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Susan Cohen^{1,*}

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*Correspondence: drsusancohen@googlemail.com

¹Independent scholar

Challenging the injustice of wartime internment: the collaboration between Eleanor Rathbone and Esther Simpson, 1940–1942^{*}

SUSAN COHEN

In May 1940, just months after the outbreak of the Second World War, Winston Churchill, the newly appointed prime minister and leader of the wartime coalition government, introduced a policy of mass internment of enemy aliens. About 26,700 or so refugees from the Reich territories, who had previously been designated as “friendly enemy aliens” by the tribunals set up in September 1939 to assess risk, were arbitrarily arrested and interned in makeshift camps around the country. Among them, and held in so-called “protective custody”, were hundreds of refugee academics and scholars, many of them German and Austrian Jews, all of whom had been fortunate enough, by some means or another, to escape Nazi persecution in Europe. By virtue of their professions they were also associated with the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) and, in many cases, with Eleanor Rathbone MP, the founder of the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees (PCR) and a renowned humanitarian activist.¹ The purpose of this paper is to explore the wartime co-operation between Eleanor and Esther (Tess) Simpson, the secretary and linchpin of the SPSL, and demonstrate the extent and impact of their activism on behalf of the interned refugee academics and scholars.

Of the two protagonists, Rathbone had devoted her working life to the service of others, and had gained a reputation as a powerful and effective feminist, suffragist, social and welfare reformer, humanitarian activist, and politician. She was the champion of the underrepresented in society, regardless of their race, religion, or gender, and from the outset of her career in 1897 had pursued a broad range of issues at home and abroad.

1 Eleanor Rathbone was the Independent MP for the Combined English Universities from 1929 until her death in November 1946. For her life and work see Susan Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing: Eleanor Rathbone and the Refugees* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010).

* My thanks to Professor Michael Berkowitz for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

But from the moment that she denounced Hitler and the recently elected Nazi regime in the House of Commons on 13 April 1933 she shifted the focus of her work to international affairs, and in particular to the rescue and welfare of refugees from Fascist and Nazi oppression.²

As explored elsewhere, Eleanor was, to say the least, disenchanted with her government's negative attitude to humanitarian relief, exemplified during the Spanish Civil War.³ Alongside Spain, there was a grave political situation unfolding in Eastern Europe, and as her opposition to Fascism, Nazism, and appeasement grew she became increasingly concerned about the official British response to endangered Jews and others attempting to escape Nazi persecution. The German annexation of Austria on 12 March 1938 transformed the escalating European refugee crisis into a catastrophe, but it was the Munich Settlement, and Britain's complicity in enabling the Nazi regime to annexe the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia, that created the human tragedy she had predicted. To help her already relentless campaign on behalf of the refugees, which included challenging Britain's immigration and visa policies as well as the obstacles created by the Passport Control Office in Prague, she established her cross-party, purely voluntary PCR in November 1938, to act as a pressure group.⁴ From then until the outbreak of war in September 1939 endangered Czechs were her priority, but as the doors out of Nazi-occupied Europe and those into Britain were all but closed, Eleanor once again refocused her priorities.⁵

Her energy turned towards the plight of refugees who had, often against all the odds, found a safe haven in Britain, but who, as newly designated enemy aliens, were suffering all manner of injustices as a result of their internment. The implementation and often unintended consequences that resulted from the policy caused a public outcry, and from May 1940 created a huge increase in the work of the PCR. This is reflected in surviving figures produced in September 1941, for between 15 July 1940 and 6 September 1941, for example, the committee dealt with 4,526 cases of which 1,693 were applications for release from internment. In excess of 7,000 letters were sent, the office made 3,500 telephone calls, and took 8,500 incoming calls, while 4,700 people visited the office.⁶

2 Hansard HC, vol. 276, cols 2761, 2763, 13 April 1933.

3 For an overview of Rathbone's Spanish campaigning see Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing*, 86–91.

4 *Ibid.*, 113.

5 *Ibid.*, 101–27.

