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NGOs and refugees in European history: assessing NGO influence on international refugee policymaking, 1919-1979

Vosters, T.S.

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CHAPTER 3

The Evian Conference and Jewish
refugees between 1933-1938

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The United States has now received favorable replies from twenty-eight of the twenty-nine countries that Secretary Hull and President Roosevelt appealed to for a co-operative effort to facilitate the emigration of political refugees. [...] The purpose of the proposal is to set up an international committee which, working with funds privately contributed, will help refugees to move from inhospitable countries to lands where they can re-establish themselves. [...] The problem of helping these people is complex. In many instances they have been deprived not only of citizenship but of all resources [...] Fortunately for them, the experience of the League in the work done by the Nansen and McDonald Committees is available to any new organizations which may be established.¹

When in 1938 the US President Franklin Roosevelt called upon nations to work together to help (mainly) Jewish refugees, hopes were high. Nations had come together before, to help refugees in the 1920s, and they should be able to do so again. That hope was in vain. Pressured by NGOs, Roosevelt organised a conference in July 1938 in the French resort in Evian-les-Bains. 32 countries gathered for eight full days to discuss how to help Jews who tried to escape Hitler's regime. Between 1933 and 1938 350,000 people fled Germany.² 43 private and voluntary organisations and 200 journalists were present at what was a public display of good will.³ The conference did not lead to any result; in the end no European state was willing to receive and resettle substantial numbers of Jewish refugees.⁴ The Evian Conference of 1938 is remembered as a major failure of the international community to save refugees from Germany. It gave Hitler the impression that he could do whatever he liked to Jews as the Evian Conference showed 'a complete lack of collective political will'.⁵ The conference even set into motion a chain reaction of more restrictive border policies.⁶ States justified their strict attitude repeatedly by emphasising the difficulties they faced due to the economic crisis. The Evian Conference is still referred to in refugee discussions today as a warning of what restrictive measures and international failure to cooperate can cause.⁷ In this chapter I analyse three NGOs that advocated for the rights and protection of German Jews between 1933 until the Evian Conference in 1938 and discuss what impact they had. I look at why they chose certain positions and analyse why they failed to influence refugee policies.

The three NGOs under study are: the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Jewish Colonisation Association (JCA), and the Dutch Council for Jewish Refugees (Comité Joodsche Vluchtelingen CJV). The NGOs under study were all important organisations that provided aid to refugees and advocated for the protection of (Jewish) refugees. How did these NGOs react to this refugee movement and to state policies between 1933 and 1938? What strategies did they apply in their advocacy work? And what explains the role of NGOs in this period? Of course, these three NGOs do not represent all NGOs, but extensive information on other organisations comes from minutes and the correspondence of committees in which NGOs participated and this allows us to also discuss organisations such as Save the Children or the umbrella organisation the World Jewish Congress.

Apart from NGOs, the League of Nations organisation the High Commissioner for (Jewish and other) Refugees coming from Germany (HCRG) also played a vital role and this role is discussed extensively in this chapter. This organisation was set up in 1933 specifically to

help refugees from Germany.⁸ The focus is on the international level and on the attempts of NGOs to influence the international community to solve the refugee crisis. However, because most attempts for international refugee solutions failed during this key moment, much of the policy was determined at the national level. The failure to create international cooperation on behalf of refugees is also explained by the tendency of most states to pursue nationalistic immigration measures focussed on protecting national labour markets and to close borders. I therefore incorporate some circumstances and events at the national level. This is why I have included the CJV; a Dutch NGO that was active in an international setting and was in contact with the High Commissioner for Refugees but mainly operated on the national level. Jews were not the only people trying to leave Germany between 1933 and 1938. Communists, trade unionists, social democrats, anti-Fascist intellectuals and pacifists also fled or tried to flee. However, because a large (but changing) percentage of refugees was Jewish and many of the NGOs involved were trying to help Jewish refugees, I focus on these refugees. An estimated 80 per cent of the 37,000 refugees that fled in 1933 were Jewish and between 1933 and 1939 a total of 175,000 Jews had left Germany.⁹

Based on my research, I argue that NGOs' ineffective advocacy was the result of structural developments in Europe such as economic decline, increasing antisemitism and appeasement politics. However, I go beyond contextual elements that determined NGOs' limited window of opportunities and show that their lack of success can also be explained by fragmentation and competition between NGOs and the absence of large non-Jewish humanitarian NGOs, an ineffective NGO-IGO nexus, and the lack of a strategy aimed at gaining publicity and creating awareness. The fragmentation in Jewish circles, which I will describe below, has already been noted by others.¹⁰ However, this study demonstrates the fragmentation over a longer period of time, how it stretched beyond Jewish organisations, and how it was not just fragmentation but a serious conflict over funds, goals and strategies and was also apparent within the NGOs under study. Additionally, this chapter shows that NGOs were highly aware of the detrimental effects of their fragmented position and the lack of any public campaign, and that they did consider the consequences. They actively thought about strategies, contemplated the balance that needed to be struck between being critical or accommodating of governmental policies in order to have an impact and evaluated this afterwards. This chapter therefore shows the unique findings of internal NGO discussions, aims and reflections.

3.2 HISTORIOGRAPHY

There is a lot of research on the 1930s and refugees from Nazi Germany.¹¹ General refugee histories such as the monumental works of Michael Marrus and Louise Holborn addressed the 1930s refugee crisis in Europe extensively. Yet, the role of NGOs received little attention.¹² Marrus for example discussed the failure of the League of Nations in detail, but dedicated only one paragraph to other non-state refugee support initiatives.¹³ The same applies to Tommie Sjoberg, who has written an extensive history of international refugee relief between 1938-1947. He focused on the League of Nations and the Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees and paid little attention to actors outside this intergovernmental arena.¹⁴ The minor role NGOs played in these general refugee histories confirms the need for an NGO perspective, also in the case of the 1930s and the help to Jewish refugees.

Other literature specifically on the refugees from Germany provides some insights into NGOs' activities and under which circumstances these NGOs tried to achieve their goals. The historians Bob Moore and Frank Caestecker provided the most comprehensive overview on refugees from Nazi Germany. They conducted an international comparative study of liberal Western European states and their refugee policy in the 1930s. Their volume starts with an analysis of international refugee policy, and provides an overview of the attempts to solve the refugee crisis through international agreements. They describe NGOs and their crucial role as financial supporters of refugees who managed to flee Germany. If relief organisations promised that refugees would not become a public charge, the refugees could be allowed to stay.¹⁵ NGOs selected the immigrants that they believed needed protection and recommended them to the authorities and therefore they were able to control the decisions for admission. This meant that NGOs were in charge of the selection process of (in their views) deserving and undeserving refugees and therefore key to refugee protection.¹⁶ However the continuing shortage of funds, and the growing number of refugees complicated this position.¹⁷ Finally in 1938, when the immigration policies got stricter, the NGOs lost this privilege and were no longer involved in choosing whom to admit as refugees and support, but they were only able to assist the ones the states had admitted.¹⁸ Although the overview from Caestecker and Moore is comprehensive in scope, the attention to the motives of NGOs, their strategies and their views on the restrictive refugee policies in Europe is limited.

