

Charles Small: My name is Charles Small, I'm the director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anti-Semitism and Policy.

Tell us the history of the Saint Louis from the Canadian perspective

Charles Small: I know that the United States, the St. Louis was followed by the US Navy and they were escorted out of US waters to the Canadian – to Canadian waters, and it's important, I think – to know the backdrop of Canadian society, the background for Canadian society at the moment. There was tension between English Canada and French Canada. The Canadian government was entering or thinking of entering into the war to support the British in Quebec, which was run very much by the church. There was a strong nationalist and even fascistic movement with Maurice Duplessis, and the tension between the French and the English made it – the St. Louis sort of was a part of this context in which French Canada and English Canada were fighting over their entry into the war. Quebec didn't want to enter the war and English Canada was more predisposed to do it. So, when the St. Louis entered Canadian waters, the Quebec nationalist who were close to French nationalists and European nationalists, were very much opposed to Jewish refugees and they were very much reflective of the anti-Semitism that was growing in Europe.

So for example, in March 1939, about six months before the St. Louis enters into Canadian waters, there were German-Jewish tourists in Canada, they're on tourist visas, and the Canadian government revoked their tourist visas and sent them back to Germany. In May 1939, when the St. Louis entered into Canadian waters, they entered into this context of anti-Semitism, of nationalism, the church under Lionel Groulx was very much connected to the fascist movements of Europe, and they were extraordinarily anti-Semitic, and the minister in charge of Quebec, a Mr. LaPointe, worked with Blair. Blair was the immigration minister at the time in Canada, to ensure that no Jews would enter Canada, and they were in discussions – there's a book by Irving Abella, a Canadian historian from the university – York University in Toronto, he wrote a book called None is Too Many, and in their conversations, Blair – actually was asked how many Jewish refugees would Canada be willing to take and he said none is too many. And when the Canadian government escorted the St. Louis out of Canadian waters, back – and went back to Germany, the Canadian officials were aware that the fate of the 107 passengers on the ship was going to be certainly incarceration and perhaps death. They knew what was waiting for them.

QUESTION *What was the reasoning of the Canadian government behind the denial of entry?*

Charles Small: Right, so it went up the east coast and there was a whole debate. Jewish – the Jewish community of Canada was trying to get the Canadian government to accept these refugees and let them enter into Canada, at least let them dock temporarily in the Canadian port, I believe in Halifax, to discuss the issues and it was just a – it was a non-starter. So the government made an informed decision – not to allow Jews to enter into Canada because they were afraid, in the transcripts it shows, that the discussion was if they allow this group of people to enter into Canada as refugees, there'd be a flood of hundreds of thousands if not millions of Jewish refugees from Canada – from Europe, excuse me, coming into Canada.

QUESTION *And the denial to dock was welcome by Canadian citizens?*

Charles Small: No, and what's remarkable, looking back at the level of anti-Semitism, there was a Gallup poll in 1943, when Canadians – when the Holocaust – the story of the Holocaust was coming out, there was a Gallup poll in 1943 and in 1944. With the knowledge of the Holocaust, only 13 percent of Canadians, 13 percent of Canadians with the knowledge of the Holocaust were in favor of any type of Jewish refugees coming to Canada, 13 percent. So the level of anti-Semitism in Canada was – just like the United States, was deep and profound.

QUESTION *Was there open Anti-Semitism in Canada in the 1930's?*

Charles Small: Sure, I mean, Canada and Quebec I think especially was – I think anti-Semitism was part of the political culture, it was part of the social culture. In Quebec, Jews weren't allowed to live in certain areas, there were certain areas of Montréal, for example, that were off limits to Jews. In Quebec, in – and Quebec, at the time, was a religious, Catholic society. Lionel Groulx and the church was – played a dominant role in Quebec politics and in Quebec culture, and they were sympathetic to the fascists and certainly anti-Semitic. This was the old – type of Catholicism that was prominently anti-Semitic. In Quebec, Jews weren't allowed to – for example, Jewish doctors wouldn't be able to touch a Catholic patient. So if you look at the Quebec Jewish community, we call it institutional completeness. Schools, hospitals, urban areas were very much completely Jewish. They Ecole St. Luke is a – is still 90-odd percent Jewish. It's segregated from the rest of Montréal. There's a Jewish General Hospital that emerged, it's a leading hospital today, but it was a place where Jewish doctors and Jewish patients were able to go to because they weren't allowed to go to hospitals. The Anglo-Saxon institutions like McGill, University of Toronto had very strict quotas for Jewish people that were finally removed in the 1960s, so.