6 François Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (London: Penguin, 1940), 159, n. 142.

The establishment of the SPSL as the Academic Assistance Council (AAC) in 1933 was also a direct but more immediate response to the Nazi regime. On 7 April 1933 legislation was implemented whereby all Jewish civil servants in Germany, which included university teachers, judges, and academics, were arbitrarily dismissed from their posts, losing their livelihoods. Many others were sacked on the grounds of their political beliefs.⁷ It was, perhaps, serendipity that William Beveridge was visiting Vienna in April 1933, for it was while he and Lionel Robbins, his colleague from the London School of Economics, were there that they learnt to their horror about this legislation and the effect it was having on fellow academics.⁸ Coincidentally, Beveridge was introduced to the physicist Leo Szilard, whose prescience of impending disaster had already persuaded him that a rescue mission was essential.⁹ While Szilard was making his own efforts at finding support, he urged Beveridge to “create a refugee settlement committee in England.” Beveridge in turn suggested that Szilard come to London, to “prod” him.¹⁰ Determined to mount a rescue operation for displaced scholars, on his return home, with Szilard’s prodding, Beveridge initiated the establishment of the AAC. He used his reputation and prestigious standing within the university and academic world, and with the network of support that Szilard collected they gathered people who were willing to aid the rescue of, and help re-establish, hundreds of the most prominent endangered scholars.

These people were indeed among the lucky ones, for untold numbers were not recipients of the assistance of the likes of the AAC/SPSL, and were doomed to the fate of millions who perished in the Holocaust.¹¹ The tragedy remains that agonizing decisions had to be made by the allocation committee of the Council, chaired by Beveridge, as to which academics would be accepted by the AAC/SPSL and receive financial and practical help.¹²

7 For the establishment of the AAC/SPSL see Shula Marks, Paul Weindling, and Laura Wintour, eds., *In Defence of Learning: The Plight, Persecution and Placement of Academic Refugees 1933–1980s* (Oxford: British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2011), 29–76.

8 David Zimmerman, “‘Protests Butter No Parsnips’: Lord Beveridge and the Rescue of Refugee Academics from Europe, 1933–1938”, in *ibid.*, 29–43.

9 William Lanouette, “A Narrow Margin of Hope: Leo Szilard in the Founding Days of CARA”, in *ibid.*, 45–58.

10 *Ibid.*, 49.

11 Tibor Frank, “Organised Rescue Operations in Europe and the United States, 1933–1945”, in Marks, Weindling, and Wintour, *In Defence of Learning*, 143–60.

12 Zimmerman, “‘Protests Butter No Parsnips’”, 41–2.

Helping the refugee scholars and academics re-establish themselves elsewhere was a monumental undertaking. It could not have been achieved without the dedication and dogged determination of Tess Simpson, the young woman whom Szilard invited to take up the post of, initially, Assistant Secretary of the AAC (renamed the SPSL in 1936) shortly after it was established in 1933.¹³ Even though Tess was only offered a third of her salary at the World Alliance of YMCAs, she did not hesitate to accept. As she recalled, it gave her the chance “to help the sort of people I’d played chamber music with in Vienna.”¹⁴ She went on to serve the organization as its Secretary for the best part of forty years.¹⁵ The endeavour was hugely successful, and was due in no small part to Tess, for she became, as Beveridge later wrote, “of lasting and growing importance.”¹⁶ But behind the success of the Society was a greater human tragedy, that of the tens of thousands of scholars and academics who did not benefit from their support, and who perished in the Holocaust. The resources of the SPSL were not unlimited, and like the Rockefeller Foundation in the USA and others they were selective in whom they supported.¹⁷ Perhaps inevitably, those whom they chose to assist offered the greatest potential benefit to the country.

The Society dealt with thousands of cases during the prewar and war years. On the eve of the Second World War some 2,000 people were registered with the SPSL, and by the end of the conflict the number had reached almost 2,600.¹⁸ Each and every one of them, and in some cases their whole family, was being helped in some way or another, many of them in a personal way.¹⁹ The vast majority were men, although the SPSL – or more specifically Tess – did also collaborate with the refugee committee of the British Federation of Women Graduates, and provide support for some of their more prominent women academics and scholars.²⁰

13 Lanouette, “Narrow Margin of Hope”, 51.

14 Tess Simpson quoted in Marks, Weindling, and Wintour, *In Defence of Learning*, 5.

15 R. M. Cooper, ed., *Refugee Scholars: Conversations with Tess Simpson* (Leeds: Moorland, 1992); see also Marks, Weindling, and Wintour, *In Defence of Learning*, 101–26.