According to Dan Michman, the CJV never had much impact on policy in the Netherlands. The CJV was not involved in or even warned about upcoming policy changes. Interestingly, Michman described how the organisation did not oppose government policies and there was an 'extreme identification with the government policy.'¹⁹ I analyse if this non-confrontational attitude was also part of the explanation for why CJV had a limited impact at an international level. Similar arguments are made about other national NGOs. Criticism of French Jewish NGOs shows how they failed to condemn the French authorities.²⁰ This attitude had, according to Vicki Caron, major consequences for refugees as it left the refugees to fend for themselves.²¹ She however also mentioned that within the French Jewish community different viewpoints developed over time and in 1938, a strong cooperative lobby campaign of both Jewish and non-Jewish organisations arose. This more confrontational campaign, which openly disapproved of the authorities' strict attitude, was an attempt to push back against some of the restrictive policies for refugees. It led to some successes; for example, it resulted in an amnesty for refugees who were already in France.²² Another example of how public pressure facilitated better conditions for Jewish refugees was the assertive humanitarian lobby in Belgium. This public campaign was initiated by a well-respected socialist politician and included journalists, other more progressive politicians and Jewish NGOs. According to Caestecker this endorsement of powerful actors created space for Jewish NGOs to advocate and confront the authorities publicly. Eventually that campaign stopped the deportations of refugees back to Germany and it ensured the maintenance of a less restrictive refugee policy after 1938 in France, especially when compared to the Netherlands.²³

Yehuda Bauer wondered if the JDC had done all that was possible to raise money, and noted the presence of conflict in the global Jewish community.²⁴ David Wyman argued that one reason, why Jewish leaders in the United States failed to rescue more Jews was because they were preoccupied with overcoming their internal conflicts. He stressed that the unbridgeable

issue of Zionism caused a lack of unity. Another interesting explanation he gave for the inability of the Jewish community to save more Jews was because of the 'scarcity of fresh and innovative leadership in the 1930s and 1940s'.²⁵ Some authors have written about the relationship between the High Commissariat for German Refugees, the American James McDonald, who was the High Commissioner between 1933 and 1935, and the NGOs. NGOs wanted McDonald's help in pursuing their own goals, but what these were differed per organisation. Zionists wanted McDonald to use the High Commissariat to enable Jewish migration to Palestine, while the non-Zionist organisations wanted him to focus on other issues.²⁶ Much of the High Commissioner's time was spent on settling disagreements, and making organisations work with him and each other.

In sum, there are studies that sought to explain NGOs' role during this key moment. Yet, little is known about NGOs and their role in the international context and about their cooperation with IGOs. Even less is known about NGOs' role during the Evian Conference. This study moves beyond the national context and includes committees that united NGOs globally and other partnerships where NGOs cooperated on an international level. My research goes into detail on NGO internal politics and dynamics and broadens the scope of the historiography by looking at different NGOs in an international context. Furthermore, I will explore Jewish NGOs' cooperation and broaden this subject by going beyond national borders. What kind of collaborations existed at an international level? And how did this influence their role and impact on refugee policy?

3.3 SETTING THE CONTEXT: DEVELOPMENTS IN GERMANY AND REFUGEE MOVEMENTS BETWEEN 1933 AND 1938

I analyse the period between Hitler's accession to power in 1933 until the Evian Conference in 1938. This section describes the situation refugees faced in the five years leading up to the Evian Conference and the structural context that influenced NGOs' opportunities for advocacy. In 1933, it was still relatively easy for German Jews to enter neighbouring countries as long as they had means of livelihood. Most of the refugees (and governments in the receiving states) considered measures and the flight of Jews temporary.²⁷ Some Jews who had fled, went back to Germany when tensions decreased in 1934, and economic growth seemed to return.²⁸ In 1934, the Nazis reformed the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*. This tax, which was originally introduced in 1931 by the Weimar Republic to keep foreign currency reserves in Germany, made it nearly impossible for Jews to take capital with them from Germany. Many countries were unwilling to accept refugees without means.²⁹ Jewish emigration increased again after the Nuremberg Laws were introduced in 1935. The new laws de facto deprived Jews of German citizenship.

Before 1936, Jewish refugees could go to Palestine, which was a British Mandate. However, during the Arab Revolt, which started in 1936 and lasted until 1939, the British, hoping to appease the Arabs, changed their policies and the possibilities of migrating to Palestine were reduced significantly.³⁰ In the United States immigration restrictions had been introduced already in the 1920s, as described in the previous chapter. The US actively barred fleeing Jews from entering, as the fate of the 937 Jewish refugees on the MS *St. Louis* in 1939 shows. The annexation of Austria in 1938 led to the flight of 50,000 Austrian Jews. European states in-

creased restrictions on border crossings, for example by providing a very low number of visas, and turning people back at the border.³¹ This, however, did not stop refugees from trying to flee. Another peak in refugee migration occurred after the *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 when synagogues, and stores and houses of Jews were destroyed, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and put in concentration camps and 91 Jews were killed. This led to some changes in refugee policy in France, the Netherlands and Belgium. The Netherlands and Belgium accepted thousands of children, refugee camps were built to accommodate refugees and, the Dutch government led a campaign to raise money for refugees.³²

It is estimated that 280,000 to 330,000 Jews fled between 1933-1940 from a Jewish population of 525,000 Jews in Germany.³³ Exact numbers are difficult to give as many people tried to flee unnoticed.³⁴ Of those who managed to get out, 50,000 went to Britain, 40,000 to France, 25,000 to Belgium, 23,000 to the Netherlands, 10,000 to Switzerland, 53,000 to Palestine and 57,000 to the United States.³⁵ The refugees from Germany were not the only refugees in the 1930s in Europe.³⁶ In 1937, 300,000 refugees fled the Spanish civil war to France. NGOs like Save the Children provided help to these refugees.³⁷ The German Jewish refugees were also not the only Jewish refugees seeking asylum in the 1930s. Millions of Jews in countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania were also living in hostile environments, and some were making plans to leave. Although the numbers of German Jewish refugees was not that large, the numbers coming from Eastern Europe were thought to be potentially much higher. The Jews from Eastern and Central Europe were not only considered and presented as harder to integrate because they were more religious, they were also poorer and it was feared that they might be communist.³⁸ European governments wanted to avoid attracting more refugees by showing leniency towards the German Jews.

Several factors directly affected states' unwillingness to receive refugees and had an impact on the possibilities for NGOs to advocate for them. The 1930s were imbued with tense international relations between Nazi Germany and Western European states. Hoping to avoid conflict with Germany, authorities avoided openly condemning Jewish persecution by the Nazis. Germany left the League of Nations in 1933. Most member states hoped that the country would return to the League and its membership became the main item on the agenda of the Assembly of the League, leaving limited room for the humanitarian dimensions of the refugee problem.³⁹ Member states of the League labelled the racial policies of Germany as an internal issue, which other states should not interfere with, even if it led to refugee migration.⁴⁰ The High Commissioner for Refugees coming from Germany (HCRG) was placed outside the geographical and official spheres of the League in the hope that this would increase the chance Germany re-joining the League. The HCRG was based in Lausanne and reported to a Governing Body instead of to the League of Nations General Assembly.⁴¹ The member states of the League of Nations did not contribute to it financially. Money came mainly from Jewish organisations. In sum, appeasement politics shaped not only states' reluctant attitude towards accepting Jewish refugees, it also externalised the organisation of the High Commissariat away from the space of the international community.

Another important factor negatively influencing the options for Jewish refugees was the economic situation. The Great Depression left millions of Europeans unemployed.⁴² This led to protectionist migration policies. Authorities feared the arrival of refugees would increase unem-

ployment figures further. Most states drew up barriers for foreigners to enter the labour market.⁴³ Immigration rates dropped all over Europe. For example, France received 220,000 new immigrants in 1930, but only 102,000 in 1931.⁴⁴ Another frequently discussed factor used to explain the restrictive refugee policies, and therefore limited NGO possibilities, was the fear that antisemitism would increase if more Jewish refugees were accepted. According to the historian Corrie van Eijl, Dutch restrictive policies emerged because the refugees were Jewish and authorities and organisations feared this would increase antisemitism.⁴⁵ According to Hans Blom and others, some Dutch politicians held and expressed stereotypes about Jews, although it would be wrong to label the Dutch decision-making and political environment as antisemitic and explicitly racist.⁴⁶ The same was true in France and the United States, where antisemitism increased and negatively impacted refugee policies.⁴⁷ Jewish communities feared this increase in antisemitism. In order to protect the local Jewish communities, they sometimes argued against receiving large numbers of refugees.⁴⁸ In the Netherlands, Jewish organisations tried to avoid an increase in antisemitism, by making sure that refugees would not rely on Dutch state support.⁴⁹

3.4 THE NGOs AND IGOs

This section provides detailed information about the three NGOs. The first organisation, the Jewish Colonisation Association (JCA), has already been introduced in the previous chapter. The JCA widened its focus to help German Jewish refugees in the 1930s. The organisation not only gave migrants materials or capital, but it also provided them with loans, which had to be repaid. In this way the JCA intended to make the recipients of their project 'self-supporting citizens' instead of 'deserving poor'.⁵⁰ The balance sheets from 1938 show an income of 638,056 pounds, which came from repayments from the loans and investment incomes. The largest share went to Germany to help German Jews. It also shows it was active in nine countries and they sponsored several other organisations.⁵¹ Archival material from the HCRG showed it was continuously involved in international deliberation on the issue, mainly in the person of Louis Oungre, the director of the French section of the JCA. The president of the JCA was Sir Osmond E. d'Avigdor Goldsmid who was also the chairman of the Central British Fund for German Jewry.

