CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Martin was...a typical pure-bred Anglo-Saxon American which means he was a union of German, French, Scotch, Irish, perhaps a little Spanish, conceivably a little of the strains lumped together as "Jewish" and a great deal English, which is itself a combination of primitive Briton, Celt, Phoenician, Roman, German, Dane and Swede.

Sinclair Lewis

It is that anomalous, nondescript...thing, neither foreigner nor native, yet a moiety of each, now one, now the other, both or neither, as circumstances suit, against whom I war.

Samuel F. B. Morse

War, revolution, oppression, famine and pestilence have afflicted mankind since the dawn of history. These "scourges" do not descend with equal severity on all. The instinct of self-preservation leads men to seek some escape from the dangers


that threaten them and to find a haven where they can make a
new life for themselves. Men who flee from their place of origin
and seek refuge elsewhere at a time of crisis are refugees. The
lot of the refugee is never an enviable one--especially if he is
poor, aged or infirm. He is unwanted at home and unwelcome and
suspect at the place where he seeks to remake his life.

The society that receives the refugees, voluntarily
or otherwise, is confronted by several constraints. Linguistic,
regional, ethnic and other differences in society make it
difficult for any one nation to open its doors to outsiders who
knock at it. Normally the receiving society is relatively less
resistant to receiving people of its own kind. Also, the
receiving country is more sympathetic towards refugees from a
country that it considers friendly. It entertains suspicions
about refugees from those countries which it considers as hostile.
The nation faced with the problem of admitting refugees has to
deal with conflicting opinions put forth by different groups in
its own domain. There is usually a group with humanistic ideals
that will point out the duty of providing a haven to helpless
refugees. It will argue that the refugees would add to the work
force of the country, and bring in some special skills. Such
infusion of people of different cultural background will add to
the cultural and spiritual strength of the country. Opposed to
them will be others who attach importance to the preservation of
the racial and cultural homogeneity of the population and who
are anxious to safeguard the institutions of the country from
contamination by alien ideas. This group is disturbed by the adverse implications of an influx of refugees. Such conflicting postures lead to tensions in the receiving country.

It is easier for any country to express sympathy and moral support to a distant people fighting for certain principles that the former upholds. Statements expressing sympathy and support do not involve any cost in real terms. The problems arise only when a country is specifically faced with the problem of receiving refugees in its midst. In view of the constraints mentioned, the gap between the expressions of help as contrasted to actual help becomes the target of criticism from those who, for one reason or another, favour the entry of that group of refugees. The admission of even a small number becomes the subject of criticism for those who are opposed to opening the door to that group of refugees at all.

The Government of the receiving country has thus to weigh the relative strength of domestic protagonists and opponents of the admission of any particular group of refugees. Governments usually do not embark on actions that are likely to injure them seriously. They are willing to tailor their actions in such a way that domestically the political advantages could be maximized and the disadvantages minimized. There are other dimensions of the problem that such a Government has to bear in mind. One dimension is the possible propaganda that it may be able to reap in other countries or the possible damage to its image if its response is negative or inadequate. A more serious
dimension is the effect of a positive or negative attitude on its part in its dealings with rival and hostile nations. The policy-makers will have to decide what courses may lead to consequences that the country could live with and what courses might lead to possible, unacceptable consequences. Thus the refugee issue has not merely domestic and propaganda dimensions, but a foreign policy dimension as well.

The present study is concerned with the response of the United States to the problem posed by Hungarian refugees following the uprising of 1956.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. American citizens, politicians, and scholars speak with pride of this aspect of its history. In the beginning, the attitude of the colonies and subsequently of the young Republic was to welcome immigrants since their land was vast and the population small. But from the earliest times too people in one pocket of land had their own reservations about immigrants not of similar origin or faith. Although "West European" Protestant immigrants were welcomed, this was accompanied by stresses and strains that operate in any receiving society. After a point the influx of immigrants from other areas and faiths was viewed with apprehension and elements of suspicion came to assert themselves.

Two rival groups—one supporting the entry of aliens and the other opposing it—have continuously existed in the history of the United States. The various groups of immigrants
have been welcomed by voluntary agencies representing a particular national group or a particular ethnic group. They have also been welcomed by those who believed in the idea of a "melting pot" whereby everyone would be assimilated into the American way of life to produce something uniquely "American". Some Americans who envisaged an international role to the United States by its becoming the home for the best skills in various societies and by its assuming the moral leadership of upholding a particular ideology also supported the admittance of immigrants. The entry of aliens has been staunchly opposed by nationalist groups and relatively recently by organized labour. This was done with the idea of preventing subversive elements from entering the United States and protecting the American labour from foreign competition. These views found organized expression when politicians saw in them an opportunity to gain political dividends.

