

SECTION THREE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

WORDS TO KNOW

- refugee
- nativism
- permeated
- anti-Semitism
- fascist
- unassimilable
- Holocaust
- latent
- stringent
- asylum
- Final Solution

Canada, Immigration, and Jewish Refugees

Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, and before long, his anti-Semitic policies began to unsettle Germany's Jewish population. By 1940, close to half of Germany's and Austria's Jewish people had fled to other countries.

The People's Views

Before you examine the evidence in Section Three, you may want to revisit Chapter One, Introduction and Section Two, and Chapter Two, Section Three, to review the structure and attitudes of Canadian society prior to the 1930s.

In Ontario, some Canadians were sympathetic to fascism. In 1933, a number of clubs preaching anti-Semitism, including the Toronto Swastika Club, were formed. These clubs were made up mainly of teenage boys and young men of British descent. The Toronto club's stated aim was to exclude from the Beach area of Toronto "all obnoxious and undesirable elements."

In the West, also, some Canadians sympathized with fascism. William Whitaker, a former British soldier, launched the Nationalist Party on September 16, 1933. The party modelled itself on the *Sturmabteilung* (SA, early storm troopers), wearing khaki shirts and riding boots. The movement appealed to European immigrant groups, ex-soldiers, and those sympathetic to fascism. The party's journal, *The Canadian Nationalist*, was strongly anti-Semitic.

- As you examine the evidence in this first half of Section Three (The People's Views), consider whether you agree with historian David Rome's statement below. Be prepared to justify your conclusions.

The reluctance of the Canadian government to admit Jewish refugees in any great numbers was a fair reflection of public opinion ... which was a strong Anglo-Saxon nativism permeated with Anti-Semitism.

Source: David Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties: On Antisemitism in Canada, 1929-1939*, vol. 11 (Montreal: [the author], 1977), p. 510.

- Use a table like the one below to organize your evidence.

Evidence number	For immigration (+)	Against immigration (-)	Justification (reasons)

- Use a table like the one below to organize your evidence and the different perspectives on Jewish immigration to Canada:

I read ... (What is the evidence saying?)	I identify ... (Who said this? What is their affiliation/background?)	I think ... (How does this relate to the quote in question 1?)	Therefore... (What do I conclude about the quote in question 1?)

Source: Address delivered before the Canadian Club of Toronto, 1931.

BEFORE READING

Discuss with a partner the difference between an immigrant and a refugee. Discuss whether you have or have not heard any negative opinions expressed about refugees. If so, list them on a piece of paper. What is the significance of the difference between refugees and immigrants?

Evidence 3.28

Commissioner Turner of the Salvation Army declared in a 1931 speech:

“I am sure you ... will want to give preference to British people, blood of your own blood, kin of your own kin, and by getting the right people into this country ... you will bring up the right kind of nation.”

Evidence 3.29

During the 1932 session of the Quebec legislature, two Jewish MNAs, Peter Bercovitch and Joseph Cohen, introduced a libel bill known as the Bercovitch Bill, targeting Quebec fascist leader Adrien Arcand's anti-Semitic campaigns in nationalistic papers such as *Le Goglu*. This January 20, 1933 cartoon in *Le Goglu* attacked the Bercovitch Bill. The door reads: Canadian Laws and Christians. The goats attacking the door read: Jewish Invasion and Anti-Christian Feeling.

Are you surprised by the existence of such cartoons in a Canadian paper in 1933? Explain. You will notice anti-Semitic attitudes emerging from Quebec in this evidence and the evidence that follows. Make a reasonable inference as to why this was the case.



Evidence 3.30

The Ligue d'Action Nationale was a Quebec organization with fascist sympathies that reflected broader Quebec opinion. On June 5, 1933, the Ligue forwarded the following resolution to the federal government:

“That the Canadian borders be kept completely closed indefinitely in these days of general unemployment ... that the government of Canada remain perfectly inflexible before Jewish pressure of any kind ... which in itself cannot be an asset for Canada, being by its faith, its customs and its character unassimilable.”

Source: *L'Action Nationale*, vol. II (September 1933), p. 152.

Evidence 3.31

In 1934, the National Social Christian Party (Quebec Fascist Party) was established by Adrien Arcand. Arcand published propaganda against Jewish people. The party's paper, *Le Patriote*, had a regular Ottawa column. This column aroused the concern of the *Ottawa Citizen*. In an editorial, the paper stated:

“It is astonishing to find Canadian people lending themselves to ... racial animosity in this country. Canadian economic conditions are sufficiently deplorable without being made worse by internal strife based on nothing more than the colour of a man's hair or accident of birth into one religious faith or another.”

