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The St. Louis Crisis in the Canadian Press: New Data on the June 1939 Incident

Abstract

Starting in late May 1939, a humanitarian crisis developed when some 900 German Jews were denied the use of prearranged Cuban temporary immigration permits in the port of Havana after having arrived on board of the MS St. Louis, *a luxury German liner. The event soon attracted much media attention because of its dramatic character and negotiations immediately began to find a safe haven for the stranded passengers elsewhere on the Atlantic seacoast. Eventually, after a few days, all efforts in this respect failed and the captain of the MS* St. Louis, *Gustav Schröder, was forced to contemplate bringing his human cargo back to Western Europe where four countries allowed the passengers to disembark. This article discusses the involvement of the Canadian government and media in this crisis, and the role that the Mackenzie-King cabinet played in denying the German Jewish refugees any hope of being welcomed in the country. Of particular interest here is the fact that the Canadian public was not well informed of the fate of the* St. Louis *passengers, in either official language, and that largely for this reason no serious pressure was put on the government to bring a different resolution of the crisis.*

Résumé

À la fin du mois de mai 1939, une crise humanitaire est apparue quand quelque 900 Juifs allemands, arrivés à bord du paquebot le Saint-Louis, *n'ont pu bénéficier dans le port de La Havane de permis d'immigration temporaires cubains déjà émis. L'événement n'a pas tardé à attirer beaucoup d'attention de la part des médias par son côté dramatique et des négociations ont immédiatement été lancées afin de trouver sur la côte atlantique un autre port d'accueil pour les réfugiés apatrides. Après quelques jours, le capitaine du navire, Gustav Schröder a toutefois dû se résoudre à regagner l'Europe de l'Ouest, où quatre pays ont accepté de prendre en charge les passagers. Cet article s'intéresse au rôle joué par le gouvernement et par les médias canadiens dans cette crise, et en particulier au fait qu'aucun geste concret n'ait été fait pour accueillir les réfugiés juifs au pays. L'auteur porte une attention spéciale au fait que le sort des passagers du* Saint-Louis *n'ait pas fait l'objet de reportages dans les journaux canadiens, dans aucune des langues officielles, et que pour cette raison le cabinet de Mackenzie-King a senti peu de pression de la part des citoyens canadiens pour trouver une résolution différente à la crise.*

In November 2018, the Trudeau government officially offered an apology to the Jewish community of Canada, and more particularly to the Jewish refugees seeking a haven in the country in the period before, during, and immediately after the Second World War. This declaration made in the House of Commons specifically addressed the issue of the failure of Mackenzie King's cabinet to open the gates of Canada to individuals forced to leave their home in the face of mounting antisemitism, racism

and political violence; first in Germany after 1933 and then in Nazi occupied regions of Europe from 1939 to 1945. Of particular importance in this public statement of contrition was the *St. Louis* liner incident of June 1939, when more than 900 German Jewish refugees were denied temporary entrance visas in Cuba and were forced to return to Europe when the United States and Canada refused to issue special permits to allow them to land on their shores. In the last twenty years or so, the event has caught the imagination of the Canadian public and has been invested with a particularly intense emotional charge. As is often the case with historical issues that have a tragic character and are viewed retrospectively with a sense of indignation, much remains to be done to shed light on the actual events that took place and to separate myth from reality. This article is an attempt at enlarging our knowledge of the *St. Louis* affair and better situate the episode in the much larger context of Canadian Immigration history in the early part of the twentieth century. Another key question in this respect, but of a very different nature, is to what extent was the Canadian public exposed to the momentous circumstances when, in June 1939, the *St. Louis* liner was refused entrance in the port of Havana, and how were the events represented in the Canadian press published in both English and French. It should be noted that no serious or valid research has been conducted up to now with regards to the attitude of French Canadian newspapers or readership in general on this episode.

The fate of the *St. Louis* passengers, as seen from a Canadian perspective, was not only the result of immediate pressures and political decisions made on the spur of the moment as the tragedy was unfolding hour by hour in the port of Havana and later on the Florida coast. Much of the blame for this disinterest or indifference at the time is judged today to rest squarely with members of Parliament, who had the power to issue orders in council and to decisively intervene at strategic junctures; or with civil servants who continued to apply insensitively standard rules and regulations in moments of pressing urgency. Although there is some truth in these statements, they tend to overlook a much longer sequence of Canadian immigration policies that came to bear on the events of June 1939, and which must be factored in the timeline if a broader picture of the *St. Louis* tragedy is to emerge. The result of these arrangements and administrative practices, often conceived as early as 1910, 1919, and 1923, in periods of relative calm on the world scene, proved devastating when totalitarian right-wing regimes became dominant in the thirties in many European countries and the number of people in distress skyrocketed.[1] To add to the complexity of the situation, the Canadian government imposed in 1923 severe prohibitions against immigrants that were not bona fide farmers or farm labourers, effectively shutting down access to the country to most individuals who came from urban milieus and practiced trades and professions incompatible with a rural way of life.[2] When German and Czechoslovakian Jews attempted to enter Canada in the late thirties in large numbers, they confronted regulations that had been in force for at least fifteen years and had remained unchanged since.

Even more troubling were the conditions imposed administratively at that time by the Department of Immigration to steamship companies, and not stated in the 1923 order in council. At some point in the thirties, without much public discussion, if any at all, the government of Canada took to classifying candidates for admission to the country into three groups: preferred, non-preferred and special permit immigrants. When describing these distinctions in his 1939 study entitled *Canada's Jews*, Louis Rosenberg, a demographer working in conjunction with Canadian Jewish Congress, stressed that they were based "upon 'racial' theories similar in many respect to those subsequently adopted by Hitler and his Nazi party".[3] By "preferred" the Canadian government meant newcomers whose "racial characteristics" were close to those of the inhabitants of the British Isles, and whose ability to assimilate into the main body of Canadian society were deemed high, such as individuals originating from the Northern and Western regions of Europe. "Non-preferred" immigrants, not to be given priority in the selection process leading to admittance to Canada, included individuals living in the regions of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Poland, Rumania and the Baltic states, and in former regions of Russia not under the direct control of the Soviet Union. Finally, the "special permit" category required the issuance by the Department of Immigration, to candidates in that group, on a personal basis and after a thorough examination, of official documents stating their suitability for immigration to Canada. Among those affected by these far more stringent measure were immigrants of Greek, Italian, Armenian, Syrian, Bulgarian and Turkish origins, plus Jews of Polish, Rumanian, Russian and Lithuanian origins. These liabilities, not mentioned in the 1910 and 1919 Canadian laws on immigration, could be expanded at any moment after 1923 to include all Jews, regardless of nationality or country of residence, except for British and American Jews. Such permits, Rosenberg reminded his readers in 1939: "Were very difficult to obtain and were usually granted only to the parents, wives and minor children of persons already resident of Canada".[4] Africans and Asians were simply judged in this respect to be "unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada".[5]

These administrative regulations, not being subsumed under the broader category of "acts of Parliament", could be modified at the discretion of the minister and without the changes having to be made known to a wider public or even beyond a limited circle of civil servants. They were also not published in Canadian offices abroad or explained clearly to prospective immigrants who applied for admittance to Canada as permanent residents. For this reason, it remains very difficult for the historian of immigration to speculate under which circumstances or context these permits were delivered to "special categories" candidates. Regulatory decisions made in the early twenties, or even earlier, according to perceptions then current, may have remained in the books for long periods, regardless of the shifting nature of immigrant flows, the sudden political transformations brought to certain countries in Europe by war or revolution, or even the fluctuating fortunes of the Canadian economy. Even the

central reasoning behind the 1919 "Act to Amend the Immigration Act", which made it possible to reject certain types of immigrants simply on the assumption that they would find it too onerous to adapt to the mores of a British colony, could be interpreted in myriad different ways depending on the context of the moment and the political sensitivity of a particular minister. In some cases, at times without apparent logic, requests were expedited upon the personal intervention of Mackenzie King, while other petitions of a similar nature remained unanswered.

Legally, the 1919 Act obliged civil servants and inspectors to prohibit the landing of certain classes of candidates "because such immigrants are deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life and methods of holding property, and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated or to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship within a reasonable time after their entry".[6] Generally understood to mean people of Asian or African descent, these terms were so vague and imprecise, that they could be applied to individuals of almost any national, cultural or religious origins that presented themselves at the border of Canada, except for persons of British extraction. Exercised in discretionary fashion and according to the circumstances prevailing at any given moment, such criteria for admission, certainly more than the provisions pertaining to the industrial and commercial needs of the country, were amenable to adjustments, modifications or even sudden redefinitions within a larger framework. The brutal economic downturn of the early thirties, which resulted in very high unemployment figures in Canada, and the fear of an impending worldwide military conflict at the end of this decade, put enormous pressure on the federal government and made renewed public acceptance for large immigration flows into the country very unlikely. After 1929, all the room for manoeuvre that had existed at the time when the 1919 and 1923 regulations were passed had essentially dissipated.