The second organisation under study is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). This was the largest NGO helping German refugees and the chief financial supporter in the 1930s of Jews worldwide.⁵² The organisation had raised 78.7 million dollars between 1914 and 1929 and much of this money was used to support other national and local Jewish organisations helping refugees.⁵³ The JDC also provided basic support via soup kitchens and helped stranded (illegal) migrants. They supported settlement outside of Germany and expressed ideas about possible solutions. The organisation was directed by liberal-minded Jews of German origin and the non-orthodox Jewish American upper class. Some of these German migrants became wealthy in America and felt it as their humanitarian duty to take care of poor and underprivileged co-religionists elsewhere. The development and the internal course of the organisation were influenced by Felix Warburg, who was the director until 1937. Other important individuals within this organisation during my period under study were Bernard Kahn, Paul Baerwald, James Rosenberg, Joseph Hyman, and Isidore Coons. Between 1929 and 1939, this group of people determined the JDC policy.⁵⁴

The third organisation under study is the national committee for Jewish refugees in the Netherlands (*Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen* - CJV). The CJV was the main organisation in the Netherlands that aided Jewish refugees. In all states that received Jewish refugees, national committees to aid refugees arose after 1933. I chose the Dutch committee for pragmatic reasons: language and my proximity to their archive. Additionally, they were active in the national and international political debates about the refugees. The organisation was set up in March 1933 at the initiative of David Cohen, a professor of Ancient History at Leiden University, who became the main director. The CJV was financed by individual contributors, charity performances and countrywide campaigns. The largest contributions came from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, HICEM and the British Fund for German Jewry. It had voluntary and paid personnel numbering over a hundred people who performed a range of different activities: 'finance, administration, immigration, vocational retraining, contact with organisations abroad, links with authorities and local refugee committees, housing, social work etc.'⁵⁵ Gertrude van Tijn born as (Gertrud Franzisca Cohn) was responsible for the daily management of the organisation and represented the CJV at international meetings. She was a German social worker who came to the Netherlands after having lived all over the world and became active in the Zionist movement in the Netherlands. She would become an important representative for Jewish refugees in the Netherlands throughout the Second World War.⁵⁶

Save the Children will be occasionally mentioned, in addition to the three organisations mentioned above. My sources showed that the Save the Children was not very involved in attempts to solve the Jewish refugee situation. Therefore, they are not analysed in depth in this chapter. For example, Save the Children where the organisation summarised its work between 1920-1950 in a brochure, but no reference was made to Jewish refugees.⁵⁷ However Save the Children was present at international meetings on the issue of Jewish refugees and some efforts were made to help Jewish refugees in Britain. This ambiguous role is interesting. Only one decade earlier the Save the Children was a dominant player in the debate on Russian refugees. It was notably absent in the 1930s. In order to understand its absence, and therefore the diminished presence of non-Jewish NGOs, this NGO is included. The International Union of Save the Children had grown in the 1920s, but in the 1930s the organisation declined in size and scope. It suffered a lot from the nationalistic regimes in Europe at this time. This resulted in a downsized organisation and an identity crisis.⁵⁸

The ICRC was also notably absent from the political debates studied in this chapter. Jean-Claude Favez has written on the ICRC during the Second World War. About the Jewish refugees and the period before the War he writes: 'the ICRC kept a low profile on the questions of Jewish emigration, in line with the Swiss public opinion.'⁵⁹ Switzerland tried to stop the influx of refugees from Germany by taking restrictive measures from 1933. Pressure on the ICRC rose after the Kristallnacht when a number of national Red Cross societies called for action. According to Favez, the ICRC lurched between abstention (which had the effect of risking their authority) and intervention (which risked alienating the Germans which would possibly damage the German Red Cross). Huber was so afraid that the international organisation of the ICRC would break down under the totalitarian grip of Germany that: 'he could envisage no other response than the strict application of the law and the constant reaffirmation of the Red Cross principles, based in his own case on strongly Christian beliefs.'⁶⁰

The IGOs that are important to this chapter are the League of Nations and the HCRG. As this chapter will show, there were two phases and two individuals leading this organisation. James McDonald was the first High Commissioner between 1933 and 1935. His organisation set out with three main goals: 1. to conduct negotiations with governments; 2. to coordinate the work of the private relief and emigration organisations; and 3. to ensure the personal participation of the High Commissioner in fund-raising efforts to secure the money required for the work of the office. McDonald resigned in 1935, which will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, and was succeeded by the British army officer Sir Neil Malcolm. Malcolm's assignment was slightly different from that of McDonald: he only dealt with legal and political issues. His task was not to raise economic support; that needed to come from private organisations. Table 4 summarises which organisations and actors played an important role in this period.

3.5 NGOs ROLE ASSESSED: POLITICAL ADVOCACY FOR REFUGEES

On an international level, several attempts to come to solutions and policy measures were made. The League of Nations established the HCRG in 1933 and appointed McDonald as High Commissioner. When he resigned in 1935, he wrote that it was thanks to (Jewish and Christian) NGOs that 80,000 refugees had managed to flee. However, he also mentioned that these organisations could only do so much and that the source of the problem needed to be tackled by nation-states.⁶¹ The next step towards an internationally coordinated answer was taken in July 1936, when Malcolm managed to arrange a conference where eight states (Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland) signed a 'Provisional arrangement'. Refugees outside of Germany (defined so that Jewish refugees from Eastern European countries that were already living in Germany for a while, were excluded) could obtain an identity card that allowed them to travel abroad for one year.⁶² This applied to refugees who legally resided in the countries as well as for those who were residing illegally but reported themselves to the authorities. The arrangement resulted in some relief for the refugees already outside Germany, but offered no hope for the people still in Germany who wanted to leave. Disappointed Jewish organisations criticised the Provisional Arrangement as being too ambiguous.⁶³

In February 1938, another international conference was held on this issue. The Provisional Arrangement was extended with a convention where the definition of a refugee was broadened for people with nationalities other than German and other basic rights were added relating to permission to access the labour market.⁶⁴ The convention was signed by seven states (Belgium, U.K, France, Spain, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway) but only two countries ratified the convention before the war broke out. Refugee organisations viewed the convention as a disappointment. They pleaded for more binding stipulations and believed the terminology was too vague, which resulted in a broad interpretation and no real opportunities.⁶⁵

Some NGOs – in line with the outlook of the state officials – considered resettlement in Europe impossible for economic reasons.⁶⁶ They therefore suggested migration to South America. Latin American countries still favoured migration from Europe and up until 1938 it remained relatively easy to enter, for example Argentina, via a tourist visa or via family ties.

