in Newfoundland," Emerson urged legislation along "strictly Canadian lines," identical with Section 38(c) of Chapter 93 of the Revised Statutes of Canada 1927. The legislation should apply to any person arriving in Newfoundland by land, sea or air, and should be followed by a proclamation

prohibiting for two years the landing for residence in Newfoundland of persons being natives of or belonging by race to any country other than the United Kingdom. . . . The proclamation would also prohibit the landing for the purpose of residence in Newfoundland of any person not being a native of Newfoundland unless he shall have received a special permit from the Chief Commissioner for Immigration.<sup>9</sup>

The Dominions Secretary objected to the "provision for unqualified exclusion especially at the present moment when [the] refugee question is so much in the minds of Governments and public." He suggested that a visa system with entry permits would provide adequate control of immigration and requested definition of criteria for the granting of a permit (GN 1/3/A, 1934, nos. 303-23, letters of 26 Nov. and 2 Dec. 1938). In April, 1938, Newfoundland had agreed to be associated with the new British requirement of a visa for holders of German and Austrian passports, and so as of June 13,

1938, refugees from the Third Reich wishing to proceed to Newfoundland needed a visa issued by a British passport control officer. According to the official instructions sent out by the Foreign Office in London to British consulates, applications for entering Newfoundland for more than six weeks "should be referred to the Chief Commissioner, St. John's, for approval before a visa is given." In reality, as a telegram from the Dominions Office observed shrewdly, the visa system as an adjunct to the permit system also served to control applications for temporary visits. A visa for a temporary visit would be granted only where a passport or document valid for return was held and where good reason for a visit could be shown. Since as of October 7, 1938, non-Aryans in Germany no longer held a document valid for return, they had become ineligible for a British visa (GN 1/3/A, 1934, nos. 303-23, Eric Machtig to Emerson, 12 Dec. 1938). Access to Newfoundland for refugees from the Third Reich was thus entirely at the discretion of the Chief Commissioner of Immigration in St. John's, and new legislation turned out to be unnecessary.

Beginning in the summer of 1938 and increasing sharply in January, 1939, personal inquiries and applications for visas forwarded by British consular officers began to pour into St. John's from actual and potential refugees in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Rumania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, Cuba and Japan. Most of the applicants appeared to be highly qualified professionals and skilled workers. An unsuccessful petition of February 3, 1939, by Dr. G. Lichtenstern, a lawyer in Budapest, was written on behalf of 1,000 Jewish families, including educated farmers, engineers and young merchants, who had "lost their working places furnishing till now all exigencies of their modest existence by the cruel disposals of the [anti-] Jewish law."

The group wishes to earn a territory large enough to nourish [a] thousand families by farm-working and would take along with them economical machines, mill equipment, the same for the proper physicians, several automobiles (tractors for the farm), various manufacturer's fittings and so on for civilized living.

GN 1/3/A, 1939, nos. 5-17, Thomas Inskip to Walwyn, 18 Feb. 1939

This was one of the most striking of a great number of applications. Rather than focus on every single refugee case associated with Newfoundland, attention will instead be concentrated on a few applications and on the shifting criteria for the rejection of every application and petition received.

One of the first well-documented cases is that of Nochau Goldman from Dunilowicz, Poland. From Poland, where in the late 1930s anti-Semitism was a popular sentiment of such force that every government had to give lip service to it, and where nearly one million Jews were given over to actual starvation (Marcus 378 ff.; Rabinowicz 174), Goldman was "compelled" to petition King George VI for permission for himself and his starving family of four (including children aged one and four) to join his sister in Corner Brook. She had immigrated to Newfoundland seven years earlier, to be married to the small dry goods store owner of Polish Jewish descent, Ernest Swirsky. The Commission, confessing ignorance of Swirsky's financial standing, turned down the request on receiving information that he had "recently compounded with his creditors," and in view of the widespread unemployment on the island. In the light of a second plea, referring to the Swirskys' declared willingness "to take us and live with them, and share with each other as one united family," as well as to the applicant's qualifications as a bookkeeper, farmer, cement finisher and tile layer, the Newfoundland government was asked to reconsider its decision. On October 22, 1938, Governor Walwyn replied that while the Commission

are prepared sympathetically to consider any applications made on behalf of doctors, specialists, skilled and professional workers, they are not anxious to encourage the immigration of persons not possessing such qualifications and for whom suitable employment is [not] proved to exist. We have therefore further decided that permission shall not be accorded to applicants whose intention is to engage in any employment for which suitable persons of Newfoundland birth are available.

GN/1/3/A, 1934, nos. 303-23, file 316/34

Yet the Commission decided not to deport sailor Hendrik Haranzy, from Danzig, by the next German boat when the Jewish congregation of St. John's offered a bond guaranteeing that he would not be a charge on the colony. He was one of two German seamen who jumped ship in Botwood and Corner Brook in August, 1938. The eighteen-year-old Haranzy claimed that he had been very harshly treated by the ship's crew and was in fear of his life because he belonged "to the race persecuted by the Nazis" (*ET* 16 Aug. 1938).

