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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

HISTORY

ELEANOR RATHBONE AND HER WORK FOR REFUGEES

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis employs a social history and biographical approach to analyse the campaigning work undertaken by the Independent MP, Eleanor Rathbone, on behalf of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe both before and during the Second World War. The aim is to demonstrate how this significant but neglected aspect of Rathbone's career was not, as popularly argued, separate from her many gender-related commitments, but was a continuation of her career as an activist who was driven by her conscience and humanitarian concerns.

Whilst the main focus of the thesis is upon Rathbone's dedication to the refugee cause, this phase of her career will be viewed within the wider context of her background and earlier humanitarian campaigns. Commencing with an introductory Chapter, Chapter Two will be a biographical overview that emphasises the educational, philosophical and social influences that informed Rathbone's campaigning activities. Following this, Chapters Three and Four will examine, chronologically, her involvement with humanitarian issues in India, Africa and Palestine, and demonstrate the way in which these paved the way for her subsequent dedication to the refugee question. Chapter Five is devoted to an examination of Rathbone's engagement with foreign policy matters and her commitment to the collective security debate in the 1930s, and will assess how these issues influenced her views on nationalism and communal and personal responsibility. Chapters Six and Seven, which represent the core of this thesis, will deal specifically with Rathbone's refugee work. Chapter Six, which spans the years 1933 to 1941, will address mainly domestic refugee issues, internment and the work of the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees, established by Rathbone in 1939. Chapter Seven, which covers the period 1940/41 to 1946, will focus on Rathbone's plans for rescue under the auspices of her organisation, the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror. Chapter Eight will provide a conclusion that draws the various strands of Rathbone's humanitarian activities together, so that an assessment of her refugee work can be made, as well as an evaluation of the impact that this had upon her career, and upon the lives of those whom she sought to help.

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Being given access by the Home Office to the personal and closed files of certain individual refugees was a great privilege, and my thanks go to Stewart Mead of the Home Office and Val Traylen of the National Archives for their unflagging help in locating files, and for arranging for me to examine these. My thanks to Sir Edward Cazalet for his generous hospitality and for allowing me access to his late uncle, Victor Cazalet's, diaries, and to Mrs Annabel Cole, for access to the private papers of her great-aunt, Margery Fry.

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This thesis is dedicated to my lovely granddaughters, Cecily and Poppy, whom I love to bits.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations Used in the Text

APAG	All-Party Parliamentary Action Group
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCC	Basque Children's Committee
BDBJ	Board of Deputies of British Jews
BCIWF	British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise
BCRC	British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia
CCR	Central Committee for Refugees
CIL	Committee For Intellectual Liberty
COS	Charity Organisation Society
FEC	Family Endowment Committee
ICG	India Conciliation Group
IGCR	Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWSA	International Woman Suffrage Alliance
JWERA	Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association
JA	Jewish Agency
LCRS	Liverpool Central Relief Society
LWIC	Liverpool Women's Industrial Council
LWSS	Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society
LN	League of Nations
LNU	League of Nations Union
LVWS	Liverpool Victoria Women's Settlement
LWCA	Liverpool Women's Citizen's Association
MP	Member of Parliament
NCFS	National Committee of the Friends of Spain
NCRNT	National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror
NJCSR	National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
PCR	Parliamentary Committee on Refugees
PJWERA	Palestine Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association
SPSL	Society for the Protection of Science and Learning
SSFA	Soldiers and Sailors Family Association
WCC	War Cabinet Committee on the Reception and Accommodation of Jewish Refugees
WIA	Women's India Association
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

Abbreviations used in the Footnotes

People

EFR Eleanor Florence Rathbone

Places

US United States (of America)

Publications

Hansard HC House of Commons Debates

Repositories and Collections

BDBJ Board of Deputies of British Jews, London Metropolitan Archive
 BL British Library
 BLPES British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of
 Economics
 CAC Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge University
 CO Colonial Office
 CUL Cambridge University Library
 CZA Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem
 FO Foreign Office
 GW Graham White Papers
 HLRO House of Lords Record Office: the Parliamentary Archives
 HO Home Office
 IWM Imperial War Museum
 JRL John Rylands Library, University of Manchester
 KM Katherine Mayo Papers, Beinecke Library Yale University
 LMA London Metropolitan Archive
 LPL Lambeth Palace Library
 MRC Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.
 NBKR Noel Baker papers, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge University.
 OIOC Oriental and India Office Collection
 PRO Public Record Office (now known as The National Archives)
 RP Rathbone Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones
 Library, University of Liverpool
 UE University of Edinburgh Library
 USL Parkes Library, Special Collections, University of Southampton
 WL Women's Library, London Guildhall University
 WRB War Refugee Board Papers, Franklin D.Roosevelt Library. New York.