This has been a recurrent theme in American immigration history. Every time a group of immigrants or refugees wanted to enter the United States the scenario could almost be predicted: groups referring to earlier clarion calls and wanting to build the image of the United States as a nation receiving the world's oppressed would support their admittance; groups zealously guarding the "purity" of the American race and the rights of the American labourer would oppose it; public opinion would rise against too many immigrants coming in and taking away the jobs of Americans and ruining the American system with new ideas.
The Government would weigh the pros and cons and the final decision would reflect its appraisal and the support that it is able to get for it from Congress. This scene has been oft repeated and almost always in the same vein. A similar scene was enacted when the United States was confronted with the Hungarian refugee problem. To understand the attitude of the United States in this particular instance, a brief survey of the evolution of the American attitude towards the admittance of aliens may be appropriate.

THE EARLY PERIOD

The anti-foreign feeling prevalent in the United States in the earlier phase of its history had in it strains of religious intolerance as well as overzealous adherence to native values. The religious intolerance took the form successively of antipathy to other denominations, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism. These fears were voiced and nourished by various individuals and took a political shape that culminated in the formation of American Party, popularly known as the Know-Nothing Party in 1854.

The antipathy for foreigners was mainly due to the fear of American labourer's job being taken away by the newcomers and the penniless condition of most of the refugees and immigrants who came into the United States from Europe. But quite a few refugee groups did find an entry into the United
States in spite of this. After the French Revolution of 1789, political emigres began coming into the United States during various phases of French history. During the Napoleonic regime, the Bourbon restoration and the reign of Louis Phillippe and later many sought political asylum in the United States.

The early nineteenth century saw the coming of German refugees after the student society persecutions of 1817-20, the political tyranny of 1830s and the socialist upheavals of 1880s. A group of educated refugees came after the Polish revolutions of 1830, 1848, 1861, and 1862. Irish refugees also sought refuge about the same time. Socialist uprisings in Austria-Hungary, that were killed before they could gain momentum, brought in refugees in the mid-19th century.

With the potato famines in Belgium, Netherlands, Ireland and Germany began a flow of economic and political refugees. The number of these refugees was augmented after the religious restrictions in Portugal, Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. An Asiatic influx to the west coast began at the close of the nineteenth century and at about the same time there was the Russian Jewish influx to the east coast.

The foreign arrivals were scorned for their shabby existence and their willingness to put the American labourer at a disadvantage by accepting a lower wage. Apart from religious fervour that created prejudices, economically and politically the immigrant was regarded as a threat to the smooth flow of life in the continent. The foreign vote could tilt the balance between the Whigs and the Democrats in the elections. The situation of an American labourer was described by a Know-Nothing Party supporter in the following words:

He finds every post occupied—occupied by foreigners. There is nothing left to him but submission or beggary. In the workshop, on the farm, and in the public offices, the effect is the same. In every department he encounters the drudging and importunate foreigner. 4

The Know-Nothing Party exaggerated the adverse influence of the foreign population. It argued that "all the dens of inequity, taverns, grog-shops, beer houses, gambling places, and houses of defame and worse deeds" were kept by foreigners. 5 It attributed the crimes of the cities to the foreign population. The Know-Nothing Party raised the first cry for restriction in immigration. Most of the immigrants


who came into the United States from 1845 to 1854 with no special skills and were classified in the records under the "no occupation" column. They were willing to accept any job. It was asserted that the "no occupation" groups were brought in "direct competition with American labor" and that the antagonism between the American labourer and the foreigner would hasten the conflict between the two. The Party presented a grim picture of the consequences of unrestricted immigration:

This unlimited and unrestricted admission of foreign emigrants is a serious injury to the native labouring population, socially, morally, religiously, and politically; socially, by overstocking the labor market and thus keeping the wages down; morally and religiously, by unavoidable contact and intercourse; and politically, by consequence of want of employment and low wages, making them needy and dependent, whereby they become the easy prey or willing tools of designing and unprincipled politicians. And in this way the native population is deteriorated and made poor, needy, subservient; and these realities produce want of self-respect, hopelessness, laxity in morals, recklessness, delinquencies, and crimes.

Apart from the extreme pauperism of the immigrants that created antagonism, another reason for apprehension on the part of "native" Americans was the formation of radical German political groups and their increased activity. Fears concerning


7. Extract from Emigration, Emigrants and Know-Nothings, n. 5, p. 293.
them found vent in anti-German riots from 1806 onwards. Some
of the riots were aimed particularly at the Catholic section of
the German population.

