

Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 312 pp.

At a time when much of the scholarly publication about the Holocaust and its antecedents is either postmodern speculation, such as Peter Novick's *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) or mindless revisionism, such as Norman G. Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso, 2000), it is gratifying to find that traditional historical scholarship about this topic is still being pursued. Louise London, using documents unavailable to previous scholars, gives us the most detailed picture of British governmental responses to the tragedy of European Jewry in the National Socialist era yet painted. Readers who know the standard works on the topic—A. J. Sherman's *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich* (London: Elek, 1973) and Bernard Wasserstein's *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979)—will not have a new narrative. The shameful story they told still stands. In the prewar years Britain admitted some Jewish refugees, but kept out more. When the war went badly in 1940, Britain interned enemy-alien Jews and put them into relatively comfortable camps on the Isle of Man—along with ardently pro-Nazi aliens. And later in the war, even after British officialdom knew about the systematic killings that we now call the Holocaust, the British still resisted admitting even those few Jews in a position to reach Britain or its mandate in Palestine.

London's contribution is threefold. For the prewar and wartime periods she throws new light on the actions of personnel at the middle levels of both the government and pro-refugee organizations to show how policies made at the top were executed in practice. She stresses throughout that British policies can best be understood as an aspect of its overall negative immigration policy. What Jews it was willing to accept, it wanted to take on a temporary basis only. Second, she devotes a brief but illuminating chapter to policy in the three years after the war. And, finally, she points out certain consistencies between British arguments for not taking refugees in the war years with those used by government officials today. In addition, her opening pages provide not only a cogent summary of the book's argument, but also an up-to-date evaluation of the most recent

scholarship. Although this book is an outgrowth of a 1992 University of London doctoral dissertation, it is clearly influenced by the author's personal and professional experiences: a daughter of wartime refugees, she is a solicitor with a practice specializing in immigration law.

Despite the depressing story that she relates, London shows that, throughout the government, there were individual officials who sought to do more. And, without entering such speculative areas as the proposals to bomb Auschwitz, she demonstrates conclusively that there were "a number of situations when the government chose to do less than it had the power to do." (15)

This is an important addition to the literature, illustrating once again the accuracy of Vice President Walter Mondale's 1979 judgment that in this tragedy, the nations of the West "failed the test of civilization."

---

*Roger Daniels is Charles Phelps Taft Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati. His most recent book is, Debating American Immigration, published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2001.*