Source: *Ottawa Citizen*, March 8, 1935.

DURING READING

Evidence 3.32

The Mail and Empire.
VOL. LXII. TORONTO, THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 1933—EIGHTEEN PAGES. NO. 19,187.

**SCORES HURT AS SWASTIKA MOBS RIOT AT WILLOWVALE
MAYOR PROMISES IMMEDIATE PROBE OF DISTURBANCES**

Thousands Caught Up In Park Melee—Gangs Wielding

Headline from the *Toronto Mail and Empire*, August 17, 1933.

What does the headline suggest about the newspaper's attitude toward the "swastika clubs"? Rewrite this headline to represent the newspaper as having an opposing view on these clubs.

Evidence 3.33

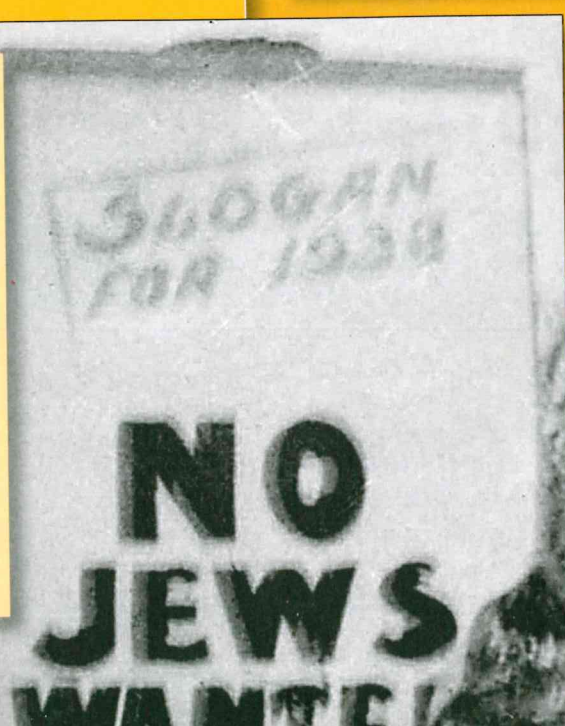
“ Following *Kristallnacht* [‘night of broken glass,’ a planned series of violent acts against Jews throughout Germany] in November 1938, some public opinion took on a different tone. A crowd of more than 20 000 filled and overflowed into the streets surrounding Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto as part of a National Day of Mourning. Similar demonstrations were mounted across Canada (Winnipeg 4000; Quebec 200; Alberta 800; Niagara Falls 1200). Telegrams, petitions, and letters poured into the offices of the prime minister and government officials, calling for them to take action in favour of refugees.”

Source: *Toronto Daily Star*, November 21, 1938.

Evidence 3.37

Sign posted on Jackson’s Point on Lake Simcoe, Ontario, 1938.

What does this sign suggest about the accuracy of Wilcox’s observation in Evidence 3.34? Revisit his remarks when you have finished reading the next section (The Official View) about government responses.



Evidence 3.34

In a speech at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto, March 21, 1939, C.E. Wilcox, of the United Church of Canada and founding member of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Persecution (CNRC), condemned government inaction and opponents of admission of refugees:

“ ... we feel that Canada should share with other countries the responsibility of providing a haven for at least a reasonable number of refugees ... ”

C.E. Wilcox, in his address delivered at the University of Toronto, also suggested that “perhaps the all-important reason for government inaction on accepting Jewish refugees, was ... the existence throughout Canada, but in some centres more manifest than in others, of a latent anti-Semitism.”

Source: C.E. Wilcox, “Canadian Post Mortem on Refugees,” *Social Welfare* vol. XVIII, no. 3 (March 1939), p. 78.

Evidence 3.35

Not all Canadians changed their tone. *Le Devoir* questioned whether the events of *Kristallnacht* warranted action in Canada:

“ If Germany has become the Jewish hell, is that a good reason for making Canada the Jewish paradise? ”

(November 13, 1938)

Evidence 3.36

The nationalistic St-Jean Baptiste Society in Quebec City presented a petition with 127 364 signatures to the House of Commons in early 1939 “vigorously protesting against all immigration whatsoever and especially Jewish immigration.”

Source: Petition to House of Commons, Monday, January 30, 1939 (*House of Commons Debates*, 1 1939, p. 428).

