

THE RESPONSE OF THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT TO JEWISH REFUGEES AND HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS, 1933-1947

This essay looks at the response of the New Zealand government to Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi dominated Europe in the years before the Second World War and to survivors of the Holocaust trying to reach New Zealand in the years immediately following the end of the war. Jews were considered extremely undesirable settlers in the 1930s and 1940s.¹ The small number who gained refuge in New Zealand before and after the war encountered prejudice and considerable suspicion of cultural differences. Given the extent of dislike of foreigners and of cultural difference at this time, it is in a way remarkable that New Zealand accepted any Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors at all. In the 1930s and 1940s, New Zealand society was extremely homogenous and most New Zealanders were ignorant about and isolated from the rest of the world (except Britain) in a way difficult to imagine today. They were very proud of their British heritage and took for granted that the most desirable immigrants to New Zealand would be British, or as much like the British as possible. This changed gradually as New Zealanders gained experience of other countries during the war and through their encounter with successive waves of immigrants arriving in the country.

THE RESPONSE TO JEWISH REFUGEES, 1933-1939

Jews² in Europe, suffering persecution by the Nazis, were the first sizeable group to seek asylum in New Zealand. Anti-Jewish campaigns began in Germany in 1933, with the introduction of discriminatory legislation in April. The April laws were the first of around 400 pieces of anti-Semitic legislation between 1933 and 1939. By 1938, Nazi anti-Semitic policies were applied with increasing ruthlessness and Jews were herded into concentration camps. Austria was annexed by Germany in 1938. Official and unofficial policies of anti-Semitism were practised by other countries in central and eastern Europe in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

About 1100 refugees, fleeing persecution in Nazi Europe, were eventually accepted for settlement in New Zealand. Thousands of others who applied to enter New Zealand were declined entry. New Zealand's restrictive policies need to be seen in the context of the policies of national exclusiveness and closed frontiers of other countries which could have given refuge, as well as in the context of what would have been possible. The Australian Government, for example, undertook in 1938 to admit 15,000 refugees over a period of three years but only about 7000 of the refugees reached Australia before the outbreak of war.³

The desperate search for a country of refuge

The victims of Nazi persecution did not usually try to emigrate until it was beyond question that their future was imperilled.⁴ As they searched the world for new homes,

¹ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand, 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 11-12.

² Some of the refugees were not Jewish in a religious sense but simply had a Jewish background.

³ This is a summarized version of discussion in Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand, 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 8-10.

⁴ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand, 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 8.

they found that most doors, including New Zealand's, were closed, or almost closed, to them. Not classified as 'refugees' by the New Zealand government, they sought to enter the country under normal immigration criteria which meant that they were subject to the restrictions of the 1931 Immigration Restriction Amendment Act. The Act, which gave the Minister of Customs and his officials the discretion to decide who was suitable to enter New Zealand, prevented aliens from Europe entering New Zealand unless they had guaranteed employment, considerable amount of capital or 'possessed knowledge and skills which would enable them to rehabilitate readily, but without detriment to any resident of New Zealand.'⁵

Jewish refugees, inquiring about migration to New Zealand were told by the New Zealand High Commissioner's Office in London, that:

The New Zealand Government is not at present encouraging immigration ... In the case of persons not of British birth and parentage it is necessary for such persons to obtain permits from the Minister of Customs at Wellington before they may proceed to the Dominion. The High Commissioner has received advice from his Government that it has recently been found necessary to discontinue the issuing of such permits except in very special cases.⁶

It was, therefore, the inquirer was told, hardly worthwhile making an application. What was a very special case? How were the successful applicants selected? On what basis were the thousands of desperate people refused entry? Each application was supposedly treated on its merits and the guidelines used for processing applications ensured most refugees were declined. The selectors' first and foremost consideration was suitability of the immigrant for absorption into the Dominion's population. Edwin Dudley Good, Comptroller of Customs in the mid 1930s, was quite explicit in his interpretation: 'Non-Jewish applicants are regarded as a more suitable type of immigrant.'⁷ Walter Nash, Minister of Customs in New Zealand's first Labour Government which took office in 1936, held the same view: 'There is a major difficulty of absorbing these people in our cultural life without raising a feeling of antipathy to them,' he wrote on one occasion.⁸