No exception was made for Erich Gruenberg, whose petition was forwarded by Dominions Secretary MacDonald on January 17, 1939. A former accountant in the Berlin bank of Alfred Freund, Gruenberg stated that he had been forced during the last months to work on roads and other construction sites and that the police had ordered him recently "to leave my

home and country within the shortest period." Enclosing two certificates of conduct from his former employer and the police, as well as assurance of sufficient funds available from a friend in Stockholm for landing and subsistence, Gruenberg asked for urgent consideration that he and his wife be allowed to reside in Newfoundland while his application for an American visa was being processed. On February 8, 1939, the Newfoundland Department of Home Affairs received a telegram with a voucher for a prepaid reply from Gruenberg in Berlin: "Urge application M 651/5 in awaiting cable answer. Have to depart immediately. Please send permit." A week later the Department cabled back: "No application received. Regret permits for residency in Newfoundland cannot be granted" (GN 1/3/A, 1939, nos. 5-17, file 9/39; GN 2/5, file 731).

A case that dragged on for four months involved millionaire James N. Rosenberg, a prominent member of the New York law firm of Rosenberg, Goldmark & Colin. A distant cousin of his from Germany had unexpectedly turned up in New York as a refugee on his way to Cuba. In mid-December, 1938, Rosenberg inquired of Major R. H. Tait, Director of the Newfoundland Information Bureau in New York, whether that cousin could come to Newfoundland and bring his mother from Germany to live there with him. "Because he was a strong courageous fellow who had withstood Nazi persecution without letting it break his nerve, I determined that I would try to find a decent life for him," Rosenberg wrote. Rosenberg intended to buy a tract of land on the west coast of the island, where his family could spend the summer fishing, and have the refugee cousin and his mother look after the place year-round. He undertook to see to it that neither the cousin nor his mother would become charges on the public. Their coming instead would "bring money into Newfoundland." The Commissioner for Home Affairs, after conferring with the Commissioner for Natural Resources, turned thumbs down on the suggestion, giving the following grounds: first, having been "faced with a considerable problem in dealing with applications from persons mainly of Jewish extraction who desire to leave Central Europe," a visa was not to be issued to any person holding a German, Austrian or Czechoslovakian passport without the prior approval of the Chief Commissioner of Immigration; second, owing to high unemployment, such approval would not be granted to anyone proposing to engage in an occupation for which qualified Newfoundlanders were available or who might become a public charge; third, only applications from a limited number of the professional class or those with specialist qualifications would be considered—each case would be decided on its own

merits; finally, since the occupations or qualifications of Rosenberg's relatives were not indicated, "we should find it very difficult to grant permission for the settlement in this country of a man and his mother merely to look after a stretch of salmon river" (GN 2/5, file 731).

The case of Rose R. Zuber of St. John's confirmed that neither financial security nor first degree family relationship was sufficient ground for admitting a refugee. Zuber and her husband, married for nine years and naturalized British subjects, carried on a successful business as ladies' costumiers in St. John's. Over a period of two years, starting in March, 1937, Rose Zuber made four futile attempts to obtain permission for her parents and, if possible, her two brothers (aged twenty-one and eighteen, and certified mechanics) in Pruzana, Poland, to join her in St. John's. "My family are all Polish Jews," she wrote, "and it is because of their increasing fear of prosecution, and the possible confiscation of their property, that they are looking to Newfoundland. . . . They have no relatives or friends elsewhere outside Poland." On her application being rejected, she engaged the services of a lawyer, who was told by customs officials as well as by the Commissioner himself "that their decision had been made in the exercise of the absolute discretion vested in Government, for which they decline to give any reason." Suffering "great anxiety and distress" and feeling that she deserved better treatment as a British subject, Zuber on March 2, 1939, made a final appeal to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in London. She insisted that there was not the slightest danger of members of her family becoming a charge upon the state or engaging in business detrimental to any Newfoundlanders. She argued that the case of her family deserved to be considered on its own merits and distinguished from the general and broad class of "Jewish refugees." Finally, she feared that further delays "may be serious or even fatal" so far as her family was concerned "and that they may not be allowed to leave Poland at all, or only after confiscation of the whole or most of their property." This appeal was sent for reconsideration to the Newfoundland government. Its Chief Commissioner for Immigration replied tersely on July 8, 1939, that there were "no grounds whatever to justify a reconsideration of the case, and the decision already conveyed to you cannot be varied" (GN 1/3/A, 1939, nos. 5-17, file 9/39; GN 38/s3-5-4, file 17).