1. Who do you think put this sign up? What do you think that person was thinking and feeling at the time?
2. If you were unemployed during the 1930s, how might you have felt about immigration? Would you have supported allowing Jewish refugees to come to Canada? Why or why not? Would your feelings have been different if you were employed? Remember the social attitudes of the 1930s, and the fact that no one anticipated the extent of the

The Official View: The Government, Government Officials, and the Jewish Refugee Crisis in Europe

1. As you examine the evidence in this second half of Section Three, ask yourself what motivations were behind each government official’s thoughts and feelings. What concerns or fears took precedence over helping Jewish refugees? Do you feel Canada had a responsibility toward the Jewish refugees of Europe to provide assistance? Should the government of Canada have allowed a significant number of Jewish refugees to immigrate here in the 1930s? Be ready to explain your position.

2. Read the claim made in the quotation below. Using the evidence given, determine whether you think this statement is an accurate representation of Canada’s immigration policy.

... what should be stressed is that the Depression also afforded Canadian government officials a dramatic opportunity to complete a process of restriction begun in the boom years of the 1920s. Canadian immigration policy had always been self-serving. When economic necessity dictated the admission of non-British and non-American immigrants, it was always in descending order of ethnic preference. ... At the bottom were Jews, Orientals and Blacks.

Source: Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933–1948* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2002), p. 5.

3. What would a Canadian immigration official today likely say about the refugees on board the *S.S. St. Louis*? How do you think the Canadian public today would react to a similar event? You may want to visit Chapter Seven, Section Four.

DURING READING

Evidence 3.38

March 21, 1931

Order-in-Council

The Deputy of His Excellency in Council is further pleased, having regard for the unemployment conditions now temporarily existing in Canada, to make the following Regulations ...

From and after the 18th March, 1931, and until otherwise ordered, the landing in Canada of immigrants of all classes and occupations is hereby prohibited, except as hereinafter provided:

1. A British Subject entering Canada directly or indirectly, ... who has sufficient means to maintain himself until employment is secured;
2. A United States citizen entering Canada from the United States who has sufficient means ... ;
3. The wife or unmarried child under 18 years of age of any person legally admitted to and resident in Canada ... ;
4. An agriculturalist having sufficient means to farm in Canada.

Source: Order-in-Council, PC 695, March 21, 1931.

Evidence 3.40

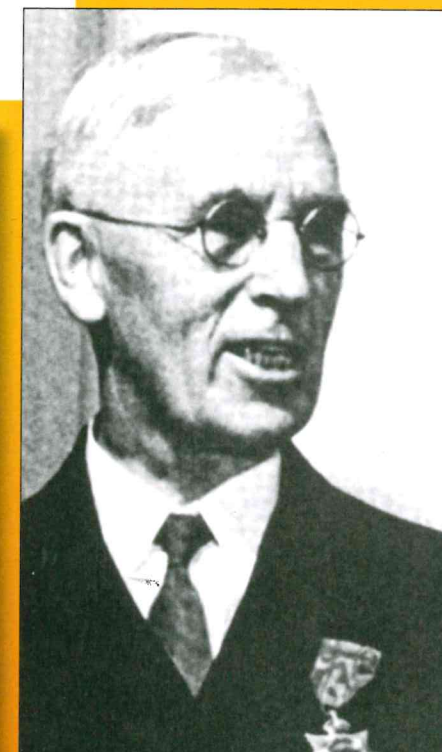
Evidence 3.39

What was Prime Minister Bennett afraid of?

On November 3, 1934, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett responded to a request made by the League of Nations High Commissioner for Canada to accept some Jewish refugees:

“ We cannot, in fairness to our population, authorize the admission into Canada of a number of people who must either remain idle or take the places now filled by Canadians, or for which Canadians are waiting opportunity.”

Source: High Commissioner for Refugees Records, Box 5, Bennett to McDonald, November 3, 1934.



Frederick Blair, Deputy Minister of Immigration:

“I often think that instead of persecution it would be far better if we ... told them [Jews] frankly why many of them are unpopular. If they would divest themselves of certain of their habits I am sure they could be just as popular in Canada as our Scandinavians. ... if these Jews were to find a home [in Canada] they would likely be followed by other shiploads.”

How valid were Blair’s reasons to restrict Jewish immigration? Which Canadians do you think supported

■ In your own words, restate each part of the following document. Check your understanding with a partner.

■ What inferences can you draw about the Canadian government’s priorities regarding immigration in 1931?