PART ONE

Introduction

Chapter One

An overview

It is remarkable that Eleanor Rathbone's life and work has received so little academic attention, for the contributions she made to many aspects of life in Britain and beyond were as significant and unique as they were various. During her lifetime she gained renown as a feminist and suffragist, philanthropist, campaigner for family allowances, pacifist, MP, Zionist, and champion of refugees, yet despite this broad canvas of achievement, research to date, including Susan Pedersen's recent biography of Rathbone,¹ has given far less attention to her work for Jews fleeing Nazi persecution from 1933 onwards than it deserves, concentrating almost exclusively on the female-related and feminist issues which she confronted. The exceptions of note are David Cesarani's article on rescuers, which includes a short study of her role during the Holocaust,² Aimée Bunting's article on the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, which Rathbone founded in 1943,³ and Pamela Shatzkes's references to Rathbone in her book, *Holocaust and Rescue*.⁴ Other than these, her devotion to this humanitarian cause has amounted to brief notes within comprehensive studies of the broader subject by a number of historians including Michael Marrus,⁵ A.J.Sherman,⁶ Tony Kushner,⁷ Meier Sompolinsky,⁸ Louise London⁹ and Richard Bolchover.¹⁰

¹ S.Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (London, 2004).

² D.Cesarani, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Towards a Taxonomy of Rescuers in a Bystander Country – Britain 1933-45', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, 9, 2 & 3 (2000) 34-6.

³ A.Bunting 'Representing Rescue. The National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, the British and the Rescue of Jews from Nazism', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, 9, 1 (2000).

⁴ P. Shatzkes, *Holocaust and Rescue. Impotent or Indifferent Anglo-Jewry 1938-1945* (Basingstoke, 2002).

⁵ M.Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees and the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1985).

⁶ A.J.Sherman, *Island Refuge. Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933-39*, 2nd ed. (1994).

⁷ T. Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination. A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1994); T. Kushner & K.Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide. Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London, 1999).

⁸ M. Sompolinsky, *Britain and the Holocaust. The Failure of Anglo-Jewish Leadership?* (Brighton, 1999).

⁹ L.London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948. British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 2000).

¹⁰ R.Bolchover, *British Jewry and the Holocaust*, New ed. (Oxford, 2003).

The dangers implicit within marginalising this aspect of Rathbone's career are numerous. First, it has enabled a myth to prevail, fostered by the limitations imposed by feminist and gender historians, whereby her refugee work, which was not specifically aimed at women, has been viewed as disconnected to her earlier activities, as an inexplicable aberration in the career of a woman who, according to their assessment, was dedicated to a feminist and female agenda. However, the argument at the heart of this thesis, that responding to vulnerable and helpless human beings, rather than being motivated by gender or feminist issues, was the driving force behind Rathbone's lifetime of campaigning, is a proposal with which historians of these views would take issue.

Rathbone has most frequently been identified as *prima facie* a feminist, although a distinction must be made between 'first wave' feminism, to which she belonged, and the modern women's movement.¹¹ The difficulty for feminist historians, as exemplified in Johanna Alberti's short study of Rathbone,¹² has been the belief that Rathbone's work can be neatly categorised as gendered and non-gendered, and that the various causes which she championed were mutually exclusive, a view which will be challenged in this thesis. Whilst Alberti has conceded that there was a shift of focus in Rathbone's commitments in the 1930s,¹³ she has not offered any reasons for this change in emphasis. Her solution has been to pay far less attention to the latter period of her subject's career, thereby diminishing the significance of Rathbone's activities during this period. By writing through the prism of feminism, Alberti has produced a rather crude and reductive picture of Rathbone's work and ideas that lacks objectivity and balance. In defence of Alberti, Pedersen maintains the fault is due to the author's reliance upon Rathbone's published writings as source material.¹⁴ It is true that less material was published on the refugee issue than on, for example, Rathbone's long running campaign for family allowances, but her political career was well documented in published sources including Hansard, and these could have been used in conjunction with the considerable body of less accessible extant archive material scattered in small pockets across many collections. Jeffreys, another feminist author, has maintained that Rathbone displayed

¹¹ O. Banks, *Becoming a Feminist. The Social Origins of 'First-Wave' Feminism* (Brighton, 1986).