Apart from concern that they would be difficult to assimilate from a cultural point of view and would provoke more anti-Semitism, Jewish refugees were considered unsuitable on occupational grounds. Many of the prospective refugees were professional or business people. Professional and business associations were anxious to keep possible rivals out of New Zealand. Nash's justification for restricting the entry of refugee business people was that 'anti-Semitism, never far from the surface, was very apt to emerge in the case of the talented race whose members can often beat us at our own game, especially the game of money making.' At other times, Nash argued that the refugees should be refused entry because they did not have the skills that were needed in New Zealand.

⁵ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 14. The immigration restriction act, amended by the 1931 act, was passed in 1920.

⁶ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 15.

⁷ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 15 -16.

⁸ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 16.

No-one would wish to add to the mass of unskilled workers looking for jobs, and by unskilled I would include those whose skill does not fit them for work in New Zealand. Among the applicants who wish to come there are many more of the clerical type than of the building operative type and it is the latter that New Zealand needs.⁹

However, refugee labourers or skilled trades people were not acceptable either, particularly to the trade union movement, because they might put New Zealanders out of work. Although unemployment had eased by the mid 1930s, enormous fear of it remained in the aftermath of the depression of the 1920s and early 1930s. A Christchurch-based committee advocating the admission of refugees in greater numbers sent the Department of Industries and Commerce a list of refugees who wanted to come to New Zealand and who had the skills which would benefit the country. In this list of cases humanitarian arguments for admitting the applicants were foregone in favour of information on the refugees' employability without displacing New Zealanders. A special case was made for applicants who could make a particular contribution to New Zealand's economic development. Included were applications from textile workers, iron workers and manufacturer of stationery, leather, knitted goods, timber goods, battery accumulators and brake and clutch linings. There were applications from chemists, mechanical and electrical engineers, textile engineers, locksmiths and printers to name just a sample. Most of the applications were declined.¹⁰

The role of the influential trade union movement in the entry of the refugees was ambivalent. Hostility to immigration in general, and to Jewish refugees in particular, existed alongside ideals of 'the brotherhood of all workers'. However the Federation of Labour clearly had misgivings about Jewish refugees. If refugees were allowed to come to New Zealand, their preference was for the non-Jewish victims of Fascism, such as Sudeten Democrat refugees with trade union affiliations from Czechoslovakia, and for Austrian trade unionists.¹¹

Pressures on the Government to accept refugees

Although there was ambivalence about and opposition to the acceptance of the refugees from such powerful groups as the Federation of Labour, the Dominion Settlement Association and the Five Million Club (the two latter organizations favoured New Zealand increasing its population, though not with Jewish refugees), the refugees did have some support in the community. Pressure on the Government to accept Jewish refugees came from individual academics (such as historian John Beaglehole) and from groups such as the Christchurch based committee - the Christchurch Refugees Emergency Committee - referred to earlier. Similar committees, formed in other main centres, urged the Government to do more to help the refugees. Groups such as the

⁹ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 16-17.

¹⁰ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 16-17.

¹¹ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 17.

Peace Pledge Union and the League of Nations Union also argued for a more humanitarian immigration policy.¹²

The response of the churches to the plight of Jewish refugees was, like the response of the trade union movement, ambivalent. This is particularly interesting in view of the Churches' great devotion to numerous (and predominantly non-Jewish) refugee causes in the years to come and their strenuous efforts in the future to influence government policy in favour of refugee settlement. Although church leaders generally favoured letting in more refugees, guarantors for refugees among church people were scarce and churches were dubious about taking responsibility for individual families. The churches' ambivalence was also reflected in some of their statements on the issue. For example, a speaker at the Wellington Diocesan Synod of the Anglican Church urged the Government to act on behalf of refugees since 'the question was not wholly one of Jewish persecution but at least equally of concern to Christianity because there were many thousands of non-Jewish refugees.'¹³ Of the churches in New Zealand only the Society of Friends actively tried to influence government policy and later helped refugees who came to New Zealand.¹⁴