Table 4: Organisations and main actors

| MAIN NGOs | EST | LED BY/MAJOR PLAYERS |
|---|------|--|
| Jewish Colonisation Association | 1891 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Louis Oungre (1880-1966), Belgian banker and Director of the French section of the JCA - Sir Osmond E. d'Avigdor Goldsmid (1877-1940), Austrian president of JCA and chairman of the Central British Fund for German Jewry |
| Jewish Distribution Committee | 1914 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bernard Kahn (1876-1955), Swedish European Director JDC, (in 1904 he was appointed secretary-general Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden) - Paul Baerwald (1871-1961), German immigrant in the US, banker and philanthropist, the chairman of the American JDC - James N. Rosenberg (1879-1970), American Lawyer, writer and Chairman National council - Joseph Hyman (1899-1949), American attorney and Vice chairman - Isidore Coons, executive vice-chairman of the United Jewish Appeal since 1939, and director of fund-raising for the Joint Distribution Committee |
| The Dutch Council for Refugees (Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen) | 1933 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - David Cohen (1882-1967), professor of Ancient History at Leiden University and director CJV - Gertrude van Tijn (1891-1974), social worker and daily management CJV |
| OTHER ORGANISATIONS OF NOTE PRESENT IN THE ARCHIVES | | |
| Save the Children Fund / International | 1919 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noel Edward Noel-Buxton (1869-1948), British politician and president of the Save the Children between 1930-1948. His sister-in-law was founder Dorothy Buxton |
| IGOs | | |
| League of Nations | 1919 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lord Robert Cecil (1864-1958), British Lawyer, politician and Chair of the Governing Body of the HCRG |
| High Commissioner for Refugees coming from Germany (HCRG) | 1933 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - James McDonald (1886-1964), American foreign policy expert and High Commissioner for Refugees between 1933 and 1935 - Andre Wurfain (1897-1946), Dutch lawyer, diplomat and executive secretary HCRG - Sir Neill Malcolm (1869-1953), British Army major general and High Commissioner for Refugees between 1936-1938 - Norman Bentwich (1883-1971), British legal academic and director of the High Commissariat between 1933-1935 |

However, also in Southern American countries policies regarding Jewish refugees became much stricter over the course of the 1930s. After 1938, entry visas became increasingly difficult to obtain due to a combination of rising nativism, a growing Jewish immigrant population and several economic crises.⁶⁷ Between 1933 and 1942, 25,000 Jews managed to flee to Brazil with the help of business contacts, congressmen and Jewish leaders.⁶⁸ McDonald went on a long trip to Southern America in order to convince state officials to admit more refugees from Germany. Louie Oungre from the JCA joined McDonald on parts of his trip.⁶⁹ They considered the Catholic church's support and attitude as crucial to achieve of their goals and therefore tried to get it involved. However, the church did not respond as positively as McDonald and Oungre had hoped, and was unwilling to provide support.⁷⁰ Their main outcome was the admission of a small number of academics to Brazil.⁷¹

EVIAN

The Evian Conference was the most far-reaching attempt to find an international solution. Roosevelt's initiative 'took the American Jewish leaders completely by surprise' as there had been no consultation with Jewish NGOs before the conference was announced.⁷² A Liaison Committee of NGOs did meet in May, just before the intergovernmental conference, and they discussed possible courses of action. The minutes of this meeting showed the dominant pessimism of NGOs as several of those present estimated that their opportunities to advocate for real change were non-existent and that governments would only frustrate a real solution. A JDC representative expressed his view that the president of the US had no concrete action plans in mind, only the good will to talk about a solution: 'I do not believe you can count on a very great increase of emigration into America at the present rate. I doubt very much that a large increase can be hoped for.'⁷³

Other NGOs present, such as Dr. Paul Hertz from the *Zentralvereinigung der Deutschen Emigration*, wanted to advocate for more overseas migration in cooperation with NGOs. He wanted the committee to come up with concrete plans that governments could agree with. Other individuals also stressed the need for cooperative and concrete proposals. The secretary of the Liaison Committee summarised this clearly when he stated:

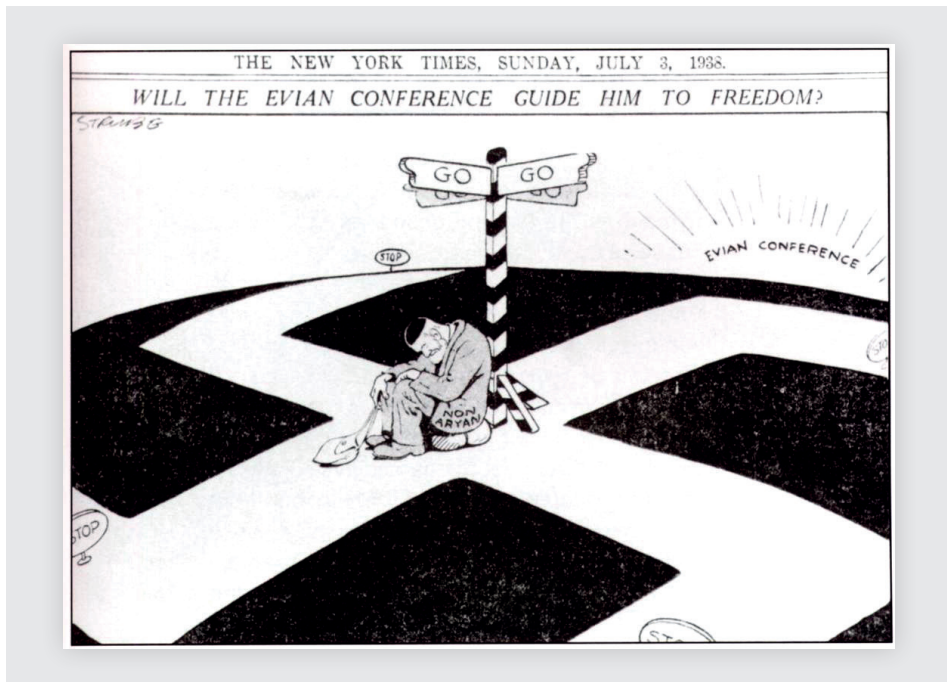
Those amongst us who in the last few years have constantly followed the work of the League of Nations at Geneva know what it means, when representatives of so many various organisations come forth with their own proposals and thus complicate the work. The organisations have had a certain amount of success in February last because it was possible to put before the State Conference centralised proposals.⁷⁴

Bernard Kahn of the JDC opposed this and reminded the committee of the fact that they had not even been officially invited yet and considered the topic of emigration not a 'subject upon which the liaison committee has really a valuable opinion.'⁷⁵ NGOs failed to come up with joint proposals and the meeting was closed with the decision not to create a special subcommittee that was to follow further developments concerning Evian.

The Evian Conference came up with no binding regulations and concluded with only some general statements. Palestine was not an option because of British pressure, and the US and European states all failed to offer to take more refugees. The only countries that pledged to

increase the number of refugees they would take were the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica.⁷⁶ Minutes of the conference show a passive attitude of states and they consistently explained their decisions by referring to the economic situation and increased unemployment. According to the statements from state representatives there was 'a strain on the administrative facilities and absorptive capacities' of their countries.⁷⁷ States also presented political arguments to justify their response. The racial and religious problems that the refugees created could stir further international unrest, it was feared. One outcome was the creation of a new organisation that would continue the work started at the conference and that would 'coordinate and develop opportunities for orderly migration and permanent settlement'⁷⁸: the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees (IGC). This organisation needed to find solutions for many of issues linked to emigration.

