

NEVER AGAIN

Next week, the House of Representatives will start to consider the Refugee Act of 1979 (HR 2816). If there was ever a "Jewish issue," this is it.

A new book has just been published on British policy towards the Jews during the Nazi period. (Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*). It complements Arthur Morse's 1967 book, *While Six Million Died*. Both books deal with, among other things, the reluctance of these two governments to take in refugees.

One of the most shocking episodes took place in 1943, when the Rumanian government apparently expressed its willingness to permit the emigration of some 70 thousand Rumanian Jews who had not yet been sent to the death camps. As an index to the failure of the allies on this humanitarian front, the British Foreign Office wrote:

"The Foreign Office is concerned with the difficulties of disposing of any considerable number of Jews should they be rescued from enemy-occupied territory."

Another Foreign Office official said: "Once we open the door to adult male Jews to be taken out of enemy territory, a quite unmanageable flood may result."

There is a kind of "law of entry" which should apply to the United States, just as the "law of return" applies to Israel. Both of these "laws" have to do with the essential nature of these two countries. All Jews should have a right to come to Israel, because that's what Israel is all about. All *political* refugees should have a right to come to the United States because that's what the United States is all about. We can't handle all of the poor people in the world as immigrants, for practical reasons. But we can't afford to turn away those fleeing political oppression, without violating our national mission.

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We turned our back on that mission during much of the Nazi period. Since that time, American policy has again become somewhat more liberal and fitting. No country has received more political refugees. Between 1948 and 1970, a half million political refugees were admitted to this country. Many were Jews, then there were Hungarians, Cubans and others. Since that time, the rate has increased, including Soviet Jews and Indochinese refugees.

However, the law on admitting refugees is patchwork and chancy. There are no two ways of admitting refugees. There is the "normal flow" quota for refugees, which is about 17,400 annually for persons fleeing Communist countries or parts of the Middle East. However, that "normal flow" quota is not adequate for emergency situations. There have also been refugees permitted through the "parole authority" exercised by the U.S. Attorney General. That has been an important, but arbitrary, system.

HR 2816 would raise the "normal flow" quota of refugees to 50 thousand per year, and would broaden the definition of refugee to include anyone who cannot return to his homeland "because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion."

The bill would allow the President, in consultation with Congress, to authorize a higher number for any given year to meet special situations; and would allow the Attorney General to retain his parole authority. The increased number of refugees would not affect the level of other types of legal immigration.

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The United States has also instituted a number of liberal programs in recent years to help fund the resettlement of refugees. Jewish agencies, for example, have been the recipients of substantial funds for the resettlement of Soviet Jews. The current patchwork of temporary refugee programs will be made permanent and uniform by HR 2816.

This Refugee Act of 1979 has already been approved by the Senate. However, there are a few resistant noises in the House of Representatives, some of which sound like the British Foreign Office in 1943. The bill might be crippled by amendments which would reduce the limits on numbers of refugees, or would restrict government's ability to deal with emergency situations.

So those who want to do something *practical* with respect to the tragic memory of the Holocaust, will communicate with their Congressmen in the next twenty-four hours, urging support of HR 2816 without weakening amendments.

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