In 1837 the North American Association of the United
States was formed to check the influence of the radical socie-
ties. In Baltimore and New Orleans papers were published to
counteract the allegedly adverse effects of foreign immigration.
The prospectus of the Baltimore Native American included among
its objectives "the repeal of the Naturalization laws, re-
establishment of the rights of native Americans, and defeat of
those parties adverse to those interests". 8

Legislative steps towards immigration restriction were
taken in the 1880s. In 1882 the concept of selective immi-
grant was introduced in the immigration laws. A law was passed
excluding convicts, lunatics, idiots and paupers from the
country. This was followed in 1885 by the contract labour law
which prohibited employers from recruiting labour in Europe
and paying their passage. By the first law, the Congress
established its right to decide on the "quality" of the
immigrants coming in. This approach to "quality" in restric-
ting immigration culminated in the literacy test provision of
the 1917 bill. Bills incorporating the literacy test provision
were vetoed by Presidents G. Cleveland and William H. Taft,
and twice by President Woodrow Wilson. Although Wilson

8. W. Dorell Overdyke, The Know-Nothing Party in the South
(Louisiana, 1950), p. 4.
knew that the mood of the country was against the admission of all types of aliens, he continued to plead for a liberal immigration policy. In the 1912 election campaign, he answered his critics saying "the only blunder I have made, the only practical blunder I have made in my interest in a liberal policy with regard to immigration, is that I got into the wrong society to encourage it". 9 He felt that the bill incorporating the literacy test provision and other restrictions of political asylum, was a "radical departure from the traditional and long-established policy" of the country. Wilson was of the view that the bill did not embody the "spirit of the nation in respect of its relations to the peoples of the world outside" the borders of the United States. After Wilson's second veto, the Congress promptly repassed the bill by large majorities in 1917. 10

By passing the Literacy Test Act along with restrictions of political asylum, the Congress had sown the seeds of isolationism which was to be the trend after the war. A liberal immigration policy at this time would mean responsibilities after the war. It would mean taking an active interest in the migratory problems that would arise after the war. By safeguarding

against such a prospect the ground was prepared for the post-war mood of isolationism.

The passage of the Literacy Test Act was considered as a victory of labour over the President. Samuel Gompers, the President of the American Federation of Labour, was convinced that the only way to protect labourers from being exploited by Big Business that imported cheap labour and hired strike breakers was to fight strongly for a restrictive immigration. Himself an immigrant, he found it a "grave responsibility" to restrict opportunities for others. However, he felt that the number of immigrants was rapidly increasing and that the "admixture of various races was too rapid for assimilation". Hence the labour movement in the United States was a vehement supporter of restrictive immigration policies. It played an important role in making the passage of the literacy test provision possible. When Wilson vetoed the bill in 1914, Gompers wrote to John L. Burnett, Chairman of the House Committee on Immigration, in whose name the immigration bill was introduced, elaborating several reasons why the President's objections should not deter the Congress from repassing the measure. He pointed out that the officers of the National Liberal Immigration League were financed by Big Business. Recalling the passage of this immigration bill in his memoirs, Gompers remarked that the "dangers etched on a background of war had been sufficiently conclusive to convince a two-third majority of both the Houses
in Congress that it was necessary to conserve American institutions". After President Wilson's second veto the bill was passed again thanks to the vigorous lobbying by organized labour.

An analysis of the racial feelings and the growing trend towards restriction would be incomplete without an understanding of the attitude towards Oriental immigration. The gold rush in California in 1849 brought in many Chinese immigrants. After the Civil War the Chinese became workers on construction of the Central Pacific Railroad. But when California was hit by the depression an anti-Chinese agitation began. A treaty was negotiated with China in 1880, by which the American Government could regulate or suspend but not totally prohibit Chinese immigration into the United States. However, this treaty was totally disregarded in 1882 when the Chinese Exclusion Act, excluding Chinese for a decade, was passed. This was renewed after every ten years and finally became law in 1904.