Illustration 4: A cartoon in the New York Times by Wintrop W. Case illustrating the expectations the Evian Conference that month.⁷⁹



There was no direct involvement of NGOs during the conference. A specific sub-committee was set up to hear statements from NGOs. Both Jewish and non-Jewish organisations were able to voice claims, opinions and suggestions. However, the time for this was restricted to five minutes for each NGO and NGOs were not included in the official meeting with state representatives.⁸⁰ The conference was therefore not structured to facilitate the inclusion of NGOs. In the final report from this sub-committee, 24 different statements are listed from NGO representatives. Different groups of NGOs working together presented statements, which showed some overlap and different types of solutions.⁸¹ The majority of these organisations were Jewish, while ten organisations had a different background: Christian (mostly

Catholic), socialists, and groups representing intellectuals and academics. All these groups presented their claims separately. Additionally, it is also striking that some of the major humanitarian NGOs, such as the International Red Cross and Save the Children, were absent from the Evian Conference.⁸²

In a confidential statement from Bernard Kahn to his colleagues in New York in September he reflected on Evian. He stated that the JDC had been: 'a valued participant in the Evian Conference. We kept in the background however, so that no public attention was centred on us.'⁸³ The JDC had provided, according to Kahn, together with other NGOs, the necessary information about the situation of refugees and about what the NGO were providing for assistance. The JDC had prepared complete reviews of information with charts and statistical tables and the US representative Myron Taylor (an American financier and diplomat) wanted to spread this amongst the other members of the conference at first but changed his mind because: 'the gloomy picture and the magnitude of the problem that emerged from it would have led too discouraging an effect upon the participants of the conference.'⁸⁴ Although the JDC had expertise, this was on purpose not shared with state representatives. Their expertise therefore was not used to communicate JDC's knowledge and hence they were unable to gain expert authority. By keeping the information to themselves the JDC was unable to show policymakers what they knew and put pressure on policy makers.

As the attempts between states to cooperate failed and united solutions did not materialise, the majority of states maintained their restrictive policies. NGOs had little impact on these developments. This research showed that while some NGOs wanted to advocate for emigration possibilities and a relaxation of admission policies, others saw Evian as a lost cause and saw no use in advocating or actively pursuing changing policies. In the precious chapter, I noted that NGOs were involved in the negotiations, and actively put the issue of Russian refugees on the agenda in the 1920s and made it an issue of political and public awareness. During this key moment the NGOs under study showed the opposite: they were not included in the official negotiations. All three NGOs were excluded from the meetings with state representatives, but they were allowed to express their opinions in a separate sub-committee. The NGOs were present but they decided to retain a low profile and were under no circumstances the agenda setters they were a decade before. What is also striking, in light of the results in my previous chapter, is the diversity between NGOs' goals and opinions. A large variety of solutions was offered during the Evian Conference from NGOs. This division, between NGOs *and* between IGOs and NGOs, will be discussed extensively below, as it contributed to NGOs' weak position during this key moment.

3.6 NGOs' ROLE EXPLAINED

As we saw above, several external developments in the 1930s, such as appeasement, economic decline and increasing antisemitism created a restricted window of opportunity for NGOs. It negatively influenced NGOs' possibilities for successful advocacy. In addition to the literature, this section seeks to find explanations from the NGOs' perspective: what did NGOs do to advocate for rights and support for Jewish refugees and how did they contribute to their own exclusion? Three main explanations appeared from my sources: fragmentation between

NGOs, disagreement between NGOs and the HCRG, and the unwillingness to seek publicity, fearing it might increase antisemitism. These factors explain why NGOs had limited impact on international efforts to help Jewish refugees. They are analysed in more detail below.

FRAGMENTATION BETWEEN NGOS

An Advisory Committee (sometimes referred to as the Liaison Committee) of NGOs was set up alongside the High Commissioner.⁸⁵ As in the early 1920s, NGOs united in a private committee specifically to discuss the issue of Jewish refugees from Germany. Their task was to advise the High Commissioner on possible solutions and actions connected to relief work and emigration issues. All three NGOs I focus on were represented in the Advisory Committee. The archive of this Committee was an important source of information and I have analysed the minutes of their meetings (amongst many other documents). It gave me insight into what the NGOs wanted, how they cooperated and what arguments they used when taking a stand regarding solving the problems of Jewish refugees.

The sources showed me there was much disagreement between the NGOs, which were part of the advisory committee between 1933 and 1935. There was a diversity of goals and ideas about the best possible solution for Jewish refugees. The CJV mainly advocated for more overseas migration,⁸⁶ while the JCA and the JDC favoured vocational training, so as to make the refugees more attractive to countries, hoping they would be allowed to settle.⁸⁷ The JCA also wanted governments to take a much stronger stance against the persecution of Jews in Germany and hoped for an improvement of the economic situation in Germany.⁸⁸ Save the Children mainly helped children that were Jewish according to German law but who had no relation to the Jewish religion or culture, and were only labelled as Jewish by the Nazis because they had a parent or grandparent who was Jewish.⁸⁹ In sum, a variation in goals created an inconsistent advocacy strategy presented to policymakers. According to an expert committee for academic refugees in 1934: 'an attempt should be made to synchronise the appeals [...] so as to stress the international character of the work undertaken.'⁹⁰ This committee, mainly consisting of NGO employees, was of the opinion that by presenting a more coherent appeal, the problem would seem more soluble to the public and therefore this would create pressure on states for donations for support.

Other people working for the JDC and the High Commission also argued that unified action would help them to achieve their goals and encouraged more coherent advocacy between the different NGOs.⁹¹ Already in June 1933, Norman Bentwich and Neville Laski sent a report to the JDC after a visit to Amsterdam, Brussels, Geneva, Frankfurt and Berlin informing them of the situation of Jews in Europe.⁹² One of the main conclusions they drew was the need for the co-ordination of Jewish policy outside of Germany. They claimed that the separate appeals were frustrating positive outcomes. They wrote:

as regards Jewish bodies, we found everywhere a consciousness of overlapping and waste of effort, and in some places much disorganisation. There are scores of schemes, and a number of persons and bodies are working independently and without coordination.⁹³

They recommended the formation of one main Jewish body that could promote international action. They considered the organisation of international political action in the League of Na-

tions a failure and concluded that a central association was therefore needed. When deliberating upon their recommendations, it is clear they were aware of an antisemitic tide and made sure that the actions they recommended did not create an increase in antisemitism. Save the Children also reflected on the need for co-ordination and authoritative guidance in a report in 1933. In their opinion this was the task of the High Commissioner.⁹⁴

Funding was a topic that created the most heated debates between NGOs and this is where fragmentation transformed into conflict. There was criticism on the larger NGOs, such as the JCA and the JDC. The World Jewish Congress, for example, was another prominent Jewish umbrella organisation established in 1936, and it claimed that:

Till now, the wealthy Jewish organisations had always waited until the damage was done and spent their millions in cure, rather than in prevention.⁹⁵

But criticism also came from the other side, from the JDC towards the smaller organisations that received funding from them. In a private meeting, the JDC mentioned that ‘the situation was not quite as desperate as painted. The other countries should not put themselves in the position of *Schnorrers*.’⁹⁶ *Schnorrers* is a Yiddish word for beggars and this comment offended several people at the meeting. Local organisations, by contrast, claimed to know the situation better because of their activities on the ground. They knew about the lived experience of the refugees, while larger NGOs had more of a coordinating role.⁹⁷

Between the JCA and the JDC there was also serious competition over funding. They both funded many of the smaller local organisations and blamed each other for not supplying their fair share.⁹⁸ The organisations had different sources of income. The JDC was dependent on public funding, while the JCA was not. This led to different attitudes amongst the organisations. Whereas the JDC was extremely cautious about their engagement with the public, the JCA had less trouble being more vocal – also with regard to criticising the High Commissioner.⁹⁹ The JDC showed its frustration when it came to the financial attitude of the JCA.¹⁰⁰ This kind of competitiveness and the sharing of responsibilities was a continuous source of discussion in the JDC as they were convinced that they could not carry the responsibility for the situation alone or even ‘any responsibility at all, unless there is a full cooperation of all the other agencies’.¹⁰¹

At a meeting between several NGOs and the new High Commissioner Malcolm in 1936, the creation and structure of a new advisory committee of NGOs (which they refer to as a Liaison Committee) was discussed. Several NGOs representative stressed the need for a coherent NGO advisory body in order to be more effective. One suggestion for a more successful advisory committee included adding more non-Jewish NGOs to create more diversity, creating an executive body to circumvent the problematic decision-making process (the committee then had 29 members) and finding Malcolm a secretary.¹⁰² The Advisory Committee that was formed to assist Malcolm met sporadically in varying configurations. The formation of a functioning advisory committee failed as the topic of its duties, their size or structure remained on-going points of discussion. In 1938 the committee was still discussing which NGOs to include or exclude.

