THE JEWISH REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA
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The Australian Immigration Politics and Jewish Refugees

The Australian continent is in need of a population of 30 to 60 million in order to develop further development. It was not practical in the past to receive immigrants from the White race on a mass level. However, when it did become possible thanks to Hitler’s rise to power, a good element of immigrants tried to settle here, the Australians did not want to allow them in. Only 7,000 came during a period of eight years (1933-1940).

How does one account for this particular paradox? We must analyse the motives, which were submitted against the allowing in of immigrants in larger numbers, in order to understand their true meaning. The motives divide into two categories.

The general approach from the Ministry of the Interior is dictated by the principle that the population of Australia must be 95 percent British-born. If one accepts that over 5 percent of the population (which makes up 350,000 of a general population of 7 million), seven thousand die out yearly, then the same number non-British immigrants should be allowed into Australia annually.

A second condition of Australian immigration politics is that the immigrant must be totally healthy both physically and spiritually, without a blemish on their character, to have a good education and to have enough money in order to support themselves financially. This last point was translated in various ways at various times. Until the first half of 1938, 200 pounds were demanded from immigrants. Later, the amount was increased to 500, 800 and even 3,000 pounds. In the end, the amount reached 5,000 pounds. With this, they apparently wanted to ensure both the immigrant and the Australian community, that the newcomers would not be a drain on public funds.

In 1933, the non-British population in Australia was about 2 percent of the general population. In New South Wales, where 40 percent of the Australian population lives, the percentage was even smaller (around 1.4). Apart from the yearly quota of 7,000, 200,000 non-British immigrants were allowed to come into Australia.

We are aware of the complaints against allowing in Jewish refugees in bigger numbers. It was said that in the end, there must be a little bit of truth in the Nazi accusations against the refugees; that they will call out anti-Semitic moods; that because of them, unemployment would grow, that they would decrease the existing living standard. In a word, they said that the refugee immigration would encompass and flood the already existing positions of economic and cultural life in Australia and that they would not create new settlements with new industries and new work-positions.

If the administration was against allowing in Jews, its guilt was eased by the great number of Australian Jews, who were scared of a flood of European Jews. The Jewish Welfare Society was proud that it had had the full trust of the leadership which in fact banned the immigration of Jewish refugees.
The Immigrants

The question of refugee-influx presents itself in a completely different light, when one equates the large numbers of those who wanted to and could come, against the small amount who were allowed in.

The make-up of the refugees from Germany and especially the Turkish and Czechoslovakian refugees who came to Australia after the fall of Turkey, was coincidental and relevant to their professions. These were just people who had money in overseas banks and who were chosen by the bureaucrats who had a say in the choice of successful immigrants. It is understood that the bourgeois element was the dominant one, because who else has foreign credits at their disposition?

The condition of the Polish Jews presents itself a little differently. Polish Jews were mostly invited by relatives, who, in earlier years, came to Australia, and with 50 pounds money to show, they were able to come into the country. The element of Polish Jewish immigrants is therefore a more mixed one, and consists of various workingmen as well as professionals.

The number of refugees who were registered with the several departments of the AJWS (Australian Jewish Welfare Society), is approximately 7,000. Bishop Dr. S. Van Pilcher, of Sydney, chairman of the Inter-Church Committee for Refugee Aid, estimates the number of refugees at 6,500, including non-Aryan Christians. The number 7,000 is surely overestimated, because a lot of the refugees carried over from one state to another and registered with the AJWS in several states. Others, especially converted refugees, searched for supporters in Jewish and non-Jewish aid-organisations, so that their names figure simultaneously in several registers.

Once can see how small the influx of refugees to Australia was from the following numbers (provided by the Office for Census and Statistics): in the years 1933-40, 19,433 immigrants came to Australia from Germany, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Lithuania and Yugoslavia; in the years 1925-32, 14,079 immigrants came in from the same countries. From the given numbers, 9,167 were from Yugoslavia. Yugoslavs, Italians and Greeks make up the biggest part of the non-British population in Australia.