¹² J. Alberti, *Eleanor Rathbone* (London, 1996).

¹³ *Ibid.* 145.

¹⁴ S. Pedersen, 'Defender of the New Faith', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 14 Feb 1997.

a lack of enthusiasm in pursuing feminist goals by the mid-1930s,¹⁵ and that the new campaigns she championed were a convenient replacement for gendered activities.¹⁶ In answer to this, it is generally agreed that there was a decline and change in the nature of feminist activism by the 1930s, but Jeffreys has implied that, by involving herself in non-gendered campaigns, Rathbone was being disloyal to the feminist movement. This was certainly not the case, for Rathbone maintained an active interest in many of her earlier feminist and gendered activities, especially the fight for a family allowance to be paid to mothers. She even declared, in 1941, that she was '... a feminist, a 100 per cent feminist.'¹⁷ The alternative, as suggested by Pedersen, that the greater crisis in international affairs diverted her from feminist issues¹⁸ is plausible enough, but it is a view also constructed from a gendered perspective, and is yet another example of the inability of some historians to reconcile Rathbone's female-related campaigning with her later parliamentary activities and refugee interests.

Conversely, historians who have looked, albeit briefly, at Rathbone's refugee work have considered this to be an episode in, rather than a concomitant part of her life's work, and have also failed to identify any connection between this and the various other strands of her multifarious career. More generally, it is fair to say that the unpopular nature of research into refugee related issues and the work of refugee activists, Rathbone included, has received little attention from those researching the response of the democracies to the Holocaust. The outcome in each case is that an important part of her career has been neglected and misunderstood by historians, and imbalanced evaluations of her whole life's work allowed to endure.

This is the case with Mary Stocks' biography, published in 1949,¹⁹ the first memoir to examine Rathbone's life and achievements in any detail. Evaluating the life of a close friend and colleague was an onerous responsibility, and it was generally accepted that Stocks had 'austere respect for factual truth,'²⁰ and that the resulting

¹⁵ S. Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1890-1930* (London, 1985) 153.

¹⁶ S. Pedersen, 'Eleanor Rathbone 1871-1946. The Victorian family under the daughters eye' in S. Pedersen & P. Mandler (eds.) *After the Victorians. Private Conscience and public duty in modern Britain* (London, 1994) 118.

¹⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol.370, col.369, 20 Mar 1941.

¹⁸ Pedersen, 'Eleanor Rathbone, 1871-1946', 118.

¹⁹ M. Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography* (London, 1949).

²⁰ *Ibid.* 333.

account of Rathbone's public activities was both broad in scope, objective and critical.²¹ However, it is evident in the light of this current research, that Stocks failed to deal fully with the refugee issue, and lacked a deep insight into this aspect of Rathbone's work. The same can be said of Pedersen's recent biography of Rathbone. Whilst this is a far more penetrating study than its predecessor, and includes a great deal of previously unpublished information, Pedersen has, by her own admission, not tackled Rathbone's refugee work with the same fervor as the other aspects of her career, thus perpetuating this marginalisation.²²

The situation is repeated in numerous biographical pictures of Rathbone. *The Dictionary of National Biography* summarised these aspects of her career as the 'polemical phase of her concern with foreign affairs... accompanied by untiring efforts on behalf of refugees both before and during the war of 1939-45...'²³ Pedersen's more recently compiled entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* improves on its predecessor, but still fails to pay sufficient attention to Rathbone's refugee work.²⁴ Even less generous is *Chambers's Biographical Dictionary of Women*, which merely notes that Rathbone took a stand against the appeasement of Hitler, and worked vigorously 'in the service of refugees'.²⁵ Yet another biographical reference is succinct in its conclusion that she 'supported an aggressive opposition to Hitler.'²⁶ Brian Harrison, in his exploratory chapter on Rathbone, provides a more global picture of her political career, but has again examined it through a narrow range of primary sources. Furthermore, he has also failed to explore in any significant detail her commitment to refugee issues.²⁷ Only Harrison and Sybil Oldfield, whose recent chronological overview of Rathbone's life has captured the essence and extent of her commitment to the rescue of the perishing,²⁸ have commended Rathbone for her outstanding record as a humanitarian activist.