Newfoundland's criteria for issuing entry permits must have been an enigma to British consular officials, because on March 30, 1939, the British Passport Control Officer in New York requested clarifications on behalf of the National Co-ordinating Committee in New York for Aid to Refugees

and Emigrants Coming from Germany, an organization that worked in close cooperation with the German Jewish Aid Committee in London. He pressed the Newfoundland Commissioner of Finance, J. H. Penson, to define his government's policy with regard to the admittance of refugees who (a) having adequate financial support without employment, have obtained a U.S. immigration quota number, but are compelled to wait abroad for their U.S. visa; (b) having adequate financial support, will not seek employment; and (c) who will seek employment or the establishment of businesses. In his reply of May 2, Penson spelled out what appeared to be the overriding criterion for turning down refugees who would likely not become a charge on public funds: "It might not be possible for such persons to be deported from Newfoundland, if allowed to enter, if for any reason such a course was found to be necessary or desirable." Only tourists in possession of return tickets and documents establishing their right to reenter the country of their origin, and whose stay was not to exceed six weeks, would be accorded permission to take up temporary residence. All other cases, with qualifications and in occupations unlikely to interfere with any established trade, and thus *prima facie* eligible for admission, would have to be referred for consideration of their particular merits to the Chief Commissioner of Immigration in St. John's. In his answer of August 17 to a follow-up inquiry by the British Consul General in New York, the Governor of Newfoundland narrowed down the eligibility of aliens wishing to take up temporary residence in Newfoundland while waiting for a U.S. visa to "British subjects *by birth*."<sup>10</sup>

The press voiced considerable support for the refugee policy that Commissioners Emerson and Penson had articulated and executed so skillfully. The alleged ease with which the laws permitted undesirables to enter the country was of great concern to the editor of the *Evening Telegram* of November 16, 1938, who cited as examples the increase in the number of Newfoundland's foreign-born from 731 in 1911 to 1,601 in 1935 (excluding those born in the United Kingdom, Ireland or the British Dominions). He suggested that the majority of the refugees, probably being unskilled as well as penniless, would become a burden to any country accepting them. "Today, more than ever, the right to come and settle is likely to be pressed, and unless the regulations are very considerably stiffened, the country runs the risk of being overrun by peoples who could not possibly be absorbed in the population." In the winter of 1938-9 commentators in the *Evening Telegram* repeated the demand for a tightening of Newfoundland's immigration laws. It was alleged that in business, labour and other activities

there was no room for increased numbers. One commentator advised that "when the times does come—if ever—when we need a larger population, we should first look to British stock." Recalling that on a number of occasions Newfoundlanders had been "fleeced by outsiders" taking advantage of the laxity of immigration laws, some expressed fears that Newfoundland was "more or less an open field for those who feel inclined to come in from other countries and settle or work here" (*ET* 17 Nov. 1938, 16 Jan. 1939). Objections to refugees on the grounds of social class and adverse economic impact thus went hand in hand with the conviction that central European refugees constituted a threat to the ethnic identity of the host society and were at best useless castaways for any country.

Could any help or knowledge be expected from central European refugees, either regarding the fisheries or the utilization of waste materials for the fisheries? one letter writer in the *Evening Telegram* asked on January 20, 1939; adding, "From all accounts it does not appear likely that any refugee from Europe would be allowed to carry with him an outfit for waste material costing \$12,000 to \$16,000," which would be the capital necessary for a modern fish-waste-converting machine. In the *St. John's Daily News* of January 21, 1939, Ronald Martin worried about the effect of refugees who were accustomed to lower wages on the local wage scale. He warned that "casting several thousand destitute pilgrims into a distressed country is going to play ducks and drakes with the unemployment problem . . . . Hold fast Newfoundland to what little you have left. You are fast losing your identity." Martin recommended the imposition of a \$500 tax on each admitted alien. He characterized Newfoundland as "one of the few countries where the only bar to the ragtail and bobtail of the world is the cursory glance of officialdom." The reason Newfoundland could get no doctors except refugees to come here, an anonymous writer in the *Evening Telegram* of February 11, 1939, charged, was because British doctors who came were not given a living wage or the necessary facilities to work with. Those refugee doctors would be "followed by all their relations, good, bad and indifferent until we fail to remain predominantly British." Newfoundlanders would hopefully "strongly object to our country being the dumping ground of people who have been turned out of their own country." Nonetheless, there was no evidence of any manifestations of unprovoked blatant anti-Semitism comparable to that of Canada in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup>

It was inevitable that Newfoundland's uncompromising policy of exclusion would be questioned from different quarters, as with the swelling tide

of refugees the search for places of asylum became obsessive and the most far-fetched settlement schemes were concocted. "Does all the world contain no land upon which refugees may be settled to work out their own salvation as pioneer communities?" wondered the editor of the *Daily News* on November 1, 1938. "Some such tracts there must be," he concluded, and "Labrador might even be one of them." In London, Hope Simpson was reported on November 3, 1938, to have urged the settlement of a large number of Central European refugees in the dominions and colonies (*ET* 3, 26 Nov. 1938). Under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, he had just published a major study on refugees and was, in the words of Sir Neill Malcolm, High Commissioner of German refugees since 1936, "commonly recognized to be the outstanding authority on the refugee problem, on which he has been at work for the last twenty years." Hope Simpson maintained that so far the generosity and effort of the Christian community had been conspicuously inadequate, and the extension of the problem to Austria had made the refugee problem insoluble for private organizations.