The division of refugees between the Australian states and territories, is as follows: 4,198 in New South Wales, 250 in Queensland, 233 in Western Australia, a couple in Tasmania and in the Northern Territory. The remaining refugees, approximately 2,100 in number, are in Victoria. The Melbourne AJWS didn’t give any information about this specific question, and we come to this number by dint of simple arithmetic. As it turns out, New South Wales has almost twice as many refugees as Victoria. It is very hard to report the number of the converted refugees, because many Jewish refugees registered with non-Jewish refugee-organisations which didn’t share information with the AJWS.

The refugees came to Australia full of hope. They thought that after the European hell that they had experienced, that they would find freedom and economic security here. However, they were quickly disappointed. Their qualifications were not always accepted and they didn’t want to hear, that they are “enemy aliens”. The anti-refugee laws didn’t only pertain to foreigners from enemy countries.

The conditions become even more difficult due to the political limits. The refugees from Germany, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy and Romania were officially stamped as “enemy aliens”. They are handled as Prisoners of War on parole. They aren’t allowed to spend a single night outside their registered dwelling, not allowed to travel without permission and not allowed to possess any radios or cameras. They must put overseas mail into separate envelopes addressed to the censor and they are not allowed to buy any land, or houses. They are not even allowed to catch fish. This all is only a part of the limitations which were placed on the “enemy refugees”. In addition, they were not allowed to be employed in government jobs such as radio, schools, and every workplace which is connected to the military. A lot of private firms imitate the government, even when
they have absolutely nothing to do with the military. Refugees do not enjoy the newly passed child bonus even when their children are born in Australia. Another characteristic limit is the prohibition on Anglicizing their names.

The government had an opposing attitude regarding the formation of colonies and separate settlements by aliens. Theoretically, it stands on the principle of infiltration. Aliens need to give up their identity and assimilate into the existing conditions of economic and social-cultural life in Australia.

Never-the-less, refugees have added something to progress in Australia. They organised, or helped organise new industries, such as optical and chemical production, hand bags, clothing, high fashion, and in a certain amount influenced public taste for the better. On the matter of culture, the author of this particular work helped organise a series of speeches for the teachers' federation in NSW, which brought in a new scientific approach to the history of art and civilisation.

The refugees also Europeanised urban life here to a certain degree. The Viennese coffee houses that they opened here, with music, with newspapers and magazines on the tables, the decorated shop windows of their fashion stores, the modern cosmetic shops, this all brought in a certain European atmosphere here. The Viennese ballet dancer, Bodenvizer, also strongly influenced the art of dance in Australia. Despite the hard conditions, these refugees help create and have an effect on all realms of Australian life.

In previous times: 1) 2,250 refugees were brought in from England, and they were interned here. Amongst them were several hundred boys aged approximately 16 years. One of them was Dr. Platter, the modern translator of Shakespeare into German. These refugees were interned "by mistake", as it was expressed by the Minister of the Interior in London. They could have be freed if the Australian Government accorded them VISAs. Of the 15,000 permits to which Australia agreed in Evian, 11,000 have not been used.

The principle of infiltration does not allow for change due to the specific economic and cultural condition in Australia. However, today, when Australia is on war-footing, the existing human material needs to be used all the more for the defense of the land. A great number of qualified workmen can be used in war-industries. In addition, we need to legalise free Germans, free Turks and Czechs, as was done in England and Canada, and Jews, as was done in Palestine.

Australia doesn't need to fear expansion. This land is in need of millions of people, in order to develop and become a healthy, strong community. The question of mass-immigration is not actual at the present time, however, we must already begin to prepare for post-war immigration. A mass-immigration must be a planned for.

The project of a Jewish agricultural settlement in the Kimberley can, in large measure, work to Australia's advantage. The project has already been accepted positively by a large section of public opinion in Australia.

Professor Walter Mordok said about the Kimberley Project: "I believe that Israel’s difficulties are a good chance for Australia. If we will be smart, we need to grab this particular chance with both hands."