16 Lord Beveridge quoted in David Edmonds, “Esther Simpson: The Unknown Heroine”, *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 May 2017.

17 For the Rockefeller Foundation see Frank, “Organised Rescue Operations”, 143–50.

18 See Bodleian Library, Oxford, Records of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, Ms. SPSL 1–578 (hereafter, Ms. SPSL).

19 For Simpson’s role in distributing clothes parcels to SPSL families see Susan Cohen, “In Defence of Academic Women Refugees: The British Federation of University Women”, in Marks, Weindling, and Wintour, *In Defence of Learning*, 173–4.

20 *Ibid.*, 161–76; Marks, Weindling, and Wintour, *In Defence of Learning*, 14, n. 49.

The archival consequence of the SPSL's activity comprises some 5,000 files of records, contained in 578 boxes, and within this is a small cache of papers relating to Eleanor's relationship with Tess and the Society. Despite the limited size of this specific group of papers, it nevertheless provides a valuable insight into how two individuals, both of whom were overwhelmed with commitments, worked together to exert pressure on the government to ease the difficulties and impositions imposed on refugee scholars and academics, collectively and individually. It also demonstrates their personal concern for the wellbeing of the refugees and their families, seeing them as individuals rather than as a collective.

The association, which began in late July 1940, was instigated by Eleanor at the suggestion of Professor A. V. Hill, who thought a joint enterprise would be mutually beneficial.²¹ The timing was no coincidence, for the circumstances and conditions of the mass detention of enemy aliens in May 1940 had raised grave concerns in political and public circles. The harsh reality of internment policies reached a peak in early July 1940 when hundreds of internees en route to Canada died when their transport, the *Arandora Star*, was torpedoed off the Irish coast. The public outcry that followed precipitated a lengthy and heated debate in the House of Commons on 10 July 1940 where, for nearly six hours, politicians, including a vociferous Eleanor Rathbone, discussed the rights and wrongs of internment and challenged the status quo.²² Her subsequent visit to Huyton internment camp in Liverpool on 20 July 1940 reinforced her view that the internment policy was deeply flawed.²³ It also served to harden her resolve to do as much as she possibly could to force change and alleviate the misery that was being caused. This was the point at which Eleanor and Tess began working together, and agreed that anything that would help secure the release from internment of the many men registered with the SPSL was worthwhile. In Eleanor's case, this was in addition to all her other refugee and parliamentary work.²⁴

Even though the Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson, had agreed that sympathetic consideration would be given to representations regarding

21 For A. V. Hill see Eleanor Rathbone (ER) to Esther Simpson (ES), 29 July 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 244

22 *Hansard* HC, vol. 362, cols. 1208–306, 10 July 1940.

23 For ER's visit to Huyton see Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing*, 142–5.

24 For ER's involvement with other refugee organizations see *ibid.*, 114.

individual cases from organizations such as the SPSL, Eleanor and Tess soon realized that achieving their goal was going to be a slow process. Eleanor had an extensive list of academics and scholars among the expanding number of PCR cases, and she immediately began sharing these with Tess. Tess's input proved invaluable for she was able to explain to Eleanor the precise procedure the SPSL had to follow when presenting release applications. She also detailed the limitations imposed by the Home Office as to which professions they could represent.²⁵ As appeals could only be made by the SPSL on behalf of "those displaced from University teaching or research posts", many of Eleanor's cases proved to be ineligible for the Society's support. However, Tess always tried to suggest an alternative organization, exemplified in the case of Dr Richard Flatter, an Austrian Shakespearean scholar, whose details Eleanor then passed on to the British Academy.²⁶

Besides considering procedural issues, the immediate issue the women wanted to confront was the widely publicized and striking complaints about the conditions in the internment camps. Contrary to the cruel assertion made by the MP Sir Annesley Somerville in June 1940 that interned aliens were being kept in "luxurious idleness . . . at a greater cost than the allowance paid to men with dependents", the conditions at Huyton, where Eleanor and Tess were most involved, were lamentable.²⁷ The alarming stories that had reached Tess, and which Eleanor saw for herself on her visit, troubled them both. Many of the interned refugees, some of whom had already experienced internment in Nazi Germany, said that they felt like criminals, for they were detained within barbed wire fences, and subject to constant body searches. They were forced to live in accommodation which lacked furniture and beds, and the older men had no access to medical care or medicine, other than aspirin, which they had to pay for themselves.²⁸ The inadequacy of food was real, as attested by the first commandant at Huyton who told the men that "he was only liable not to let them starve, but he could not give them enough that we would not be hungry."²⁹ Eleanor used her political position to question repeatedly and

