

The 'Jewish Question', Irish Refugee Policy and Charles Bewley, 1933-39

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On general refugee and asylum policy, the Irish government adopted a regressive line that can be traced to the foundation of the state, and was inherited from British rule. In at least some cases, the mantra of 'in the national interest' could conceivably act as a smokescreen for, or legitimisation of, prejudice against outsiders and particular groups of easily identifiable outsiders such as Jews. This was a near universal phenomenon. There is no denying that anti-Semitism was commonly held 'even fashionable' in the pre-Holocaust era throughout the western world.

After 1922 Irish diplomatic representatives abroad had a significant role in vetting applicants for visas, including: interviewing applicants; assessing their suitability; checking references; and making recommendations to officials in Dublin to accept or reject applicants on a case-by-case basis. Throughout most of the interwar period these Irish representatives were to play a key role in Jewish immigration policy particularly those in situ in countries exercised by the alleged 'Jewish Question' or 'Jewish Problem'. Consequently, the indicators for Jews seeking refuge in Ireland during the Nazi period were poor and they were worsened by the fact that a particularly indifferent Irish diplomat, Charles Bewley, resided in Berlin during the peacetime rule of the Nazis.



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INTRODUCTION

Ireland was and is not free from the intolerance and prejudices endemic in western civilisation. It is our contention that anti-Semitism pervaded elements of Irish society and bureaucracy in the 1930s influencing its granting of visas to Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Irish anti-Semitism may have largely lacked the intensity and extremism which translated stereotypes and attitudes into action domestically, but it clearly disadvantaged Jews seeking an escape from the clutches of Nazism.

This chapter assesses Irish policies towards the Jewish question. In particular, it investigates the attitudes and actions of Charles Bewley, the Irish Minister to Germany 1933-39. But firstly, in light of Bewley's problematic anti-Semitism, and the restrictive Irish refugee policy, we may ask to what extent he reflected the attitudes of Irish society.

JEWIS IN IRELAND

Ireland was never a centre of primary Jewish immigration due to its peripheral location. The present Irish Jewish population is largely descended from immigrants fleeing the pogroms of the early 1880s in Eastern Europe. Most Jewish immigration occurred between 1880 and 1910. The Jewish population grew by 900% between 1881 and 1911 from 394 to 3,805 people and fluctuated around this figure from 1911 to 1946, during the formative years of the state. Hence, Jews only accounted for 0.13% of the Irish population in 1936¹. Many of these lived in what became known as 'Little Jerusalem', a small working class area in the Clanbrassil/South Circular Road area of Dublin.

Despite low immigration and the tiny size of the Jewish population, anti-Semitism existed. An outbreak of popular persecution and a boycott of Jews occurred in Limerick in 1904, stimulated by the anti-Semitic sermons of the Redemptorist priest, Fr. John Creagh. Creagh inflammatorily argued that not only were Jews religious enemies of Catholics but they were also economic enemies who exploited the Irish people economically, utilising the stereotype of Jews as greedy moneylenders. Immigrant Jews were seen as preventing urban Irish workingmen from gaining employment. Accordingly, Creagh legitimised a self-defensive boycott among Limerick Catholics driving the small Jewish community away to the larger cities of Cork and Dublin. Anti-Jewish stereotyping pervaded elements of Irish trade unionism and the working class in the late 19th and early 20th centuries particularly in those parts of Dublin and other large cities which experienced the immigration of initially impoverished Jewish families who worked particularly as tailors, shopkeepers and small tradesmen.

Evidence of intolerance certainly persists and heightens during the period after the Nazis' takeover of power in Germany in 1933. However, antipathy towards Jews where it existed in Ireland had less to do with notions of racial purity and rather more with ignorance of wider European politics and with religiously originated anti-Semitism. Right-wing Catholic literature and ideas, especially those of French Catholicism, proved a temptation to some sections of the socially and economically conservative and occasionally triumphalist Irish Catholic Church. The demonic trilogy of Jews, Communism and Freemasonry appealed to some Irish Catholics, such as the Holy Ghost priest, Fr. Denis Fahey. These ideas found an outlet in popular Catholic literature such as *The Cross*, *The Irish Rosary*, *The Irish Mind*, and the *Irish Catholic Bulletin*. Fahey imbibed the French Catholic historical experience and the reactionary rhetoric it spawned. He reproduced it in Ireland, a country whose historical, social, cultural, and religious experiences bore no similarity to those of France. Ireland had not had a French Revolution.