New Zealand's Jewish community was active on behalf of refugees although its efforts were tempered by considerations of what was acceptable to the New Zealand government. When the community appealed to the government it emphasized that 'mass migration was not sought and that the life history and capabilities of every immigrant would be known and vouched for.'¹⁵ Vera Ziman was a member of the Auckland Jewish Welfare Society and very active on behalf of refugees. She recalled that:

We were bombarded by people in distress, but still we tried to obtain and check their credentials. Yet it was so difficult for us living in security to judge; it wasn't easy to get the true credentials of desperate people. But we tried, and we tried to get people who would be of value to New Zealand. We were very good New Zealanders.¹⁶

In addition to internal appeals, the Government was also under some pressure from Britain to accept refugees to ease the flow of refugees to Britain and to Palestine. Pressure came too from the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees, set up by the Evian Conference, a conference on refugees arranged in 1938 on the initiative of the United States. New Zealand was represented at the Evian Conference by Cyril Blake Burdekin, a junior diplomat from the New Zealand High Commissioners' Office in London.¹⁷ He expressed the New Zealand Government's sympathy for 'those unfortunates who were compelled to seek new homes' and indicated that New Zealand

¹² Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 18-19.

¹³ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 19.

¹⁴ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 19.

¹⁵ *New Zealand Jewish Review*, October 1938, statement by Rabbi S. Katz, Chairman Wellington Jewish Refugee Committee, page 17.

¹⁶ Interview with Vera Ziman, 6 November 1984.

¹⁷ I have not been able to find further information on Burdekin which suggests that he was probably a junior diplomat.

was prepared to consider applications, but the number accepted would be governed by economic conditions.¹⁸

Most people in New Zealand probably supported the position put by Burdekin - the country could do no more than express sympathy. However, a writer in the left-leaning publication *Tomorrow* noted that an opportunity for New Zealand to make a significant contribution had been lost at Evian. 'An official pronouncement that New Zealand was to receive a definite and generous number of refugees might have changed the whole tenor of the Evian Conference.'¹⁹ The writer also commented that New Zealand had been willing to make principled statements on the international stage in the past. 'During the Abyssinian crisis the courageous pronouncement of the New Zealand representative at Geneva appealed to the imagination of the democratic peoples of the world.'²⁰ New Zealand governments would make such statements and generous and innovative offers in relation to refugees in the future (such as accepting refugee families with handicapped members). On the question of Jewish refugees from Nazism, however, the country was unwilling to take a more generous stand.

'Nobody wanted us' (Gerty Gilbert)

Gerty Gilbert, who came to New Zealand from Brno in Czechoslovakia in 1939 at the age of sixteen, recalled the desperate search for a country to escape to. Her parents, unable to get visas and entry permits, stayed behind and perished in a concentration camp.

Nobody wanted us. You had to be very clever and to have contacts of an important sort to be able to get out and to get in anywhere. People tried desperately hard. For us, it was a mixture of luck, coincidences and a fair amount of machinations and skill. You also had to have a certain amount of money. It was my mother who was determined to get us out. 'The sooner the better', she said. New Zealand was one of the prize places to go to but it was incredibly difficult to get in. New Zealand didn't want us; nor did anyone else really.²¹

For applicants and their sponsors, it was very hard to tell in advance how the rules governing entry would be interpreted. Two impressions predominated. The regulations were extremely restrictive and the restrictions were applied seemingly arbitrarily. Having the right work skills did not necessarily help in obtaining the sought-after permits. Contacts and money sometimes did. Often the new arrivals were themselves unable to explain how they had succeeded in entering New Zealand while many others had been prevented from doing so. Without exception they put it down to good luck.²²

¹⁸ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 10.

¹⁹ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 9-10.

²⁰ *Tomorrow*, 18 January 1939, page 170.

²¹ Interviewed by Ann Beaglehole in Ann Beaglehole, 'A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946', M.A. thesis in History, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, 1986, page 149.

²² Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, pages 21-22, page 131.