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A competitive atmosphere defined NGO relations. In May 1938 several national committees argued that the national circumstances within their borders were severe. Gaston Kahn from the French *Comite d'Assistance aux Refugies* made it very clear he thought that France was 'the most important centre of refuge'.¹⁰³ NGOs were, in line with most of the heads of states, trying to push around responsibilities. The fragmented and competitive relations inhibited NGOs from pursuing effective advocacy, and the NGOs were aware of this. In a letter from 1942, Hyman reflected on it by writing:

My only hope is that someday the various organisations that wish to lead an independent life can reach an amicable understanding about the way in which they issue their publicity and their statements, so that disorder may be cleared up.¹⁰⁴

In the previous chapter I showed that in the 1920s the cooperation between NGOs played an important role and proved crucial for effective advocacy. It was a network of expertise where ideas were shared and it was clear for policymakers what the NGO standpoint and claims were. During this key moment the opposite happened. NGOs' fragmented relations made them less effective. The logistical authority of a strong advisory committee was never attained in the 1930s and was evaluated by NGOs themselves as a reason for their inability to be more influential.

One other element of the relationship between NGOs was considered damaging. The lack of involvement from non-Jewish organisations frequently was a point of discussion and it was, according to McDonald and other NGO representatives, a problem. Correspondence between the Save the Children International Union and the High Commissariat showed this limited involvement. The High Commissioner asked for financial support but Save the Children International Union declined because its funds for German refugees were already exhausted and a recent public appeal for refugees from Germany did not result in 'a single penny'.¹⁰⁵ Brochures of the Save the Children Fund stressed the dreadful situation of German child refugees. Appeals were made in the universal claim of 'humanity' and it does not mention that the children were Jewish. The persecution was mentioned in abstract ways. When references were made to an ethnic or religious background this backfired. What they asked from the public were cloths and money.¹⁰⁶

Earlier reports of the Save the Children Fund stated that the organisation was not eager to make appeals on behalf of the Jewish refugees. It was, according to the leaders, a mistake to share too much information about Jewish refugees. Growing unemployment and competition on the labour market was at the heart of this argument; it was felt that this would lead to a storm of resentment amongst those looking for work:

The fact that the French government has allowed some 30,000 people to enter France, does not seem to be known to the mass of French people. In view of the growing unemployment in France there is no doubt it would be regarded with the greatest disfavor, and that any competition for vacant jobs by German immigrants might lead to a storm of indignation.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, attention on the plight of Jewish refugees was to be avoided. The same report from the Save the Children Fund spoke about the failure of aid work in Paris, already in 1933. They

mentioned that the money raised, mainly by a small number of wealthy Jews, was spent on supplying only the barest needs. NGOs were, according to the Save the Children Fund, not able to properly help refugees and they had no political power.¹⁰⁸

Lord Robert Cecil, who was a British politician, lawyer and one of the architects of the League of Nations and chairman of the Governing Body, considered the problem of non-Jewish participation in November 1934 as follows:

I am bound to add that the corresponding effort made by the non-Jewish public on behalf of the refugees has not been so good. It is striking that whereas, as I understand it, 20 per cent of the refugees are non-Jewish, only three or four per cent of the relief money comes from non-Jewish sources.¹⁰⁹

Also McDonald was of the opinion that the Christian and secular communities should take responsibility and that the lack of contribution by the non-Jewish public was partly to blame for the failure to help refugees adequately. If these groups, according to McDonald, had contributed just a little, the financial problems would have been solved.¹¹⁰ At a meeting from the advisory committee in 1934 it was noted:

the greatest disappointment about fundraising was the non-Jewish efforts both in England and America. The response had been negligible and inadequate.¹¹¹

The Quakers and the Rockefeller Foundation gave some aid, but it was minor in comparison to Jewish contributions. In another meeting, where the same attitude prevailed, the inadequate response from the Christian community was discussed again. The advisory committee was convinced the Christian community did not support the refugees because of the 'common error' that they thought these refugees were mostly communists. The High Commissioner claimed that he had tried to change this misunderstanding among the public and politicians but that this was a persistent assumption that was hard to eradicate.¹¹² The absence of the Red Cross (ICRC) in my sources was also striking, specifically since it had been so active in the 1920s for Russian refugees. I found no explicit references that could explain its absence.

FRAGMENTATION BETWEEN JAMES MCDONALD AND NGOS

The fragmentation stretched beyond NGOs and was also visible between NGOs and the HCRG. However, within a year of the HCRG's foundation, it became apparent that the NGOs and the High Commissioner were dissatisfied. McDonald felt that he was failing. He acknowledged certain successes that NGOs working for refugees achieved. For example, McDonald claimed that NGOs managed to resettle approximately 27,000 refugees from Germany. But he continued by stating that: 'no one connected with the work is satisfied. On the contrary, the situation of thousands of Jewish and Christian refugees is now acute.'¹¹³

McDonald met with the advisory committee regularly between 1933 and 1935. They shared information and strategies and there were private discussions on tactics and actions before pursuing them.¹¹⁴ However, because the High Commissioner was excluded from official spheres of the League of Nations, claims made by the NGOs in the Advisory Committee meetings rarely reached official spheres in Geneva. NGOs were aware of their exclusion and

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this was discussed in Advisory Committee meetings.¹¹⁵ Minutes of those meetings also revealed disagreements between the High Commissioner and NGOs, because several NGOs were sceptical about what the High Commissioner could achieve. The JCA and the French National Jewish Committee were dissatisfied with the daily work of the High Commissioner and argued that the largest share of aid work was done by NGOs. The negative attitude also applied the other way around, as the High Commissioner would complain about the work done by the French national refugee committee.¹¹⁶

The JCA and the JDC disagreed on the position of the High Commissioner. According to the JDC, the JCA had opposed much of his work.¹¹⁷ McDonald needed to defend his course of action from accusations from the JCA (and other NGOs), stating that he was doing all he could, but was unable to be everywhere at the same time.¹¹⁸ Eventually the JCA pushed for the resignation of the High Commissioner because of a lack of results. The JDC, however, wanted McDonald to continue his work and was of the opinion that resigning would have a negative effect. In a confidential memorandum, Rosenberg wrote to Warburg stressing the importance of showing full support for McDonald. He also criticised the attitude of the JCA in doing otherwise: 'My god, can't they give the man a chance. For JCA and others to try to bring about the resignation of McDonald is suicidal.'¹¹⁹ Rosenberg argued that if it became public that Jewish organisations had pushed for McDonald's resignation, this would damage the Jewish community in the public eye.

All NGOs were, obviously, very unhappy with the way the High Commissariat was structured. Even though NGOs were in agreement that the exclusionist position of the HCRG was partly the cause of its ineffectiveness, a possible resignation created much disagreement. Some NGOs were of the opinion that the League of Nations would never create a high commission for refugees that would be included in its official organisational structures. Other NGOs were in favour of the suggestion and thought that it could lead to the centralisation of work on refugees.¹²⁰ When McDonald resigned in 1935, he wrote in a public resignation letter that he had been unsuccessful in settling refugees outside Germany and therefore failed to fulfil his task. He blamed states for this and no mention was made of JCA's push for his resignation.¹²¹ McDonald's resignation was a deliberate attempt to encourage states to include the High Commission properly in the official construction of the League of Nations. McDonald's resignation was an appeal for better cooperative relations with member states.