This was a matter in which the British Empire might work together. Vast areas in the Dominions and Colonies might be developed and populated. The problem was a true refugee problem, and the need should not be regarded as relief merely for Jews but rather as relief for multitudes of "sorely tried and unwanted but perfectly innocuous and innocent people." *ET* 26 Nov. 1938

Hope Simpson's exhortations coincided with reports and editorials in the press condemning the barbarism of *Kristallnacht* in Germany and its cruel aftermath. "Intolerance of differences of race, creed or color finds no favour under the rule of democracy," asserted the editor of the *Evening Telegram* on November 12, 1938, while the same issue noted the admission to Australia and New Zealand of one hundred Jewish men, women and children from Germany and Austria. "All the men are skilled workers. . . . Some have sufficient means to pay their fare. Others have been assisted by the Jewish Aid Society." One anonymous letter in the *Daily News* of November 15, 1938, concluded that Newfoundland should not stand by and do nothing. "It is not often that Newfoundland is able to assist others. We think we have so little to offer. But we have the present of freedom. . . . And we need doctors badly." The writer pointed out that Newfoundland, Canadian, English and American doctors were very reluctant to accept the conditions of living in Newfoundland outports, and that it should be possible to bring in German-Jewish doctors and assign them to certain territories



so they would not interfere with local doctors. "History has shown," he concluded, "that any country which has extended ordinary rights to Jews has never lost by it."

In a major policy statement of November 22, 1938, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain promised British aid in settling Jewish refugees in the Empire. He proposed Tanganyika, Kenya and British Guiana as suitable areas. On January 11, 1939, the *Times* of London suggested that Newfoundland should be included in the list of areas under investigation by the Inter-governmental Refugee Committee established at the Evian conference in the summer of 1938 to explore refugee immigration possibilities. By the end of January, 1939, a survey of the island's potentialities on behalf of certain New York welfare organizations had apparently already been completed, and the *New York Journal* of January 31, 1939, announced that serious consideration was being given to settling thousands of Jewish refugees from central Europe in Newfoundland. Saul Bernstein, a noted civil engineer, had travelled incognito across the island by every means of conveyance and found that, apart from thirteen dentists and twenty doctors practising in and near St. John's, only a handful of medical and dental practitioners served 75% of Newfoundland's population of 280,000. With its "absolute need" for doctors and dentists, and its possibilities for farming, Bernstein identified Newfoundland as a "secondary haven" for central European refugees. Each family would need to have \$2,000 to \$3,000 to start life there. He was amazed at the number of unsolicited suggestions coming from across the island that "the oppressed people of Europe would be welcomed."

The Newfoundland government could not entirely ignore the growing pressure from the outports to fill existing medical vacancies with foreigners. The annual death rate from tuberculosis was 171 per 100,000, compared to fifty-three per 100,000 in Canada (Alexander 18). There was an acute shortage of trained personnel for Newfoundland's newly inaugurated health care system, to be implemented by six new cottage hospitals and additional nursing stations across the island. On January 11, 1939, Commissioner Penson inquired about British policies concerning qualifications for immigrant doctors. Newfoundland was "receiving [a] considerable number of applications from Jewish and other persons desiring to enter Newfoundland who claim medical qualifications," Penson stated; and Newfoundland was prepared to adhere to rules similar to those applicable in Britain. P. A. Clutterbuck of the Dominions Office explained that after some 200 German refugee doctors had been permitted to settle and practise in Britain between 1933 and

1936, it was decided to deny further requests for studying and registration. Thereafter, exceptions had only been made in favor of fifty Austrians selected from about 1,000 by representatives of the profession and the refugee organization (GN 1/3/A, 1939, nos. 5-17, file 9/39). In May and June, 1939, the Newfoundland Department of Public Health proceeded to hire seven refugee doctors—four female and two male doctors from Austria, and one female from Czechoslovakia—on three-year contracts (GN 38/S 6-1-2, file 12). They were to serve as district nurses and medical officers in cottage hospitals and outport nursing stations all over the island and Labrador. They had all fled to London on their own, where they learned from the Jewish refugee committee about the openings in Newfoundland. The Overseas Nursing Association certified that they had passed their medical examinations (Dickman 13-15).