A historian of the Jewish community in New Zealand dismissed New Zealand's efforts to rescue the victims of Nazi persecution as 'insignificant' and 'paltry'.²³ Historian Erik Olssen concluded that the first Labour Government did not do all that was politically feasible during the late 1930s to help refugees.²⁴ Anton Binzegger, a historian of refugee immigration to New Zealand, came to the conclusion that the government's rather 'inconspicuous intake of refugees' was 'understandable' in the circumstances.²⁵ These circumstances included New Zealand's long-standing opposition to non-British immigration, the fear of unemployment in the aftermath of the depression and support for restriction from influential professional and working class groups. Attitudes prevalent in the Labour Government, including those held by Walter Nash who feared that allowing in too many Jewish refugees might mean importing to New Zealand such problems of the 'old world' as anti-Semitism, also contributed to the restrictive policy.

New Zealand's cautious approach (or lack of generosity in accepting larger numbers of refugees) seemed to be justified by the strength of public opinion against the small number of refugees who did gain admittance, which surfaced after their arrival. Resentment against the refugees (classified as enemy aliens during the war) became particularly marked in the last two years of the war. The BMA (British Medical Association), Otago Division, moved that a resolution be passed requesting 'all refugee doctors in New Zealand to be returned to their own countries to help in reconstruction now that the war was over.' This proposal was not prompted by New Zealand doctors' deep concern for reconstruction in Europe but by their desire to remove their unwelcome competitors from the country.²⁶

The Returned Servicemen's Association (RSA) passed a similar resolution at its annual conference in July 1945:

Any person or persons who arrived in New Zealand from Germany, Austria, Hungary or Italy since 1939 must return to their own countries within two years after hostilities with Germany have ceased and they should be allowed to take out of New Zealand the same amount of money or property or both that they declared to the Customs Department on entering New Zealand; any further money or property that they possess to be realised and the proceeds handed to the New Zealand Government for distribution among needy wives and dependents of those who fought while the enemy aliens enjoyed peace and plenty in New Zealand.²⁷

²³ L. M. Goldman, *The History of the Jews in New Zealand*, A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1958, page 229.

²⁴ Erik Olssen, *John A. Lee*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1977, page 209.

²⁵ Anton Binzegger, *New Zealand's Policy on Refugees*, New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Wellington, 1980, page 9.

²⁶ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 95.

²⁷ Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 95.

'I didn't know a soul in New Zealand' (Siegfried Rothmann)

Among the lucky few to receive asylum in New Zealand was Siegfried Rothmann from Berlin.²⁸ When Hitler came to power he had just graduated as an engineer from the Technical University of Berlin and begun his first job. With the rise of the Nazis, he lost his job and his wife, a medical student, could no longer continue her training at the university. Siegfried tried to obtain entry permits to many different places: Argentina, England, United States and Australia. 'The permit for New Zealand arrived two days before all Jews without a work permit had to be out of the country.' Leaving behind a family circle of some fifty people, most of whom he would never see again, Siegfried left Germany.

With his wife, Siegfried sailed into Wellington on a beautiful morning in 1939. 'Nobody met us. Nobody knew we were coming. I didn't know a soul in New Zealand.' Before long, he had his first job – as an electrician. Just before the war broke, he got work as a draughtsman in the Public Works Department. 'They took me on because they were so short of staff.' But there was no chance of promotion during the war years. 'One of my superiors told me that as an enemy alien I should be pleased to have a job at all.'

After the war, Siegfried found that as a foreigner he had to be twice as good as a New Zealander. 'But I did climb the ladder in the end ... I had a reasonably successful career. But it is all behind me now.'²⁹

Trying to bring relatives to New Zealand before the war

Leaving behind relatives had been the sad experience of many of the Jewish refugees who fled Nazi Europe before the outbreak of the Second World War. Refugees, interviewed fifty years on, recalled the memory of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters standing on the platform as the train pulled away from the station. The relatives of many of the pre-war Jewish refugees did not survive the war. Those who did, had spent the war in hiding or in concentration camps. Their sons, daughters, brothers and sisters had done what little they could to help them from New Zealand. While it still appeared possible to leave Europe, they had tried to obtain New Zealand entry permits for their relatives. The success or failure of these attempts depended on a combination of luck, contacts and money - and on their knowing enough English to set the appropriate procedures in motion. Eva Brent (not her real name), despite her poor English, 'tried and tried' to make the arrangements, but 'it was hopeless, absolutely hopeless. New Zealand wouldn't accept old people and my father was seventy. We corresponded through the Red Cross for some time and then my parents disappeared.' Later she found out that they had been killed in Auschwitz.³⁰

One young woman from Germany went to see Walter Nash about six times concerning permits for her parents. Each time she was turned down without explanation. German

²⁸ Ann Beaglehole, 'A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946', M.A. thesis in History, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, 1986, pages 139-141. Siegfried Rothmann was interviewed by Ann Beaglehole just a few months before his death in June 1985.