Such intolerance provoked an Irish academic Dr. Moody into writing a pamphlet countering it in 1938. Moody had *Why are the Jews persecuted?* published under the auspices of the Catholic Truth Society and introduced by Archbishop Byrne. His proclaimed goal was to

dispel systematically the anti-Jewish arguments that were appearing in the 'popular Catholic press' at the very time that Jews sought assistance and asylum from the predations of Nazism. Moody argued that:

To pass strict moral judgement upon a people who hate being bred in the bitter cauldron of hate and oppression is to neglect the basic laws of justice and charity. It is far more reasonable to try and to understand the modern Jew in the light of the conditions which have shaped him.

Unfortunately, such good intentions failed to alter the parsimonious Irish Government policy towards granting German Jewish refugees sanctuary in Ireland.

TREATMENT OF THE IRISH JEWISH COMMUNITY

Irish treatment of its existing Jewish citizens was satisfactory, though unimpressive, in the context of the policy of discrimination and persecution that was pursued towards the Jewish populations in several central and eastern European countries. During the 1920s and 1930s there was no active or conscious state sanctioned discrimination against Irish-born Jews – if the state was forced to consider the Jewish Question at all in light of the small size of the Irish Jewish population. Instead the new state was preoccupied with state-building, ending the partition of island of Ireland, and redefining its relationship with Britain within the newly created British Commonwealth of Nations. Additionally, the Fianna Fáil governments after 1932 pragmatically accepted the donation of a crucifix to hang in the Houses of the *Oireachtas* (parliament) ². Catholicism was in a triumphalist mood following the success of the independence movement. Catholicism was practically interchangeable with Irish nationalism in most people's eyes.

The Irish Jewish community was almost totally dependent upon teachers and religious from abroad to sustain its traditions and beliefs. Immigration to meet these community and religious necessities was the lifeblood of the small community. Indeed thanks to the good relationship that the Chief Rabbi of the Free State, Dr. Isaac Herzog, had with the first two leaders of the Irish governments during the interwar period, William T. Cosgrave (1922-32) and Eamon de Valera (1932-48), as well as to his personal popularity, the Irish Jewish community experienced limited difficulties in gaining state agreement to sanction the import of necessary expertise to maintain its cultural and religious customs.

The only Jewish Deputy in the Dáil, Robert Briscoe, sought to distance Jews from the stigma of moneylending by proposing a moneylending bill in 1929 to regulate this highly contentious business. It duly entered the statute books in 1933 but according to Dermot Keogh: 'This did something to undermine, but not to eradicate, a popular prejudice...' ³.

In 1937, the explicit reference to the freedom of religion in Éire under Article 44 of the new Irish Constitution, which actually mentioned the Jewish religion by name as one of the religions recognised by the Irish state, was exceptional in the context of the persecution of Jews on the European mainland. The *taoiseach*, Eamon de Valera, had consulted the Irish Jewish religious leaders about the framing of this article when he was drafting it. Domestically, therefore, a tolerant state policy towards the Jews was codified. Meanwhile, immigration increasingly intruded upon the considerations of Irish policymakers.

CHARLES BEWLEY

Charles Bewley (1888-1969), a lawyer by profession and a Quaker convert to Catholicism, was initially appointed Irish Consul to Berlin for the promotion of trade in late 1921⁴. His conduct in the succeeding months was ominous. On the night of 19 January 1922 Bewley visited the Tauenzien Palast in Berlin and made anti-Semitic remarks about Robert Briscoe, another Irishman and, as we have mentioned, later a Fianna Fáil deputy in the Dáil. His remarks caused a major controversy in the Irish mission in Berlin. A colleague of his said that he was 'mad on the Jewish question' and the incident was 'inexcusable'. Regardless, Bewley escaped reprimand and the incident was ignored because the Free State was by then spiralling towards civil war. Bewley happened to be on the pro-Anglo-Irish Treaty government side and Briscoe, as an anti-Treatyite, was viewed as 'an undesirable person'. In February 1923, Bewley retired from his post in Berlin for other reasons and re-entered the Irish legal profession. However, in 1929 he became the first Irish Minister to the Vatican and in August 1933, Bewley was transferred to the Berlin Legation to become Irish Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary there.

It was not long before he began to show some of his thoughts on the so-called 'Jewish Problem' again. In June 1934, he reported that 'ritual murder' was used to support Nazi policies against the Jews revealingly adding, 'This belief is held to my own knowledge by many well educated and intelligent people'. Then he indicated that some of the alleged ritual murder cases:

have been the subject of very copious literature, and... full reports of the trials have been reprinted, from which in some cases the impartial reader gets the impression that the person in question was killed by Jews in a manner corresponding to the Jewish rite in slaughtering animals.