Starting in the early thirties, the overall number of immigrants admitted to Canada took such a dramatic plunge, that the prospective newcomers classified in the least desirable categories by the Department of Immigration literally ceased to be considered. From 166,800 a year in 1928, the number of new residents plummeted to 37,500 in 1931 and then to 14,400 in 1933, this without any consideration being given specifically to Jewish candidates. For the next twelve years, including for the duration of the Second World War, Canada's average intake of new population remained on average about 12,000 a year, or a mere 1,000 new arrivals per month.[7] This radical and sudden flattening of the immigration flow meant that the minister responsible, and his highest-ranking civil servants, would consider only candidates most likely to conform to the generally accepted view of "immigrant desirability", and reject individuals who did not strictly reflect the ideal presented in the 1919 act and administrative guidelines already in existence. Since no serious study of the profile of immigrants accepted in the country during the period of 1933 to 1945 has been

undertaken in any detail, we can hypothesize that this is most probably the direction that the selection process took during this tense period, with the exception of individuals who could obtain order in council decisions for themselves after applying sufficient political pressure. Given that the entire edifice of Canadian immigration was being drastically reduced in the mid-thirties to a mere shadow of its former self, it should come as little surprise that the number of Jewish immigrants would at least suffer a comparable blow. While 3,848 persons of Jewish origins were being admitted to the country in 1928, the figure for 1931 was down to 649. For the rest of the thirties, Canada would admit on average six to seven hundred Jews per year, and even fewer when large European Jewish communities fell prey to Nazi occupation.[8]

Much has been made, and rightly so, of the very low level of Jewish immigration to Canada in the crucial years when admittance or denial of entry were issues of life and death for European refugees seeking a safe haven from persecution. This was particularly the case during the highly tragic interval between Kristallnacht and the first few weeks of the invasion of Poland. In this context, the Mackenzie King cabinet and the officials in charge of administering the Department of Immigration showed a great deal of insensitivity to the sufferings of stateless immigrants – Jewish or not – and refused to suspend or even briefly modify those regulations in place since the early twenties. The demographic figures for Jews presented above must also be understood in light of the general trends affecting the processing of all individuals seeking entrance into Canada at that time, a factor to which not enough attention has been given. The overall percentage of Jews relative to the total immigrant flow being let into the country remained stable at approximately 3 to 4% between 1923 to 1934. After that period, the proportion of Jews allowed into the country even began to climb steadily, reaching between 5 to 6 % during the years 1935 to 1939. According to the figures presented by Joseph Kage in his 1962 book, *With Faith and Thanksgiving*, 10% of the immigrants entering Canada in 1940 were of Jewish origins, an all-time high for the first half of the twentieth century.[9] That year, a further 2,000 German Jews rounded up in Great Britain as “enemy aliens” were accepted in Canada as war prisoners, but not accounted for as legal immigrants.[10] At the same time, an equivalent number probably crossed the border coming from the United States. As Justin Comartin has argued convincingly in his M.A. thesis, it is not so much the absolute numbers of Jews entering the ports of the country that is of significance, but their relative proportion to the total movement of newcomers, a statistical principal not necessarily well understood by all authors who approached this subject.[11]

If Canada did very little indeed to offer a refuge to the Jewish victims of Nazism, it also kept all admissions from all countries and touching all nationalities to a very bare minimum during at least a ten-year period before the Second World War. If the government must be faulted, it should also be censured for systematically refusing to extend a friendly hand to immigrants in general and essentially for bringing to a

grinding halt during an entire decade all movement into the country on the part of foreign citizens. The legal and administrative instruments to achieve these results did not have to be created or even discussed in public, since they already existed in the form of official acts of parliament passed shortly before and after the First World War. Regulations detailing the permeability of the maritime border of Canada with Europe had been in place since 1923, and only needed to be enforced more strenuously than in earlier periods. Had Mackenzie King's cabinet been more generous in its conception of immigrant admission overall after the onset of the great depression, and had greater numbers of newcomers regularly entered the country during the thirties, perhaps Canadian Jewish Congress and other refugee lobbying organizations might have had more success in convincing Ottawa to do more in favor of the European victims of Nazi persecution. As it was, the approach of the government was already well entrenched by the late thirties and had borne clearly racial overtones since at least the turn of the century, if not before.[12]

These features of Canada's immigration policy appeared so deeply rooted in the country's history that no amount of pleading could alter them, not even the dramatic context emerging in Germany in the late thirties. In fact, the ideological and cultural origins of Canada's attitude to migration flows is probably to be found in conceptions developed by Great Britain about the long-term evolution of its empire and particularly notions about "White Dominions" as places reserved for British colonial settlement. When Canada won a measure of political independence from the mother country, in the late nineteenth century, these notions of racial purity were simply reinterpreted in national terms and slightly altered to meet the less racialized context of the day.[13] It should come as no surprise therefore, that Jewish calls for humanitarian gestures on the part of Canada fell on deaf ears. Even pressing appeals made by mainstream advocates of refugee admission went unheeded until the very end, which is when Canada declared war on Germany in September 1939. If Canadians with British origins could not affect a change of attitude on the part of the federal government, it was very unlikely that Canadians recently immigrated in the country, and described by official documents as "non-preferred" individuals, for lack of a more insulting term, would sway the Mackenzie King cabinet. What Canada had conceived of very early in the twentieth century as a sound immigration policy, was not about to be modified by political events taking place after 1933 in a faraway country and affecting a religious minority ranking not particularly high on the scale of desirability. The racialist approach used in judging prospective newcomers to the country, and the very high obstacles erected by Canadian authorities on the road to admission and acceptance, such as the infamous clause prohibiting "the landing in Canada or at any specified port of entry in Canada of any immigrant who has come to Canada otherwise than by continuous journey from the country of which he is a native or naturalized citizen", remained constant features of Ottawa's immigration policy during long periods.[14] Such a deep-seated perspective on the part of Canadian

authorities would prove very resistant to change, especially in the middle of a world-wide economic crisis and at a time when the fear of communism loomed large in the xenophobic attitudes directed to the European continent.

Considering Canadian attitudes toward immigrants brings to the fore the question of how much the general population of the country actually knew about the plight of refugees from Nazism before the beginning of the Second World War, and particularly about the persecution of Jews in Germany before Kristallnacht.[15] This question is crucial to understanding the professed attitude of indifference manifested by the Liberal cabinet in Ottawa, notably since the Prime Minister and his close political allies were very sensitive to public opinion, both Anglophone and Francophone. Canadian political leaders would surely have become more concerned with the sufferings of stateless immigrants, had a groundswell of sympathy manifested itself in their favor among large segments of the Canadian population. In their seminal study entitled *None is Too Many*, Harold Troper and Irving Abella place the blame for the inattention to Jewish requests for more admissions in several places, including the perceived lack of responsiveness on the part of the general public as the situation of German Jews grew increasingly desperate after Kristallnacht. The authors advance a series of reasons explaining the seemingly deep unconcern of Canadians, which they list at the end of the second chapter of their study: "Thus the unyielding opposition of certain key officials, the depression, the general apathy in English Canada, the outright hostility of French Canada, the Prime Minister's concern for votes and the overlay of antisemitism that dominated official Ottawa combined to insure that no more than a mere handful of Jewish refugees would find a home in Canada".[16] The problem remains that Abella and Troper's treatment of French language sources was very superficial, producing distortions in methodology and interpretation that are also perceptible in L. Ruth Klein's book on the *St. Louis* tragedy, particularly in Amanda Grzyb's chapter on the press reaction; a weakness in the analysis of the St. Louis episode that this article will attempt to remedy.[17]

In modern liberal democracies, such as Canada, apathy or ignorance of a pressing issue on the part of citizens is generally no longer a product of illiteracy or lack of readily available public channels of information. Most likely, average Canadians who remained aloof to certain political causes or events unfolding in the arena of international relations, such as the Nazi persecution of Jews or other perceived enemies of the German people, were reacting to a much broader context of disinterest on the part of the press, political commentators and members of parliament. To substantiate such a claim of indifference on the part of the general public to certain key issues, and to explain the reasons for this apparent blindness, historians have the option of resorting to a systematic study of newspapers published in both official languages in the country and to numerous sources readily available to the contemporary researcher. With regards to the treatment of refugee demands for admittance to the

country at the time of the Kristallnacht pogrom, the fundamental question remains, still unanswered in large part: were Canadians fundamentally unconcerned, were they poorly informed of the situation, or simply uninformed? Historians must also examine seriously in this respect the issue of the existence in Canada of two official languages and consider the respective sensibilities of Anglophone and Francophone readers. Very likely, I would hypothesize, little substantial evidence reached Canadians before the middle of 1938 about the rapidly degrading position of Jews in Germany. The situation would begin to change only when newspapers everywhere in the world reported in November of that year images of synagogues burning in almost every city under the control of the Nazi Party.