²⁹ Siegfried Rothmann, interviewed in Ann Beaglehole, 'A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946', M.A. thesis in History, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, 1986, pages 139-141.

³⁰ Interviewed in Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 118.

refugee Helmut Einhorn's attempt to rescue his parents failed because he was not wealthy enough to pay his parents' fares, or to guarantee their 'support and abode', as the regulations required, nor did he have the wealthy contacts who could have made these commitments on his behalf. When war broke out, he lost contact with his parents. They were taken to concentration camps in about 1940 and 1941, where they died. Paul Oestreicher's father (also from Germany) had every intention of bringing his mother to New Zealand. But after war broke out all contact was cut off. 'My grandmother left behind in Meiningen was rounded up and eventually committed suicide. She was a strong woman; she sat down and wrote farewell letters to members of the family. We have the record of her suicide.'³¹

Fred Turnovsky's attempt to rescue his parents by arranging their emigration from Czechoslovakia to the United States (before the United States entered the war) also failed. In order to make possible his parents' emigration, he needed to remit £3000 to the United States. Getting together such a large sum of money was in itself a big problem, but the main difficulty was that the Reserve Bank declined his application to remit the money. Many years later, at a social function, Fred Turnovsky met the chief cashier who had turned down his application:

I asked him if he remembered me and my request to remit £3,000 and he said, 'Yes, it was very unfortunate.' 'It may interest you to know,' I said to him, 'that my parents were killed by the Nazis.'³²

THE RESPONSE TO HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS, 1945-1947

When the war ended, Jewish refugees who had reached New Zealand before the war tried to resume contact with their relatives, to find those who were missing and to try to bring the survivors to New Zealand. New Zealand's policy in relation to survivors of the Holocaust was to continue with the significant restrictions in place before the war. The policy was applied despite the awareness that existed at senior government level and in the community of the atrocities against the Jewish people that had taken place.

Awareness of the concentration camps and other atrocities

New Zealanders had been exposed to a good deal of information about the Holocaust. Just before the war was over, about mid-April 1945, New Zealand newspapers began to publish photographs and eyewitness accounts of the concentration camps. People had known before this that these camps existed. Some had believed it, others had been doubtful. In mid-May 1945, there were reports of New Zealanders visiting the camps and verifying that earlier accounts were not exaggerated.³³

In two recent books, writer James McNeish suggests that Prime Minister Peter Fraser and Secretary of the Department of External Affairs Alister McIntosh had received first

³¹ Interviewed in Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 118.

³² Interviewed in Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-1946*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1988, page 118.

³³ Nancy, M. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War; the Home Front: Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, 1939-1945*, Government Print, Wellington, 1986, Volume 2, pages 1246-50; *Auckland Star*, 20 April 1943, page 2.

hand accounts of the death camps from New Zealander Desmond Patrick (Paddy) Costello buy delayed the publication of the report in New Zealand. Costello had served in the earlier part of the war with the New Zealand Army and had been working and studying in Britain. In March 1945 he was invited by the British to lead a contact mission into Poland to arrange for repatriation of British Commonwealth and other Allied prisoners who were being liberated by the advancing Russian Army. In the course of this mission Costello visited Maidanek and Auschwitz death camps, apparently the first Western diplomat to enter the death camps. Costello's despatches were circulated to the London press to help counter allegations from Central and South America that stories of Nazi atrocities were a hoax, his report to External Affairs in Wellington also being published in Whitehall as a Foreign Office white paper.³⁴