²¹ A view expressed by S. Simon in 1950 and reasserted by Brian Harrison in 1987. See S. Simon, 'Two Women', *Universities Quarterly*, 4, 2 (Feb 1950) 184-91 and B. Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries. Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* (Oxford, 1987) 101.

²² See Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 441-2, f.43, for her reference to this thesis.

²³ L.G. Wickham Legg & E.T. Williams (eds.) *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 1950) 711-13.

²⁴ S.Pedersen, 'Rathbone, E.F (1872-1946)', in C..Matthew & B.Harrison (eds.) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) article 35678.

²⁵ M. Parry (ed.) *Chambers Biographical Dictionary of Women* (London, 1996) 547.

²⁶ A. Crawford et al, *The Europa Biographical Dictionary of British Women* (London, 1983) 338-9.

²⁷ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*. 99-124.

²⁸ Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, 190-2.

Describing Rathbone as a humanitarian activist, and examining what motivated her actions, clearly warrants some exploration. For the former, the *Oxford English Dictionary* locates the derivation of 'humanitarian' to the early 1800s, when it was first used in a religious context as 'one who affirms the humanity but denies the divinity of Christ.' Such people are described as philanthropists who advocate or practice humanity or humane action, devoting themselves to the welfare of mankind at large.²⁹ Minear and Weiss have concluded that, historically, such people characteristically involved themselves in saving people from life-threatening situations, attempted to rescue helpless civilians in imminent danger, or tried to prevent mass suffering.³⁰ Rathbone can clearly be identified within these descriptions, for her rescue work, especially after late 1942 through the auspices of her National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, was explicitly about saving the lives of Jews threatened with annihilation. Her view of Christianity, as discussed in the following chapter, was also non-conformist, and she was certainly sceptical about the divinity of Christ.³¹ With an overt lack of concern for dissenting voices within the political machinery, she repeatedly and vociferously demanded that the British government take steps to intercede in the human catastrophe, using every means at her disposal. The apparent lack of compassion which the government displayed towards Jews in particular acted as a catalyst, and impelled Rathbone to pursue her campaign with added vigour, for her ideological belief in Victorian liberalism and national and personal responsibility was severely challenged. Her philanthropic gestures were legendary, even though she did, to a certain extent, adhere to the Victorian ideal of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving,' a theme that will be explored in this study. The fact that political imperatives and gains outweighed moral considerations in the minds of the British government was something that Rathbone was never able to accept. Whilst she was, as Kushner has suggested, an 'exceptional individual', willing and able to rebel against convention and defy the received wisdom of the time, it was this very individualism that marked her out as an outsider.³²

²⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1989) 475.

³⁰ L. Minear & T. Weiss, *Mercy Under Fire: War and the Global Humanitarian Community* (Boulder, 1995) 18.

³¹ Rathbone wrote, in instructions for her funeral, 'My own feeling is that whether the soul survives the body – and of that I am not sure – my body is not me and of no more importance than a cast-off garment. Do not take this to mean that I am un-Christian. I do not think I am. But Christianity seems to me a guide for life, but is rather vague about the after-life of individuals.' See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 34.

³² Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 45-6, 273.

The latter question, what compelled Rathbone to become a humanitarian activist, is complex. Nature certainly had a part to play, for the twin ideals of personal service and responsible citizenship, and her belief in the concepts of liberty and freedom, were deeply rooted within her psyche. But nurture, as will be discussed, developed, honed and influenced these attributes, especially during her years at university. She was undoubtedly devoted to the welfare of others, a commitment that was founded in selflessness, characteristic of the altruistic personality conceived by Comte almost two centuries earlier.³³ Every campaign Rathbone fought was undertaken to improve the human condition, whether it was conducted from inside or outside the framework of governmental authority. However, unlike the rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe whom Oliner and Oliner studied, she was never in the position of risking her life in the course of her activities. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that she would not have done so had the opportunity arisen.