More or less the same treatment was meted out to the Japanese immigrants. The Japanese came into the United States in the 1890s. The agitation against the Japanese followed very soon. In 1906, when the San Francisco School board issued an order segregating all Chinese, Japanese and Korean children

in the public schools, the President intervened and an agreement was reached with the Japanese Government to withhold passports from the Japanese labourers planning to go to the United States. The agreement did not say anything about stopping Japanese immigration into the United States. This was the well-known Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907. This agreement was flouted when the Quota Law, which will be dealt with later, came into effect in 1924. By this, Japan was excluded from the list of countries to be given a quota. This prevented Japanese immigrants from coming to the United States.12

BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

A historian writing on American nativism was not far wrong when he called the 'twenties the "Tribal Twenties".13

The 'Twenties were years when the "crusading spirit" of 1917 had spent itself out and the people wanted to travel back in time to years not disturbed by involvement in the affairs of other countries, "Red Scare", or rising costs of living. They were "trying to make a bridge back to yesterday". The war created severe repercussions in the American society and Harding's campaign slogan "Back to Normalcy" catered to the moods of the times and the refrain was taken up by many enthusiastic voters who wanted to keep Europe away from their thoughts.14

There began a tendency to play up the nativist feelings with the Ku Klux Klan striving to come back to life in the wake of the "Red Scare". The latter part of 1919 set off an anti-Japanese hysteria in California which continued into the year 1920. The antagonism for foreign elements and the eagerness to adhere to native American values was not very different from pre-war trends of anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism or hatred for southeastern Europeans. In a way, it was a carry over of the pre-war fears and antagonisms which for a time were held in check by the involvement in the war. However, the forms these fears and dislikes took were more pronounced and definite and to a certain extent, set the pace for policy towards restriction in immigration.

The American manufacturers had fervently advocated the repeal of the literacy test provision. But the war time upsurge of emotions and the Red Scare made them too somewhat frightened of immigration. The American manufacturers felt that the United States was not getting the best labour from Europe, which fact confirmed, according to them, that the influx of such a labour on American economy would deteriorate its standards. Richard H. Edmonds, the editor of Manufacturers'

16. Ibid., p. 303.
Record wrote that material progress at the expense of national life would be apparent and not real. He also said that the better class of people from Europe did not migrate to the United States with the result that the United States would have to deal with the "anarchistic, the diseased morally and physically, and the incompetents". Henry Ford, the industrial tycoon, was an avid supporter of restrictive immigration policies. Ford was personally affected by the war. The economic slump of 1920 hit him rather badly. His antagonism for the Jews was only for their role of financiers, initially. Ford conducted his anti-Jewish campaign through his journal Dearborn Independent. At times the anti-Jewish propaganda and the anti-Bolshevik propaganda of the period got interlinked and Jewry was identified with Bolshevism. Jews were accused of leading and supporting the Bolshevik revolution and this made the position of the Jews in the United States precarious. The Jews of the United States had to publicly declare their enmity towards the Jews of Russia and the Bolshevik leaders.

Certain members of the American Expeditionary Forces in France during the war, viewed with concern the extreme political radicalism which they feared would spread everywhere.

after the 1917 revolution. Returning to the United States, a group of "veterans" formed the American Legion in May 1919 to prevent the spread of any such radical movements in the United States. In the Charter of the Legion among other aims, one was "to foster and perpetuate hundred per cent Americanism". The Legion's programme, popularly known as the programme of Americanism, was to preserve the American institutions. The Legion's major fight was against Bolshevist aliens and those who spread Bolshevist ideas. It saw "red" in every alien. The American Legion acted as a pressure group to push through the Congress restrictive immigration bills.20

Organized labour continued to be against the entry of too many immigrants. Samuel Gompers expressed the view that too many immigrants would break down the standard of living of the American people. "Shutting out from our shores the poor of other nations and races is caused by the law of necessity and self-protection consequent upon our industrial system", he said.21 "Labor does not declare that America is for Americans alone", he asserted, "but it does insist that there should be and must be such a restriction of immigration as will prevent disintegration of American economic standards".22

22. Ibid.
The prevalent opinion of the period was that the American society had reached the limit of its capacity to absorb foreigners. The melting pot was broken by the First World War. The reason given for this incapacity to absorb any more foreigners was that the foreigners failed to assimilate themselves into the American society. This was understood to be a direct threat to all that was American. James J. Davis, Secretary of Labour, spoke for many when he said in 1923: "When those who come to us from abroad fail to consecrate themselves wholly and entirely to America, the American life, American institutions and American ideals, then we will have lost the thing which has made America great". 23

It was also believed that the population then seeking refuge was of an inferior variety. Increasing crimes were associated with the immigrants from south and central Europe and there was fear that this might lead to a "dilution of the population". 24

It is with this picture of the American society that one should understand the passage of the Quota Act of 1921 and 1924. The first Quota Act of 1921 limited the number of aliens of any country who might be admitted into the United

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23. USA, Congressional Record, vol. 67, 23 April 1936, p. 5929.

