No Haven for the Oppressed
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2. From Anschluss to Evian

Shortly before dawn on Saturday, March 12, 1938, advance patrols of the German Eighth Army filtered unopposed across the Austrian border to secure abandoned fortifications at Passau, Salzburg, and Kiefersfelden. By four o’clock that warm spring afternoon Adolf Hitler crossed the border in an open-air Mercedes at his birthplace, Braunau-am-Inn, ostensibly as a visitor on the way to his mother’s grave, but actually as a conqueror filled with vengeance for the humiliations he had sustained in his native land two decades before. Hitler would be received in Vienna by cheers of 200,000 persons singing the “Horst Wessel Lied” to the ringing of church bells in steeples draped with the swastika.

This bloodless coup was the culmination of four years of concerted intrigue and assassination directed by the Hitler regime against the Austrian republic. Just twenty-four hours before the Anschluss, Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg had been proceeding with plans for a national referendum which would defiantly proclaim the nation’s independence of Nazi influence. Schuschnigg had stationed 5,000 men, constituting Austria’s standing army, in positions along the German border. They were pledged to die for their nation’s honor and freedom. Hopelessly outmanned and outgunned by the German Wehrmacht, lacking the support of any adherent of the so-called Stresa Front, and facing Nazi revolutionary activity in Graz and Styria, Schuschnigg yielded before the threats of Adolf Hitler.¹

A world which had seen Hitler flaunt the Treaty of Versailles by repudiating its war guilt clause and by rearming
Germany with tanks, planes, and a powerful navy, which had permitted Hitler to propagandize the inhabitants of the Saar and Rhineland back into the Reich, which had looked askance as Hitler refortified Germany’s frontiers, should not have been particularly horrified when the Nazi tyrant scrapped his mutual security pact with Schuschnigg and stormed into Austria.

Seventy-six thousand Austrian patriots, Catholics, Jews, and government officials in Vienna were trundled off to jails by the Nazis within hours after the invasion. Six thousand persons were dismissed from the ministries of public safety and education. General Otto Zehner, the last Austrian defense minister, was murdered, and the rest of the general staff was pensioned off. To ensure its loyalty the tiny Austrian army was sent on parade in Germany, there to be integrated into the Wehrmacht.\(^2\)

Britain and France reacted passively to the Anschluss and treated it as an accomplished fact even before the Germans had reached the outskirts of Vienna. London and Paris accepted Goering’s vouchsafe that German troops would be withdrawn as soon as the Austrian situation stabilized. No protest was raised by the Soviet Union. In the United States, German Ambassador Hans Heinrich Dieckhoff cabled his superiors that he had discussed the matter with Secretary of State Cordell Hull on March 12 and “from a few questions, it was apparent that Mr. Hull thoroughly understands our actions.”\(^3\) Only the Czechs, who had volunteered to assist the Austrians in precisely such a crisis, stood ready to fight Germany, and they were unable to act alone.

The democracies could ill afford to be so blasé. Suddenly what had always been regarded as a domestic problem, Germany’s persecution of its Jews, now loomed before the world in more dramatic proportions. Somehow mankind had become injured to the harshness of the Nuremberg Laws as they slowly but methodically declassed and dehumanized Germany’s 700,000 “non-Aryans.” Now that malevolence was being transmitted beyond the original confines of the Reich. Now the 1,600-year-old Austrian-Jewish community, never as wealthy nor as secure
as German Jewry, was to be subjected to an instantaneous terror.

In the first few days of the Anschluss, 500 Jewish leaders, including Otto Loewi (1936 Nobel Prize winner in medicine), Heinrich Neumann (a noted ear specialist who had treated both King George of England and the Duke of Windsor), Baron Louis de Rothschild, eighty-two-year-old Sigmund Freud, and Felix Salten (author of *Bambi*), were arrested. Anti-Jewish caricatures showing large hook-nosed figures wearing a hammer and sickle, with palms outstretched, were plastered on public buildings in Vienna. Graveyards were desecrated with jeering invitations for Jews to come to the one place where they would be welcomed. Jewish stores, newspapers, and offices were plundered. Reichsmarshal Goering announced that all Jews with more than $2,000 in savings or property had to register such personal wealth with the state, which reserved the right to confiscate said property “wherever necessary.” Jews were disfranchised, thereby preventing their interference in the special plebiscite on April 10, which the Nazis had arranged to sanction the Anschluss. Jews were evicted from apartments and dismissed from medical schools and college faculties. Austrian literature and music were purged of the works of Stefan and Arnold Zweig, Franz Werfel, Vicki Baum, Mahler, Bizet, Mendelssohn, Toch, and Korngold. According to a dispatch from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on March 18, Vienna was becoming a city of whispers.