Evidence 3.41

What "internal problem" is King afraid of? Can you understand his point of view? What evidence from the previous section (The People's Views) supports these fears?

While he was sympathetic to humanitarian concerns, King always considered national unity first and foremost. He wanted at all costs to avoid a division between French and English Canada, as had happened during the First World War. Following the announcement that an international conference would be convened in Evian, France to address the refugee crisis, King wrote in his diary:

“My own feeling is that nothing is to be gained by creating an internal problem in an effort to meet an international one. ... We must ... seek to keep this part of the Continent free from unrest and from too great an intermixture of foreign strains of blood. ... I fear we would have riots if we agreed to a policy that admitted a number of Jews.”

Source: W.L. Mackenzie King, *Diaries*, March 29, 1938.

Evidence 3.43

Following the events of *Kristallnacht* on November 10, 1938, King reflected in his diary:

“... the sorrows which the Jews have to bear at this time are almost beyond comprehension. ... I feel Canada must do her part in admitting some of the Jewish refugees. It is going to be difficult politically, and I may not be able to get the Cabinet to consent, but will fight for it as right and just, and Christian.”

Source: W.L. Mackenzie King, *Diaries*, November 13, 1938.

Evidence 3.42

Some members of the House of Commons opposed the government's position on Jewish refugees. Liberal MP Arthur Heaps summarized the feelings of these members in a letter to Prime Minister King:

“Immigration regulations in Canada are the most stringent in the world. They are inhuman and unchristian. ... We think it is not in keeping with good liberal doctrine to refuse the right of asylum to a limited number of political and religious refugees.”

Source: King Papers, Library and Archives Canada, A.A. Heaps to W.L. Mackenzie King, September 9, 1938.

Evidence 3.44

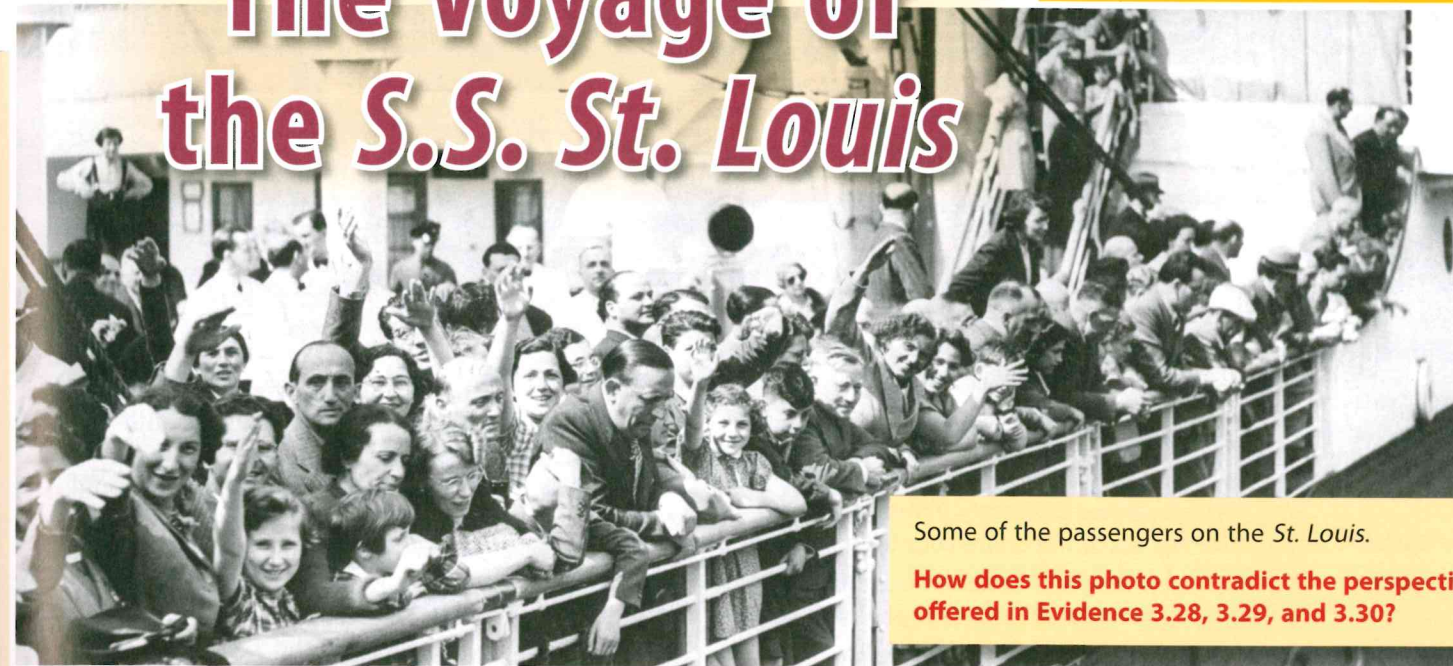
Secretary of State Ferdinand Rinfret best summarized the government's position in January 1939:

“Despite all sentiments of humanity, so long as Canada has an unemployment problem there will be no 'open door' for political refugees here ... [especially] that element who is assimilated with difficulty among the English and French of our Country.”