States to three per cent of the number of persons belonging to that nationality residing in the United States. This was based on the census of 1910. The total quota for all the countries, according to this, was 357,803. The second quota system was incorporated in the Immigration Act of 1924. This was intended to be a provisional measure till the details of the national origins system incorporated in the Act could be worked out. This reduced the quota to two per cent of the number of aliens of a given nationality. This allowed 164,667 persons to enter the United States. This was based on the 1890 census. The third quota system contained in the 1924 Act, as a permanent method of calculation to be adopted later was the national origins system. According to this, the annual quota of a nation was computed by tracing the origins of the American population as given in the 1920 census. This could be done by going back in years to the 1790 census and statistically comparing how many persons of a given nationality continued to come into the United States down till 1920 and arriving at a proportionate quota. This kind of calculation gave more weightage to the old immigration before 1890 and the new immigration after 1890 especially from south and central Europe, was given comparatively less quota. This became effective only in 1929.


The first Quota Act affected the Assyrian refugees who had already embarked upon a journey to the United States. The Assyrians claimed themselves to be devout Christians. During the war, they lived mainly in the Hakkari mountains on the frontiers of Turkey and Russia. They had also fought on the side of the Allies along with Russian forces and after Russian forces withdrew, with the English forces in Mesopotamia. Their religion made their relations with their Mohammedan neighbours strained. Their support of Allies in the war made matters more difficult. Fearful of being treated harshly, they left their houses. When they were half way towards the United States, the Quota Law came into existence. The yearly quota for "Other Asia" under which Assyrians came, was ninety-two. This was already filled up. Five hundred other Assyrians were permitted after the exhaustion of the quota.27

The fall of the Czar and later of the Kerensky government led to the flight of two million Russians. Only 28,897 were admitted between 1921-1930. The status of these refugees was permitted to be legalized in the year 1934, if they could prove they had entered the United States before 1 July 1933 and were bona fide refugees and persons of good moral character. Only 1,425 could take advantage of this provision.28

28. Ibid., pp. 80-81.
The anti-foreign sentiment got stronger during the 'thirties due to the added factor of the Great Depression. Organized labour came forcefully against any liberalization of the immigration laws. It would not approve measures "which would weaken even to the slightest degree the restrictive features of immigration legislation". When Congressman John H. Kerr introduced a bill to liberalize the deportation provisions in the immigration statutes in 1935, the American Federation of Labor strongly opposed it. The Executive Council of the Federation reported that it would do all that lies within its power "to strengthen and perfect immigration legislation rather than to modify or weaken existing statutes". 29

The Congress showed clearly isolationist trends and the tendency was still to keep away from foreign entanglements. One particular group of refugees that was affected rather badly by these prevailing tendencies was the Jewish. A companion measure to the Kerr bill introduced by Senator Marcus A. Coolidge simply remained in the Senate calendar. 30

The deportation laws of the period are a good example of the eagerness to clean up the United States. In the first


30. Ibid., 1935, p. 141.

31. Ibid., p. 140.
three years of the 'thirties deportations increased rapidly. The spirit of the times was to lay emphasis on national interest. It was felt that uncontrolled admission of immigrants would harm the basic interests of the United States. "Nothing can be clearer", the Secretary of Labour W.N. Doak said, "than that our whole future structure as a great commonwealth rests upon the uninterrupted continuation of all the standards—social, economic and political—coupled with Christian civilization.... Thus we must cling to self-preservation with sufficient zeal to see that our national customs, traditions and progress are not injured by any immigrant group." 

Representative Martin Dies (Democrat, Texas) reiterated this view when he said that what the United States needed was more "selfish patriotism" and "less fatuous internationalism, more devotion to the needs and problems of Americans themselves and less sentimental and unappreciated concern for the affairs of the other countries." He did not claim that the policy of

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33. USA, *Congressional Record*, vol. 74, 19 January 1931, p. 2531.
economic isolation was either wise or desirable but he felt that the time had come "when Americans must cease being made the dupes and willing victims of European duplicity, deceit and cunning." 34

This attitude of non-involvement showed itself when trouble for the Jews started brewing in Germany.

