

***Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States.* Edited by Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2010. 346pp. £65.00 (hardback).**

Since the late 1960s, the immigration policies of the west European democracies and the United States, which limited the admission of Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria under the Nazi dictatorship, have been a controversial and morally troubling question in the study of the prehistory of the Holocaust. The historians contributing essays to this volume discuss with nuance and balance the failure of political decision-makers to assign a higher priority to the rescue of Jews in peril. This examination of immigration management in its historical context ends at the outbreak of the Second World War 'to rule out any teleological discussion' of the policies in the 1930s in relation to the extermination of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe after 1940 (p. 8). In their long comparative analysis in Part 2, Caestecker and Moore contend that the arrival of Jewish refugees was a catalyst in the push for restrictive immigration controls in the late 1930s, 'but [this process] has to be seen primarily as a continuation of policies adopted to counter the effects of economic recession rather than directed specifically against those fleeing from Germany' (p. 315).

The transnational perspective of this book is mainly devoted to the 'frontline states' that had common land frontiers with Germany—Switzerland, France, Luxemburg, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark. As the Nazi regime became more determined and brutal in stripping German and Austrian Jews of their assets and pushing them out, the governments of these countries resorted to tighter controls at their borders and consulates to withstand the pressures of a mass migration of refugees who would become a 'public burden'. The essays of Vicki Caron, Susan Hein and the two editors are especially effective in demonstrating the domino effect and spiralling dynamic of these controls. Hein observes that the reactions of the frontline states were 'related to each other in a negative way'. No government wanted to be seen as more sympathetic to the plight of Jewish emigrants than its neighbours and 'to lag behind in respect to immigration restrictions in order not to make the country the last accessible haven for refugees who had been rejected everywhere else' (p. 38).

The authors convey strikingly the scale of the refugee crisis in 1938/39 and the fears of an 'inundation' of immigrants in the democracies of western Europe. Up to this time, the authorities had managed the flow of German-Jewish refugees by granting them temporary protection, residency permits until they could remigrate overseas. Emigration from the Third Reich swelled and became more coercive and chaotic after the Austria *Anschluss* in March 1938 and in the aftermath of the

Kristallnacht pogroms and the annexations of the Sudetenland and Bohemia-Moravia. Luxembourg, Belgium and France protested when the German police literally dumped groups of Jews across their borders. After right-wing Polish nationalists introduced discriminatory measures with the intention of pressuring the Jewish minority to emigrate, officials in western Europe had ‘well-founded fears’ of the migration of hundreds of thousands of refugees from eastern Europe. They thought that ‘any generosity to refugees from Germany might well stimulate the impatience and rapacity of the Polish and Hungarian governments to solve “their” Jewish question in the same way as Nazi Germany had attempted to do’ (p. 277).

The problem of illegal immigration led government ministers in Belgium, the Netherlands and other frontline states to order the police to round up refugees who had crossed the border without the proper documents and to repatriate them swiftly to Germany. When the expulsion of desperate illegal immigrants provoked humanitarian protests, the authorities turned increasingly to methods of remote control in order to manage migration away from domestic public scrutiny. Using ethnically and racially neutral terms, the instructions given to consular officials made it difficult for Jews to obtain visas if they were likely to stay permanently in the country without the financial means of supporting themselves and their dependents. In her essay on the *Kindertransporte*, Claudia Curio contends that the admission of German-Jewish children to Britain, Belgium and Switzerland was ‘utilized to cushion the inhumanity of policies towards alien immigration’ and to distract public attention from the worsening conditions for adult refugees (p. 183).

Several contributors to the volume conclude from their research that the disparate practices of officials ‘make it difficult to draw a conclusive picture’ of prewar refugee policy, as Regula Ludi states in her essay on Switzerland (p. 98). Swiss consular officials in northern Italy admitted Jewish refugees in defiance of federal instructions. Caron points out that some French officials objected to the enforcement of cruel measures and turned a blind eye when refugees crossed the border illegally. Caestecker and Moore argue that ‘civil servants’ autonomy to act independently of political influences or public opinion may have served either to strengthen the enforcement of regulation, or equally to have provided some amelioration of these same regulations’. These freedoms ‘may help to explain why it is difficult to ascertain exactly how alien and immigration policies were implemented at the border or by police and bureaucrats inside the country’ (p. 323).

The noteworthy strengths of this work are its transnational and comparative perspective and its nuanced analysis of the disparate practices of refugee policy below the level of discourse and official decision-making. The question of whether the callous treatment of Jewish refugees was rooted in antisemitic prejudice is, however, not discussed sufficiently. The refugees and the aid organizations within the local Jewish community, which shouldered the financial responsibility for the refugees up to the time of their remigration, are present in this account as highly abstract figures, without a human face and voice. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, this work provides a thoughtfully critical examination of the controls used by officials in western Europe to manage the migration from the Third Reich and to withstand the pressures on their frontiers during the refugee crisis of 1938/39.