He further stated:

on the assumption that ritual murders do not in fact take place, it seems regrettable that the Jewish authorities do not deal more circumstantially with the very detailed charges made. A general denial or denunciation of 'medieval superstition' is an unsatisfactory method of meeting accusations which give dates and names, nor does it explain why at all periods and in all countries this particular charge should have been fastened to the Jewish race alone⁵.

Bewley indicted the Nazis' virulent anti-Semitic propaganda, not because it was anti-Semitic *per se*, but because its 'extremism' produced negative international repercussions for Germany, and allowed Jewish propagandists to escape a reasoned debate⁶.

THE NUREMBERG LAWS

Bewley was fully aware of the consequences of anti-Semitic attitudes and policies for German Jews. Throughout 1934 and 1935 he reported Nazi actions against the Jews in Germany: attacks on Jewish shops, businesses, and synagogues; the painting of anti-Semitic

inscriptions on their premises; their prohibition from certain public areas; the boycott of Jewish businesses; and physical violence and intimidation of non-Jews for associating with them.

On 15 September 1935, the Nuremberg Laws instituted the biological-racist anti-Semitism of the Nazis. These denied German citizenship to German Jews, that is those who had been born in Germany and whose families had lived there for generations. Marriage and extra-marital relations 'between Jews and nationals of German or allied blood' were outlawed. Bewley endorsed the main Nazi claims that were used to justify the Nuremberg Laws. He stated: "As the Chancellor pointed out, it amounts to the making of the Jews into a national minority; and as they themselves claim to be a separate race, they should have nothing to complain of author's italics" ⁷.

In November 1935 Bewley asserted that the Orders necessary to implement the Nuremberg Laws were 'on the whole, somewhat milder than might have been expected'. One of the 'concessions', he argued, included the definition of 'Jewishness', whereby 'One whose ancestry is half non-Jewish counts as a non-Jew'. The calculation of half non-Jewishness was based on having two non-Jewish grandparents ⁸.

Kristallnacht

Bewley's main commentary on the Jewish question was delivered after *Kristallnacht* (the Night of the Broken Glass) on 9 and 10 November ⁹. This Goebbels-inspired pogrom was launched on the pretext of the assassination of the Legation Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris. It left almost one hundred Jews dead. Practically all the synagogues in Germany and about 7,000 Jewish shops were destroyed. Then a fine of 1 billion marks was placed on the Jews ¹⁰. Soon afterwards Bewley approvingly explained to his superiors in Dublin the reasons why he thought central European governments discriminated and persecuted Jews. He cited several popular anti-Semitic rationales ¹¹.

First, Bewley intimated that Jews were non-assimilative, unpatriotic, and 'invariably sacrifice the interests of the country of their birth to Jewish interests'. Next, Bewley alleged that the Soviet Bolshevik movement was Jewish-led and that the vast majority of those arrested and found guilty of illegal Communist activities in central Europe were Jews. Yet in the same report he attacked Jews for being the ideological enemies of communism, that is capitalists and financiers. He claimed Jews avoided physical labour and unscrupulously attained wealth at the expense of non-Jews.

Bewley further asserted that before the Nazis came to power, 'The whole press, theatre, cinema, stock-exchange, the banks were completely under Jewish control', alleging that Jews accounted for 70% of the people working in the medical and legal professions in Berlin and other major German towns. The Irish Minister then wrote '*Anyone who knew Germany before 1933, whatever be his political opinions, must admit the truth of this particular claim [author's italics]*', and expressed his gratitude to the Nazis for ending this supposed state of affairs. He accused the Jews of being responsible for the supposed immorality and indecency that pervaded the Weimar Republic and, by association, declared that Jewish emigrants had corrupted every country that they had entered, using tainted German/Nazi police statistics as a proof.

Consequently, Bewley characterised the measures taken by the Nazis to ‘completely’ isolate Jews as the understandable self-defence mechanism of a beleaguered German state. Instead of criticising Germany, he condemned other states’ reactions to Germany’s anti-Semitic policies as hypocritical, averring that in every state in which Jews lived in moderate numbers, their hosts perceived them as undesirables. Remarkably, Bewley claimed to lack knowledge of any cases of ‘deliberate cruelty on the part of the [German] Government ... towards the Jews’ though he was present in Germany at the time of *Kristallnacht*¹². He admonished ‘the Irish press and public opinion’ for indulging in ‘paroxysms of moral indignation at the treatment of the Jews’ while remaining ‘blind and deaf to atrocities committed on Christians in other parts of the world’, such as Spain.