The expressed purpose of this persecution, according to the Nazi official organ, *Voelkischer Beobachter*, was to rid Austria of its Jews. By all gauges, the Nazis were succeeding. Before the Anschluss the daily mortality figure among Jews in Vienna was six. Within a fortnight, the figure was fifty, with many deaths attributable to starvation, beatings, or suicide. In the same period more than 30,000 persons queued up before the American consulate, and another 10,000 before the Australian consulate, in Vienna to seek visas. Officials estimated that 95 percent of these persons were Jewish.

Because legal emigration did not proceed with the speed
and precision that the Germans desired, they devised new techniques of expulsion. Early in April a group of fifty-one Jews, many of them children, were roused from their homes in the Burgenland, forced at gunpoint to board an old, vermin-infested barge, and then abandoned in the Danube near the Hungarian shore. They stayed there, in no man’s land, without food, money, or warm clothing, while Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary all denied them entrance.9

What began here as an experiment in terror developed into an institutional part of the Nazi program through the remainder of 1938. After the Munich partition of Czechoslovakia in September, 20,000 more Jews were expelled from the Sudetenland. Late in October another 18,000 Jews of Polish origin residing in Germany were rounded up in the middle of the night and driven to the swampy borders of Poland, where guards told them to run for their lives and then shot over their heads.10 Any convenient ditch or open field between Germany and its neighbors now could serve as a dumping ground for unwanted Jews. They came to rest in stables or along the roads of Nitra, Tarpolcany, Zilina, Michalovce, Prestany, Zbonszyn, and Zbaszyn, to sit in silence beside huge vats of steaming soup contributed by the Joint Distribution Committee, to sleep on straw supplied by local peasants, to freeze in Europe’s most severe winter in a century, to die of typhus and typhoid which were rampant among those who had not gone mad.11

The concept of “no man’s land” was not limited to Nazi Germany. The Anschluss merely unleashed latent hostilities toward the Jews in virtually every state which had signed League of Nations’ minority treaties.12 The Ronyos Garda (Guards in Rags) in Hungary, the Iron Guard in Rumania, the Hlinka Guard in Slovakia, and the Sic in the Western Ukraine all actively barred Jewish refugees from their homelands and turned on their own fellow nationals. Shortly after the Anschluss, Mussolini announced that the 15,000 Jews who had come to Italy after 1919 would have to leave within six months and that the remaining Jews would be barred from participating in the economic life of Italy. For four days in October, anti-Semites in Slovakia and Hungary shunted 10,000 Jews back
and forth across their common borders, until they came to rest in miserable camps operated by the Joint Distribution Committee near Kosice, Poland. One of those expelled expressed the grief of what he called “these human tennis balls” when he said, “I can’t survive like a criminal. I can’t gate-crash in this world. If this goes on, I’ll kill myself.”

From a practical standpoint, then, the Anschluss warned every one of Europe’s seven million Jews that he was in immediate jeopardy of becoming a stateless refugee. On July 21, 1938, Estonian Minister of Welfare Otto Kask stated that his country (with 5,000 Jews constituting 0.5 percent of the population) could accept no more refugees because of a rising tide of anti-Semitism. Like statements were issued by government spokesmen in Lithuania and Latvia. And in a communiqué to Cordell Hull, dated August 30, 1938, American Ambassador to Poland Anthony Biddle underscored the growing anxieties of the Slawoj-Skladkowski government over the Jewish question. Poland, according to Foreign Minister Colonel Josef Beck, with three million Jews, resented being treated as the dumping ground of Europe’s undersirables. For Beck and other officials in the anti-Semitic Camp of National Unity, which dominated Poland’s government, there was no difference between the Jewish refugee problem and Poland’s Jewish problem. The international community had to treat these questions as one and the same and had to provide some outlets of emigration for Polish as well as Austrian or German Jews.