On 2 March 1933 the American newspapers carried a dispatch from Associated Press, London. It spoke of completion of plans for anti-Jewish programme in Germany "on a scale as terrible as any instance of Jewish persecutions in 2000 years". 35 A member of the American Jewish Committee brought this to the attention of President Herbert Hoover. The Secretary of State was instructed to cable the American Ambassador at Berlin. Later, Cordell Hull, the designated Secretary of State, assured the President of the American Jewish Committee that "whereas there was, for a short time, considerable physical mistreatment of Jews this phase may be considered virtually terminated". 36

As befitting the mood of the times, no attempt was made to offend Germany openly. In a speech delivered at San Diego on 2 October 1935, President Roosevelt carefully avoided any references to Germany although he spoke of the freedom of


36. Ibid., p. 365.
every person to enjoy the free exercise of his religion according to the dictates of his conscience. "Our national determination to keep free of foreign wars and foreign entanglements", he said, "cannot prevent us from feeling deep concern when ideals and principles that we have cherished are challenged". The same cautiousness was practised in an earlier instance and the American Government hastened to send a letter of apology to Germany when in New York the German flag was tampered with and the judge gave the verdict that the flag was a "defiant challenge to society" and hence the action was justified.

When Mayor Fiorello La Guardia made impassioned speeches in one of which he suggested having a "chamber of horrors" in the coming World Fair in New York city where as a climax he would have "a figure of that brown-shirted fanatic" who was "menacing the peace of the world". Hull made an official statement expressing the hope that all those who were participating in the controversy over the excesses in Germany, may soon reach the conclusion that "it would be to the best interests of both the countries for them to find other subjects which can be discussed more temporarily".

The Jewish refugees who wanted to enter the United States had to face a formidable barrier in the Act of 1924,

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37. Ibid., p. 370.
38. Ibid., p. 373.
39. Ibid., p. 374.
especially Section 7(c) of the Act. This required the applicant to furnish a police certificate of good character for the previous five years, together with a record of military service, two certified copies of birth certificate and two copies of all other available public records". 40

Only the literacy test was waived in the case of Jewish refugees. The State Department instructed that strict adherence to the letter of the law was to be practised. Green H. Hackworth, State Department's Legal Adviser in 1933, made it clear that the Jewish refugee situation was not going to be treated as an exceptional one. "It is believed", he said, "that the sure fact that a Jew has been driven out of Germany into another country or has found it desirable to flee from Germany to escape persecution, does not in and of itself excuse him from producing the documents required by Section 7(c) if it is reasonably possible for him to obtain such documents upon applying therefor to the appropriate German authorities." His objection to waiver of this clause was "the likelihood that numerous undesirable persons, including criminals and anarchists, would take advantage of the waiver." 41

President Roosevelt was a great believer in international co-operation in solving problems. In 1938, he suggested an International Conference at Evian. The outcome of the conference was the creation of the Inter-governmental Committee


41. Ibid., p. 138.
on Refugees and a Refugee Aid Bureau in London. On 15 November 1938, Roosevelt denounced the violent anti-Semitic campaign at a press conference. When questioned by a reporter if he would recommend that Congress relax the immigration restrictions in the case of the Jewish refugees, Roosevelt replied: "That is not in contemplation; we have the quota system." 42

An attempt to liberalize the immigration law was made by Senator Robert M. Wagner (Democrat, New York) in 1939. The Wagner-Rogers Bill sought entry of 20,000 German refugee children, most of whom were Jews, as non quota immigrants for a temporary stay in the United States. The American Legion was strongly opposed to the Bill and it finally died in the Committee since Wagner could not accept the amendment that they be allowed in as quota immigrants. The restrictionists in the Congress had won the day. 43

THE WAR YEARS AND AFTER

An attempt to break away from the traditional isolationist attitude was noticeable when Senator Key Pittman, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, delivered a speech against totalitarian states. The foreign press got the message and there was criticism about the attitude of the United States. The Berlin Press said: "The dynamite of war agitation has not yet been played with more unscrupulously." The Herald Tribune called it "a program of provocation" and its Washington dispatch

42. Divine, n. 12, p. 17.
43. Ibid., pp. 99 ff.
bore the headlines: "Roosevelt's megalomania becomes increasingly dangerous to world peace". 44

The Lend-Lease programme of President Roosevelt further confirmed the end of isolation. While there was indication that the United States would enter the war, the forces of intolerance at home were being combated by several organizations and individuals. The League for Industrial Democracy began a nation-wide campaign of popular education to combat racial prejudice which the League thought was due to "increased Nazi and Fascist activity in the United States". 45 A teacher's manual of "An American Answer to Intolerance" was prepared by the Council Against Intolerance in America and in some schools "tolerance" courses were introduced. 46 In spite of these efforts, there was propaganda of fear in the United States directed against refugees fleeing from racial and political intolerance. 47

The restrictionists, however, urged that the immigration laws should in no way be liberalized. Senator Elbert D. Thomas, Chairman of the Senate Education and Labor Committee felt that the immigration quotas should be maintained since they were "both low and high enough". Senator Robert B. Reynolds (Democrat, North Carolina) expressed a similar view when he said that "the time has come when the tradition that the United States is an asylum for the oppressed of the world must be changed. Our house is full." 48

