

ED

Closing Canada's Door

By the mid-1920s, Canadian officials believed the West was adequately settled, and Canada began accepting fewer immigrants. In the Depression, immigration dropped from an average of 124 000 people per year in the 1920s to 20 000 people per year.

As in earlier Canadian immigration history, some immigrants were less welcome than others. Immigrants from central and southern Europe were only rarely accepted. The government associated people from these regions with communism and other radical political activities.

Many government officials (and other Canadians) were openly **anti-Semitic**, or prejudiced against Jewish people, so Jewish immigration was limited. These limitations had especially tragic consequences. After Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in 1933, the persecution of Jewish people in Germany became more pronounced. Many Jewish people sought refuge in other nations. Although Canada accepted a few **refugees**, its efforts were minimal compared to other countries. A refugee is a person who leaves her or his home country because of a threat of persecution.

In the Depression, minority groups frequently faced racism and discrimination. Recently arrived immigrants were often treated as outsiders who were draining resources away from "real" Canadians: those of British or French origin. In 1931, 83 of the 150 Chinese immigrants who applied for relief in Calgary received \$1.21 per week. Non-Chinese applicants received \$2.50 per week. In 1937, the weekly amount for Chinese people rose to \$2.12 per week.

First Nations and Métis people, although not immigrants, were also given reduced relief payments. The government justified the reductions by saying First

Nations and Métis people could live off the land. Any complaints about unfair treatment were ignored by the government.

Immigrants who applied for relief could face **deportation**, being sent back to their country of origin. Immigrants involved in radical political activities could also be deported. Between 1930 and 1933, 23 000 immigrants were deported for these reasons. Many immigrants did without relief to avoid deportation.

Few people complained about discrimination against immigrants because many Canadians saw immigrants as competition for scarce jobs and relief. Laws did not prevent companies from discrimination, and many companies regularly refused to hire Jewish people, Ukrainians, and people from other ethnic minorities. Some immigrants changed their names in an effort to hide their cultural background.

Figure 11-15 Countries Admitting Jewish Refugees from the Nazis, 1933–1945

Country	Number of Refugees
United States	240 000
Great Britain	85 000
China	25 000
Argentina	25 000
Brazil	25 000
Colombia and Mexico (combined)	40 000
Canada	4000–5000

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- Given the hardships Canadians experienced during the Depression, do you find their acceptance of discrimination against immigrants understandable, even if unethical? Do you think this kind of discrimination could ever happen in Canada today? Explain why or why not.
- Does a country like Canada have an ethical obligation to accept refugees from other countries, especially if they face persecution or death in their country of origin? What kind of obligation does Canada have toward its own citizens?