The fear that Poland might indeed emulate Germany by expelling masses of Jews across its boundaries was supported by an intensified anti-Semitic press and radio campaign conducted by the government in the summer of 1938. This was followed by hints that “if other means fail,” Poland might adopt “German methods” of calling attention to her Jewish problems. Equally distressing to Washington were reports coming from Ambassador Hugh Wilson in Berlin that the Anschluss was merely a prelude to future German assaults on the Balkans for control on Hungarian wheat, Rumanian oil, and Czech munitions. Wilson predicted that Hitler would not be satisfied until he had absorbed the Sudetenland, as well as Austria, and he
worried that the peace of the world rested with the state of mind of “this nervous man.”¹⁹ Despite Wilson’s sagacity, the State Department’s only official comment on the Anschluss, apart from a few bitter words which Undersecretary Sumner Welles addressed to Ambassador Dieckhoff on March 15, ²⁰ was that it was studying the situation.

Much of the American public, however, was less reserved. The major New York daily newspapers, like most papers across the country, editorialized against Nazi brutality in Austria and the snowballing effect of expulsions into no man’s lands. The Catholic monthly Wisdom, the Messenger, national organ of the Evangelical and Reform Churches in the United States, the National Methodist Student Conference, the YMCA, the World Conference of the Society of Friends, Bishop William Manning of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Al Smith, Representative Samuel Dickstein of New York, Vito Marcantonio, a New York Republican, were among those who spoke out against the Nazi coup. ²¹ Donald O’Toole, a Democrat from Brooklyn, even introduced a bill in Congress calling for severance of diplomatic relations with Germany “until that nation relinquishes coercive, forced control of Austria, and further abates persecution of minorities because of race or creed.”²²

Roosevelt shared this popular revulsion at the course of events in Europe and was subsequently blamed by Dieckhoff for the sudden frost in American policy vis-à-vis Austria. Roosevelt was well aware of how this country had already been culturally and scientifically enriched by refugees from Hitlerian persecution, including people like Albert Einstein, Enrico Fermi, Niels Bohr, Max Reinhardt, Kurt Weill, Thomas Mann, George Grosz, Otto Klemperer, Julius Ehrlich, Nahum Glatzer, Richard Goldschmidt, Karl Lange, Rudolph Schoenheimer, and countless others, most of them Jews. ²³ He was also well aware that the Jews in America constituted his most loyal and most vocal base of support. ²⁴ Thus, at a cabinet meeting on March 18, 1938, Roosevelt, in what Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau described as an unusually serious mood, expressed his concern over the fate of the German Jews. “America was a
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place of refuge for so many fine Germans in the period of 1848. Why couldn’t we offer them again a place of refuge at this time?25

The answer should have been obvious. Figures compiled by the American Federation of Labor showed unemployment in 1938 stood at 11,000,000, nearly 20 percent of the work force.26 The hopes for emergence from the depression had been smashed in the recession of 1937, which had expanded the welfare rolls, shaken public confidence, and left FDR despondent. Roosevelt hardly needed to add the sensitive question of immigration to the series of domestic squabbles that he already had on his hands in the spring of 1938. The nation had not yet forgiven his badly handled “court-packing” scheme of 1937 and would presently express disapproval of an equally bungled purge of conservative Democrats in Congress.27 Roosevelt’s popularity had reached a new low, and a nationwide survey indicated that barely one-half of the people would have voted for him if the presidential election had been held that November. Immigration reform should have been the farthest thing from the president’s mind that spring, especially after he had received a telephone call from one of his whips on Capitol Hill who informed him, “For God’s sake, don’t send us any more controversial legislation.”28 Restrictionists had taken no chances, however, and once more William Green of the AFL, John Rankin of Mississippi, Reynolds, and John Trevor went on record as opposing any legislation which might flood the country with communist agitators and competing workmen.29

The president could hardly have bucked popular sentiment, which, while sympathetic to the plight of the “non-Aryans” in Germany, was nevertheless firmly opposed to the admission of additional refugees in the spring of 1938. Only 4.9 percent of those persons polled by Roper felt that the United States should welcome the victims of Nazi persecution if this meant suspending immigration quotas. And 18.2 percent felt that such refugees should be permitted to enter the United States within existing restrictions. But 67.4 percent of the Americans polled argued that conditions here being what they were, the government should “keep them out.” Ironically, although the position of
the Jews under Nazism was critical, 20 percent of the American Jews polled also favored an absolute exclusionist policy.\textsuperscript{30}