In this respect, decisions made by the Nazis in Germany against Jews and other minorities throughout the mid-thirties, such as the Nuremberg laws of 1935 and the measures destined to curb a so-called Jewish influence in the civil service, the press, and the arts, probably did not for the most part reach mainstream Canadians. It is not so much that these decisions on the part of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) went unreported in the country, but that they were presented in an inconsistent and erratic way in the Canadian press. Rarely before Kristallnacht did editorialists or political observers in Canada paint a broad picture of the policies of the Third Reich with regards to "racial minorities", relegating most of the meager information on this subject to back pages and small size press releases.[18] Most of the journalists and editorialists working in Canada, in both official languages, did not have a pronounced interest in Germany's internal affairs and few took to describing during the thirties the long-term policies of the Nazi State concerning its Jewish citizens and other religious minorities. It certainly did not help that the Prime Minister of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King, made an official visit to Berlin in June 1937, giving the German government an aura of legitimacy on the international scene and meeting Hitler in person to discuss peace in Europe and throughout the world.[19] Upon seeing the head of their country in direct contact with high-ranking Nazi officials, and being offered a much-publicized tour of Berlin festooned with Nazi symbols, many Canadians must have felt that there existed no reason to oppose or to condemn the Third Reich from the point of view of diplomatic ties or government-to-government relations. Clearly, whatever the Canadian Jewish Congress and other activists within the Jewish community found objectionable to Nazism produced little echo in Ottawa or in the mainstream press of the country before late in the thirties.

My main working hypothesis in this respect is that, during the thirties, there emerged a negative consensus in the French and English language press of Canada regarding the issue of immigration, although not borne by a common understanding of the phenomenon at hand.[20] Francophone editorialists tended to generally oppose the incoming of migrants on the ground that it marginalized further French Canadians

in the federation, and generally comprised individuals who could not be convinced to join the rural and traditionalist Catholic ideology defended by this group's elites. British Canadians, as the immigration policies of the country attests clearly, tended to view newcomers from a perspective of racial purity and sought to reject those not of Northern European and Protestant origins. Likewise, both official language newspapers viewed Jews, and particularly German Jewish immigrants with a great deal of suspicion, but again not exactly for the same reasons. Catholic Francophone antisemitism did not have the same basic references as its Anglican equivalent in the British realm, and relied on authors and commentators unknown to English speakers, such as Édouard Drumont, abbé Maximilien de Lamarque, Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras. It should also be noted that, except for the marginal and often ephemeral press organs animated by Adrien Arcand during the thirties, important French Canadian dailies did not harbor very radical negative notions of Jews and tended to voice relatively moderate and often inconsistent forms of antisemitism. Until the severe depredations brought against German religious minorities in late 1938, *Le Devoir*, among others, did not dwell at length of the situation of Jews in Central Europe and had no definitive opinion on their possible immigration to Canada.

Recent research that I conducted in two leading socially conservative Francophone newspapers of Canada point in this direction.[21] Between January 1933 and September 1939, *Le Devoir* published 35 substantial editorials on the political situation in Germany, on Hitler and on Nazism, 77% of which appeared after January 1937 over a period of 33 months.[22] Of particular interest in this sequence was a series of eight editorials written in December 1937 by Georges Pelletier, the director of *Le Devoir*, while touring Germany and other European countries. If we take into account this detailed portrait of the political situation in central Europe published very late in 1937, the bulk of *Le Devo*ir's reflections on Hitlerism actually began to appear only starting in the second half of 1937. A similar trend is visible in *Le Devoir's* treatment of Jewish sufferings in the Third Reich and the possible outmigration of Jewish refugees from Germany. Of 11 major editorials dedicated specifically to this subject, 8 appeared in 1938–1939, or 82% of the total, with a strong concentration immediately before and after the pogrom of Kristallnacht. While in Germany in late 1937, Pelletier took a dim view of the NSDAP regime and denounced in particular the absence of a free press in the country and the general suppression of democratic rights, but paid little attention to the persecution of religious minorities and Jews in particular. This subject would surface only a few months later when *Le Devoir* argued in favor of not opening the gates of Canada to refugees from central Europe, namely German Jews:

> We have our Jews and we do not persecute them. They live happily and in wealth, without being repressed. Their presence constitutes one of the multitude of major problems that Canada needs to resolve quietly and without injustice first and foremost to itself. We have enough of our own problems, starting

> with our Jewish problem. This is not the time to make any of the problems worse. The propositions such as those of the *Star*, and still less that of Mr. de Kerillis, who has no business in Canada's affairs, solve nothing. To listen and want to follow up on these propositions – London cannot follow up on them, this is Canada's business alone – would lead to a dead end. The solution to the issue lies elsewhere than in the massive migration of German Jews to Canada. The issue is really a European one and we old-stock Canadians refuse to suffer its consequences.[23]

A compilation of all the articles, opinions and editorials published on Germany in *L'Action catholique*, between January 1933 and the beginning of the Second World War, shows the same trend, mainly that the Quebec City daily began to pay attention to the situation unfolding in Nazi Germany quite late in the thirties.[24] The turning point for *L'Action catholique* was the Anschluss of March 1938, when very decisive measures were taken by the German occupying forces against the predominant Catholic institutions in Vienna, and not the persecution of Jews in the Third Reich. In 1938 alone, *L'Action catholique* offered 343 texts of all types to its readers bearing on Nazi Germany, out of a total of 920 for the period mentioned above, or 37% of the total. If the output for 1938 and 1939 is regrouped in one statistical category, the proportion reaches 44%. It is important to point out as well that by the end of the thirties, most of the editorials published in *L'Action catholique* presented the Nazi regime under a very negative light, largely because of the decision made by the NSDAP to suspend the freedoms enjoyed previously by the Catholic Church in the country.[25] Nonetheless, the trend remains that for the large part, the French speaking Canadian public, in both *Le Devoir* and *L'Action catholique*, received very little information on the situation in the Reich until it reached a crisis point in international relations and war was at hand. At that point, late in the thirties, all eyes were turned to the possibility of a new global conflict and the role that French Canada would have to play in this confrontation. In this context, very little information was accessible that could sustain a display of sympathy for the oppressed Jewish populations living in the Reich.

While we have at the moment no conclusive data for the Anglophone Canadian press on similar issues for the entire decade of the thirties, it does seem reasonable to consider that mainstream English language newspapers in the country likewise did not systematically follow in detail, before the pogrom of Kristallnacht, events in Nazi Germany relating to Jews.[26] The consequence of this negligence or indifference may lead us to believe that Canadian readers were not offered over a long period of time a full and coherent picture of the antisemitic persecutions taking place in the Third Reich before the Second World War, nor credible observations as to the ultimate meaning of these developments. Since it is very difficult to ascertain what public opinion in Canada, in both official languages, may have felt about the assaults suffered by Jewish communities in Germany, perhaps turning to an incident that took

place closer geographically and politically to Ottawa might help shed light on the perceptions prevailing in the country just before the declaration of war. The *St. Louis* affair of June 1939 might well be described as one such occurrence of persecution likely to attract the attention of Canadians, and perhaps susceptible of offering in the large circulation press of the country an occasion to highlight the grave abuses being committed in Germany at the time. The episode had clear international repercussions, had attracted the attention of the American press before reaching Canada and possessed a dramatic tonality that could easily touch a wide audience. Furthermore, contrary to discrimination taking place in the Third Reich, a country that welcomed few Canadian press correspondents in the late thirties, the fate of the Jewish passengers on board the *St. Louis* rested at least in part on decisions made by Prime Minister Mackenzie King and his cabinet, or so it seems retrospectively.

If Canadian politicians seemed relatively powerless to change the situation of the Jews of Germany, or perhaps even uninterested in discussing the issue with Third Reich officials, they could hardly ignore the plight of refugees sailing at some distance past the country's main ports on the Atlantic Ocean.[27] Still, it should be borne in mind that the passengers on board the MS *St. Louis* of the Hamburg-America Line, having departed from Hamburg in the middle of May, were treated rather well by the captain of the ship, Gustav Schröder.[28] Essentially, they suffered no severe humiliation on board the liner or grave mistreatment, as opposed to many of their German coreligionists who were already in Nazi camps or were the object of systematic harassment on the streets of German cities. If by all means one sought at the time to get a sense of the deep persecutions and radical racial inequity endured by the bulk of German Jewry, the *St. Louis* was certainly not the best place to look. In fact, it probably appeared at first sight to Canadians that the fate of the 900 or so passengers was rather more endurable than the situation of the majority of Jews who remained in the Reich, and whose state of affairs was fast deteriorating in the summer of 1939. Providing of course that the Cuba bound travelers could be brought to a safe haven somewhere. Canadians, it can be surmised, had only a vague understanding of the murderous attitude of the Nazis to Jews living in Germany, and of the ignominies imposed on minorities by the theories of Alfred Rosenberg.[29] The actual departure of the *St. Louis* from Hamburg, despite the unusual circumstances of the voyage, was not initially recorded in newspapers published in Canada, nor were the unique circumstances of the temporary Cuban landing permits awarded to almost all passengers.