25 ES to ER, 30 July 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 245.

26 ER to ES, 29 July 1940; ES to ER 30 July 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fols. 244 and 245.

27 Hansard HC, vol. 361, col. 981, 6 June 1940.

28 Jennifer Taylor, "We have more than enough': Conditions in Huyton Internment Camp in the Autumn and Early Winter of 1940", *Liverpool History Society Journal* (2009): 100.

29 *Ibid.*, 101, citing Lafitte, *Internment*, 22 June 1940, 110.

to urge officials to make improvements, and along with official pressure and the change of commanding officer in late July 1940, conditions did slowly improve. Nevertheless it was almost another month before the local *Prescot Reporter* newspaper confirmed that beds had at last been provided for the elderly and sick.³⁰ Apart from the poor accommodation, there were real safety concerns, as Tess discovered from one of her contacts in mid-September 1940. Since the late summer Liverpool had been subjected to heavy bombing raids, putting the whole city, including the 2,400 Huyton internees, at risk. But, as she told Eleanor, the air raid precautions at the camp were almost non-existent. Every house accommodated sixteen internees, but none had a basement, so the only place the men could shelter was under the stairs, which was totally inadequate. Any chance of extinguishing a fire was hindered as there was only one stirrup pump in the whole camp.³¹

Another major issue that the two women discussed in the early days was related to the mental health of internees. There had been a number of suicides at Huyton in early July, and this tragic fact had been brought to the attention of politicians by Eleanor and others during the House of Commons debate. She had also recounted how an eminent professor of chemistry aged sixty-two had killed himself rather than be taken by the police and interned, having previously been held in a concentration camp in Germany.³² It was hardly surprising that the men were depressed: they had no idea where they would be transported to, possibly the Isle of Man, in some instances Canada or Australia, and the lack of reliable information resulted in rumour and uncertainty and the fear of something worse. Added to this was the loss of liberty, the enforced separation from friends and family, and being deprived of any means of communication, to say nothing of the lack of basic human needs.³³

When the White Paper was issued in early August 1940, Tess wrote of her great disappointment to Eleanor, for the Category B internees, the doubtful people whose activities had been curtailed, were completely ignored. Among them were many Cambridge scientists who had the misfortune of coming before a local tribunal judge who was highly

30 "Huyton Aliens' Camp", *Prescot Reporter*, 23 Aug. 1940.

31 ES to ER, 17 Sept. 1940. Ms. SPSL, 120/2, fol. 268.

32 *Hansard HC*, vol. 362, col. 1215, 10 July 1940.

33 Miriam Kochan, *Britain's Internees in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 67-75.

suspicious of them all: his argument was “that if he were the German government, Cambridge was an excellent place to which to send spies disguised as refugee scientists” where they could do untold damage. Not only was he inclined to put many of the scientists into Category B, although there was no evidence against them, but he also included their whole families as well, just to be on the safe side. There were, Tess said, so many cases of the unjust award of the B category, replicated across other areas, that it reinforced her view that the “variety of the standard adopted by different tribunals was worrying.”³⁴

Hopes that the situation would change were dispelled when Tess received an official circular from the Central Office for Refugees in October 1940 concerning the imminent establishment of a tribunal to review Category B cases. What really concerned her was the proposed appointment of Mr Willoughby Jardine KC as chairman for, as she wrote to Eleanor “in absolute confidence and purely unofficially”, his reputation for handling cases preceded him. His decisions had caused grave consternation among the local refugee committees, and in Leeds, for example, eighty per cent of refugees found themselves placed in Category B. Jardine’s record as a locum tribunal judge in Cambridge was no better. Now there was a possibility that he would be reviewing cases on which he had previously pronounced judgement, many of them Leeds cases, and this, Tess remarked, could not be right.³⁵