If there was a foreign policy question which truly interested Americans (after the all-encompassing domestic crisis), it was not what was going on in Austria, but Japan’s mutilation of our long-fancied protégé, China.\textsuperscript{31} Most Americans felt that the Jews in Europe were at least partially to blame for their present sufferings.\textsuperscript{32} Better than 60 percent of those polled by the Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) in the spring of 1938 objected to the Jews who were already in this country.\textsuperscript{33} A substantial portion of the followers of demagogues like Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith believed there were too many Jews in the country already.\textsuperscript{34} The influential Jesuit weekly \textit{America} washed its hands of the situation in Europe, despite the fact that 15 percent of the potential refugees in Germany and Austria were Christians, because “it remains mainly a Jewish problem.”\textsuperscript{35} And a consistently sizable block of Americans, one in eight, indicated through 1938 and 1939 that they would support an organized anti-Semitic campaign against the Jews on a par with that being waged by the Nazis.\textsuperscript{36} The nation did not particularly appreciate its own Jews, let alone seek any more that might complicate the employment situation. It is significant that in virtually every poll conducted by Gallup, Roper, ORC, and NORC through February 1946 the group singled out by most Americans as posing the greatest menace to the country was the Jews.\textsuperscript{37}

Roosevelt had learned the previous fall that he could ill afford to antagonize public opinion. By his own admission a novice in the field of foreign affairs (shortly after the Anschluss, he wrote a friend, “I am in the midst of a long process of education—and the process seems to be working slowly but surely’’),\textsuperscript{38} FDR had been miserably unsuccessful in his attempts to secure international peace late in 1937. The American-sponsored international disarmament conference at Brussels had foundered because of quarrels among the democracies and because Germany, Italy, and Japan did not send delegates.\textsuperscript{39} Then on October 5, 1937, Roosevelt stated that it might become necessary to quarantine aggressor nations which were “creating
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a state of international anarchy and instability from which there is no escape through mere isolation or neutrality.  

The president was not prepared for the response to his quarantine speech. Cheered abroad as a harbinger of American entry into a system of collective security, the speech was lacerated by isolationist newspapers and spokesmen in Congress as an unwarranted departure from America’s traditional stance of neutrality. Welles wrote presidential aide Samuel Rosenman of the surprise and dismay the president had felt about the attacks on his speech in this country. Rosenman later noted, “It was a mistake he seldom made—the mistake of trying to lead the people of the United States too quickly and before they had been adequately informed of the facts or spiritually prepared for the event.”

Once singed by such abuse, and thoroughly aware that Congress was “in a nasty mood” and eager for a chance “to clip the President’s wings,” Roosevelt stepped warily to avoid provoking further outcries against his programs. Rosenman noted that henceforth FDR was careful not to recommend any drastic action without first giving the people the facts to the extent that military security allowed (p. 168).

At the same time, however, FDR was under great pressure from powerful Jewish groups in the country like the B’nai B’rith, the American Jewish Committee, the Zionist Organization of America, the Jewish Labor Committee and the American Jewish Congress, as well as the nonsectarian National Coordinating Committee, to do something to succor the Jews of Europe. Roosevelt, surrounded by Jewish intimates like Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Commerce Secretary David Niles, personal advisers Samuel Rosenman and Benjamin Cohen, economic advisers Bernard Baruch and Mordecai Ezekiel, Supreme Court Justices Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, and maintaining close lines of communication with Rabbis Stephen Wise and Abba Silver, Governor Herbert Lehman, and the NCC’s Gentile chairman, Joseph P. Chamberlain, must have felt the tremendous impact of such pressure.

In actuality, however, the Jewish community in this country was as riven as the fascist bloc, but with the added com-
lication of having no common, ultimate goal. Wise, an indomitable soul who had been instrumental in founding the Zionist Organization of America, the American Jewish Congress, and the World Jewish Congress, complained in 1937 that he had Roosevelt all but convinced to issue a presidential decree in March 1933 which would have admitted victims of political and religious persecution to the U.S. Only through the intervention of Eric and James Warburg, wealthy New York Jews who convinced Roosevelt that tales of persecution under Hitler were greatly exaggerated—“atrocity and rumor mongering”—was the plan rejected.  