Most probably, on the very eve of the Second World War, and given the very tense international situation following the dismembering of Czechoslovakia, Canadians were mainly preoccupied with the possibility of being drawn into a new world conflict and having to engage in a costly fight once more on the side of Great Britain. Two other events overshadowed the refugee crisis unfolding in Cuban waters and along the

Atlantic Seaboard starting 30 May and ending 8 June 1939, at least according to the timetable provided by most Canadian newspapers.[30] One was the accidental sinking on 1 June of the HMS *Thetis*, a new type of submarine that was being tested for the first time by the British navy in the shallow waters of Liverpool Bay. During three days, news of the event and of the possible rescue of the men still inside occupied the front page of most Canadian newspapers, particularly those published in the English language, with photographs of the various attempts carried out by a small fleet of ships in favor of the trapped sailors. Finally, it was announced on 3 June that all hopes of saving the men on board the HMS *Thetis* had been abandoned, including many scientists and shipbuilding experts. In all, 99 lives were lost in the disaster and a considerable emotion was felt throughout the British world at the news of this sudden and unpredictable tragedy; all the more since the failed testing of the submarine arrived as the country was desperately preparing for a military confrontation with Germany. The event reverberated for a few days afterwards as journalists speculated on the reason why the HMS Thetis laid motionless at the bottom of the ocean and grieving relatives were being interviewed.[31]

While the attention of the world briefly focused on the disaster that had befallen the HMS *Thetis*, Canada itself was the scene of a much more joyous event. As the refugees were departing from Hamburg on board the *St. Louis*, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were beginning on May 17, in Quebec City, a much-anticipated tour of the country. The royal trip was scheduled to end in Halifax on June 15, including a brief five-day diplomatic mission to the United States. It was, in Canadian perception, an extraordinary occasion since it constituted the first official visit of a reigning monarch to the Dominion, and by all measures remains to this day the longest and most publicized. During eighteen days, the King of Canada visited all provinces on board a special train and stopped for an official ceremony of welcome in all major cities of the country. Huge crowds gathered along the way for the joyous occasion and a sense of overwhelming pride swelled as the royal couple travelled across the vast expanse of the land. Never before had Canada attracted so much attention on the part of the royal family and in such a momentous time, perhaps on the eve of a world conflict that would test the military strength of the British Empire and the Allied nations. When the *St. Louis* crisis began to unfold for Canadian readers, on May 31, the tour had reached the Prairies and by then the excitement generated by the passing of the royal train knew no bounds. All the more since Prime Minister Mackenzie King was constantly at the side of George VI and wished to emphasize by his presence the so-called national independence of Canada within the British Commonwealth. Without interruption almost, in both official languages, Canadian newspapers reported the progress of the royal train and adorned their pages with pictures of shy children meeting the visiting monarchs with armfuls of flowers. Rarely had a more triumphant image of Canada been presented by the national press.[32]

It is important to note as well that the genuine excitement surrounding the royal tour created a power vacuum at the highest level of government. Mackenzie King not only accompanied the royal couple across Canada, but also joined the British monarch on May 7 when he began an official diplomatic visit to the United States, posing for reasons of protocol as the sole minister in attendance to the King, rather than any British minister. In such a context, Mackenzie King was certainly not about to have unplanned minor events derail his political agenda.[33] When information about the *St. Louis* refugee crisis finally reached him in Niagara Falls on the evening of 7 May as he was about to enter the territory of the United States with George VI, Mackenzie King dismissed the affair out of hand. Rather, he asked his Undersecretary for External Affairs, O. D. Skelton, to examine the solutions available to Canada on legal grounds.[34] In real terms, this meant that documenting the situation and proposing possible options fell to Skelton and Director of Immigration Frederick Blair, two high level civil servants who had not shown much sympathy in the past for admitting immigrants outside of the very limited categories already defined since the passing of PC 1923-183 order in council.[35] This disinterest on the part of Mackenzie King, as far as Canada was concerned, would prove fatal to the hopes of the Jewish refugees on board the *St. Louis*.

The crisis finally caught the Prime Minister's attention when George M. Wrong, and 41 other Christian Anglophone signatories of British origins from Toronto, sent him a telegram on the evening of 7 June addressing the issue.[36] In this cable, Wrong suggested that Canada welcome the 900 or so refugees on board the *St. Louis*, which by then was heading back to Europe; since the captain and the passengers' advocates from the US-based Jewish Joint Distribution Committee had exhausted all other options, including landing at an American port. A man of great moral stature, Wrong was an ordained Anglican priest and the retired head of the Department of History at the University of Toronto. His son, Humphrey Hume Wrong, had been the official Canadian representative at the international Évian Conference of July 1938, during which the diplomats from 32 countries had discussed – with little concrete results – the best way to come to the rescue of Jewish refugees being expelled from Nazi Germany. Essentially, Wrong, who certainly had read about the tragic circumstances of the *St. Louis* from the Canadian press, or perhaps even from its better informed American equivalent, described providing a haven to the harassed passengers as a gesture inspired by "Christian charity" and following on the heels of the very successful royal tour about to end in the country. The wording of the telegram was entirely non-political and referred to the British sense of national pride:

> As a mark of gratitude to almighty God for the pleasure and gratification which have been vouchsafed to Canadian people through the visit their Gracious Majesties King George and Queen Elizabeth and as evidence of the true Christian charity of the people of this most fortunate and blessed country we the un-

> dersigned as Christian citizens of Canada respectfully suggest that under the powers vested in you as Premier of our country you forthwith offer to the 907 homeless exiles on board the Hamburg American ship St. Louis Sanctuary in Canada.[37]

Certainly, Mackenzie King could not remain unconcerned or silent following such an appeal emanating from the highest echelons of Anglo-British academic and clerical milieus in Toronto. The following morning – from an American office in Maryland – he sent a telegram to O. D. Skelton at the External Affairs ministry requesting information on the advisability of the suggestion presented by Wrong. King's instructions read as follows: "Would you please communicate the contents immediately to Acting Prime Minister and also to Director of Immigration. Would like to be advised immediately as to powers of government to meet suggestions which communication [Wrong's telegram] contain. Please advise colleagues that I would like immediate considerations given to suggestion made". The decision to first consult his highest-ranking civil servants, in the absence of the minister responsible for Immigration, Thomas Crerar, would mean that precious time would be lost while a thorough examination of the legal and administrative options were being considered. Blair was made aware of the situation on June 8 and exchanged correspondence with Skelton the same day. The two men discussed sending a telegram to Mackenzie King providing some answers on June 9 and probably sent the same day.[38] It took a rather negative stance on admitting the *St. Louis* refugees, a perspective that was reinforced by the minister of Justice Ernest Lapointe when he voiced his opinion on the affair.[39] By then, the German liner had certainly reached the middle of the Atlantic and its captain could not risk waiting for a possible change of heart on the part of the Canadian authorities. Nor was captain Schröder made aware of the fact that the Canadian Prime Minister was discussing the fate of his passengers. It was probably at exactly this juncture that Mackenzie King ultimately decided not to intervene in favor of the *St. Louis* passengers.

