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THE ADMISSION OF REFUGEES INTO IRELAND BETWEEN 1933 AND 1945

Back in mythical times the original inhabitants of Ireland were giants who were called the Tutha de Danann. Numerous invasions by other races followed over the centuries. The Irish of today are a mixture of many peoples, including to a small degree persons who fled from Nazi persecution in Germany and Austria between 1933 and 1945. In general Ireland operated a closed door policy to refugees in this period. There are examples that it granted limited access to persons who were willing to adopt the Roman Catholic faith. This policy denied access to many Jewish persons who could have added to the well-being of Ireland at that time. The law gave the Minister for Justice absolute control over who could enter and remain in Ireland.

Ireland has always been a country of immigration. It is a country occupied by aliens, foreigners, invaders, refugees and asylum seekers. I very much doubt if there is a person living on this island who can truly claim that he or she is a full blooded and true direct descendant of the original native inhabitants of this island, namely the Tutha de Danann. In fact what we see today are descendants of Celts originally from mainland Europe, Scandinavian Vikings, Norman invaders, shipwrecked Spanish sailors, Huguenot and Palatine asylum seekers and many others.

Nevertheless we in this country regard any newcomer whether migrant, asylum seeker or refugee with suspicion and horror. This approach, which includes the refusal of permanent settlement to strangers unless they could maintain their footholds, extends back into history, for the Annals of Inisfallen record the arrival of five Jewish persons in 1079 and the fact that they were sent back to where they came from.

There are other references to Jewish people in Ireland from the period of the Norman invasion down to 1660 when the first Jewish synagogue was established in Dublin in Crane Lane. It is significant that for the next hundred years synagogues were generally located close to glassworks. An investigation of the names of the master craftsmen indicates that they were probably Jewish or of Jewish origin as they had names such as Costa and Morano, (a word of Spanish origin for describing a Jew). One may assume that these immigrants brought the secret of making crystal glass to Ireland. A further wave of immigration occurred following the end of the Napoleonic wars when a considerable number of German-speaking Prussian Jews arrived in Ireland and were instrumental in establishing the Mary’s Abbey Synagogue in Dublin. The last wave of
Jewish migrants came in the mid 1880s onwards and were generally of Lithuanian descent.\textsuperscript{1}

During the 1930s this policy of closing the door against the stranger was supported by the law of Ireland by virtue of the Aliens legislation which was then in force. Many nations comprise various combinations of immigrants and thus Ireland is no exception. It is regrettable that this fact was forgotten and deliberately ignored by many of the citizens of this island during the 1930s. It was also forgotten in 2004 when we removed by referendum the right of children born on this island to claim Irish citizenship unless the child had at the time of his or her birth a parent who was an Irish citizen or a parent entitled to Irish citizenship.

**Aliens and the Law**

Every country has the right to control the numbers and the types of aliens who may enter its territory and to regulate their stay while within its borders. In 1922 national self-determination was granted to Ireland and it was natural that in 1935 an Aliens Act should be enacted to provide for the control of aliens and for the regulation of other matters relating to aliens. This Act repealed the earlier (British) Acts of 1914 and 1919. However, alien legislation goes back a very long time. One of the earliest Acts was the Regulation of Aliens Act 1836. This was followed by the Aliens Act 1905, which came into operation on 1 January 1906, the Aliens Restriction Act 1914, and the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act 1919.

The 1935 Act enabled the Minister for Justice to make Orders and for completeness I quote them as follows:

4. Section 11 – Aliens (Name and Licence) Regulations 1936, (No.65 of 1936).
5. Section 5(7) – Aliens (Amendment) Order 1936, (No. 75 of 1936), revoked in 1943.
7. Section 5 – Aliens Order 1939, (No. 291 of 1939), revoked in 1946.
8. Section 5 – Aliens Order 1941, (No. 290 of 1941), revoked in 1946.