This invective was undertaken by an official representative of the Irish Government, who received Jewish applications for visas, discussed them with the authorities in Dublin, vetted the applicants and their *bona fides*, and passed on the decisions of his superiors to applicants in Germany. And he occupied this potentially powerful role in the latter part of the decade, when Jews living in the expansionist Nazi German empire were most in danger, in need of protection and asylum.

BEWLEY’S ATTITUDE TO JEWISH IMMIGRATION

The evidence of the practical impact of Bewley’s prejudices on his work in dealing with Jewish applicants for visas (temporary, work or permanent visas) is limited due to the closure of many refugee application records. Nonetheless, evidence is emerging which suggests that Bewley’s anti-Semitism disadvantaged Jewish applicants. Take for example the case of the Viennese Clare family, trapped in Berlin before and during *Kristallnacht* while awaiting the decision of the Irish Government on their application. George Clare suspects that Bewley ‘had sat on’ the visas the Irish Government had granted the Clares, until his secretary persuaded him to issue them the morning after *Kristallnacht*. As George Clare wrote, ‘It just seems too pat somehow that authority from Dublin should have arrived on the very morning after *Kristallnacht*’¹³.

By this stage in late 1938 and early 1939 Bewley openly criticised Irish refugee policy as inordinately liberal, and facilitating the entry of the ‘wrong class’ of people; by this he meant criminals, communists, and Jews. In November 1938 Bewley recommended Mrs von Rintelen as a suitable candidate for a visa to enter Ireland. Under the Nuremberg Laws she was classified as a Jewess, but Bewley wrote:

I gather that she never belonged to the Mosaic confession or was in the habit of associating with Jews, and in fact, this must certainly be so, as the brother would not have been appointed ambassador if he had been regarded a Jew.

Bewley suggestively continued:

While I do not wish to make any recommendation, I feel bound to point out that Mrs. von Rintelen is not merely such a danger to the Irish community as many of the persons to whom visas have been granted [author’s italics]¹⁴.

Thus for Bewley it appears that even though Mrs. von Rintelen had some Jewish ancestors, the important thing for him was that she was not a practicing member of the Judaism, she did not have Jewish acquaintances, and her family were respected members of society. Thus Bewley's anti-Semitism appears to be based upon religious sectarianism. He was perhaps not an adherent of racial anti-Semitism, which afflicted the Nazi movement.

PROCESSING REFUGEE APPLICATIONS

Beyond meeting the religious and educational needs of the established Irish Jewish community, the policy of the Irish government towards Jewish immigration was parsimonious. It seems to have been accepted by Irish society and officials that immigration in general was not desirable unless it strengthened nation-state construction through the acquisition of human expertise and skills for a self-sufficient economy. The construction of a broadly homogeneous nation was almost universally accepted. Thus, minorities were not a priority. Of course, some officials involved occasionally revealed jaundiced views towards 'outsiders', particularly the much maligned Jews, as was common in most of Christian Europe. A persistent stereotype was that Jews were a wealthy, influential, non-assimilative caucus of people – a sort of colony of a world-wide community – which would stimulate the latent anti-Semitism of Irish society, irritating the body politic.

To understand how the Irish state dealt with applications from Jewish refugees (or more accurately those labelled as Jews by the Nazi regime) an understanding of the Irish immigration system is imperative. To a great degree, the state inherited the restrictive British system of dealing with aliens and immigrant applications, which suited Ireland's state-building and nationalist ethos. In 1922, the newly formed Irish Free State arranged a process of consultation with the British Government for admitting 'aliens' or non-nationals. Though the Free State controlled immigration after gaining independence in 1922, it was agreed that the Irish Government would apply the British aliens regulations to Ireland and consult with Britain on matters relating to aliens. By joint agreement, 'undesirable aliens' were to be discouraged from entering the British Isles. British intelligence about aliens was made accessible to Irish officials involved in processing aliens wishing to enter the Free State¹⁵. Some Irish and British officials involved in operating these arrangements were prone to adopt a very cautious attitude to immigration generally on the basis of 'national interest', that is safeguarding employment for the natives¹⁶. They also feared alien economic penetration of the national economies might create 'native' resentment.