The crucial question is how much the general Canadian public knew about the drama unfolding in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, several hours of navigation from the closest Canadian port, and if so, could serious pressure be brought to bear on Mackenzie King on the part of concerned citizens living in various regions of the country. In other words, had Canadians been outraged by the indifference of their government to such a crisis, and had press releases reverberated their demand for action, might Mackenzie King and his cabinet have reconsidered their initial response during the hours following the fateful evening of June 7? A detailed study of three important dailies during a period of about two weeks, from 31 May to 15 June, reveals that essentially the plight of the *St. Louis* refugees did not appear anywhere in sufficiently bold coverage to attract the attention of Canadian readers in either of the country's official languages.[40] If leading dailies such as *The Globe and Mail*, *La Presse*,

and *Le Devoir* remained unconcerned or even uninformed about the possibility that Canada might grant asylum to the 908 German Jews seeking refuge on the North American Atlantic coast, it is very unlikely that newspapers with a smaller circulation could have fared much better. As we will soon see, the *St. Louis* was never more than a minor mention lost in a vast sea of information touching on all aspects of Canadian and international affairs.[41]

For a short while, the drama unfolding in Cuban waters was briefly described in the Canadian press, mostly from 31 May to 7 June, and then it was almost totally set aside until news of the ship reaching Europe and refugees being offered sanctuary in Belgium, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands was reported on 14 June and 15 June. In between those dates, during the crucial interval when Ottawa was considering the fate of the *St. Louis*, no Canadian paper of substance presented its readers any information to the effect that the Mackenzie King government was in fact debating, if only administratively, the possibility of making a gesture in favor of the German Jewish passengers. Not only was the Prime Minister away from the nation's capital and the even from the country; but the minister responsible for immigration, Thomas Crerar, could not be reached for a few days and Parliament remained in recess for the summer months.[42] Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that no echo of the Canadian activity in this affair would have filtered to the press or to journalists, all the more since the file was mostly handled by O. D. Skelton and Frederick Blair, two high-ranking civil servants who were bound by the nature of their responsibilities to remain silent. Essentially, Canadian readers were lead to believe that the *St. Louis* was an international incident falling entirely under Cuban jurisdiction and, since the temporary landing permit had been revoked by the authorities in Havana, should be resolved in that context alone. No substantial information in any major Canadian paper alluded to the tragic circumstances of the Jewish refugees trapped at sea, during the period under study, as being an issue of concern to the country. Canadians were thus lead, in both official languages, to read the story as a distant occurrence and, with very few exceptions, no journalist or editorialist discussed the story as having an impact locally. As far as can be established, the crisis passed in Canada's main press organs in a way unlikely to arouse interest on the part of the general public.

Canadian dailies did make mention early on of the American involvement in the *St. Louis* crisis, but mostly because it became known on 31 May that the German refugees had hoped to eventually gain entrance in the United States, via the delivery of Cuban temporary permits.[43] Offers of help and financial guarantees from American Jewish organizations would soon follow on 2 June, notably from the National Co-ordinating Committee for Jewish Refugees in New York.[44] On 3 June, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the liner was anchored some short distance from Havana: "In response to appeals from powerful influences in the United States who have undertaken to

straighten out the situation so the refugees may be landed either in Havana, to await immigration under the quota restrictions into the United States, or at some other port on the Atlantic ocean".[45] *La Presse* contained essentially the same information, which was that on 2 June: "Le capitaine a annoncé qu'il allait tenter d'obtenir la permission d'arrêter à un autre pays d'Amérique" and on 3 June that : "Il semble que le paquebot a interrompu sa traversée [de l'Atlantique] et que de puissantes influences américaines tentent d'obtenir soit que les réfugiés du 'Saint-Louis' trouvent un asile provisoire à Cuba, ou que quelque port du littoral américain les accueille".[46] This was very little in the way of helping Canadians to believe that the liner would eventually sail some distance past one of their country's seaports on its return journey to Europe, or that the refugees' fate would be brought before the Liberal cabinet.[47] That, as we know, would happen only on the evening of 7 June, in a most inauspicious manner.

In the meantime *The Globe and Mail* wrote on 5 June: "No overtures were made by captain Wilhelm [sic] Schröder to land in the country [the United States], but it was known that a series of conferences both here and elsewhere were being held during Sunday afternoon [June 4th] by American Jewry to try to work out some plan whereby the ship might land its human cargo in the Dominican Republic".[48] Much contradictory information circulated in the Canadian press as to the whereabouts of the *St. Louis* after it had left Havana Harbor on 2 June and as to the intentions of its captain, adding to the confusion reflected on the pages of most national dailies. Some articles sent the liner to the Dominican Republic, where the passengers would be let ashore, some saw it return to Cuba where further negotiations were to take place and others yet described the plight of similar ships having German Jews on board, such as the *Monte Olivia* in Montevideo and the *Orinoco* cruising in the Caribbean. *La Presse* reported on 5 June that a large boat, presumed to be the *St. Louis*: " A levé l'ancre et a fait route vers le sud-est très lentement; il s'est éloigné de 10 milles vers le large, près des Keys [of Florida]. À bonne heure ce matin, un gros navire qu'on n'a pu avec certitude désigner comme le 'Saint-Louis' [...] s'est arrêté plus d'une heure devant le littoral de Miami, puis s'est éloigné lentement vers le nord".[49]

On 6 June, both *The Globe and Mail* and *Le Devoir* offered news of the Cuban authorities having finally changed their mind and being ready to accept the German refugees under certain conditions: "Les sociétés de secours juives doivent décider d'ici midi si elles vont accepter l'offre du gouvernement cubain de recevoir les 907 réfugiés juifs allemands du 'Saint-Louis' dans un camp temporaire sur l'île des Pins [Isla de Pinos]".[50] By the time it was printed, the information (which may or may not have had any validity) was already outdated and on 7 June all three newspapers declared that the *St. Louis* "has set her course for Europe" late on the night of June 6. While *The Globe and Mail* announced the event in a 35 word paragraph at the very bottom of page 2, *La Presse* reproduced on page 3 a declaration by Lawrence Berenson, described as a leader of an American refugee aid organization in New York:

"Le problème des réfugiés du 'Saint-Louis' n'est pas encore résolu. Le paquebot a reçu l'ordre de regagner l'Allemagne".[51] *Le Devoir* goes a little further in explaining the situation: "Les 907 réfugiés juifs allemands du 'Saint-Louis' ont apparemment repris le chemin de l'Allemagne après avoir erré cinq jours durant le long des côtes de la Floride pendant que les sociétés de secours juives s'efforçaient de leur obtenir le droit de débarquer dans l'île de Cuba".[52] These articles essentially end the coverage, in Canadian newspapers, of the story of the *St. Louis*' vain attempt to obtain a safe haven for its passengers in the American hemisphere. Only *Le Devoir* alludes on 7 June to the fact that a message has been sent in extremis to President Roosevelt by the refugees asking for his clemency.

In total this represents sixteen articles over eight days (including 7 June), printed in three of the country's leading newspapers; seven by *The Globe and Mail*, four by *La Presse,* and five by *Le Devoir*, all of which are minor mentions in rather marginal placings on the front page or further down inside.[53] As none of these dailies had reporters in Cuba while the crisis was unfolding, all three relied on news agencies for their information, mostly American firms such as Associated Press and United Press International who often relayed human interest stories and poignant episodes; such as an attempted suicide in Cuban waters and the emotional reactions of certain refugees on learning that they could not be reunited with members of their family in Havana. Only one photograph of the events appeared in a Canadian paper; that of a Jewish German couple on board the *St. Louis* about to be separated as the ship leaves Havana harbor on June 2, also probably obtained from an American source.[54] Entitled: "Brief Reunion in Havana Has Tearful Ending", the picture appears in *The Globe and Mail* on 6 June on page 2 of the newspaper. It was hardly enough to attract the attention of a Canadian public inundated with pictures of the royal couple touring in grand fanfare the various regions and cities of the country. On 7 June, as all three papers had announced the end of the saga and the sailing of the *St. Louis* toward Europe, *The Globe and Mail* published an editorial on the subject deploring the treatment metered to the German Jewish exiles by the Cuban government – and not the Canadian one. It appears on column 3 of page 6, making it a rather minor issue for the paper. It is nonetheless a strong condemnation of the tactics used by the Cuban president in withdrawing the visas already awarded a few days earlier, and which placed the refugees in a difficult conundrum. *The Globe and Mail* writes:

> Obviously the refugees were duped. Whether or not the Cuban Government is solely to blame, it had a large hand in the business. Its responsibility to this extent was admitted. Inferentially at any rate, in the [Cuban] President's statement on Monday. Having been admitted, the only possible conclusion to be drawn from its latest reversal of policy is that the immigrants and the committees negotiating for them are victims of a holdup racket. If this is not the case, Cuban officials should think again and relieve themselves of suspicion.[55]

Although *The Globe and Mail* did acknowledge on 7 June the distress and agony of the German Jewish refugees on board the *St. Louis*, nowhere did the paper allude to the possibility that the government of Canada would offer a safe haven to the passengers now on their way back to Europe. It is probably this editorial issued in the Toronto daily – or news obtained from better-informed American sources – that convinced George M. Wrong and 41 other persons to send on that very evening an urgent telegram to Mackenzie King requesting action. If the three Canadian newspaper examined in this study did very little, if nothing at all, to suggest before 7 June that the *St. Louis* be allowed into a Canadian harbor, they did not either bring to their readers news of the refusal by the American authorities to welcome the passengers under their own jurisdiction. Up to that point, the Canadian dailies had only reported a situation in which, rejected by Cuba and possibly other Caribbean nations, the captain of the liner had no other choice but to sail back to Hamburg. It simply did not appear in the Canadian press, in either of the official languages, that the United States and Canada were in fact options along the way back to the stateless German exiles. On 8 June, *The Globe and Mail* published Wrong's telegram to Mackenzie King, but it is reproduced on page 17, at the bottom of Judith Robinson's regular column in the paper. Next to it is an almost page wide photograph of the King and Queen of Canada as they appeared in full regalia at a welcoming ceremony in Brantford, Ontario.