Costello's report on the death camps, which were dated 26 March 1945, six weeks before the end of the war in Europe, anticipated the discovery of crimes at Buchenwald and Bergen Belsen camps. 'I thought I was hardened to reports of atrocities', J. V. Wilson, New Zealand's longest serving diplomat, wrote to Costello, 'until I read your report on Poland.' Peter Fraser and Alister McIntosh both read and discussed Costello's report and made sure it reached the Dominions Office and the Foreign Office in Whitehall. Initially the report was treated as confidential, reaching Cecil Day, Anthony Eden and Churchill. As McNeish notes, 'while Whitehall hastened to circulate Costello's findings to other embassies, Wellington slept. When the New Zealand government finally decided to seek his (Costello's) agreement to publish the report under its own imprint in August 1945, the author at first could not be found. He was in Stockholm.'³⁵

Trying to bring relatives to New Zealand after the war

The Jewish Welfare Society set up a search bureau to help refugees and New Zealand Jews trace missing family members³⁶ and an immigration bureau to 'assist people who are settled here to bring out their relatives'.³⁷ The columnist in the *Jewish Chronicle*, who described the role of the Immigration Bureau, did not believe this could readily be achieved, and warned that 'tangible results cannot be expected quickly'.³⁸ This certainly proved to be the case. To some extent, shipping problems and the priority given to servicemen and to other New Zealanders in the United Kingdom who had applied to return home accounted for the delays and the reluctance to bring refugees and Holocaust survivors to New Zealand. More than 9000 New Zealanders in the United Kingdom had lodged applications to return. Priority was also given to the dependents of servicemen who had returned to New Zealand for demobilization.³⁹

³⁴ James McNeish, *Dance of the Peacocks: New Zealanders in Exile in the time of Hitler and Mao Tse Tung*, Random House New Zealand, 2003, Auckland, pages 352-353.

³⁵ James McNeish, *The Sixth Man, The Extraordinary life of Paddy Costello*, Random House New Zealand, 2007, Auckland, pages 165-166. Paddy Costello was a Second World War intelligence officer, New Zealand diplomat, linguist, teacher and scholar. He was suspected by his enemies of being a Soviet agent during the Cold War, ending up a victim of the McCarthy period.

³⁶ *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, April-May 1945, page 190.

³⁷ *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, November 1945, page 69.

³⁸ *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, November 1945, page 69.

³⁹ ANZ, EA 108/4/4, Part 1, R. M. Campbell, Official Secretary, New Zealand High Commission, London to Sir Herbert Emerson, Director, Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, 25 January 1946.

But the main impediment to the reunion of families, which the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees had expected New Zealand to facilitate,⁴⁰ was 'the question of policy'. A statement by the New Zealand Delegation to the United Nations Special Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons on 10 May 1946 opened with the obligatory expressions of sympathy about the plight of refugees, but went on to state that the 'New Zealand Government does not favour mass or group immigration of refugees' and that immigration of aliens would continue to be restricted under the Immigration Act.⁴¹ Replying to the request from the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, R.M. (Richard Mitchelson) Campbell, Official Secretary to the New Zealand High Commission in London, stated that each case was dealt with 'in a sympathetic manner'.⁴² Yet the figures speak for themselves. Only 120 permits were granted out of 588 requests from near relatives.⁴³ Some refugees had little difficulty arranging permits for their relatives, but many others had applications refused, sometimes without explanation.⁴⁴ As before the war, chance, contacts and money seemed to be the crucial factors in obtaining permits.

By contrast, Australia, with similar shipping problems and pressures to give priority to repatriating Australians, undertook between August and October 1945 to 'give favourable consideration to persons in Australia who wish to bring out to that country close relatives who had survived in Europe'.⁴⁵ By March 1946, 2000 landing permits had been issued, and, in spite of the shipping shortage, Jewish refugees began arriving in September 1946.⁴⁶ Australia's policy of granting permits on humanitarian grounds alone continued till early 1947. It owed a great deal to the Labour Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, and to the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell. Both men stressed Australia's humanitarian obligations and were willing to take political risks to retain their policy for the crucial eighteen months after the war. They did this in spite of a great deal of criticism that the needs of the refugees were taking precedence over those of Australian servicemen, and in spite of opposition to the immigration of aliens in general and Jewish refugees in particular.⁴⁷ Eventually 35,000 Holocaust refugees found haven in Australia.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ ANZ, EA 108/4/4, Part 1, Sir Herbert Emerson, Director of Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to R.M. Campbell, Official Secretary, New Zealand High Commission, London, 14 January 1946.