Jewish and other refugees applying to Ireland for sanctuary encountered a formidable bureaucratic configuration involving several departments of the Irish Government, and consultation between Irish and British immigration authorities. Three government departments vetted refugee applications: the Departments of Justice, Industry and Commerce, and External Affairs.

The Department of Justice played a central role in all cases. Justice was usually the final arbiter, and fought to maintain a final say on whether to accept applications. It was generally slow to grant visas for fear of 'alien penetration' of Irish society and economy. The Department of Justice, when vetting temporary visa applicants from Germany, was insistent on determining at least two basic points in the later 1930s. Firstly, insensitively it

tended to ask, 'Whether the applicant is Jewish, or for any other reason is unlikely to be allowed to return to Germany' ¹⁷. Automatically, if the answer to this question was in the affirmative, the department was reluctant to grant a visa to enter the state. Its rationale was simply that it did not want individuals entering Ireland on a temporary visa who could not return to their home country, thus placing an additional burden on the Irish state. The second matter exercising the department concerned the ability of the applicant to support himself or herself without becoming a charge on the state, or competing for scarce employment with the native population.

In line with its policy of autarky in the 1930s, the Government sought the establishment of industries not already in the state to meet domestic needs and maximised the use of domestic labour, capital and resources. Indigenous factors of production, especially entrepreneurs, commercial ideas and capital, were not always available, so some degree of dependence on foreign resources had to be accepted. The Department of Industry and Commerce examined the economic implications for the state of accepting individual applicants. Many Jewish visa applicants in the 1930s tendered professional, technical, or entrepreneurial skills to advance their applications ¹⁸. Industry and Commerce assessed whether they could make a positive contribution to the economic welfare of the state. The decision of Industry and Commerce proved crucial in gaining an entry visa in some individual Jewish cases initially in the 1930s ¹⁹. But as the 1930s proceeded and as Nazi persecution of the Jews intensified, a fear grew in the Department of Industry and Commerce that if too many entrepreneurial applications from German Jews were accepted, indigenous latent anti-Semitism might be stimulated by claims of undue Jewish wealth, influence and control in the country.

Professional Jewish applicants, in particular medical doctors, repeatedly met with the additional argument that Ireland was professionally 'overcrowded' ²⁰. The professions in Ireland, especially medical doctors, were powerful pressure groups determined to prevent immigration of non-Irish educated foreign professionals. Technicians were treated in much the same way, unless Industry and Commerce concluded 'that the alien is required for the purpose of Irish industry', which only occurred in a tiny minority of cases ²¹. Refugee applications tended to be refused if they sought to acquire landholdings. As Mr. Duff of the Department of Justice informed Joseph P. Walshe (Secretary of the Department of External Affairs): 'It is thought that the acquisition by aliens of land in this country would be likely to provoke unrest' ²².

Although the Department of External Affairs was no paragon of virtue by comparison to the other departments, it tended to adopt the most lenient line of all three departments in pursuit of its desire to maintain a positive international profile. The Minister of External Affairs, Eamon de Valera (who was *Taoiseach* or head of state as well), was also inclined to have a moderating influence. He usually adopted a sympathetic stance towards individual Jewish refugee applications that were drawn to his attention.

Nonetheless, only a handful of Jews gained entrance to Ireland because the vetting process was harsh ²³. Perhaps less than 100 were successful in gaining permanent residency between 1933 and 1939. S.A. Roche of the Department of Justice encapsulated this mean policy when he unequivocally stated in an internal document that, 'in common with other small countries similarly placed ... it would be impossible for us to allow any immigration into this country'. Regarding the issuing of temporary visas, the Department of Justice feared that once a person holding a temporary visa from the German Reich (e.g. students) entered

Ireland the German Government would withdraw their German passports/‘nationality’ and compel Ireland to naturalise them and to permit them ‘to compete in our own already overcrowded professional market’²⁴. Clearly, all people classed in any way undesirable by the Nazi state, in particular Jews and Gypsies, were vulnerable to this Nazi treatment and consequently had little chance of gaining a temporary visa to Ireland.

When an Irish delegation attended the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees Conference at Evians-les-Bains in July 1938 it attempted to justify its overall miserly attitude by saying that Ireland was sympathetic to the plight of German refugees, but she could not help since she was experiencing high levels of emigration herself. Unemployment was rife and the economy was in serious difficulty, the argument went. Ireland had problems meeting the needs of her own population, so why should she take on additional burdens²⁵?