Source: *Montreal Gazette*, January 21, 1939.

Evidence 3.45

The Voyage of the S.S. St. Louis



Some of the passengers on the *St. Louis*.

How does this photo contradict the perspectives offered in Evidence 3.28, 3.29, and 3.30?

In May 1939, 937 passengers, mostly Jewish refugees, left Hamburg, Germany on the *S.S. St. Louis* en route to Cuba. Hundreds of children were among the refugees. All passengers held landing certificates permitting them entry to Cuba. But when the *St. Louis* reached the port of Havana, the president of Cuba refused to honour their documents. After the ship left Havana's harbour, it sailed so close to the Florida coast that the passengers could see the lights of Miami. The captain appealed for help, but in vain. US Coast Guard ships patrolled the waters to make sure that no one jumped to freedom. The ship was not allowed to dock in the United States. Nor was it allowed to dock in Canada. The *St. Louis* turned back to Europe, where Belgium, the Netherlands, England, and France admitted the passengers. But within months, German forces overran Western Europe, and hundreds of the passengers who had disembarked in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France eventually fell victim to the Nazi "Final Solution." (Source: Adapted from the United States Holocaust Museum Website.)

A distinguished list of Canadians sent a telegram to the prime minister on June 7, 1939, pleading the case of those on board the *St. Louis*. Among the petitioners were G.M. Wrong, professor; B.K. Sandwell, editor, *Saturday Night* magazine; Robert Falconer, past president of the University of Toronto; and Ellsworth Flavelle, a prominent businessman.

... we, the undersigned, as Christian citizens of Canada respectfully suggest that under the powers vested in you as Premier of our country you forthwith [*sic*] offer to the 907 homeless exiles on board the Hamburg American ship *St. Louis* [*sic*] Sanctuary in Canada.

When faced with the plight of the refugees on board the *St. Louis*, Prime Minister King, who was on a visit to Washington with the British royal family, deferred to the advice of his advisers and

... The question of immigrants on the ship "St. Louis" came up. ... It is much less our problem than that of the U.S. and Cuba.

Source: W.L. Mackenzie King, *Diaries*, June 8, 1939.

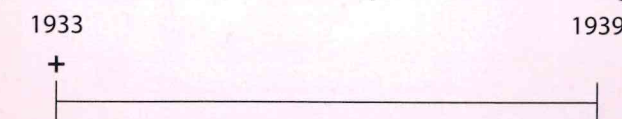
The Canadian Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, O.D. Skelton, also sent a telegram to King, responding to the appeal, from the *St. Louis*. However, F.C. Blair stated the government's definitive position:

[No country could] ... open its doors wide enough to take in the hundreds of thousands of Jewish people who want to leave Europe: the line must be drawn somewhere.

Source: IR, File 644452, Blair to Skelton, Undersecretary of External Affairs, King's main foreign affairs adviser, June 8, 1939.

1. In partners, put Prime Minister Mackenzie King in the "hot seat" as a way to explore his thinking during the 1930s on the topic of Jewish immigration. Prepare questions focusing on King's values, ideas, understanding of events, beliefs, and opinions at the time. One student should play Prime Minister King and another should act as the host asking questions. You may act out this role play or record it in audio or video format.
2. Refer back to the statement by historian David Rome on page 62 (During Reading, question 1). Using the evidence of the historical perspectives offered in the chapter, write an argumentative paragraph supporting or refuting his point of view.
3. Using the evidence presented in Section Three, put together a horizontal timeline like the one below, plotting public and government opinion. Place events favouring refugees above the line; place events against refugees below the line. Use two different colours to represent government and public opinion. The dates should progress chronologically from left to right. Include a simple visual beside each opinion that shows an understanding of the historical figure's perspective on the issue.

Rating Scale: Government and Public Opinion on Jewish Refugees



AFTER READING