After McDonald resigned, the HCRG was indeed restructured. It became part of the League of Nations and it came under the responsibility of the secretary general. However, the move did not strengthen the HCRG's position. It further encapsulated the organisation into member states' goals. Specifically, relations between the High Commissioner and the NGOs deteriorated, as the High Commissioner was no longer allowed to receive funds from NGOs. This meant he had almost no financial resources left. McDonald's resignation backfired. According to Marrus: 'neither the Nazis nor the Western governments had much to fear from the High Commission at this point.'¹²²

The advisory committee discussed the strategy of stepping down to achieve more constructive solutions for refugees. NGOs suggested that discharging their aid work or by threatening to do so, would mean that other actors, including the state, would need to help refugees. This

was clearly a very risky move to make as it would also entail that refugees were left to fend for themselves.¹²³ However, by continuing to support refugees in their daily needs, the NGOs contributed to and were part of an unsustainable relief scheme. Because refugees were not allowed to work, they remained dependent on NGOs. This made it difficult to integrate them into receiving societies and resettle them permanently. By stopping their aid work, some NGOs argued, a more durable solution for the integration of refugees in the new societies would be stimulated. Another argument for this strategy was that NGOs' funds were limited, and they were unable to support refugees financially forever. Because the treatment of Jews and political opponents of the Nazi regime in Germany worsened and more people tried to flee from Germany, this strategy only had an adverse effect.

Several elements of this problematic NGO-IGO nexus resulted in limited influence. Specifically, when I compare these findings with those for the 1920s, it becomes obvious how the High Commissariat had changed. First of all, the location of the HCRG outside the League made it hard for NGOs to reach policymakers and member states of the League of Nations. The close cooperation between the IGOs and the NGOs in the 1920s enabled NGOs to transfer ideas to policymakers effectively. The High Commissariat functioned as a bridge; a function that completely disappeared in the 1930s through the structural exclusion of the organisations outside of the League of Nations and distorted relations between the HCRG and the NGOs. Secondly, the HCRG was underfunded and had little prestige or authority, and this was also true for McDonald. Nansen was a well-known public and political figure with great experience and an admirable reputation. McDonald had no such history, and no network or public reputation. McDonald had a background of teaching at several universities and headed a non-profit organisation between 1919-1933 that spread awareness about American foreign policies. He was not the popular iconic figure that Nansen was. In sum, the lack of IGO power and impact affected NGO influence.

CAUTIOUS PUBLIC ADVOCACY AND THE FEAR OF ANTISEMITISM

The minutes of the advisory committee provide an insight into NGOs' thoughts on publicity and public opinion. This discussion went in different directions. Public opinion would become more positive if the public was assured that something was being done about the 'Jewish masses'.¹²⁴ The CJV, for example, tried to publicise the fact that they were financing and taking care of the refugees who made it to the Netherlands and they emphasised that no public funds were used to support these refugees. They seemed to be consciously trying to counter fears that charging public funds would lead to more antisemitism.¹²⁵ Others, including Oungre from the JCA, argued that governments could withdraw all responsibility if NGOs made their own activities public. Governments were already taking so little responsibility for the refugees and that should not be encouraged further, according to Oungre.¹²⁶

Generally, the sources showed a cautious view on the issue of public advocacy. Little information about the refugees was shared beyond the Jewish community. All NGOs under study spread limited facts and figures on the Jewish refugees because of the fear of a xenophobic or antisemitic backlash. In confidential correspondence between Joseph Hyman and Isidore Coons from the JDC, the policy of publicity that the JDC had engaged in was evaluated in detail. Hyman believed that they had done a fair job with the Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish press. When it came to the general press however, he wrote:

We have the strong feeling on the part of a great many members of our own Committee and of other influential and personalities in NY and perhaps in other communities that the Jews should not intrude their problems on the general press and it is not right that special Jewish situations should be stuck under the noses of a preponderant Christian population which at best is not sympathetic to a consideration of Jewish requirements. What may be good for the Red Cross, the Hoover Committee, the Dutch, British etc committees, may not be good for the Jews.¹²⁷

The cautious way of approaching the non-Jewish press was also reflected in a JDC meeting in September 1936, at which the circulation of their campaign material was discussed. They produced leaflets, holiday appeals and radio programmes about their work and their viewpoints. It was aimed mainly at the constituency that supported them financially and the Jewish community more widely. Several committee members argued for a broader outreach. This discussion however did not result in a change of tactics. The only outcome was the creation of a special subcommittee that would undertake a careful study on engaging the non-Jewish press.¹²⁸ An internal report revealed more insight on the issue. Between 1 December 1935 and the end of May 1936 – so over a six-month time period – there had been 143 articles in the national press in the United States that had mentioned the work of the JDC in some way. 111 of these were in the Anglo-Jewish press and 32 in the non-Jewish press.¹²⁹ Unfortunately it is not specified what this meant qualitatively or how the JDC was mentioned. However, it is clear that the JDC had a limited outreach in the non-Jewish press.

Several other documents from the publicity committee evaluated these numbers and their publicity generally. In November 1938, the director of public relations stated that success in obtaining newspaper space was: 'at best limited and sporadic'.¹³⁰ He also went into more detail on the approach and content of their external publicity. He stated that their outreach always stressed the local participation and the principles of democracy and avoided harsher notes of overseas politics and complications that might react against our work in Europe and stimulate anti-Semitic reaction in this country.¹³¹

The JDC remained cautious in sharing its opinions. It expressed little criticism of restrictive policies or deteriorating developments for Jews abroad. No risks were taken that might fuel anti-Jewish sentiment anywhere. Hyman evaluated this strategy in 1940 and mentioned how it had reached its limits. He stated that when:

We have carried our feelings of this respect to a limit beyond the realistic appreciation of organisational requirements. When so important a news agency as the Associated Press is unaware of this very existence of the JDC. I think we just about reached the limit and that we have been so cautious, so prudent, and have defeated our own ends. We are a responsible, and honest, and intelligent, and reputable, patriotic American organisations, conducted in accordance with the best interest as we conceive them of American citizenship and I believe with you that we have no right completely to keep our name out of the general press, which is what we have been doing virtually for a period of a year – and especially a year when the history of the world in its most crucial form is on the scales.¹³²

Hyman wanted to change tactics dramatically and argued that the most important thing the JDC should do was to invest in numerous different tactics with regard to public relations.¹³³

This fear of publicity was not only something that came from NGOs themselves, it was also pressed upon them by the High Commissioner. In 1938, Malcolm mentioned that after the Evian Conference, several NGOs talked to the press about the proceedings and that some governments had been unhappy with that. He made clear that he thought it was unwise to antagonise any other actor that was working for or with the refugees and that there should have been no reporting to the press. This would have negative effects for NGOs. He saw external public statements as a threat that resulted in not being invited to future conferences:

I will only say that I would ask you all to be very careful and not allow anything to be made public, especially deliberations considered to be confidential. It hampers the work and makes it difficult for them, or any other conferences, to extend the same courtesies on another occasion [...] and anyway it is our duty to be very careful.¹³⁴

The CJV pursued a similar strategy. They preferred to seek direct contact with policymakers in order to influence policy than to oppose states through public pressure. CJV tried to remain in a constructive dialogue with Dutch authorities, which resulted in an agreeable attitude. In an advisory committee meeting in 1938 for example, they explicitly mentioned that they did not want the High Commissioner or any other actor to advocate against the expulsions of refugees in the Netherlands back to Germany. The expulsions were an issue that attracted sizeable criticism from all NGOs in the meeting and suggestions were made to take action and speak out against the Dutch government. However, according to the CVJ, such criticism could harm the very delicate conversation between them and state officials and they made sure that no action was taken.¹³⁵

As mentioned above, the reason for this cautious attitude was the fear of an increase of antisemitism. Sources show that all Jewish NGOs deeply feared this. A report by Save the Children said that:

It should be borne in mind that one of the far-reaching consequences of the systematic stirring-up of anti-Semitic feeling (in school, universities etc.) will be that even should there ultimately be a change of regime, an amelioration with regard to the Jews, it will not greatly affect the situation, for the anti-Jewish movement has now taken deep root in the popular mind.¹³⁶

The backlash was explained by the economic situation. The sources elaborate on the connection between the economic situation and the refugees and how they could instigate anti-immigrant feelings. Unemployment was seen as the main reason. The argument was not only used by government representatives to justify their own policies. NGOs also refrained from asking for radical changes in the restrictive regulations for refugees because of the economic climate.¹³⁷ They understood the complications this entailed and considered it as reasonable justification for the immigration policies and declining sympathy for Jews.