QUESTION *Was there a political impact in Canada, as a consequence of the Saint Louis events?*

Charles Small: No, I would say that Canada has a horrible record of accepting Jewish refugees. It was one of the worst records in the world for accepting Jewish refugees, I imagine. After the war, in fact, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, they actually took more Nazi war criminals than Jewish refugees, if you can imagine. So Canada has a bad record when it came to issues of anti-Semitism and Jewish refugees. I would argue that the Canadian national identity, when Canada sort of moved from a – from Anglo conformity, so sort of an English dominated society to bilingualism and biculturalism and then eventually to multiculturalism, and under Lester Pearson and Diefenbaker, the prime ministers in the '60s – they were at the forefront of joining the United Nations and international law and they developed sort of a multicultural identity, and I think Canada in the 1970s into the 1980s emerged as more of a multicultural, following the International Declaration of Human Rights, becoming a responsible international player on these issues, it leaves behind its anti-Semitism, and over time some of its racist policies, as well, dealing with immigration.

QUESTION *Did the denial to let the Saint Louis land constitute an AntiSemitic event?*

Charles Small: 100 percent, yes. I think the rejection of basic humanity, of the rejection of the notion of allowing a refugee refuge, especially in the 19 – in 1939 when the Nazis were rising to power and clearly discriminating against the Jewish people of Germany and of Europe in the most profound, disgusting way, the fact that the Canadian public and the American public and governments did not give these few people refuge points to a horrific form of bigotry and anti-Semitism, yes. the whole discourse – of this tragedy, of the St. Louis, would've been completely different if it wasn't for the fact that these were Jewish refugees. The discourse surrounding whether to accept or reject the refugees were largely based on the fact that they were Jews.

QUESTION *Do you see any parallelisms between Anti Semitism then and now?*

Charles Small: I think the demonization and the de-legitimization of Israel is a form of anti-Semitism, because what happens is young kids in the diaspora in Europe, in North America, in South America, the community, students who have an affiliation to Israel, after all, Israel is an integral part of Jewish culture and Jewish identity, that diaspora community, student groups who have an affiliation to Israel are being connected to the demonization of Israel. So if the discourse on –

campuses in Europe and the Americas are such that Israel is a racist state or Israel is an apartheid state, if this is true, as many intellectuals are now asserting, this is part of the demonization process, that Israel is an apartheid or even a Nazi state, if this is true from a human rights, liberal educated perspective, you would be morally obligated to dismantle this racist, apartheid, Nazi state, and if students on campus or Jewish organizations or synagogues have an affiliation to this racist, Nazi, apartheid state, then these people are part of the problem. These people are opposed to democracy and democratic principles. So we're in a process, this demonization is also de-legitimizing Jews in the diaspora. It is inverting and turning over reality, it's even, in a sense, destroying or murdering the history of the Jewish people.

That the inversion is that somehow the Jews are the Nazis. It – it's – the irrationality is profound, but when intelligent people become irrational, this is – we know this is a warning sign.

QUESTION *What do the events surrounding the Saint Louis in 1939 represent in today's context?*

Charles Small:

So the catastrophe of the Holocaust and the horrible case of the St. Louis and the symbolism of what the St. Louis represents in terms of the Holocaust and demonizing human beings, hundreds of people with stories and careers and professions and to be boiled down to a dangerous Jew and sent back to certain death or high probability of death, in a horrible situation in Germany, the lessons that we should learn is that never again. Never again do we permit societies, governments, institutions to demonize human beings to the point where we can create a genocide, and the same demonization of what happened to the Jews in Europe is happening to, in my mind, in my – and I think in the body of knowledge is the demonization of Israel. I was at the United Nations and – for Durban II and Ahmadinejad spoke the same day that I was there, and I was on a panel discussion for the Durban II, it was called Racism: the pathway to genocide, and I was on the panel with Professor Irwin Cottler, the esteemed international human rights lawyer, former minister of justice – of Canada, a woman from Rwanda who lost her family in the genocide, a legal scholar from Darfur, so we were speaking about the Holocaust, about genocide in the past, the present, Darfur. Amazingly, this genocide continues despite the internet and news, this goes on for year after year after year, and we spoke, I spoke about the incitement to genocide and preventing genocide, i.e. Iran's design to destroy Israel, and after the lecture, a group of Rwandans came up to me, I never met them before, and they said, "We must speak to you, it's urgent," so we went into the UN lounge and we had coffee together, there were about six people from the Rwandan delegation of the United Nations, and they told me based on the experience in Rwanda, how they demonized Rwandans –