45. Ibid., 27 April 1939.  
46. Ibid., 6 August 1939.  
47. Ibid., 29 November 1939.  
48. Ibid., 19 June 1939.
There was a general fear that there were spies among the refugees. Two official advisory committees functioning from July 1941 rejected outright over 300 applications for visas by October on the ground that the applications were submitted by "potential propagandists and fifth columnists, or by persons inimical to the American form of government". 49

The American Federation of Labor took vigorous actions to prevent repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act advocated by some in 1943 in view of China's fight against the Japanese. 50 The Federation passed a resolution in 1944 that the people of the United States must do "all in their power to assist the unemployed and the destitude in other countries through loans, food, clothing, supplies and the implements of peace-time production...." But it was opposed to the lowering of immigration standards. The organization came out strongly against advocates for liberalization. It called them people "with a selfish and spurious cry of humanity on their lips" who wanted to lower the immigration barriers "to permit a general influx of impoverished people from all countries of the earth...." 51 It argued that until the country was converted from a war time to a peace time economy no immigration should be permitted. 52

The American Federation of Labor passed a resolution which reflected the general feeling prevailing at that time both

50. Ibid., 1943, p. 70.
51. Ibid., 1944, p. 50.
52. Ibid., p. 51.
in official circles and among the public. The resolution ended saying:

That we will do all things possible to assist the peoples of every stricken land to rehabilitate themselves so that they can again become self-sustaining; but to destroy our own standards will not permanently assist other nations and will only impoverish our own people. 53

The State Department, at this time wanted to ensure strict vigilance over the entrants. The only way to do this was by tightening the procedures and adhering strictly to the requirements of law. This was communicated by Breckinridge Long, Assistant Secretary of State, in a memorandum addressed to Adolph A. Berle, Assistant Secretary of State, and James C. Dunn, State Department's Advisor on Political Relations, on 26 June 1940:

We can delay and effectively stop for a temporary period of indefinite length the number of immigrants into the United States. We could do this by simply advising our consuls to put every obstacle in the way and to require additional evidence and to resort to various administrative advices which would postpone and postpone the granting of the visas. 54

Long's method worked for almost an year.

The State Department followed this up later also by giving directives in 1941 to all consuls abroad that visas were not to be given to refugees from Germany and German-occupied

53. Ibid.

territories if the refugees planned to leave close relatives behind. The reason given for this move was that such immigrants might become espionage agents. This applied to prospective immigrants from Norway, Holland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Balkans as well as to Germany proper.55

There were protests against such a move from prominent Americans like Louis Fischer, Max Lerner, William White, Roger Baldwin and others.56 An editorial in the New Republic stated that the State Department, particularly Avra M. Warren, Head of the Visa Division, must decide whether "they were fighting on the side of democracy or on the side of Hitler". The editorial added that the efforts for such a regulation came from "anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi forces in the State Department".57

An editorial in Nation called Avra Warren "the most active and determined among the restrictionists" and remarked that "the Department does not refuse visas. It merely sets up a line of obstacles stretching from Washington to Lisbon and on around Shanghai."58

The efforts to plead the cause of the refugees were thwarted by the co-operative attempts to keep them out made

by the State Department and the Congress with the silent con-
currence of the President. In secret testimony before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee on 26 November 1943, Breckinridge
Long said that the United States had admitted 530,000 victims
since Hitler's persecution and that most of them were Jews.
The testimony served the purpose of making the Committee oppose
two bills which provided for executive creation of a Commission
"to effectuate the rescue of the Jewish people of Europe". 59

The figures given by Long were disputed by others. 60

The State Department's policy on refugees was condem-
ned by many pro-Jewish Americans. Representative Emanuel Celler
denounced the State Department charging that "The heartbeat of
our State Department has been muffled by protocol". 61

In view of the prevalent sentiments against refugees,
the War Refugee Board set up in 1944 "to rescue victims of
oppression in imminent danger of death and to afford such
victims all other possible relief and assistance" 62 and the
Anglo-American Conference at Bermuda in 1943 did not go a long
way in taking positive actions to solve the refugee problem.