By choosing to not be openly critical, NGOs hoped to be included in intergovernmental conferences and other important negotiations concerning Jewish refugees at an international

and national level. This strategy failed, however; NGOs were rarely involved in official consultations and did not attain an influential position during important state decisions concerning refugee policy, as we saw for example during the Evian Conference. The NGOs were aware of this. Already in early 1935 complaints were voiced in the Advisory Committee about their lack of result: 'the problem of relief, as well as the problem of settlement, has still to be met in nearly all countries of refuge.'¹³⁸ However, a change of strategy was not pursued. They did not decide to circumvent the policymakers and target the public instead. NGOs kept attempting to remain in a constructive dialogue with authorities which resulted in a positive attitude towards states.

This strategy of limited publicity meant that the public and the authorities were infrequently reminded of the severe persecution of Jews in Germany. The miserable situation of Jews in and outside Germany was not continuously a topic of public and political debate. Only a decade earlier, NGOs made the issue of Russian refugees a point of discussion and kept it on the public agenda. This public appeal – based on sharing and showing the horrific situation of Russian refugees gave NGOs moral authority, which strengthened the success of their advocacy work. During this key moment, NGOs had that knowledge but decided not to use it. The sources from the Save the Children Fund contained numerous examples of refugees in hopeless situations and in need of aid.¹³⁹ These individual cases from Save the Children show detailed knowledge of the practical situation of refugees, for example:

Jewish, 42 years old; doctor on Coburg, where he dealt with Jewish questions. Compelled to leave Germany. Lives with wife and 2 children, meaningless in Saarbrücken.

This accounts for most of the other NGOs as well – the JDC, JCA and the CJV were important aid providers by this point.¹⁴⁰ With extensive aid work came expertise about the practical reality of refugees' everyday situation. The NGOs would have been able to show this publicly. They decided, however, to only share this information cautiously, making sure not to focus any extra attention on Jews. Expertise is therefore not a synonym of expert authority. In order for expertise to have any political power, NGOs need to share it with and influence policymakers and the public.

3.7 CONCLUSION

In this second key moment, the political and economic situation was unfavourable for NGOs. Many states restricted immigration options for Jewish refugees coming from Germany and explained their choice by pointing to the economic crisis. Geo-political tensions between Germany and other European states, and appeasement politics also had an important effect on NGOs. Countries tried to maintain good relationships with Nazi Germany. This made it hard for NGOs to support German Jews and convince authorities to do the same. The window of opportunity for NGOs was also restricted by (fears of) an increase of antisemitism, also outside Germany. Many countries experienced increased antisemitism.¹⁴¹ Authorities feared losing their power if they supported Jewish refugees because of the effects this could have on the electorate and therefore their own position.

NGOs' internal politics were the result, in the first place, of disagreement. Other authors have already pointed this out.¹⁴² I outlined in much more detail the fragmentation between all NGOs, and showed how it negatively influenced their position in the 1930s. Non-Jewish organisations did not support Jewish refugees. The problem was seen as a Jewish problem that Jewish organisations had to solve. A decade earlier, many of the large humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross and Save the Children helped refugees from Russia, and advocated fiercely for their cause, and this resulted in an international agreement. These NGOs were largely absent or adopted a low-key position in the 1930s.

Furthermore, this research has shown that NGOs not only disagreed, but were also involved in open conflict and competition and that they were highly aware of the detrimental effects this had. One of the main issues that created problems between NGOs was funding. Financial responsibility for the refugees was a hot topic. The JDC blamed the JCA for not taking responsibility, and vice versa, and both distrusted the national committees, who in turn blamed the larger organisations for limited resources. I have shown how relations between the NGOs were reproachful and competitive. NGOs disagreed about funds and goals. NGOs had the same objective – to improve the situation of Jewish refugees – but had different ideas about how to achieve this. As a result, the NGOs lacked expert authority. The NGOs had expertise but they did not share this in a coherent and strategic way and policymakers had to deal with numerous solutions suggested by NGOs. This disagreement became most evident during the Evian Conference. Numerous NGO claims were presented that partially overlapped and partially diverged, sending an unclear, mixed and confusing message from NGOs to policymakers. This was a continuous struggle in the advisory committee of NGOs already before Evian. The NGOs I studied did not agree upon a much-needed solution for Jewish refugees.

Where most studies focused on the role of IGOs, I expanded on the relationship between IGOs and NGOs to explain why NGOs had little impact.¹⁴³ By going beyond national borders I showed that the shape and format of the League institutions and their collaboration on an international level were important. The diminished NGO-IGO nexus was a crucial factor that explained the lack of influence of NGOs in the 1930s. First of all, the structure and the position of the High Commission was weak. The HCRG was organisationally excluded from the League of Nations, which eliminated the possibility of functioning as an intermediary between NGOs and policymakers. In the 1920s, the High Commissariat created a connection between NGO claims and state officials. This was not achieved in the 1930s. Additionally, the relationship between NGOs and the HCRG was fraught. The JCA strongly opposed the HCRG between 1933 and 1935 and caused McDonald's resignation. The reorganisation that followed made the HCRG even more powerless. Malcolm mostly had to deal with legal issues and obtained no more funding from NGOs. The close-knit network, which I described in the previous chapter for the 1920s, between individuals working for IGOs, NGOs or both, which had made it easy for ideas to move from one organisation to another, was no longer present in the 1930s. Most of the principal advocates, such as Lucien Wolf, Fridtjof Nansen or Gustav Ador, that had advocated so fiercely for Nansen passport had died by 1930. The new generation did not yet possess experience and networks. Complicated relations between all (new) actors involved resulted in the lack of an effective network. In sum, organisational fragmentation, between all actors involved, meant that NGOs were never able to display logistical authority to states.

In contrast to most studies on refugees from Nazi Germany specifically this researched displayed NGO motives and considerations.¹⁴⁴ Specifically, the fear of growing antisemitism and the public opinion had not been emphasised as such in previous studies. It was known that NGOs were cautious in their political advocacy but the reason why remained vague.¹⁴⁵ The organisations under study were actively trying to reduce refugee visibility. My research showed that NGOs were hesitant about presenting information to the press and wanted only information that they carefully curated in press reports. NGOs did not make the issue of Jewish refugees part of the public and political agenda and debate. Several individuals of the JDC evaluated this strategy negatively, arguing that it led to declining awareness about the organisation and the predicament of Jewish refugees. This weakened the NGOs' position as it created little understanding and urgency for the issue in the years 1933-1938. They lacked moral authority as a result. They feared that advocating for Jewish refugees might increase antisemitism and weaken NGOs' position. The situation of refugees was not communicated to the public as clearly as it could have been. Campaigns that were ran in France and Belgium and which did result in some changes in policies in favour of the refugees, suggest that this might have been met with some success.¹⁴⁶ A more graphic campaign confronting the authorities that explicitly showed and informed the public about the situation of the Jewish refugees could have increased sympathy. Public pressure could have moderated or challenged the restrictive stance of authorities.

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- 33 K.J. Bade, *Migration in European History* (Malden 2003) 203.
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- 36 Beyond Europe, refugees were also on the move. In East Asia, for example, almost 300,000 refugees fled after the Japanese invasion in China.
- 37 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 72.
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