how they called them cockroaches and the like, and paved the way for the genocide, they were imploring me. They said, "Don't you understand what's happening to the Israelis? Don't you understand, your people experienced the Holocaust, we experienced the genocide of Rwanda, don't you understand what's happening to the Israelis in the Middle East?" They said, "Please," they were begging me, "Go back to the United States and tell the leaders of the Jewish community and tell the leaders of the government that we are terrified of what's happening to Israel in terms of its demonization," that they see the same patterns happening from the Holocaust to their experience of Rwanda to the demonization of Israel, imagine. And so I think the lesson that – one of the lessons we can learn is that once people are objectified, once this demonization goes on, we have to stop it there.

We have to remember that Auschwitz and the concentration camps and the death camps, the railroad tracks bringing people, that the Holocaust didn't begin with bricks and mortars, it didn't begin with train tracks. The Holocaust began, the Shoah began with words and ideas, and the words and ideas coming out of the Middle East today is very much in that vein. If you study and look at the ideology of political Islam, not Islam, not Muslims, but radical political Islam and its demonization of the Israeli, the Jew and the Zionist, this must stop. And somehow, some liberal intellectuals, some post-modernists in the West have sort of jumped on the bandwagon or acquiesced and are not being responsible global citizens to stop this demonization of Israelis, even if it's not – that Israel's not the post popular nation in their – worldview, we must stop the demonization of anybody. This would be the one profound lesson of the Holocaust, and we're not – in my estimation we're not learning – we have not learned this lesson.

QUESTION *Is there a lasting effect of not allowing the Saint Louis passengers into the US?*

Charles Small:

Well, I think if we don't take a principled stand against barbarism, against fascism, racism, it sends a message. So the fact that these poor refugees were sent back to their death, I can imagine only emboldened the Nazis by their saying, "Okay, the North Americans are not going to stand up against us. They're going to acquiesce to our anti-Semitism – our form of government. They have – they're also anti-Communist and we're anti-Communist, so okay." The message must've empowered the Nazis in Europe and helped them to take hold, and just like today, just like today. The fact that we are not sending a clear message to the Muslim Brotherhood to stop your genocidal anti-Semitism, to stop having political rallies where you sing songs about how the Jews will never rest and the Jews will never sleep again and that we're all Sahibs and we're all Hamas. This has to stop. We have to send a clear message, and the fact that we don't send a clear message empowers this reactionary movement. We have to remember in philosophy and physics, every action has a reaction and every inaction has a – the same

profound effect. And what we do and what we don't do has an effect and we have to take responsibility for what – not only what we do, but also for what we do not do.

QUESTION *What would you tell people watching this interview several years from now?*

Charles Small: That's a good question. So if I was speaking – if people watch this in 20 years, what would be the lesson? So it's a profound question. I don't know if I'm up to answering it, but I'll try. The lesson is don't always look – back. Don't fight the anti-Semitism of two generations ago. That's easy. It's easy and it's even popular to fight the anti-Semitism of the past. It's easy to denounce the anti-Semitism that affected the Jews that are dead. We have to fight contemporary anti-Semitism. It's not popular to ever fight contemporary anti-Semitism. Perhaps in 20 years we'll look back and we'll say, "Yes, it's easy, we shouldn't have accepted the demonization of Israel," and perhaps in 20 years, anti-Semitism will morph into something else, or perhaps if there's a catastrophe in the Middle East, there'll be another honeymoon period for Jews for a generation or two, nobody will bother the Jews, if there's another catastrophe. The challenge is to fight the anti-Semitism of the moment, and it's never been popular, it's never been easy. When I was in the anti-apartheid movement, I was a leader in the anti-apartheid movement in Canada, in the United Kingdom, it was easy, it was popular. To be part of the anti-apartheid movement, it was a cool thing. There were – there was music, there was culture, there was poetry, international musicians, scholars, lawyers, everybody came together. There was teach-ins and concerts. It was a good thing to do to fight apartheid, as it should've been, because apartheid was a crime against humanity. It's never popular to fight anti-Semitism, and you have to be brave and you have to be strong and we have to continue the struggle for humanity, to stop the barbarism.