THE CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

The Irish Government still felt it necessary to be seen to assist in the developing humanitarian crisis. From the summer of 1938 this crisis was becoming acute and Ireland, like many other countries, experienced a large increase in the number of refugee applications from the German Reich. The integration of Austria into Nazi Germany after the Munich Crisis heightened the refugee emergency.

In November 1938, two weeks before *Kristallnacht*, an Irish Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees was formed. This voluntary co-ordinating body drew together a number of interested Irish charities, philanthropists, prominent churchmen and private individuals (notably distinguished academics). Dissatisfied with the ungenerous policy of the Irish Government, its objective was to alleviate the Nazi-induced humanitarian crisis. The *Taoiseach* and Minister of External Affairs, Eamon de Valera, supported the establishment of the committee apparently as a means to reduce the power of the Department of Justice and the Department of Industry and Commerce in processing European refugee applications²⁶.

Unfortunately, despite the Committee’s aim of ensuring that Ireland ‘should now do her share’ for the German refugees²⁷, the agreement that the Committee made with the Department of Justice was in several ways derisory. The Committee agreed with the Department that any German refugees accepted by Ireland would only achieve temporary visas, and that they would be resettled permanently elsewhere later. The Committee was to generate funding from overseas sources and from donations within Ireland to maintain the refugees who came to Ireland on temporary visas. It also undertook to sift through applications for visas using its connections with overseas refugee bodies to ensure that only ‘suitable’ people would be accepted into Ireland. Suitability had a religious element and related:

only to Christians with Jewish blood. The Coordinating Committee are of the opinion that this country should confine itself to such persons as there are adequate funds subscribed by the Jewish Communities in other countries to deal with the cases of professing Jews²⁸.

Thus the Committee would only accept and financially support Jewish refugees who sincerely professed Christianity. The Committee had to ensure that the *bona fides* of each temporary ‘alien’ was correct (that they were not criminals, were not carriers of infectious dis-

eases). Perhaps the most difficult requirement of all was the guarantee of a permanent resettlement outside of Ireland (and not in Nazi Germany). In early 1939, the Committee could only raise enough money to provide for about 70 refugees and the vice chairman of the committee, Professor T.W.T. Dillon, was forced to admit after months of effort that the Committee found it 'extremely difficult' to meet the government's entry criteria. Only those who had friends or relatives in Ireland, or who had managed to smuggle money out of Germany, had a chance of gaining entry:

For the ordinary refugee who knows nobody, who has nothing to recommend him except his Christianity, who is in fact a complete liability, it is desperately hard to find the guarantee required. And yet these people are just as deserving of help as the others, and they need it much more urgently ²⁹.

Despite the ineffectiveness of the Co-ordinating Committee in achieving its agenda of liberalising Irish refugee policy and the religious sectarianism of its rules, this did not prevent Charles Bewley from bridling at its attempts to alleviate the plight of the persecuted Jews of 'Greater Germany' during early 1939 ³⁰.

CONCLUSION

Since Bewley spent seven years in Berlin (two years as unaccredited trade representative from 1921 to 1923, and five years as Irish Minister from 1934 to 1939), he was familiar with the 'Jewish Question' and played a role in the operation of Irish refugee policies. Nonetheless, Bewley was a seriously flawed diplomat. He failed to rise above the anti-Semitic, racist and fascist climate that existed in Germany in the 1930s. Even the Irish Free State experienced some anti-Semitic outbursts among its inhabitants, though overall Jewish denizens were well-treated and the Jewish faith was officially recognised and respected in the 1937 Constitution. Therefore, domestically, the Irish state exhibited commendable democratic and human rights credentials, in a Europe that was steadily falling under the spell of dictatorships and racist ideology. Consequently, Ireland offered a potential haven for refugees fleeing Nazi persecution as the decade progressed.

However, Bewley was not alone in his antipathy towards Jewish immigrants. Many Irish civil servants betrayed negative preconceived notions about the Jews. Stereotyping and retrograde religious attitudes were betrayed in internal minutes and memoranda concerning Jewish refugees ³¹. The economic state of the country was used as a convenient justification for excluding deserving applicants. Therefore, only a handful of Jewish refugees managed to gain legitimate entry to the Irish Free State before the outbreak of war. Bewley's allegations of excessive liberalness against Irish refugee policy were misplaced. Irish refugee policy was embarrassingly restrictive. Ultimately, however, Bewley was forcibly retired from the Irish foreign service in August 1939 ostensibly for his unreliability, quarrelsomeness and failure to represent Irish foreign policy and its neutralist intentions in the run-up to the outbreak of World War II. However, his departure from the Irish foreign service did not in any way alter the parsimonious policies of the Irish Government towards Jewish refugees during and immediately after the Second World War.