Eleanor and Tess jointly and severally took up innumerable cases, and looking at a few of these allows a more nuanced understanding of the impact of internment. It also demonstrates the personal interest that both women took in individual men and their families.³⁶ One early case they discussed was that of the German philologist Dr Richard Samuel, whom Eleanor heard about from a university constituent. She received a pleading letter in August 1940, recounting Dr Samuel’s already fragile mental state, which, the friend said, was exacerbated by his real fear of not being released before the start of the next academic term.³⁷ He had been held in Huyton since 12 May, and despite the appeal which the SPSL had

34 ES to ER, 1 Aug. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 247.

35 Ibid.

36 See ER to Professor Weissenberg, 5 Aug. 1940, Rathbone Papers XIV.2.17 (19), University of Liverpool Library.

37 A. Fletcher-Cunningham to ER, 10 Aug. 1940, Ms. SPSL 301/4, fol. 290; see also Vera Craig to ER, 19 Aug. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 264.

lodged with the Home Office weeks earlier, he was still in detention in late September.³⁸ His was one of a few cases where Tess could see “there was no rhyme nor reason why some men in the same category were released, while others were not.”³⁹ The two women knew that Dr Samuel’s job hung in the balance, and if he lost it he would be deprived of his livelihood, and be unable to maintain his British born wife, baby son, and mother. To make matters worse, a bomb partially demolished his home in Cambridge, forcing his family to seek refuge with friends.⁴⁰

Another worrying case that Tess discussed with Eleanor was that of Kurt Jooss, creator of the Jooss Ballet, who had been forced to flee Germany after he refused the Nazi order to dismiss his Jewish dancers. He was interned in Huyton and was, as she wrote, “in a state of extreme depression... not only as a result of his helplessness of his own case, but also at the plight of his company, for which the internment measure is responsible.”⁴¹ Part of his corps were in South America, but because he was unable to send them any funds, they were destitute. From Tess’s viewpoint, his internment was “absurd”, even more so as there was no appeal category available to him. He was finally released after six months, and was able to stay with colleagues in Cambridge and rebuild his career.⁴²

One of the main arguments for releasing men speedily was precisely because their skills were badly needed in the workplace. Secondary school teachers were one such group which Tess highlighted in November 1940, but again there was no category of the White Paper that covered appeals for their release. There were, she knew, “a number of school teachers of guaranteed character who were still interned”, including a German man, Mr Curt Ofner.⁴³ He had already experienced a month of incarceration in Sachsenhausen concentration camp after a roundup following Kristallnacht in November 1938. After being released he had managed to emigrate to the UK and joined the staff of St Bee’s School, Cumberland, before being interned in May 1940, with no hope of release. The school were urgently appealing for his release, yet he was still lingering in an internment camp

38 ES to Captain Rose, 26 Sept 1940. Ms. SPSL 301/4.

39 ES to ER, 18 Sept 1940. Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 269.

40 ES to Captain Rose, 26 Sept 1940, Ms. SPSL 301/4.

41 ES to ER, 26 Sept 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fols. 271–72.

42 Ibid.

43 ES to ER, 20 Nov. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 283; Ofner family papers, Acc. No. 2013.371.1, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.

in late November 1940. And what, Tess asked Eleanor, was being done to persuade the Home Secretary “to include school teachers of guaranteed character and loyalty” among the new categories of internees due to be announced?⁴⁴

From the outset, Tess shared information with Eleanor about some of her cases on an almost daily basis, including those of the Viennese musicologist Professor Egon Wellesz and Professor Martin Wolff, an eminent law teacher, on whose behalf Oxford University were appealing. This letter highlighted Tess’s exasperation at being unable to help many of the people whom she heard about, because they fell outside the remit of the SPSL. Many were medical doctors and dentists, but there was “no special body to deal with medical people.”⁴⁵ Tess stated her intention of getting the Medical Department of the Council of Refugees at Bloomsbury House to approach the Royal Society of Medicine and the British Medical Association to redress this omission.⁴⁶ In her customary proactive fashion she added, “if nothing happens, I shall write to these bodies myself.”⁴⁷ Eleanor had already received a list of medical people from Huyton some weeks previously, and Tess now responded about five of them, including Professor Oskar Fehr, a German-Jewish ophthalmologist aged sixty-nine who had been the head of one of the most important eye clinics in Germany for nearly thirty years.⁴⁸ He had been arrested on 25 June 1940, ultimately interned in Hutchinson Camp on the Isle of Man, and despite his age and poor health was elected chief eye specialist for all the internment camps on the island. Besides treating all the internees, he also had to take care of the British commanders and their families.