⁴¹ ANZ, EA 108/4/4, Part 1, R.M. Campbell to Sir Herbert Emerson, 25 January 1946; ANZ, 22/1/27, Part 1, Statement by the New Zealand Delegation to the United Nations Special Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons, 10 May 1946. Also relevant to the subject of post-war immigration of relatives of refugees and of New Zealand Jews is ANZ, Nash Papers 1597/0918 and 1597/11. They refer to the period 1945-47 and are concerned with the need for a policy in order to respond to the many applications from refugees in Europe to join their relatives in New Zealand and the government's determination that servicemen must be rehabilitated before immigration could be resumed.

⁴² ANZ, EA 108/4/4, Part 1, R.M. Campbell to Sir Herbert Emerson, 25 January 1946.

⁴³ L. M. Goldman, *The History of the Jews in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1958, page 234. Goldman derived this figure from a report to the Interchurch Council of New Zealand by Mrs O.5. Heymann. Unfortunately no date is cited. A further 200 permits were issued some time later according to Goldman, page 234

⁴⁴ L. M. Goldman, *The History of the Jews in New Zealand*, A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1958, page 234.

⁴⁵ *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, September-October 1945, page 29.

⁴⁶ Michael Blakeney, *Australia and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-1948*, Croom Helm, Sydney, 1985, pages 291- 293.

⁴⁷ Michael Blakeney, *Australia and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-1948*, Croom Helm, Sydney, 1985, pages 305-8. It is possible that the Australian government's acceptance of the Holocaust survivors was to some extent inadvertent, that is, it did not expect the refugees to come due to shipping problems. But even if

The Select Committee on Dominion Population, 1945

New Zealand's restrictions on the immigration of the relatives of New Zealand Jews and of the pre-war refugees were in contrast not only with Australian policy, but also with the increasing national consensus, which originated before the war, that New Zealand needed to increase its population.⁴⁹ (The same perceived need for more population existed in Australia before and after the war but was accompanied by greater willingness to consider non-British migrants as acceptable settlers.)

In December 1945, a parliamentary select committee was set up 'to consider the ways and means of increasing the population of the Dominion'.⁵⁰ The committee's terms of reference were wide: to carry out a broad survey of economic development in the Dominion. Immigration was one of the issues considered by the committee which received submissions from seventy individuals and organisations.⁵¹ The four New Zealand Jewish communities submitted a memorandum to the committee. Among the reasons offered in support of the migration of the relatives of Jews living in New Zealand were: 'the saving of the remnants of European Jewry' and 'the stabilising effect that the reunion of families would have on the lives of those already here. 'The Jew who has suffered agonies about the fate of his nearest and dearest in Hitler-dominated Europe, has never been able to enjoy wholeheartedly the freedom and the plenty which were denied to those he loved.'⁵²

The memorandum also pointed out the potential benefits to New Zealand from allowing the settlement of the relatives of those already here, as well as a few selected Jewish adults and their families.

We fully realise that New Zealand must consider the question of immigration solely from the viewpoint of her own requirements of people who will help her solve population problems such as defence, labour and the establishment of secondary industries.

Accordingly, the memorandum emphasised that the prospective migrants would be carefully selected to make good New Zealand citizens. If elderly, they would be supported by their New Zealand families and would not become a burden on the state. All the newcomers would 'bring a wealth of cultural knowledge or industrial experience from which New Zealand is bound to benefit'.⁵³ Detailed information was provided by

the Government's role was confined to merely not preventing the refugees coming, it was far more generous than New Zealand's position.

⁴⁸ The figure is from Harvey Cohen, webmaster and author of the website of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, email message to Ann Beaglehole, 1 August 2007. According to Michael Blakeney, the policy of allowing the entry of Holocaust survivors in the immediate post-war years aroused considerable anti-Semitism in Australia, Michael Blakeney, *Australia and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-1948*, Croom Helm, Sydney, 1985, pages 292-304.