That she was able to pursue a course of humanitarian activism owed much to her position within society, for she had privileged access to governmental circles, the media and the intelligentsia. She had the added benefit of financial independence, and continually channelled resources into the supporting her campaigns, and especially to the running costs of the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees that she founded in 1939.³⁴ But the fact remains that, as Tony Kushner has pointed out in respect of refugees, she chose to ally herself to the fate of people with whom she had no bond in terms of ethnicity, religion or nationality. Instead what bound them was a common humanity.³⁵ Whilst she may have lacked the bonds Kushner has cited, Rathbone came to identify closely with the Jews, and in admiring them for their cultural, philosophical and religious contributions to society, viewed them as deserving of help. According to Victor Gollancz, her fellow refugee activist, left-wing publisher and founder of the Left Book Club,³⁶ Jewish refugees were 'the greatest sufferers, the most grievously oppressed: and to succour the suffering and oppressed was something

³³ Credited to August Comte almost two centuries ago, the word altruism derived from the Latin *alter*, meaning 'other'. As cited in S.Oliner & P.Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality. Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York, 1988) 4.

³⁴ Besides various bequests from her father, she inherited approximately £50,000 from her sister Elsie when she died in November 1920. See Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 155-6.

³⁵ Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 45.

³⁶ The standard work on Gollancz is R.D.Edwards, *Victor Gollancz, A Biography* (London, 1987). For the book club see S.Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1, 2 (1966) 65-86. Also J.Lewis, *The Left Book Club* (London, 1970). Gollancz had published Rathbone's book on foreign policy, *War can be Averted*, in Jan 1938.

more than the motive of her life – it *was* her life.’³⁷ No less important was her personal conscience and profound belief in her own responsibility, and that of the British nation, to alleviate the suffering of European Jews - men, women and children - who, through no fault of their own, had been singled out by Hitler for annihilation.

Sources

Given that there is a major repository of Rathbone’s papers at the University of Liverpool, there would seem, at first glance, to be no shortage of readily available primary source material available to the researcher. Nothing could be further from the truth, for not only were many papers destroyed when Rathbone’s offices were bombed during war-time raids on London, but Rathbone also requested that all her personal correspondence and diaries, along with those of her companion, Elizabeth Macadam, be destroyed after her death. Documents relating to refugee issues are particularly badly represented in the collection, a factor that has undoubtedly contributed towards the limited interest in this subject.

In researching this thesis innumerable collections, private and public, national and international, were examined to enable a detailed picture of Rathbone’s campaigning activities to be compiled and considered within the wider context of her life’s work. As far as possible, previously unused unpublished sources have been utilised, as exemplified in respect of Rathbone’s correspondence with the War Refugee Board, Arthur Koestler, Chaim Weizmann and Dr Schwarzbart in the 1940s. Privileged access to certain collections, including Victor Cazalet’s diaries, certain closed files of the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BDBJ),³⁸ and numerous closed Home Office files relating to individuals with whom Rathbone was personally involved, have proved invaluable. Cazalet’s diaries provided a personalised glimpse of Rathbone’s dedication to the refugee cause, whilst the BDBJ papers yielded an important source of information about refugee committee meetings and her relationship with the Anglo-Jewish community. Home Office files concerning individual internment cases were of special significance, not only because they helped establish the extent of Rathbone’s personal involvement, but because no researcher has ever been granted access to them before. It should be explained that the Home

³⁷ V. Gollancz, ‘Eleanor Rathbone’, *AJR Information* (Feb 1946) 13.

³⁸ My thanks to Sandra Clark, administrator for the BDBJ, for allowing me access to certain closed files.

Office routinely created a file for every immigrant who had contact with the Aliens Department. Following standard practice, the Home Office periodically destroyed case files no longer required for official purposes, setting aside for transfer to the National Archive only a small number of representative or historically significant cases. This process was halted in the mid 1990s and all surviving files opened before 1948 were individually reviewed. All those relating to individuals who arrived before 1948 and subsequently applied for naturalisation have been preserved.³⁹ In addition a relatively small number of non-naturalisation cases were selected, including those that contained transcripts of internment tribunal hearings or appeals against internment.⁴⁰ The files in HO 405 are closed as a block for 100 years, but the Home Office policy is to review the closure of individual files on request with special access arrangements for academic researchers. Identifying cases proved especially difficult, and was achieved by cross matching refugee names that appeared in a variety of Rathbone's correspondence with Home Office lists. This could not have been achieved without the generous co-operation of Home Office and National Archive officials.⁴¹