On 8 August 1940 Eleanor was on her feet in the House of Commons asking Sir John Anderson if he realized that on 8 July there were twenty-six doctors and approximately twenty-one dentists, all qualified to practise, who were still interned in Huyton, damaging their practices and hospital

44 ES to ER, 20 Nov. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 283.

45 ES to ER, 30 July 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fols. 245–46.

46 Bloomsbury House was the headquarters for about eleven refugee organizations working under the umbrella of the Central Office for Refugees; <http://www.kitchencamp.co.uk/research/bloomsbury-house/> (accessed 26 Jan. 2021).

47 ES to ER, 30 July 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 245.

48 See Walter Lisch and Mark J. Mannis, “Professor Dr Med Oskar Fehr. The Fate of an Outstanding German-Jewish Ophthalmologist: An Early Contributor to Cornea and External Disease” (2014), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263708830> (accessed 29 Jan. 2021).

appointments. She knew full well that none had been released in the previous four weeks, but she nevertheless asked Anderson if any of them had been freed and, if not, whether he could expedite their release. His reply was that applications would be “dealt with as expeditiously as possible.” Yet again, on 15 October 1940, Eleanor was asking the Home Secretary, Mr Peake, about the numbers of aliens still interned, and especially the Category 19 internees, with an equally unsatisfactory answer.⁴⁹ Professor Fehr’s release was far from speedy for he was not freed until early 1941. To add insult to injury, despite having been entrusted with an important and onerous medical post while interned, he like all foreign doctors was not allowed to practise in Great Britain until he had retrained. He eventually acquired his British medical degree, awarded by Edinburgh University, in April 1943.⁵⁰

Tess meanwhile shared her concern about Dr Otto Pächt, a Jewish Viennese art historian aged thirty-eight: no longer able to pursue an academic career in Germany he had fled to Britain in 1936, and had been invited to join the Warburg Institute.⁵¹ In 1939 the SPSL entrusted him with the job of creating a handlist of the illuminated manuscripts of the British Museum. When war broke out he tried, unsuccessfully, to enlist for National Service, and then to join the Pioneer Corps, which also failed. He was sent to Huyton on 26 June 1940, and despite his wife’s desperate pleas to Eleanor, he was still in internment on 26 September, much to the dismay of the Warburg, who eagerly awaited his return to work. From the point of view of the Warburg, internment measures had a catastrophic impact on their refugee academics, as Tess wrote, and even though they were the first to be recommended for release by the British Academy Tribunal, by 18 September 1940 not one of them had been freed.⁵²

In early October 1940 Tess forwarded Eleanor a telegram from two of the SPSL’s scientists, both held in the Central Promenade Camp, Douglas, Isle of Man, and for whom the Royal Society had lodged appeals for their release. One was Dr Fabius Gross, whom she described as “a brilliant scientist and of excellent character”, the other, Hans Schlossmann, a Cambridge pharmacologist. Even though she was “fully conscious of the exceptional difficulties under which the officials are working”, Tess could

49 Hansard HC, vol. 364, col. 431, 8 Aug. 1940; vol. 365, col. 37, 15 Oct. 1940.

50 Lisch and Mannis, “Professor Dr Med Oskar Fehr”.

51 For Otto Pächt, see Jeanne Pächt to ER, 24 July 1940, Ms. SPSL 190/5, fol. 488.

52 ES to ER, 18 Sept. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 269.

still not understand “the prolonged detention of scholars and scientists who are most urgently needed in universities and similar institutions”, while others with less claim under Category 8 were released far more quickly.⁵³

During a few weeks in the summer of 1940 when Eleanor was totally inundated with work, two of her secretaries, Doris Hardman and Vera Craig, kept up the momentum as they tried to relieve her of the burden, consulting her whenever they could. Tess, in turn, sent the secretaries cases which were deemed more suitable for the PCR.⁵⁴ Eleanor and Tess regularly confided that they were swamped with refugee work, and even had difficulty finding time to make a plan of action to avoid an overlap of appeals. There was no easing of the pressure as Eleanor passed on more lists, this time of interned doctors, all held in Huyton, all of whom had been engaged in unpaid research work under permit, including the neuroscientist Professor Hermann Josephy. He had been among the almost 6,000 Jews incarcerated in Sachsenhausen in late 1938 following the orchestrated pogroms that erupted across Germany and Austria on Kristallnacht.⁵⁵