NOTES

- ¹ NAI (National Archives of Ireland), DFA (Department of Foreign Affairs series) 102/510.
- ² D. Keogh, *Jews in 20th-Century Ireland: Refugees, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust*, Cork 1998, p. 89.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- ⁴ "Irish Times", obituary, 3 February 1969; C. Bewley, *Memoirs of a Wild Goose*, W.J. McCormack ed., Dublin 1989, pp. 13-24, 289-291).
- ⁵ NAI, DFA CRS 19/50, Bewley to Walshe, 6 June 1934.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ NAI, DFA CRS 19/50A, Bewley to Walshe, 17 September 1935.
- ⁸ NAI, DFA CRS 19/50A, Bewley to Walshe, 19 November 1935.
- ⁹ NAI, DFA 202/63, Bewley to Walshe, 9 December 1938.
- ¹⁰ K.D. Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure and Consequences of National Socialism*, Harmondsworth 1985, p. 456.
- ¹¹ NAI, DFA 202/63, Bewley to Walshe, 9 December 1938.
- ¹² A Department of Foreign Affairs official, possibly Walshe, highlighted the offending statement with a crayon in the margin of the report.
- ¹³ G. Clare, *Last Waltz in Vienna: The Destruction of a Family 1842-1942*, London 1981, p. 229.
- ¹⁴ NAI, DFA 102/577, Bewley to Walshe, 2 November 1938.
- ¹⁵ K. Goldstone, *Ireland and the International Reaction to Jewish Refugees*, in M. Kennedy, JM. Skelly (eds.), *Irish Foreign Policy, 1919-66: From Independence to Internationalism*, Dublin 2000, p. 123-124.
- ¹⁶ D. Keogh, *Jews in 20th Century Ireland* cit. p. 78.
- ¹⁷ NAI, DFA 102/575, Duff to Walshe, 24 November 1938.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ¹⁹ NAI, DFA 102/645.
- ²⁰ NAI, DT (Department of Taoiseach) S 11007A, Department of Justice memorandum, 14 November 1938.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² NAI, DFA 102/507, Duff to Walshe, 4 November 1938.
- ²³ NAI/DFA 102/438, Roche to Walshe, 29 August 1938.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ D. Keogh, *Ireland and Europe, 1919-1989: A Diplomatic and Political History*, Cork - Dublin, p. 106.
- ²⁶ Keogh, *Jews in 20th Century Ireland* cit., p. 138.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ²⁸ NAI, DT, S 11007/B1.
- ²⁹ T.W.T. Dillon, *The Refugee Problem*, Studies, 1939, 28, p. 412.
- ³⁰ Bewley to Walshe, 2 February 1939, NAI/DFA 102/642.
- ³¹ See D. Keogh, *Ireland and Europe* cit., pp. 110-111.



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SOURCE

Excerpt from NAI, DFA 202/63, Bewley to Walshe, 9 December 1938. The original confidential report is 13 pages of typescript and space has necessitated its reduction into a more succinct form for publication.

In response to your requests for a report on the anti-semitic movement in Germany, I desire to point out [...]

1. The Governments of the countries mentioned [Germany, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland] have been led by their experience to the conviction that Jew, even when settled in a particular country for centuries, do not become assimilated to the people of that country, but, when the interests of the country of their birth come into conflict with their own personal or racial interests, invariably sacrifice the interests of the country of their birth to Jewish interests [...]

It is also claimed in all the countries mentioned that the chief supporters and organizers of Communism are almost invariable Jews. The Bolshevist movement in Russia was almost entirely led by Jews is a fact so well known as to need no emphasis: I would however refer to a pamphlet entitled "The Rulers of Russia" by the Rev. Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., also the fact alleged for many years in Germany, and now officially confirmed in the evidence recently given before the Commission at present sitting in the United States of America for the purpose of studying un-American movements in the U.S.A., and in 1917 the Bolshevist movement was financed by American-Jewish banking houses, as Kuhn, Loeb & Co. When Communist Governments were set up after the War in Hungary and Bavaria, the majority of the leaders in each case were Jews. In recent years the governments of all the mid-European states have formally prohibited the Communist party, and have effected very numerous arrests for illegal communist activities: the vast majority of the guilty persons in each country have been Jews: this is not merely a statement made in the German press, but it is proved by a perusal of the reports of trials of Communists in any country in Central Europe.