Wise continued to have difficulties with the more reserved American Jewish Committee and B’nai B’rith when he proposed a full-scale boycott of German goods and mass demonstrations against Nazi persecution early in 1933. Similarly, when Baruch Vladeck of the Jewish Labor Committee promised cooperation in such matters in 1937, Wise noted sourly, “He may cooperate in the boycott where the cooperation is altogether to their advantage, we doing all the work and they appropriating the major credit, but that’s all.”

Even when Pittsburgh philanthropist Edgar Kaufmann convinced the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, B’nai B’rith, and the Jewish Labor Committee to merge their efforts in the summer of 1938 under one General Jewish Council, the groups failed to cooperate. Throughout 1938 and 1939, Wise and his executive secretary, Lillie Shultz, scored the separate fund-raising tactics of the American Jewish Committee, which merely duplicated the work of the United Jewish Appeal and deprived the other three organizations of a greater share of American support. By April 1941 the leaders of the Congress were paranoid about every action taken by the other groups. An example was Congress Vice-President Lipsky’s warning to Wise that “the Congress will soon be facing a planned underground attack, which will come from the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Labor Committee, and possibly the B’nai B’rith.” Lipsky suggested avoiding the initiation of any attack, in favor of building up the structure and influence of the Congress. By the end of the month the Congress
had withdrawn from the General Jewish Council, a move which ended any thought of Jewish unity.

What happened in the General Jewish Council was not unique. Disorder and disagreement permeated every aspect of the Jewish Community's plans to help the victims of Nazism. Not until July 1940 did HIAS, the Joint, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the National Refugee Service (the creation of the National Coordinating Committee in 1939), which collectively spent upwards of $30,000,000 on relief in Europe between 1933 and 1941, decide among them what role each should play in the transporting and receiving of immigrants. Some Jewish organizations championed emigration to the United States, while others opposed this, fearful that increased Jewish immigration might result in violent anti-Semitic eruptions. The Zionists labored to help thousands of persons leave Austria and Germany and go to Palestine. They were frustrated in this aim by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which as late as 1935 was on record as opposed to such a concept, and by dissidents in the American Jewish Committee like Lessing Rosenwald, who held that Jewish nationalism only promoted the idea that there was a Jewish race as well.

At the same time organizations like the American Jewish Congress and the National Coordinating Committee, which favored admission to the U.S. of larger numbers of Jewish refugees on a nonquota basis, could argue strongly in support of their views. First, they rejected the restrictionists' contention that immigration was contributing to the depression. They cited data to show that immigration was self-regulating in times of economic distress, that far from competing with unskilled native labor, those persons who had fled to the U.S. from Nazi Germany were mainly professionals who were badly needed in this country, that many of these persons had actually expanded job opportunities for Americans, rather than constricted them.

The experience of Western Europe with German-Jewish refugees should have demonstrated the beneficial influences on employment of such immigration. In 1934 a special Dutch commission reported that the number of persons employed as a direct result of new economic activity introduced by the refu-
Refugees was approximately equal to the number of immigrants taken in by the Netherlands since the rise of Hitler. Sir Samuel Hoar, British Home Secretary, later noted in the House of Commons that 15,000 British workers were directly employed by 11,000 refugees. And R. F. Harrod, president of the Economic Section of the British Association, in 1938 rejected the notion that existing unemployment was a good reason for discouraging immigration, concluding that the expansion of numbers is often good for employment and the contraction bad.

The irony of this situation was that American immigration laws were allegedly designed to keep out the inferior elements of Europe. The persons now knocking at the door were refined, literate, professional Germans, whose average worth was once estimated at $25,000. But even if the refugees were not all capitalists, scientists, or shopkeepers who transferred complete enterprises to the U.S., they still offered another potential tonic to the U.S. economy. Many of the immigrants were children, aged persons, or wives, people not seeking jobs and posing virtually no threat to those who did hold jobs. In fiscal 1938, for example, fewer than 20,000 of America's 68,000 immigrants fell in the employable male category. Between 1931 and 1940 not more than 49,000 new job competitors were introduced in this country by immigration. These people did not oust native Americans from jobs which the latter already held. They were not radicals or criminals. They did not subsist on welfare, and they did not lower the American standard of living. In fact, every new immigrant with a family meant more mouths to feed, bodies to clothe, shelters to build, minds to educate, services to render, and products to sell. That they by no means constituted a menace to the economic life of the country was clear to Labor Secretary Frances Perkins who testified in February 1939:

The number of immigrants admitted into the U.S. in the last five years has averaged less than 50,000 per annum. It is unlikely that this number has greatly affected the conditions of the unemployed in this country, especially when consideration is given to the fact that a large part of the number admitted were dependents of citizens or aliens legally here, or were otherwise not of the employee class.
While some persons in the U.S. labored in the Herculean task of convincing the government that the admission of Jews to this country would aid the economy, they also realized that many Jews in Europe did not want to leave their homelands, no matter how miserable their lot. Until the Anschluss the Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland, founded in 1901 to help less fortunate East European Jews, was committed to the idea of holding on rather than emigrating. Until the Anschluss the German immigration quota of 27,370 was never filled. This desire to remain with the familiar, even in times of evil, was best summarized by Marie Ginsberg, who wrote:

Many thought that the Nazi regime was but a passing phenomenon and, though prohibited from practicing their professions, still did not see that they ought to leave the country; but tried to make a living in trade or existed on their savings, hoping that a change of government would reinstate them in their former positions. Even those who did detach themselves from Germany clung to Europe, because they wanted to be ready to return as soon as circumstances permitted.

Even if planned emigration had been possible in 1933, the Anschluss had changed that. In the summer of 1938 the European office of the Joint Distribution Committee in Paris warned that mass emigration was impossible because of situations in the immigrant countries, which had little capacity for absorption and which had unemployment problems of their own. Noting the ominous prospect of three million more potential Jewish refugees in Poland (something which had perturbed World Zionist Organization President Chaim Weizmann as early as 1936), the Joint bravely resolved to treat the problem in the host countries through relief, rehabilitation, and training.

There is a tribal myth among Jews that anytime two Jews congregate, three opinions are present. This adage approximates the dissension which existed in the American Jewish community on the eve of World War II. Presidential aide Benjamin Cohen noted that Roosevelt was well aware of this division. While Roosevelt was sympathetic to the German refugees (“knocked pillar to post”), he also recognized that the Jews were unable to present any united plan of action to save their brethren.
Moreover, none of Roosevelt’s Jewish advisers spoke out strongly for special action on behalf of the Jews in Europe. In the face of criticisms of Roosevelt’s “Jew Deal” and “Jewocracy,” such leaders as Baruch, Rosenman, Frankfurter, Niles, and Morgenthau, “leaders of the periphery” according to Kurt Lewin’s terminology, opted for mendicancy rather than leadership. Insecure themselves, constantly wary of raising the specter of double-loyalty which was the grist of anti-Semites, these persons ever-exerted themselves to display their Americanism, their concern for this nation’s welfare to the exclusion of all others, even when doing so meant the deaths of loved ones in Europe.

Because of the explosiveness of the Jewish refugee question, and because no one could offer him a satisfactory suggestion as to how to resolve the problem, Roosevelt tempered his humanitarian impulses with the harsh realities of the times. It simply was not politically expedient for him to suggest any breaking down of U.S. immigration walls. A fight over refugees might be just the opening his enemies were seeking to jeopardize his entire legislative program, including relief and public works projects, rearmament, and revision of neutrality legislation. FDR made it clear to Mrs. Roosevelt, who had taken a keen interest in refugee affairs, that he was not willing to run that risk. “First things come first,” he said, “and I can’t alienate certain votes I need for measures that are more important at the moment by pushing any measure that would entail a fight.”

Still, Roosevelt recognized the moral necessity of doing something to aid the Jews in Europe. Legitimately the problem should have been within the province of the League of Nations, but the League had been incapable of handling refugee questions in the past. After World War I the league had been instrumental in underwriting international loans to cover the cost of transporting and integrating 2,000,000 Greeks and Turks and 220,000 Bulgarians in new lands. Faced with the discomforting prospect of 1,000,000 White Russian, 300,000 Armenian, 50,000 Saar German, and countless other political and religious refugees, the League had established the Nansen Organization for Help to Refugees in 1921. The Nansen Office, directed by
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Norwegian polar-explorer Fridtjof Nansen, attempted to regularize the emigration of persecuted peoples by issuing an international passport, which at one point was honored by fifty-two nations.\textsuperscript{70}