The only Canadian professional newspaper person to discuss the issue of the *St. Louis* in a regular column was Judith Robinson. A journalist with *The Globe and Mail*, she had gained a reputation during the Great Depression for investigative journalism and had a deep sense of social justice, often criticizing governments for their indifference to the sufferings of the common folk. Robinson was also a vocal adversary of the policy of appeasement pursued by both the British and Canadian Prime Ministers concerning the territorial ambitions of Nazi Germany. In her 8 June text, she first cited the Wrong telegram in its entirety, as mentioned above, and then commented – in contradiction to the feelings of most of her compatriots – that its content was "a reminder of a responsibility even more pressing than that of attendance of their Majesties".[56] Christian principles, she insisted, should have convinced members of the Mackenzie King cabinet that charity made no distinctions of race while the life of human beings were in peril. She then went on to cite the Gospels and in particular Mathew 25:40, which in her opinion should have been the guiding light in such a predicament as German Jewish refugees found themselves in. In all, Robinson's plea in favor of the *St. Louis* passengers' admission to Canada had a length of about 300 words, including the entire text of the Wrong telegram and citations from the Gospel. It was very little for Canada's largest newspaper, despite the columnist's good intentions and the pressing circumstances at hand. In all likelihood, very few readers would have dug in deep enough in that day's *Globe and Mail* to read Robinson's opinion or to understand the urgency of addressing the situation.

The next day, 9 June, across two columns in the middle of page 4, one of the 41 signatories of the Wrong telegram expressed his opinion on the refugee crisis, which *The Globe and Mail* had described up to then as an entirely Caribbean affair taking place very far from the seacoast of Canada. On the occasion of a Baptist convention, Bishop Robert John Renison, a Toronto Anglican priest and then rector of St. Paul's parish on Bloor St., declared: "Here in Canada, we ought to be helpful and happy, but I can't help but think of that ghost-ship that sails the Atlantic tonight carrying nearly 1,000 refugee Jews who came from the Old World toward this land of hope and glory and plenty. I think of them with death and suicide in their hearts, returning to the country whence they came."[57] It was three small paragraphs in a sea of information on all imaginable subjects, and on a page featuring five photographs of young men and women enjoying themselves at a sunny beach in the Toronto area. On the front page of *The Globe and Mail* that day was a large photograph of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and George VI approaching the White House in a motorcade, part of the royal tour that was now entering in its American segment amidst much media attention. Among the official retinue, surrounding the King in Washington stood Canada's Prime Minister, ever at the side of the monarch as a representative of his close cabinet of advisors. The tone of the newspaper that day was a far cry from a serious exploration of the fate of German Jewish refugees in the world. On the contrary, as one of its editorialists admitted, *The Globe and Mail*, had been rather happy to concentrate on the frivolities of a royal diplomatic mission being conducted throughout North America, rather than report on the menacing situation in Europe:

> Not the least benefit derived from the Canadian tour of their Majesties has been its effect in driving the swaggering dictators off the front page. This newspaper admits frankly that it has been guilty, along with others, of overplaying the gestures of the mountebanks and unconsciously helping them to spread the jitters. [...] Now it is up to us to take things in hand. We have reason to consider the dictator's balloon pricked. Their importance is relegated to the background. Let us keep it there until we find real cause for alarm and without relaxing safeguards, get on with the pressing business of making this domain of their Majesties more worthy of their sovereignty.[58]

If the threat of a world conflict had receded briefly in the early summer of 1939, at least on the front pages of Canadian papers, sending victims of Nazism back to Europe on board a luxury liner was certainly not going to trouble the conscience of local politicians and editorialists.[59] On 10 June, *La Presse* reported that the passengers of the *St. Louis* were still waiting for a resolution of the diplomatic impasse and that the boat was moving away from the coast of North America "à petite vapeur."[60] This, the readers could learn from an United Press dispatch, was while negotiations were taking place between Robert T. Pell, assistant chief of the Division of European Affairs of the American Secretary of State and four European governments. *La Presse* went on

to note that other passenger ships with German Jewish refugees on board – such as the *Orazio*, an Italian vessel, and the *Orduna*, a British one, bound for the Chilean port of Arica – were also experiencing great difficulties in finding South American ports willing to welcome their stateless passengers.[61] *La Presse* was the only one of the three newspapers that followed the situation of the *St. Louis* in any detail after 8 June, but it did so without mentioning that the government of Canada had been called upon by some of its own citizens to offer a solution to the refugee's ordeal. More likely than not, *La Presse*, a French language press organ, was not informed of such a possibility and had not obtained a copy of the Wrong telegram of 7 June.

The crisis came to an end on 14 June when a release from the American Press agency revealed that Britain, France, Belgium, and The Netherlands would share the responsibility of welcoming the passengers of the *St. Louis* on their soil. Apparently, efforts on the part of the American Secretary of State and Jewish American relief organizations had finally borne fruit. The *Globe and Mail* offered the news with no reference to the fact that the Canadian government had washed its hand of the fate of the refugees a few days earlier. The paper cited only the intervention of the American Joint Distribution Committee in offering a bond for each of the passengers on the liner "as a guarantee that the refugees would not become public charges of the nations giving them temporary homes".[62] The articles conveying this information were minor mentions easily lost to the distracted reader on a front page featuring, on 14 June, the visit of the royal couple to New Brunswick and announcing news of the Japanese blockade of British and French concessions in Shanghai. *La Presse* and *Le Devoir* followed suit the same day with even smaller size articles buried deep into the pages of the French language dailies, both using American sources and not mentioning a Canadian involvement.[63] Altogether, the three newspapers under study offered 23 news mentions of the St. Louis crisis over 16 days, from 31 May to 15 June, ten in the *Globe and Mail*, seven in *La Presse* and six in *Le Devoir*. Among them were twelve first page placements, mostly in *The Globe and Mail*, but not in a bold type susceptible to attract the immediate attention of most readers.

On 15 June, while the ill-fated passengers of the *St. Louis* had not yet set foot in Antwerp, *The Globe and Mail* published an editorial entitled "Immigration Means Employment", arguing that Canada had been too prejudiced or too narrow-minded to consider admitting men with abilities to contribute to the country's prosperity.[64] If Canada was to develop economically, proposed the Toronto newspaper, it must consider the advantages brought by the immigrants, such as an enlarged consumer market and increased domestic production, even in time of high employment:

> Increased production, whether it be of farm or factory, means work. This leads to another, the most important, feature of the immigration question we seem to have overlooked. Many of the people now seeking escape from Central Europe

> are highly skilled artisans. Many are distinguished in science, the arts, technology and commerce. Such people have a contribution to make wherever they are. Men with the courage to sacrifice home and all it implies sooner than conform to the autocratic mould [sic] are of the stuff of which democracy is made, the same stuff that colonized and pioneered this country.[65]

Upon close reading, the editorial of 15 June indirectly brings to light a serious disconnect between the events taking place in Cuba in the first few days of June, mainly the *St. Louis* affair, and the wider perception that *The Globe and Mail* held of international immigration; this at a time when large numbers of European citizens were being displaced by Nazi brutality. As Amanda Grzyb's study of English language Canadian newspapers between September 1938 and August 1939 reveals, editorialists and journalists were quite willing to show sympathy for the German Jewish victims of the Third Reich around the time of Kristallnacht.[66] They were much less adamant though, a few months later, about considering the admission of these individuals in large numbers within the country's border. As we saw, *The Globe and Mail* was ready to report in early June on the tribulations of a ship filled with close to a thousand German Jewish refugees, cruising in close proximity with the Canadian coast, but ignored the incident entirely when addressing a week later the issue of a possible beneficial immigration of "highly skilled" Central Europeans to the country.

As it was, hundreds of such candidates, all of Jewish origins, had just sailed at some distance past the Maritime Provinces on board the *St. Louis* without attracting the attention of Canadian journalists or publicists as prospective immigrants, despite their tragic situation. At no point did *The Globe and Mail* remind its readers in early June, as it would have been reasonable in the circumstances, that indeed here was a group of people whose profile came close to the desirable one about to be presented a few days later in the "Immigration Means Employment" editorial. *The Globe and Mail* went even further on 15 June, denouncing with strong words the apathy of Canadians to the advantages of welcoming new citizens. This shortsighted attitude, the editorialist mused, was due entirely to the anti-immigrant prejudice found rampant in Canadian public opinion: "Surely no one in Canada will argue that we have no need of and no place for enterprise of this kind. But that is, in effect, what our immigration phobia suggests".[67] From this we must conclude that the Toronto paper had only expressed empathy for the *St. Louis* passengers on an abstract and moral plane, but was not ready to consider in practical terms German Jews as acceptable candidates for immigration, even when they were experiencing close to the Canadian border an insensitive treatment on the part of Cuban and American authorities. In fact, it must be admitted that such a disengagement of the Canadian press from pressing refugee situations is quite typical of the immediate pre-war period. That was also the judgement passed by Mackenzie King and his close advisors when they refused, behind closed doors, to become involved in the *St. Louis* affair.