A different note was injected into the refugee debate with the publication of a report on January 17, 1939, by the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution. The report called for an initiative in economic development through new industries not operating in Canada at the time; these were to be launched by refugees. "The immigration of carefully selected individuals or groups of refugees," it was argued, would bring skilled workers, new arts, crafts and industries and thus prove of inestimable value to Canada's national economy. "Why should not Newfoundland also avail of the opportunity to reap the benefit?" the editor of the *Evening Telegram* asked on January 18, 1939. He drew his readers' attention to the fact that 11,000 Jews permitted to settle provisionally in England since 1933 had not only managed to establish new industries and to remove the centre of the fur industry from Leipzig to London, but also were already employing 15,000 Englishmen. Australia, it was reported, would admit 15,000 refugees within the next three years, giving preference to those able to establish new industries (*ET* 1 Dec. 1939). Even such an ardent opponent of refugee immigration as the above-quoted Ronald Martin conceded that if an outsider came to process local raw materials, such as herring, "and created a new line of work, should he not be welcome?" (*ET* 9 Feb. 1939).

The refugee issue had now become a part of a growing public debate over alternative approaches to Newfoundland's economic recovery. This debate was fuelled by the increase in 1939 of the average number of Newfoundlanders on relief to 58,187 from 31,899 in 1934, by the apparent lack of concern of the small prospering mercantile community in St. John's for the appalling rate of unemployment and poverty in the outports, and by the

fact that by 1939 the Commission government's conservative approach to rehabilitation was widely considered a failure (Clark 152; Noel 236 ff.; Lodge 254 ff.; Neary, "Great Britain" 29 ff.). In his Interim Report of November, 1938, on long-range reconstruction policy, J. H. Gorvin deplored the low standards of education and the lack of apprenticeship for trades in Newfoundland. Gorvin was a principal attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in England who was seconded to the Commission to advise on development prospects. He was appointed Commissioner for Natural Resources in May, 1939. Although the thrust of his recommendations dealt with schemes of rural reconstruction, he urged an offensive "over a wide front by a combination of the best brains the trade and industry of the country and the Departments of Government can produce." He suggested new industries on the model of Norway and the recruitment of experts. "Let us . . . invite to our shores . . . those men and women who can best help—scientists, engineers, agriculturists, economists, social workers," he told the St. John's Rotary; "Let us develop organized effort to suit Newfoundland" (*ET* 28, 29 Nov., 2 Dec. 1938).

A more aggressive note was sounded by Albert Perlin, who in the *Observer's Weekly* of February 7, 1939, charged that the government's schemes for land settlement, subsistence farming and cooperative efforts along various lines "can at best . . . create a peasant population that will have life but no economic existence." This would be a "dreary outlook." He saw industrial development as the only road to prosperity, but warned that "no one is going to drop industries into our laps. If we want them, we have to go after them." Newfoundland's population was so small, Perlin declared, that one large factory would accommodate most of those who were then unemployed. On November 4, 1938, the *Evening Telegram* reported that the Council of the Board of Trade, of which Perlin was a member, had appointed a special committee to study the possibilities of establishing new industries in Newfoundland. It was the first fruit of Perlin's campaign for a new approach to economic recovery and development.

The formal constitution of a New Industries Committee, with Commissioner Penson as its acting chairman, was officially announced on August 22, 1939. As the predecessor of the Newfoundland Industrial Development Board, incorporated in 1942, it had a mandate to consider proposals for the establishment of new industries in accordance with the recommendations of the Gorvin Interim Report of November, 1938. Penson was known to be the driving force behind the new committee, whose official chairman, Commis-

sioner Gorvin, according to W. J. Browne lacked sufficient interest to attend any meeting after the first one (Nfld. House of Assembly *Proceedings* 28 Mar. 1955). As early as February, 1939, Penson had made the first confidential inquiry with Clutterbuck of the Dominions Office about suitable refugee enterprises, but was told to ensure "that [the] Commission as a whole concur generally in what is proposed" before proceeding further. After the *Times* of April 20, 1939, indicated the possibility of openings for skilled craftsmen in Newfoundland for the purpose of establishing new industries, Penson on June 12 cabled Clutterbuck again, asking for confidential inquiries among refugee organizations as to the kinds of expertise available. The Commission insisted on having the opportunity to examine proposals before any indication of Newfoundland's attitude was given. In his reply of July 5 Clutterbuck pointed out that it was impossible for refugee organizations to put forward concrete proposals without first sending representatives to study local conditions in consultation with the Commission. Penson's instructions, to "gather information without disclosing that Newfoundland was in any way interested," had left the Dominions Secretary wondering whether the Commission really welcomed an investigation by representatives of refugee organizations, and are indicative of internal dissension and strong reservations about the proposed course of action among the Commissioners (GN 1/3/A, 1939, nos. 5-17, file "Immigration into Newfoundland").