60. "Crocodile Tears", Nation, 25 December 1943, p. 748;
views of Earl G. Harrison, US Commissioner of Immigra-
tion and Naturalization, New York Times, 19 February
1944.
62. Department of State Bulletin (Washington), 17 June 1944,
p. 553.
Although statistically it could be proved that the refugees were not an economic danger--the refugees brought with them capital to invest in new industries, opening new markets to the United States--the suspicions of subversion, anti-Semitism and nativistic nationalism prevented an objective analysis of the situation. Such suspicions were at play when the frenzied evacuation of the Japanese from California took place. General De Witt who took part in the evacuation activities and who had fervently argued to achieve it, called the Japanese an "enemy race".

Hopeful thoughts about a peaceful world were entertained by some optimists during the course of the war. Wendell L. Wilkie dreamt of a "One World" and he fervently hoped that his country would play a constructive role in the struggle against war, exploitation, and inequality. He noted that the United States had three courses after the war: "narrow nationalism, which inevitably means the ultimate loss of our own liberty; international imperialism, which means the sacrifice of some other nation's liberty; or the creation of a world in which there shall be an equality of opportunity for every race and every nation". He was "convinced" that the Americans will choose the last course.


Such visions nurtured during the course of the war against the Axis began to wither away as the threat of "Soviet Expansionism" came to take the place of the "Fascist threat" almost immediately after the Second World War ended. The new threat was depicted as being more dangerous than any other that the United States had ever faced in its past. The massive machinery erected in war-time to carry out psychological warfare against the Axis swung into action to alert the people of the United States and the rest of the world to "godless, atheistic, international Communist conspiracy directed and controlled from Moscow".

The extent of the Communist "danger" was viewed in an exaggerated fashion due to several developments even during the war. The espionage activities during the war underwrote the need to safeguard the interests of the nation within the United States. Externally, the Soviet threat loomed larger following the setting up of the Communist regimes in East Europe by the Soviet Union. The threat, it was felt, needed to be tackled in a serious fashion due to two important events. One was the coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and other was the "loss of China" in October 1949. This strengthened the stereotype of measures to contain Communism in Europe and elsewhere.

The US propaganda in Eastern Europe was an important post-war phenomenon. It protested against the imposition of Soviet rule on nations in Eastern Europe by "force and fraud". The propaganda also foresaw liberation struggle in Eastern
Europe which would have the blessings of the United States. With this self image of a protector of the liberties of the oppressed nations and that of a fighter for democracy and freedom all over the world, the United States was the hope of refuge to many escapees from totalitarian countries. However, this role was difficult to be played due to several domestic compulsions. Certain institutional and political realities had to be taken into consideration. The atmosphere in the country was to doubt the loyalty of any person vaguely suspected as having Communist leanings. The growing suspicion of escapees from totalitarian regimes and the rigid legal provisions of the immigration law were facts to be contended with. Hence the implications of the US rhetoric stood in direct contrast to the US performance whenever such a crisis presented itself. Both the rhetoric and the inadequate performance came into play after the war.

How the United States tackled refugee problems after the war has to be understood against the background of conflicting pressures— from those, who, for a variety of reasons, argued for a liberal policy of admission and a revision of the entire immigration law during every refugee crisis and those from the restrictionists who argued against any liberalization. The Hungarian refugee problem can be seen in the proper perspective only on the basis of an examination of the actions taken on the refugee problems since the end of the war and the constraints and emotions that influenced such actions.
The first measure in this area was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 which will be examined in the next chapter. After many gruelling sessions in the Congress the Displaced Persons Act was adopted which provided for the admittance of 205,000 displaced persons in a two-year period. This number included 3,000 war orphans. Forty per cent out of 205,000 were to be displaced persons from Baltic States and Poland east of Curzon line, and thirty per cent were to be farmers. Those not in refugee camps in Western Europe by 22 December 1945 were not eligible. This discriminated against the Jews most of whom came into the camps after 1945. Restrictionists fought hard against the measure while their critics argued that it was an inadequate response to the problem. The New York Times called the bill a "bill of exclusion" because it "cruelly favoured one D.P. group above another, injected the religious issue" and had "unworkable administrative provisions". A Jewish leader called it "a legislative monstrosity which will work irreparable injury to the international prestige of the United States."

Nevertheless, the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 represented a new turn in the refugee policy of the United States in the sense that it moved away from the older concepts.

of absolute restriction, and quotas and took note of such international considerations as the burden on friendly European countries, the requirements of foreign policy, and the influencing of world opinion. Refugee policy became increasingly interwoven with foreign policy. Compulsions of domestic politics and the well-organized opposition of the restrictionists acted as continuing constraints on policy-makers. As a result, they were compelled to deal with the problem on an ad hoc basis. The results that were accomplished were not on a par with the rhetoric of American propaganda. That again continued to be a problem that policy-makers had to wrestle with.