What would have happened had Canadian public opinion, in both official languages, been made aware in clear terms of the possibility of a Canadian rescue of the *St. Louis* passengers between 8 June and 10 June? That would have been while the ship was still close enough to the North American coast to change direction. Could popular pressure or perhaps even public indignation on the part of a large number of citizens have forced Ottawa to reconsider its initially negative decision? Even after more than eighty years, such a resolution of the *St. Louis* crisis remains highly speculative. There were very few precious hours between the sending of the Wrong telegram and the decision made by the captain to finally head back to Europe, still unaware of the possibility of a Canadian welcome. Why did *The Globe and Mail*, and other Canadian papers, neglect to report or perhaps choose to ignore the Canadian side of the affair? Was it for lack of information or because of a shameful inclination to reject outright "non-preferred" Jewish immigrants? All that can be confirmed, with some certainty, is that there was no substantial coverage of the affair in the Canadian press, both in English and in French at the crucial time when the *St. Louis* was leaving Cuba with almost all its initial passengers. Even the distant possibility of a Canadian solution to the crisis was not discussed by any editorialist or journalist after 7 June, save one. If Canada was guilty in this instance of an inhumane treatment of refugees, it was essentially because its mostly Anglophone political elite refused to address the issue openly and squarely in public.

There was also no intention on the part of the federal government, on the eve of the Second World War, to modify or even marginally alter a series of rules and regulations regarding immigration that had been in force since at least the turn of the century. These laws and administrative measures defined Canada as a "white dominion" composed of people of British stock or Nordic European origins. In this perspective, all other groups were deemed unacceptable or undesirable, with the possible exception in the late nineteenth century of farming communities considered sturdy enough to resist the harsh conditions existing in the unsettled Canadian West. No sufficient amount of political pressure could be brought forward in the late thirties, even by bona fide Anglo-British defenders of the European refugees of Nazism, to change the original racist overtones Canada's immigration policies. On this issue, there was certainly a large consensus, among the Anglophone and Francophone population of Canada that precluded admitting individuals of other ethnic stock under any circumstance, except on a one-to-one basis. That, essentially, was the larger obstacle that lay in the way of acceptance for the *St. Louis* passengers in June 1939, not merely antisemitism or social disdain for German Jews fleeing political persecution. It was, on all counts, a formidable ideological barrier that would not be removed in Canada until much later after the war, when British colonial notions of racial purity gradually ebbed in favor of a multicultural approach to citizenship.

Another issue that we have to grapple with in this instance is the inability on the part of Canadian elites, both Anglophone and Francophone, to perceive in all its consequences the violent and inhuman character of the racial policies applied in the Reich, especially against Jews. The mass murder of entire populations and the forced displacement of certain categories of individuals, with all the attendant sufferings, humiliations and material destructions, are realities that Canadians could simply not imagine being conducted on such a scale as was about to be implemented in Central and Eastern Europe. Most citizens of Canada had not followed events in Germany with much attention, and saw no reason to oppose sending back victims of Nazi persecutions in what appeared to be safe havens on that continent. Who could foresee in the summer of 1939 that France, Belgium and the Netherlands would be occupied a year later by a German military force, and that Great Britain would be under the threat of a pending invasion? All in all these reasons would lead to a failure on the part of Canada to provide a credible and humanitarian answer to a crisis taking place at the country's doorstep. On the rare occurrence when immigrants tried to force their way into a Canadian port – as in the case of the *Komagata Maru* in Vancouver in 1914 – authorities had always stood firm and pushed the intruders away. Canada's immigration policies had not been designed to react to emergencies and crisis situations, but to stem the long-term flow of undesirables right from the start, before they began their journey. As the *St. Louis* affair would demonstrate, the country was not at all prepared in June 1939 to react to the new conditions under which immigration would soon take place, in a world torn by military conflicts and genocidal impulses. Canadians, both French and English speaking, had deep isolationist reflexes and did not for the most part perceive the storm clouds of the Second World War coming towards them in the distance.

1
The three main legal documents mentioned here are: Statutes of Canada, "An Act Respecting Immigration", 9-10 Edward VII, Chap. 27, Assented to 4th May, 1910; Statutes of Canada, "An Act to Amend the Immigration Act", 9-10 George V, Chap. 25, Assented to 6th June, 1919 and Order-in-Council PC 1923-183. All three can be found on the web site of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canada-and-ms-st-louis (consulted January 29, 2020).

2
For the Chinese Exclusion Act see: https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/chinese-immigration-act-1923 (consulted January 29, 2020).

3
Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews, a Social and Economic Study of the Jews in Canada*, Montreal, Canadian Jewish Congress, Bureau of Social and Economic Research, 1939, p. 127.

4
Idem.

5
Statutes of Canada, "An Act Respecting Immigration", 9-10 Edward VII, Chap. 27, Assented to 4th May, 1910, article 38c.

6
Statutes of Canada, "An Act to Amend the Immigration Act", 9-10 George V, Chap. 25, Assented to 6th June, 1919, article 13c.

7
For a detailed analysis of the historical figures pertaining to Canadian immigration between 1867 to 2014 consult Statistics Canada archived web pages "150 years of immigration in Canada" at https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm (consulted January 29, 2020).

8
Joseph Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving : the Story of Two Hundred Years of Jewish Immigration and Immigrant Aid Effort in Canada (1760-1960)*, Montreal, The Eagle Publishing Co., 1962, p. 259-260.

9
Idem, p. 259-260.

10
For this aspect see: Eric Koch, *Deemed Suspect; A War Time Blunder*, Toronto, Methuen, 1980 and Pierre Anctil, "L'internement des Juifs allemands sur les Plaines d'Abraham à l'été 1940, Pierre Anctil and Simon Jacobs, eds., *Les Juifs de Quebec, quatre cents ans d'histoire*, Quebec, Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2015, p. 165-179.

11
Justin Comartin, *Humanitarian Ambitions – International Barriers: Canadian Governmental Response to the Plight of the Jewish Refugees (1933-1945)*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa, M.A. thesis in History, 2013, p. 132.

12
Dirks, Gerald. *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference of Opportunism?* Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977, p. 316.

13
David C. Atkinson, *The Burdens of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Migration in the British Empire and the United States*, Chapel Hill, N.C., The University of North Carolina Press, 2017, p. 334

14
Statutes of Canada, "An Act Respecting Immigration", 9-10 Edward VII, Chap. 27, Assented to 4th May, 1910, article 38c.

15
Pierre Anctil, « Uneven Perceptions; Kristallnacht in the Yiddish and French-Language Press of Montreal » (p. 90-107) in Colin McCullough and Nathan Wilson (eds.), *Violence, Memory and History; Western Perceptions of Kristallnacht*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 169.

16
Irving Abella and Harold Troper. *None is Too Many; Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012 [1983], p. 66. The 2012 edition is an exact reproduction of the 1983 edition.

17
See Amanda Grzyb, "From Kristallnacht to the MS St. Louis Tragedy: Canadian Press Coverage of Nazi Persecution of the Jews and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, September 1938 to August 1939" in L. Ruth Klein, *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses; Confronting Antisemitism in the Shadow of War*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012, p. 78-113.

18
Laurel Leff, *Buried by the* Times*; the Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, 444 p. Leff presents this argument very convincingly for *The New York Times*.

19
Robert Tiegrob, *Four Days in Hitler's Germany; Mackenzie King's Mission to Avert a Second World War,* Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2019, 256 p. See also, Ian Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry, the Nazis and the Road to War*, Toronto, Penguin Books, 2005, p. 509.

20
For a discussion of this issue consult : Pierre Anctil, « A Double Standard : The Respective Responsibilities of English and French Language Canada in the German Refugee », special insert to *Canadian Jewish Studies*, vol 26, no. 2, 2018.

21
See Pierre Anctil, *'À chacun ses Juifs', 60 éditoriaux pour comprendre la position du* Devoir à l'égard des Juifs, 1910-1947, Sillery, Éditions du Septentrion, 2014, 452 p.; translated by Tonu Onu as : *A Reluctant Welcome for Jewish People : Voices in* Le Devoir's *Editorials, 1910-1947*, Ottawa, the University of Ottawa Press, 2019, p. 390

22
Pierre Anctil, 2019, *op. cit*.

23
Georges Pelletier, 'À chacun ses Juifs', *Le Devoir*, 3 décembre 1938, p. 1. The editorial has been translated by Tonu Onu under the title "To Everyone Their Own Jews" in *A Reluctant Welcome for Jewish People; Voices in Le Devoir's Editorials, 1910-1947*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 2019, p. 171-174.