That public opinion exerted pressure on the government to act became obvious as the local press urged the recruiting of such world-famous manufacturers as the Czech Bata shoe company, whose intended relocation to Canada was initially opposed by the Canadian shoe industry. Such a concern, the *Evening Telegram* of June 22, 1939, reasoned, might utilize local animal hides and seal skins, which were at the time all sent abroad for processing. Newfoundland, the *Daily News* of July 7, 1939, agreed, would welcome refugees of the kind reported to be setting up some twenty new industries in Montreal, manufacturing glassware, chemicals, plastics, textile specialties and food products, and employing a total capital of \$2 million. "The opportunity is one that may be short-lived, and it is certainly too good an opportunity to be lost for want of trying," the editorial concluded. Nothing came of Penson's timid and half-hearted quest for refugee industries. In the memory of the advocates of industrial development, "the Commission of Government missed the opportunity of a lifetime," and the belief in a diversified economy for Newfoundland began to fade in the following decade (Nfld. House of Assembly *Proceedings* 28 Mar. 1955).

Opinions expressed in the local press in the summer of 1939 reveal that although there was a significant groundswell of support for new industries, opposition to the immigration of refugees without such industries was as strong and outspoken as ever. A stinging editorial in the *Evening Telegram* of July 7 greeted the arrival in St. John's of the refugee doctors who had been hired by the Department of Health to serve as district nurses in the fishing outports. The editor criticized admission of these refugees on every conceivable ground. "These foreigners" were suspected of taking away jobs from eligible Newfoundlanders, of lacking proper qualifications as doctors and nurses, and of being spies and fifth columnists, entering the country under the guise of refugees. They were reproached for not being immigrants with the capital and skills necessary to establish a badly needed new industry or a rare trade which would not interfere with any local industries. "Who vouches for the bona fides of these newcomers," asked the editorial, "and what steps are taken to prevent the entry of persons who in the capacity of doctors or nurses would have a great opportunity—in fact the best opportunity—to inculcate ideas inimical to the best interests of a British community?"

The discovery of rich ore deposits in Labrador in mid-November, 1938, drew attention once more to the challenge of developing this region's vast natural resources (*ET* 22 Nov. 1938). The realization that the development of Labrador could bring prosperity to Newfoundland made the revival of a modified version of the scheme of 1936 a serious proposition. In the first week of March, 1939, the Newfoundland press carried the startling headline: "Proposal to Place Refugees in Labrador; Provides For Admission of 5,000 Emigrants; \$10,000 AVAILABLE" (*Daily News* 2 Mar. 1939; *OW* 6 Mar. 1939). It was reported that Henry Klapisch, a Seattle fish merchant, had secured an option to purchase certain timber limits in the St. Lewis Bay and Alexis Bay area as a preliminary to settlement. He had under consideration a proposal to export timber as well as to process it in a new furniture factory, to set up a fish cannery and to transfer entirely new industries from Germany and Czechoslovakia. The development would rely heavily on Newfoundland labour and make St. John's its base of operations. At least three large Jewish organizations in the United States were apparently prepared to fund the entire project. It was proposed to settle about 5,000 selected immigrants, adequately financed, during the first year, and increase the number year by year as the settlement developed.

Klapisch was a representative of the Santa Cruz Oil Company, which was the biggest producer of herring and pilchard oil and meal in California. He

had come to Newfoundland in 1937 with a proposal to build three plants for the reduction of herring into oil and meal on Newfoundland's south coast, together with a floating herring reduction plant on the coast of Labrador. By May, 1939, he had built a herring reduction plant at Argentia which was working at full capacity, and he was in the process of developing a herring industry on the Labrador coast. In April, 1939, Klapisch went to New York to settle this and other deals. But when he returned in July, his interest seemed only to be in the floating herring factory project on the Labrador coast. By the end of July there was no further mention of the Labrador settlement project in the California company's rhetoric. The fate of Klapisch's settlement scheme, proposed at a time when a similar scheme for settling Jewish refugees in Alaska received some publicity, remains a mystery (*OW* 25 Apr., 9 May, 18 July 1939; *ET* 29 July 1939).

As a corollary to the desired formation of new industries by refugees, the Commission of Government appears to have agreed in principle to entertain proposals for "assisted immigration of groups of refugees from Central Europe with a view to their settlement in areas of the country hitherto unsettled, e.g. Labrador." Commissioner Penson confirmed that unofficial inquiries had been received by bodies or persons purporting to represent Jewish refugees, but by the end of April, 1939, no formal approach had been made (*OW* 22 Aug. 1939; Feingold 94 ff.; Wyman 99 ff.). On July 27, 1939, Penson cabled the following proposition to Clutterbuck in the Dominions Office:

We should be glad of an investigation of certain parts of Newfoundland territory as a possible location for a controlled immigration scheme. . . . Actually area to which investigation would probably be directed is Labrador. For guidance . . . it might be mentioned that industries which appear most likely to be worth consideration in that region are lumbering and paper manufacture, fish canning or curing, and agriculture. GN 1/3/A, 1939, nos. 5-17, file 9/39

This was the closest the Newfoundland government ever came to offering asylum to refugees from the Third Reich. Unfortunately, it was now too late. The outbreak of war in Europe and the subsequent climate of fear and suspicion of everything foreign that gripped the island, and which by 1940 bordered on paranoia, generated apprehensions that not only refugees of German birth but even refugees from countries occupied by or allied with Germany might be enemy agents (GN 1/3/A, 1938, no. 694/3, file "Aliens—Treatment of").