In the second place, it is claimed that in Germany and the other countries mentioned the Jews

had acquired so dominating a position in the financial world that they were in a position to control public policy, and up to a certain point public opinion, that they monopolized the learned professions and held important positions in the universities out of all proportion to their numbers, and in fact had become a force in face of which the lawfully elected government were in many cases powerless.

Anyone who knew Germany before 1933, whatever be his political opinions, must admit the truth of this claim. The whole press, theatre, cinema, stock-exchange, the banks were completely under Jewish control. In Berlin and the other chief towns the medical and legal professions were composed of roughly 70% Jews and 30% Germans; even the hospital nurses were in many nominally non-Jewish hospitals Jewish. Jewish professors held important positions in the universities: their influence was frequently anti-Christian, anti-patriotic and Communistic [...] This situation of course no longer exists in Germany; it exists at the present day in Warsaw, Budapest and Prague, although measures are being devoted to alter it in these countries also.

Another cause of the special measures taken against the Jewish community is the fact that almost in no cases do Jews work in the sense of being manual workers, labourers, farmers or artisans. This is, of course, obvious whether in Germany, America or Ireland. The Jew in Germany mainly devoted himself to finance or "business" in large towns [...]

[T]he inference is drawn, not only in Germany, that the Jews endeavour with success to avoid doing his duty in defending the state in which he resides. Anyone who witnessed the immigration into Ireland of English Jews after the introduction of conscription in England will feel inclined to adopt the German view [...]

A further reason given in Germany ... for introducing discriminating legislation against the Jews is their demoralizing influence on the communities among which they live. It is a notorious fact that the international white slave traffic is controlled by the Jews. No one who has even a superficial knowledge of Germany can be ignorant that the appalling moral degradation before 1933 was, if not caused, at least exploited by the Jews. The German stage was the most indecent in Europe; it was a Jewish monopoly. German papers appeared of a purely pornographic nature: the proprietor and editor were invariably Jews [...]

Furthermore, it is right to mention the fact which determined the last and most severe measures of the German Government against the Jews – the murder of von Rath in Paris. It is claimed that this is one of a series of murders committed by Jews against persons whom they considered enemies of their race [...]

To the suggestion that these cases are exceptions, and that the whole Jewish community should not be held responsible for the crimes of particular Jews, the answer is given [by the German Government] that, when a non-Jew commits a non-political crime, the whole of his country does not rally in his defence, but that international Jewry at once rallies in the support of a Jew, whatever be the crime of which he is accused. Anyone familiar with the criminal courts in Ireland must be aware that every Jew convicted of a crime can count with confidence on the Chief Rabbi testifying on oath that he knows the man intimately and is convinced that he could not be guilty of the crime of which he has been found guilty by an Irish jury [...]

There are of course very many other reasons adduced for the elimination of the Jewish element from the public life of Germany [...] I desire [...] to point out that the facts here stated are well known to everyone who has lived in Central Europe, or who has taken the trouble to make enquiries from non-Jewish sources into the situation as it really is [...]

Obviously the fact that, not only in Germany but in every state they exist in any quantity, the Jews are regarded as an alien body [...] makes an attitude of assumed moral superiority towards Germany somewhat out of place. If every state which has experience of Jews, including those with Catholic clergymen at their head, finds it necessary to introduce similar special measures restricting their activities, it is impossible to take up with any degree of reason the

attitude that they should be treated like ordinary citizens of the country. It is of course necessary to be aware of the particular circumstances prevailing in each country before it is possible to judge whether the measures adopted are necessary or not. Naturally this would not apply to cases of deliberate cruelty on the part of the Government, but I am not aware of any such towards Jews on the part of the German Government. There has been no episode in connection with Jews in Germany which could even remotely be compared to the atrocities of the Communists in Spain or Russia or the English in Palestine [...]

I have no doubt [...] that the Minister will be glad of an exposé of the Jewish problem which under present circumstances is permitted to the Irish public, and of the complete want of proportion in the importance ascribed to events in Germany.

As I stated [...] it is impossible to give even a summary of the Jewish problem except in very insufficient form. The German official view is set out fairly fully in an official publication of some 400 pages. If the Minister so desires, I can forward it to the Department. If there are any further points to which I have not referred, I should be very glad to discuss them with the

Minister during my approaching visit to Dublin.