In between concerns over the refugees, in late 1941 Professor Hill discovered that Eleanor had been financing the PCR herself since its inception, and that funds were perilously low.⁵⁶ In response Tess spearheaded an extraordinary fund-raising campaign, first in Cambridge and then in Oxford. Although she wrote only to “selected refugees” there was a backlash from some who were either insulted to be asked for what they misguidedly thought was the cost of internment, or were just too poor to give anything. Many others, including Dr Ludwig Guttmann, who went on to found Stoke Mandeville Hospital, made a huge effort to collect what they could from colleagues. When he sent £9 from twenty-two refugee academics in January 1942, he wrote: “I hope that even this small

53 ES to ER, 7 Oct. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fols. 276–77.

54 For the PCR and ER’s workload see Doris Hardman to ES, 13 Aug. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 261; see also Craig to ES, 19 and 20 Aug. 1940, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fols. 263–64; ES to Craig, 16 April 1942, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 296; Craig to ES, 23 March 1943, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fol. 316.

55 See <https://hekint.org/2017/01/22/neuroscientist-refugees-from-nazi-germany-find-haven-in-illinois/> (accessed 9 Dec. 2020).

56 Hill to ES, 30 Oct. 1941, Ms. SPSL 12/3, fols. 467–69; see also ES to Miss Helen Laurie, 5 Dec. 1941, Ms. SPSL 120/3, fol. 417. Miss Laurie was associated with the Scottish National Council for Refugees, and was offering to help raise funds in Scotland.

amount will help, and show the gratitude of refugees for the work of the committee.”⁵⁷ It was, as Eleanor knew, largely due to Tess’s energy and enthusiasm that the academic community responded generously, and she also appreciated that without their support, which continued throughout 1942, she would have had to dig even deeper into her own, admittedly deep, pockets.⁵⁸

A different set of issues arose as the internment problems diminished, and in July 1942 Eleanor was once again seeking advice from Tess, this time about refugee architects. It had come to her attention that the Architects Registration Council were discriminating against aliens, and while they were happy to accept payment from them to put their names on the register, they were then withholding scholarships from them. Tess found it hard to believe that the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) were only answerable to their own council, and not to any government body, which precluded Eleanor putting down a Parliamentary Question. Still, she was determined to pursue the matter, and called on Edward ‘Bobby’ Carter, the RIBA’s librarian-editor, and Walter Moberley, the chair of the University Grants Committee, for support.

Bobby Carter was, in fact, the driving force behind the Architects Refugee Relief Fund, and had set up an *émigrés* group to help architects, including Walter Gropius and Erno Goldfinger, flee repressive regimes. He had then found work for them, as well as a number of engineers, painters, and musicians, not just in England but all over the world. Eleanor chose well, for both men were in fact keen to see that something was done, and while Carter was “happy to share his very full files of refugees in connection with their release from internment”, he and Moberley both felt it needed some official rather than behind-the-scenes action. Tess, for her part, was able to suggest only a few influential people for Eleanor to approach, and in the absence of any further correspondence there is no way of knowing how successful she was.

In conclusion, even though the collection of letters on which this paper is based is relatively small, it nevertheless provides an important insight into how Tess and Eleanor worked together for the benefit of the interned refugee scholars and academics. There is no doubt that they, and indeed

57 Ludwig Guttman to ES, 8 March 1942, Ms. SPSL 120/3, fol. 344; see also ES to Guttman, 20 and 22 Jan. 1942, Ms. SPSL 120/3, fols. 342–43.

58 ER to ES, 6 and 13 Nov. 1942, Ms. SPSL 120/2, fols. 304, 307.

Professor Hill, were grateful for the support that the SPSL and the PCR provided.⁵⁹ Both women were prepared to use every tool at their disposal, leaving no stone unturned in the pursuit of justice and freedom, using their extensive network of contacts, and in Eleanor's case, her political position, to draw attention to and ameliorate the injustice of internment. The success of their joint intervention is immeasurable, but what is clear is that they both fought hard in the pursuit of justice and freedom, and to restore Britain's reputation as a generous and humane society.

59 ES to Helen Laurie, 5 Dec. 1941, Ms. SPSL 120/3, fol. 417.