⁴⁹ The reasons for this trend are discussed fully in Department of Labour, *Monthly Review of Employment*, March 1947, article entitled 'Immigration'.

⁵⁰ Department of Labour, *Monthly Review of Employment*, March 1947, page 1.

⁵¹ Department of Labour, *Monthly Review of Employment*, March 1947, page 1.

⁵² Jewish Communities of New Zealand, 'Memorandum to the Select Committee on Dominion Population', April 1946.

⁵³ Jewish Communities of New Zealand, Memorandum to the Select Committee on Dominion Population, April 1946.

the Jewish communities regarding the applicants they wished to bring to New Zealand: 340 of the applicants were close relatives of New Zealand Jews. The majority were young, youngish or middle-aged. They included tradesmen, engineers, mechanics, applicants with horticultural-type skills, office workers, dressmakers or milliners, domestic workers and nurses.⁵⁴ Importantly, in view of the housing shortage, the Jewish community offered to take responsibility for housing any newcomers.⁵⁵

The select committee's conclusions, as outlined in its report, contained a measure of sympathy for Jews, but did not recommend commitment to a different immigration policy.

No person who has followed the trials of the Jewish race over the past decade can but feel considerable sympathy for them ... [but] in view of the fact that matters of high government policy are involved and that the Government has, over the years, particularly prior to the war, accepted a number of such Jewish refugees, we think that we will have fulfilled our responsibilities in this regard if we bring this matter to the notice of the Government. In view of the housing situation and the demand at the present time for special types of workers, we doubt whether it is advisable to recommend preferential treatment to any particular type of immigrant.⁵⁶

In fact, preferential treatment was repeatedly recommended by the select committee, but to people of 'British stock'. If sufficient numbers of this most desirable type of immigrant were not available, then immigrants from Northern European countries were preferred.⁵⁷ In its report, the committee outlined the approach to refugee policy to be followed in the years ahead. A key component was the careful selection of prospective refugee migrants to provide useful skills for New Zealand and to preserve the status of New Zealanders. A 1946 report from the Director of Employment to the Acting Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department made the same point.

It is considered that New Zealanders and British immigrants should obtain preference in filling the more attractive jobs in the community. If we are obliged to accept a number of refugees, these people would be more easily assimilated if the selection is largely restricted to the unskilled types who are prepared to accept employment in heavy industries. It is felt that professionals and highly skilled technical personnel are more likely to prove difficult to assimilate in that before long they would desire to embark on their own account as employers of labour.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ ANZ, LI22/1/27 Part 1, 'Report on Data Received from the Jewish Communities of New Zealand Regarding Relatives who Desire to Come to This Country', July 1946. This report was enclosed with a memorandum for Acting Minister of Customs, from Permanent Head, Prime Minister's Department, 25 March 1947.

⁵⁵ *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, April/May 1946, page 157.

⁵⁶ Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, Vol. 5, 1946, 'Report of the Select Committee on Dominion Population', page 100.

⁵⁷ Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, Vol. 5, 1946, 'Report of the Select Committee on Dominion Population', pages 44, 99, 116, 117.

⁵⁸ ANZ, LI 22/1/27, Part 1, Director of Employment to Acting Permanent Head, Prime Minister's Department, 25 October 1946.

The writer was echoing the views expressed by professional and business organizations and by the RSA during the war and immediate post-war years: that successful (Jewish) refugees posed a threat to New Zealanders.

A dismal record

In the years before the Second World War, as Jewish refugees desperately searched the world for new homes, New Zealand turned away most applicants but was not significantly less generous or humanitarian in this regard than other countries. A small number of Jewish refugees were admitted before the outbreak of war put a stop to most immigration. The Government hoped that the numbers were small enough for it to avoid criticism from those who had wanted a more generous policy and to ensure that opposition to those admitted was minimal.

The difficulties former refugees and New Zealand Jews encountered after the war in bringing to New Zealand relatives and friends who had survived the Holocaust were a consequence of the continuation in the post war period of pre-war immigration restrictions. During the 1940s, as in the 1930s, government policy was primarily concerned with the maintenance of New Zealand's ethnic homogeneity, with Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors regarded as undesirable settlers.