24
Published in Quebec City, *L'Action catholique* was the newspaper with the largest circulation in that city.

25
The full results of this research should be published in the course of 2021 by the University of Ottawa Press.

26
The research conducted by Grzyb touched only the English language press of Canada and specifically during the *St. Louis* crisis of June 1939. All observations on her part about the French language press used secondary sources, most of which are of dubious value methodologically.

27
Robert Tiegrob, *Four Days in Hitler's Germany: Mackenzie King's Mission to Avert a Second World War*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2019, p. 256.

28
The departure date from Hamburg vary in the literature available. The most reliable source for this type of information is probably the web site of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, which has May 13 as the start of the voyage of the *St. Louis*. https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canada-and-ms-st-louis (consulted January 29, 2020).

29
Alfred Rosenberg was the author in 1930 of one of the most significant interpretations of the Nazi race theory: *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. See Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professor; the Part Played by Scholarship in Germany's Crimes Against the Jewish People*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999 [1946], 304 p.

30
That being the date when the captain of the *St. Louis* decided to sail back to Europe and abandoned all hope of disembarking his passengers in the American hemisphere.

31
On June 5, on page 6, *The Globe and Mail* published a full editorial on the *Thetis* tragedy, entitled: "the *Thetis* Disaster ". No French language paper in Canada published comments on the event.

32
In 1939, there were no notable differences on this subject between the English language and French language press. *Le Devoir* published three editorials on the royal visit, on June 10, "On n''empiège' pas ainsi les vrais Canadiens"; on June 12, "Le voyage des souverains » and June 14, « Avant le départ », all on page 1. *La Presse* offered an editorial on June 12, page 6, entitled: "De retour dans la province". All were rather positive about the tour and the institution of the monarchy in Canada. It is important to note that the Francophone press in Canada was as enthusiastic as the Anglophone press with regards to the royal tour and also devoted a large part of its front pages to the covering the month long event. Antipathy for the British monarchy would surface in Quebec only after the Quiet Revolution of the sixties.

33
The Prime Minister had the same reaction in September 1945, when news of an alleged Soviet defection reached him while he was about to open the first session of the 20th Canadian parliament. It was several days before Mackenzie King finally reacted officially to the Gouzenko affair, the first major crisis of the Cold War.

34
Norman Hillmer, *O.D. Skelton: Work of the World, 1923-1941*, Toronto, the Publications of the Champlain Society, 2013, p. 517. ; For documentation on this aspect of the crisis, see the Pier 21 web site as mentioned previously.

35
The text of the 1923 order in council can be found on the Pier 21 web site: https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/order-in-council-pc-1931-695-1931. (consulted January 29, 2020).

36
It should not be concluded from the absence of Francophone signatories in this telegram, as some authors have suggested, that No French-Canadians opinion leaders did view such a request favorably. The urgency of the situation, and the almost complete absence of social contact between the two dominant linguistic groups at the time probably account for the uniquely Anglophone character of the June 7 telegram to Mackenzie King.

37
Both the Wrong telegram and King's answer are found on the Pier 21 web site.

38
The documents supporting this interpretation are also on the web site of Pier 21.

39
John MacFarlane, *Ernest Lapointe and Quebec' influence on Canadian Foreign Policy*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999, p. 270. ; Lapointe was acting Prime Minister while Mackenzie King was touring the United States with George VI.

40
The first news about the situation of the *St. Louis* refugees in Cuba appeared in *The New York Times* on May 28.

41
Texts on the *St. Louis* crisis were found using visual identification and the key words "Jews/ Juifs", "Cuba" and "St-Louis" through the resources offered by the Pro Quest Historical Newspaper web site, in the case of *The Globe and Mail*, and those of the Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec in the case of *La Presse* and *Le Devoir*.

42
Thomas Crerar was officially minister of Mines and Resources in the Mackenzie King cabinet from 1936 to 1945, an office that comprised the responsibilities of the ministry of Immigration and Colonization abolished in 1936. Crerar himself was an ardent anti-immigration personality and an advocate of the Western agrarian lobby in Ottawa.

43
"Cuba Rejects German Jews", *The Globe and Mail*, May 31st, 1939, p. 1. This is the first mention of the incident in a Canadian newspaper. *Le Devoir* would reveal the ordeal of the *St. Louis* refugees only on June 1st and *La Presse* on June 2nd.

44
"Refugee Liner Ignores Order to Leave Cuba", *The Globe and Mail*, June 2nd, 1939, p. 1, 2.

45
"Dominica Offers Haven to Refugees Barred at Havana", *The Globe and Mail*, June 3rd, 1939, p. 1, 3.

46
"Cuba fermé à ces Juifs sans patrie", *La Presse*, June 2nd, 1939, p. 3. ; "Les émigrés de la Havane ont un abri", *La Presse*, June 3rd, 1939, p. 1.

47
That eventuality never materialized since the *St. Louis* quickly set its course directly to Europe after navigating close to the Florida coast.

48
"Liner Carries Refugee Jews into Caribbean", *The Globe and Mail*, June 5th, 1939, p. 1. For a description of these negotiations between the Cuban Government and the American Joint Distribution Committee see: C. Paul Vincent, "The Voyage of the St. Louis Revisited", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, August 2011, p. 252-285.

49
"Le 'Saint-Louis' vu au large de la Floride", *La Presse*, June 5th, 1939, p. 1.

50
"Offer Respite to Wandering Jews on Liner", *The Globe and Mail*, June 6th, 1939, p. 1. ; "Cuba a déjà reçu 7,000 réfugiés", *Le Devoir*, June 6th, 1939, p. 3.

51
"La question des réfugiés à la Havane », *La Presse*, June 7th, 1939, p. 1.

52
"Les 907 Juifs du 'Saint-Louis' en route pour l'Allemagne », *Le Devoir*, June 7th, 1939, p. 1.

53
During the thirties, unlike in more recent periods, news published on the front page of a Canadian daily do not necessarily reflect the gravity of an event. Front pages of *The Globe and Mail*, *La Presse* and *Le Devoir*

during those years are cluttered with small-scale information and little attention is paid to classifying news by importance. This is especially true of *Le Devoir* that places its editorials and other opinion pieces on the front page. All of the so-called front-page coverage of the *St. Louis* crisis in *The Globe and Mail* for the period between May 31st and June 6th are for articles covering 5 % or less of the actual surface of that page. Grzyb's methodology in this respect is misleading when claiming that the *St. Louis* tragedy was present on the "front pages" of *The Globe and Mail* during several days. Although true, this statement does not necessarily reflect the importance afforded to the crisis by the paper. The difference in the number of articles printed is in part due to the smaller size of the French language newspapers compared to *The Globe and Mail*.

54
"Brief Reunion in Havana Has Tearful Ending", *The Globe and Mail*, June 6th, 1939, p. 3.

55
The editorial appears on a Wednesday, two days later. ; "Strange Business", *The Globe and Mail*, June 7th, 1939, p. 6, col. 3.

56
Judith Robinson, "Forty-second Signature is Invisible", *The Globe and Mail*, June 8th, 1939, p. 17.

57
"Canada Condemns Jews to Suicide, Says Renison", *The Globe and Mail*, June 9th, 1939, p. 4.

58
"Let Us Get On With Things", *The Globe and Mail*, June 5, 1939, p. 6.

59
The Globe and Mail also reported on the progress of the *St. Louis* that day (June 9), but on page 34 in an article entitled: "Havana Becomes 'Port Despair' to Another Group of Refugees". The *St. Louis*, explained the news dispatch, "cruised idly off Bermuda today, while those aboard hoped some American country would receive them".

60
"La Bolivie reçoit 383 immigrants", *La Presse*, June 10, 1939, p. 1.

61
Idem.

62
"Drifting Jews Offered Haven by 4 Countries", *The Globe and Mail*, June 14, 1939, p. 1, 10. A last article appeared in the *Globe and Mail* the following day mentioning Antwerp, Belgium, as the landing place of the *St. Louis* passengers: "Belgians Give Haven to Jews", June 15, 1939, p. 3.

63
"Des refuges enfin pour ces 907 Juifs », *La Presse*, June 14, 1939, p. 26 and « Les Juifs errants du 'St. Louis' », *Le Devoir*, June 14, 1939, p. 7.

64
For the position of *Le Devoir* on the issue of immigration at that period, consult : Pierre Anctil, *'Soyons nos maîtres'; 60 éditoriaux pour comprendre* Le Devoir *sous Georges Pelletier (1932-1947)*, Sillery, les Éditions du Septentrion, 2013, p. 484.

65
"Immigration Mean Employment", *The Globe and Mail*, June 15, 1939, p. 6, col. 2.

66
Amanda Grzyb, *op. cit.*

67
"Immigration Means Employment", *op. cit.*