The Nansen Office was aided after October 1933 by the Autonomous Office of High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany. This organization, formed in a reaction to the wave of anti-Jewish persecution in Germany, received at least the tacit endorsement of the United States. Joseph Chamberlain participated in organizational deliberations, and James G. McDonald, an Ohioan who had written at length against German barbarities in World War I and who was then chairman of the Foreign Policy Association of the United States, was named High Commissioner.\textsuperscript{71}

Neither the Nansen Office nor the High Commissioner was able to handle the flow of German-Jewish refugees, to say nothing of the potential wave of persons in Eastern Europe. The Nansen Certificate, that quasi-passport which accorded emigrants social and economic rights equal with those enjoyed by nationals in any host country, was valid only for one year and only if the emigrant's original country would certify that he could return to his homeland. Quite obviously, then, the Nansen Office could be only mildly successful. From the time it entered the League of Nations in 1934 the Soviet Union agitated to abolish the office, which it charged was giving protection to counter-revolutionaries living abroad. After the rise of Hitler no German-Jewish refugee could qualify for one of those protective certificates, because none could obtain the necessary guarantee of the right to return to his homeland. By the summer of 1938 the Nansen Office, which had issued only 4,782 passports during the previous fiscal year, admitted its inability to cope with more than several thousand refugees at best.\textsuperscript{72}

The High Commissioner's Office proved to be of little help. For one thing it was set up as a totally autonomous organization, divorced from the League of Nations. It was established mostly to appease the U.S. which, while interested in its success, did not want to become a party to any official League organization. But another reason for such autonomy was to spare
the League’s treasury a constant drain on its resources. Although it had been initially funded with 25,000 francs from that treasury, the commission was dependent upon voluntary contributions to support its programs. Before he resigned in fury and frustration in December 1935, McDonald did succeed in raising several million dollars to aid approximately 100,000 persons. But McDonald’s 3,000-word letter of resignation was as much an indictment of unwise reliance upon philanthropy to solve the refugee problem as it was of the Nazism that had created the problem. Lacking a firm financial base, without a secretariat until 1936, duplicating instead of supplementing the work of the Nansen Office, the High Commissioner was virtually powerless and by 1938 was placing no more than fifty to 100 refugees a week in countries surrounding Germany. It was powerless to touch refugees from Hitler’s persecution in Austria (technically beyond the territorial limits of Germany and hence outside the jurisdiction of the commissioner’s office). The office had been the subject of many proposals, all negative, most suggesting its abolition or, at best, its merger with the Nansen Office.

With the Anschluss, Roosevelt also was compelled to conclude that the League and its operatives were incapable of dealing with the Jewish refugee problem. The president wrote later in 1941 that an orderly plan for intergovernmental cooperation was needed to deal with mass emigrations because the abilities of private organizations to find places of refuge had been overtaxed. On March 23, 1938, Roosevelt directed Hull to invite the representatives of more than thirty nations to another international conference on refugees. For the first time the U.S. government pledged its fullest, official support. On March 24, 1938, Hull issued the following statement to the press:

This government has become so impressed with the urgency of the problem of political refugees that it has inquired of a number of Governments in Europe and in this hemisphere whether they would be willing to cooperate in setting up a special committee for the purpose of facilitating the emigration from Austria and presumably from Germany.
of political refugees. Our idea is that whereas such representa-
tives would be designated by the Governments concerned, any
financing of the emergency emigration referred to would be
undertaken by private organizations within the respective coun-
tries. Furthermore, it should be understood that no country
would be expected or asked to receive a greater number of im-
migrants than is permitted by its existing legislation. In making
this proposal the Government of the United States has empha-
sized that it in no sense intends to discourage or interfere with
such work as is already being done on the refugee problem by
any existing international agency. It has been prompted to make
its proposal because of the urgency of the problem with which
the world is faced and the necessity of speedy cooperative effort
under governmental supervision if widespread human suffering
is to be averted.78

This communiqué aroused much interest at the League of
Nations, and it also established hard principles from which gov-
ernment officials, including Hull and Roosevelt, were bound not
to stray.79 Noteworthy among them were: (1) that no particular
ethnic, political, or religious group should be identified with the
refugee problem or the calling of the conference; (2) that noth-
ing should be done to interfere with the operations of existing
relief organizations, no matter how ineffectual those organiza-
tions might be; (3) that all assistance for refugee work should be
drawn from purely voluntary sources; and (4) that no nation
should be required to amend its current immigration laws to
accommodate the refugees.

