

# CANADIAN KNOWLEDGE AND (IN)ACTION DURING THE HOLOCAUST

What information did Canadians have about Jewish persecution and the Holocaust during the Nazi regime, and what did they do with this information?

## Canadians Knowledge of the Holocaust From 1933-1945

### **The Toronto Daily Star**

- Between February 1933 and April 1945, the *Toronto Daily Star*, Canada's largest and most distributed newspaper at the time, provided Canadians with extensive detailed information about Jewish persecution and the Holocaust in real time. This demonstrates that Canadians' failure to come to the assistance of Jewish refugees was in spite of knowledge about the violence against the Jewish population of Europe.

**1933-1939:** The *Star* published detailed reports on specific measures of segregation and alienation of Jews in Germany and German-occupied Austria.

#### Canadians received information on:

- Mass arrests, torture, and murder of German Jews
- Anti-Jewish riots
- The banning of Jewish-authored texts
- Nazi government policies of Jewish expulsion
- Boycotts and "Aryanization" of Jewish shops and businesses
- Banning of Jews from civil service positions
- Federal and local policies banning Jews from renting or owning land and from attending municipal baths and sporting events
- The 1935 Nuremberg race laws, which removed citizenship rights from non-"Aryans" and banned German-Jewish (and non-Jewish) relationships
- The destruction of Jewish homes and businesses in the November 1938 pogroms (Kristallnacht)

**1941:** *Star* articles focused on antisemitic persecution in Western Europe, and portrayed Nazi anti-Jewish persecution measures as a Europe-wide phenomenon.

#### Canadians received detailed information on:

- Antisemitic persecution in Vienna, Austria:
- Anti-Jewish policies in Vichy France
- Application of Nuremberg laws to Slovakian Jews by the Slovakian collaborationist government
- Forced labour for minimal wages
- Bans from certain activities (eg. visiting the theatre)
- Specially marked ration cards
- Forced adoption of middle names 'Sara' or 'Israel' to signify Jewishness

Canadians were made aware of the progressing violence and methods of the Holocaust.

**1942:** References to systematic mass extermination of Jewish people demonstrate an awareness of the Nazi plan of Jewish extermination as early as 1942.

#### The *Star* published articles with details on:

- Jewish people being murdered, rounded up, and worked to death in Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Spain, Bulgaria, Holland, and Norway
- Concentration camps
- Jewish slave labour in Bulgaria
- The deportations of Jews from Germany, Slovakia, and the Netherlands
- The ghettoization of Polish Jews
- The mass murders of Jews in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland by Germans and civilian collaborators

**1943:** The *Star* provided increasingly specific information, and included regular updates on the growing number of Jewish victims. If Canadians had any disbelief about the severity and scope of the violence against Jews, it was cast aside by the increasingly frequent and detailed information on the genocide.

#### The *Star* published articles that...

- Explicitly referenced extermination camps in Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor
- Described the process of extermination in these camps
- Noted the inhumane conditions in the Warsaw ghetto
- Reiterated the comprehensive nature of the Nazi extermination policy
- Referenced the Nazi plan of extermination of the Jewish population of Europe and North Africa
- Provided detailed information on the violence in German-occupied territories between 1941-1943, including the Babi Yar massacre, made available by Soviet liberation

**1944-1945:** The *Star* published further detailed reports and eyewitness accounts made available by Soviet Army advancements and camp liberations.

- **1944: The *Star* on Majdanek**
- Extensively covered the inhumane conditions in Majdanek
- Explicitly referred to it as an "extermination camp"
- Made no mention of the Jewish victims of Majdanek
- **1945: The *Star* on Auschwitz-Birkenau**
- Described the Buna work camps and medical experiments
- Emphasized the scale of Auschwitz and its exclusive purpose of Jewish extermination
- In April 1945, the *Star* attempted to calculate the number of victims of the Holocaust by listing assumed Jewish deaths for 25 identified "German extermination camps."

Ulrich Frisse's analysis of the *Toronto Daily Star* demonstrates that the major Canadian newspaper provided its readers with extensive information of the major "milestones" of the Nazi genocide in real time, and that Canadians were aware of the Nazi "Final Solution" as early as 1942.

# Canadian Actions During the Holocaust 1933-1945

The *Toronto Daily Star* provided extensive information on the Nazi genocide, and published articles warning about the implications for Jewish people in North America.

In light of this information, how did Canada treat its Jewish population?

## ONTARIO/TORONTO

- Jewish people were banned from renting or owning land, and faced employment discrimination and public segregation
- Canada's leading pro-Nazi group "Deutscher Bund Canada" maintained a membership base throughout Ontario, and attempted to discredit anti-Nazi articles by alleging that the authors of these articles were Jewish and therefore biased
- Rise of Swastika Clubs in the summer of 1933 attempting to prevent Jewish people from accessing Toronto beaches
- Canadian Nazi sympathizers instigated a race riot by displaying the swastika flag and chanting Nazi slogans at a mixed Jewish and Christian softball game at Christie Pits in August 1933

## QUEBEC

- Publication of antisemitic right-wing nationalist newspapers *Le Goglu*, *Le Miroir*, and *Le Channeau* (banned in March 1933)
  - Subsidized by Montreal mayor Camille Hounde
  - Campaigned to boycott Jewish businesses
  - Distributed the antisemitic conspiracy text *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*
- National Social Christian Party established in 1934
  - Patterned after Nazism
  - Called for Jews to lose citizenship and be deported

## ALBERTA

- Under the 1935 Social Credit Party and Premier William Aberhart, ideological antisemitism flourished in Alberta despite the lack of a significant Jewish population
- Antisemitic stories circulated in the press
- Jewish people were excluded from social and sport clubs
- Premier Aberhart met with American antisemites, and publicly denounced "Jewish bankers"
- 1943: Social Credit MP Norman Jacques attempted to read from *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* in the House of Commons.

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- After meeting in 1937, Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had an extremely positive impression of Hitler.
- At the 1938 Evian Conference 1938, PM King and Immigration Director Frederick Charles Blair made the decision to refuse Jewish refugees fleeing Europe entry to Canada.
- In 1939, Canada turned away the German Jewish refugees aboard the *St. Louis*
- Canada accepted only 5000 Jewish immigrants during the Holocaust; the lowest number out of all the Commonwealth nations.

**Ulrich Frisse argues that the Canadian government's decision not to take action was *in spite of* knowledge about the scope and severity of antisemitic violence in Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe.**

**The widespread antisemitism among provincial and municipal government leaders and Canadian citizens, and the Canadian federal government decision to refuse Jewish refugees, constituted explicit and deliberate acts of antisemitism and complicity in the Holocaust, not a *lack of action*.**

Frise, Ulrich. "The Bystanders' Perspective: Toronto Daily Star and its Coverage of the Persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust in Canada, 1933-1945." *Yad Vashem Studies*, 39.1 (2011): 213-243.

Sitara, Georgia. "1930s: Antisemitism and the Holocaust in Canadian Context." HSTR 382B: Race, Racism and Ethnicity in Canada Since 1900. Class Lecture at the University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, February 27, 2024.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Kristallnacht." Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht> (accessed April 11, 2024)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The Nuremberg Race Laws." Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nuremberg-race-laws> (accessed April 11, 2024)