In July, 1940, a community of 289 Hutterite brethren in Britain asked the

Dominions Office to convey their request to the Government of Newfoundland that they be permitted to send out two representatives to examine local conditions and to discuss the possibility of settling in Newfoundland. They stated that their fellow groups in Canada and the United States would finance their resettlement. Reputed to be a law-abiding and industrious community, they practised agriculture and local industries and also did educational work. The British Ministry of Agriculture spoke of their farm work in laudatory terms. As "refugees from Nazi oppression," they had been exempted from internment in Britain owing to their Christian pacifism. Suffering from the hostility of neighbours, they were seeking a place to settle overseas. The Governor of Newfoundland did not recommend the visit of a representative because "hostility to which community subjected in United Kingdom would almost certainly be experienced here probably in marked degree" (GN 1/3/A, nos. 5-17, file 9/39).

A proposal by C. F. Garland in the *Daily News* of June 29, 1940, to help the Empire at war by relieving the British Isles of its large number of evacuees, refugees and interned aliens, also had little chance of being seriously considered. Garland suggested that at least 10,000 evacuees and refugees could be placed in Newfoundland homes for the duration of the war at the expense of the British government and at considerable economic benefit to Newfoundland. "We have plenty of space to accommodate hundreds of thousands," he wrote. The groceries, fuel and additional transportation required would stimulate trade and employment, and compensate Newfoundland for the loss of foreign markets.

The only documented case of a refugee from the Third Reich whose admission to Newfoundland during the war was recommended, was that of Bernhard Altmann, a world-renowned Austrian knitting goods and textile manufacturer. Compelled to leave Austria, he first relocated to Liverpool; and when that city was declared a protected area in June, 1939, he founded the Massachusetts Textile Company (Bernhard Altmann) Inc. with a capital of U.S. \$200,000 in Fall River, Mass. After ascertaining that labour was cheaper in Newfoundland than in Canada, he proposed to teach Newfoundland workers the art of knitting in their homes a certain type of sock for which there was a considerable demand in the United States. He intended to start with a few workers but the number would grow to a hundred or more. The New Industries Committee was impressed with Altmann's credentials and his plans to start a knitting industry in Newfoundland, and in February, 1941, Commissioner Gorvin urged the Commission to grant Altmann and a number of his relatives connected with his business permis-

sion to enter Newfoundland. Whether Altmann ever visited the island is uncertain. He certainly did not start the proposed industry there (GN 13, box 38, file 9).

To central European refugees, Newfoundland from 1934 to 1941 appeared to be a country that, like Canada, cared little and did less. Not a single one of the thousands appealing for rescue from persecution in central Europe, including first degree relatives of Newfoundlanders, was saved by the Newfoundland government. No humanitarian considerations entered the picture, as the admission of refugees was viewed solely from the vantage point of their immediate and specific economic usefulness within the framework of a narrow conception of the country's economic self-interest and a myopic view of Newfoundland's rehabilitation and development. The accommodation of a large number of refugees would undoubtedly have been a herculean task and responsibility that the Commission might have been unable to undertake. Having come close to bankruptcy in 1933, furthermore, Newfoundland's preoccupation with its own survival during this critical period is understandable. Yet the evidence is clear that the European refugee crisis of the 1930s was pregnant with significant opportunities for Newfoundland's recovery that were rejected for no compelling reasons. Challenges for newcomers existed in spite of the exodus of Newfoundlanders to the North American mainland. After having attracted few immigrants for generations, Newfoundland suddenly found large numbers of skilled refugees knocking at its door, ready to take up those challenges. Here we have, the future editor of the *Evening Telegram*, Michael Harrington, wrote in the *Daily News* of February 16, 1944,

a practically undeveloped country of 42,000 square miles and her huge dependency of Labrador virgin country, begging for people to help to open it and develop these uninhabited areas. What an opportunity for Newfoundland! New blood, new ideas, new enterprise, new visions, new faith.

From the perspective of 1944, Harrington considered a small population and a closed society which disapproved of any intermingling with "foreign" blood the chief hindrance to Newfoundland's growth and progress. Impressed with the fringe benefits accruing from the stationing of thousands of American and Canadian troops in Newfoundland, he was the first to hail the prospects of a selective multicultural immigration after the war.