Roosevelt and Hull could defend the use of the euphemism
“refugee” instead of “Jewish refugees.” The League of Nations
had estimated that there were still some 300,000 White Rus-
sians, 120,000 Armenians, 20,000 Nestorian Iraqis, and 30,000
Italians in need of assistance in 1938, as well as some 400,000
Spanish Republicans subsisting in French detention camps, an-
other 3,000,000 of their compatriots who were labeled “internal
refugees,” and the millions of Chinese who had been uprooted
by the Japanese invasion.80

Although this was true, the fact remains that in 1938 the
Jewish question was the refugee question. The persecution and
expulsion of the Jews were especially vicious, the potential num-
ber of persons affected was the greatest, the willingness of
European nations to welcome the victims of persecution was the lowest. The intergovernment meeting was called not in response to the Spanish Civil War nor Bolshevik purges, but as a direct consequence of the persecution of the Jews of Austria and Germany. This question would dominate the entire conference. The number of “refugees” discussed at Evian—600,000—was identical with the Jewish population of greater Germany. Walter Adams, secretary to Sir John Hope Simpson’s Survey of Refugee Problems, conducted under the joint auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, claimed the word refugee was a mere euphemism for Jew. U.S. Immigration Commissioner James Houghteling would later concede that the term “refugee” was useless as far as official definition went. Harold Willis Dodds, principal U.S. delegate to the Anglo-American Conference on Refugees at Bermuda in 1943, indicated some years later, “Everyone knew that when you talked about refugees in those days, you were talking about the Jews.”

Roosevelt knew it, too, for he wrote of the proposed conference that “the policy of the German Government toward Jewish minorities was the prime cause of the entire problem.” Nevertheless, the government, partially for defensive purposes at home, where anti-Semitism was strong, partially for the sake of the Jews abroad whom it was feared would suffer additional persecution if their case was singled out for mention, held to the official fiction in 1938 and throughout the war years that there was nothing unique about the Jewish refugee problem. The wording of Hull’s call for an intergovernment conference obscured the true problem and prematurely burdened the conference with the same restrictions which had severely limited the League’s refugee bodies.

Roosevelt and Hull could hardly have been encouraged by official responses to their announcement. Within four hours after receiving Hull’s cable Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano notified the American Ambassador William Phillips that although he recognized the humanitarian character of the proposal, “Italy could not participate in any move to care for the enemies of Fascism or Nazism.” Rumania and Poland, in offering to attend the conference, conditioned their participation
upon some discussion of their Jewish problems as well. Russia hedged, fearing that the United States planned to revive the White Russian question. And Canada expressed concern over duplication of the work of existing League offices.\textsuperscript{84}

In America, the response to Hull’s call was anything but positive. AFL President Green gave his support on the condition that nothing be done in juggling quotas, which might prejudice labor’s position. Representative Richard Jenkins of Ohio again warned against becoming embroiled in Europe’s problems, and John Rankin of Mississippi, a strong anti-Semite, warned that “almost every disgruntled element that ever got into trouble in its own country has pleaded for admission into the United States on the ground that they were oppressed at home.”\textsuperscript{85} Roosevelt even received several pieces of hate literature from persons calling themselves “most ardent supporters.” “Please spare us,” these few letters ran. “Why open the door for more Jews? Don’t we have enough of that scum here already?”\textsuperscript{86}

On the whole, however, Roosevelt and Hull were cheered by the editorial opinions in British, American, and French periodicals, which applauded the idea of an international conference on refugees.\textsuperscript{87} By the end of spring, acceptances had been received from Great Britain, the Dominions, Denmark, France, Belgium, Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Panama, Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Bolivia, and Ireland. France had generously offered to host the conference at Evian-les-Bains, a small town in the Alps.

Nazi Germany, which had precipitated the call to Evian with its seizure of Austria and subsequent brutalization of that nation’s Jewish community, would not attend the conference on the shores of Lake Geneva. Nor were the interested East European nations accorded delegate status at Evian. Even before the conference began the Western democracies decided upon a distinction between “sender” and “receiver” states. The East Europeans, who were permitted to send unofficial observers, were designated as “senders” of refugees.