There are many obvious similarities between Newfoundland's and Canada's attitudes towards refugees from the Third Reich. Among the notable differences is the lack of any statement in the local press and in the



government documents examined in which Jews are singled out as being less desirable than non-Jewish refugees. Whether this indicates that there was less anti-Semitism in Newfoundland cannot be determined within the context of this study. However, after the end of World War II Jewish refugees were admitted to Newfoundland two years before they were allowed into Canada. Those who needed transit visas from Canada had difficulties as late as 1947 in obtaining them because Canadian officials could not believe that the Jewish refugees' destination was Newfoundland instead of Canada (interview with Andreas and Betty Barban, 4 Aug. 1985). Newfoundland's approach had begun to differ from that of Canada in 1939 when the Newfoundland government had decided to solicit proposals from Jewish refugee organizations for the establishment of new industries in Newfoundland and of group settlements in Labrador. It is intriguing to speculate whether this story would have ended differently had war not broken out in September, 1939.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Belkin 183. The financial assistance of Multiculturalism Canada for this study is gratefully acknowledged. I am indebted to Melvin Baker for reading a first draft and offering helpful suggestions. I am grateful to Cyril Banikhin, and to Andreas and Betty Barban, for granting me interviews in connection with this study.

<sup>2</sup>*Acts of the General Assembly of Newfoundland* (AGAN) 1906, Cap. IX, An Act Respecting the Immigration of Chinese Persons; AGAN 1906, Cap. III, An Act to regulate the Law with regard to Aliens; AGAN 1924, Cap. X, An Act to amend Chapter 73 of the Consolidated Statutes (Third Series) Entitled "Of the Disembarking of Paupers"; AGAN 1926, Cap. XXIX, An Act Respecting Immigration.

<sup>3</sup>Public Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL) GN 38/S 7-1-1, undated memorandum by Commissioner E. N. R. Trentham. PANL GN 38/S 4-1-5, memorandum by Commissioner L. E. Emerson, 11 April 1938. All subsequent GN references are to material in PANL. See also Belkin 183.

<sup>4</sup>Anti-Semitic measures started with the declaration on 1 April 1933 by the Nazi party leadership of a boycott of Jewish business firms, Jewish merchandise, Jewish physicians and Jewish lawyers. On 7 April 1933 the so-called Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service led to the enforced retirement of non-Aryan civil servants and professionals from the public service and from semipublic and private sectors.

<sup>5</sup>*Observer's Weekly* (St. John's) (hereafter *OW*), 24 February 1934 and 10 December 1935. *Evening Telegram* (St. John's) (hereafter *ET*), 10 August 1939. See also Belkin.

<sup>6</sup>Between 1914 and 1934 the St. John's Jewish community grew from 42 to about 120. See GN 1/1/7, 1914, Governor Sir William Davidson to Hon. L. Harcourt, 31 December 1914; and Baker 74-87.

<sup>7</sup>Public Archives of Canada, MG 30, E 82, vol. 18, file 97, "Newfoundland Royal Commission, 39th Day, The Newfoundland Hotel, St. John's, Thursday 8th June 1933 (private session), Evidence of Mr. A. B. Perlin," 18 ff., 31. I thank Melvin Baker for referring me to this source.

<sup>8</sup>GN 38, s 2-1-12, Humphrey Walwyn to Malcolm MacDonald, 12 March 1936, and Memorandum submitted by Commissioner for Natural Resources for consideration of Com-

mission of Government, 13 March 1936.

<sup>9</sup>GN 1/3/A, 1934, Nos. 313-23, file "Immigration into Newfoundland." Canadian limitations on admission were similar to those of Newfoundland but, as Emerson pointed out and emphasized, contained "special provision against persons of undesirable political opinions and against illiterates, and a very broad provision against persons who do not fill the requirements of regulations. The regulations may require money qualifications or may prohibit or limit the number of any nationality or race or any class or occupation or immigrants whose customs, habits or modes of life are deemed undesirable, or who are considered not readily assimilable by Canada." See GN 38/S 4-1-5, "Memorandum on Immigration and Deportation," 11 Apr. 1938.

<sup>10</sup>GN 38, S 7-1-2, memorandum "Applications of Refugees from Central Europe," by Commissioner Penson, 2 May 1939; and GN 1/3/A, 1939, Nos. 5-17, file 9/39, Governor Walwyn to British Consul General Haggart in New York, 17 August 1939.

<sup>11</sup>Only one possible manifestation of anti-Semitism in the contemporary local press came to my attention. On the occasion of the Royal visit to Newfoundland in June, 1939, an unidentified Jewish Water Street businessman "employing quite a lot of labour" refused to give his employees an extra holiday. He gave them to understand that he was not a millionaire and that the Royal visit meant nothing to him. Thereupon he and "his race" were attacked in an anonymous letter in the *Evening Telegram* of 26 June 1939 for being ungrateful while his countrymen were being persecuted in Germany. "Quite a lot of these people play their employees for a bunch of suckers," the writer said, when they ought to "crawl on their hands and knees before the flag of the world's greatest Empire—where freedom is given to all regardless of creed and color."

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