Extensive use has been made of House of Commons daily Hansard papers, and Home, Colonial and Foreign Office files in the National Archives. The latter proved to be crucial in establishing the nature of the relationship between Rathbone and government officials, thus highlighting the obstacles that she encountered in her battle on behalf of refugees seeking rescue and refuge. They also provided many documents and references relating to the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees (PCR), established by Rathbone in December 1938. Assessing the scope and value of Rathbone's activities within the PCR was vital, and proved challenging, for there is no single collection of papers, but a fragmented mosaic of correspondence, reports, memos and minutes scattered within a wide range of personal and official archives. A small and incomplete collection of material was donated by Vera Craig, one of Rathbone's wartime PCR secretaries, to the House of Lords Record Office, but it was within this repository that the papers of Graham White, Member of Parliament and PCR member, proved to be an especially rich and unexpected resource.

Interviews with people who had come into contact with Rathbone in the course of her

³⁹ PRO HO 405.

⁴⁰ PRO HO 382.

⁴¹ I am indebted to Ms Val Traylen of the National Archives for alerting Professor Kushner to the survival of these files, and locating 'names' on my behalf. My thanks also to Mr Stewart Mead, at the Home Office, for allowing me access to individual files.

refugee work added a personal dimension to this research, and, as in the case of, for example, Arieh Handler and Nicholas Winton, served as poignant reminders of Rathbone's sometimes eccentric character. More forthcoming as far as the PCR was concerned was correspondence between Rathbone and Esther Simpson, secretary of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, which was helpful in providing information about the handling of individual interned alien cases. By piecing all of this evidence together it has been possible, as will be seen, to produce a detailed chronological examination of the work of the organisation during the Second World War, and enabled an assessment of Rathbone's activities and role within it to be made. Much the same applies to the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, which Rathbone was instrumental in establishing in 1942/3, for again, primary source material was found within a wide range of collections.

Methodology

Careful consideration was given to the scope of this study for whilst it was essential to contextualise Rathbone within a biographical and contemporary framework, it would have been unrealistic, and inappropriate, to undertake a complete life study of her. It was therefore decided to provide, following on from this general synopsis, a biographical overview that would be limited to demonstrating the influences which impacted upon her life, and which informed and shaped her career as a humanitarian activist. This overview will enable the various strands of Rathbone's work to be drawn together, for although the focus of the thesis is upon her refugee work, there were, it will be argued, vital links between this and other international campaigns, links that have been ignored or marginalised by other historians.

The foregoing factors dictated which other areas of Rathbone's work would be examined. The third, fourth and fifth chapters will deal with, respectively, India and other imperial concerns, humanitarian causes in Palestine and, lastly, her involvement with foreign policy and the collective security debate. Each of these chapters will include an overview of the contemporary domestic and international political situation to contextualise Rathbone's activities. The sixth and seventh chapters, covering the period 1933-1940/1 and 1940/1-46, form the core of this thesis and are devoted to a penetrating examination of Rathbone's work for refugees. Taking account of the chronological overlap of these two chapters, and the connectivity

between them, only the sixth chapter will include a contextualising overview. The seventh will examine Rathbone's activities within the context of the domestic and international political situation and general issues concerning the Home Front.

The decision concerning the chronological division of Rathbone's period of refugee activism was not made arbitrarily. The starting date coincided with Hitler's accession to power in Nazi Germany, and marked the pivotal moment at which Rathbone declared her support for the Jews of Europe. Similarly, 1940/1941 was a turning point, when domestic refugee issues were superseded by the greater international human catastrophe. The end date of 1946 arose as a result of Rathbone's death in the January, but also coincided with a new phase in refugee work, that of post-war rehabilitation.

Rathbone herself was modest about her achievements, and did not consider her actions to be exceptional in any way. As Margaret Simey and Stocks confirmed,⁴² she never sought public recognition for her work, nor would she accept any commendation. She would have undoubtedly disapproved of anyone writing about her life and work, so that researching, evaluating and documenting her activities is somewhat paradoxical. However her humanitarian activities, and especially those connected with her refugee work, which have been overlooked, warrant attention, so that full credit can be given to the broad scope of her life's work. What follows is an overview of Rathbone's life that examines her background and the influences that shaped her life and work, and led ultimately to her aiding refugees from Nazi Europe.

⁴² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 194-5, 266. See also M. Simey, *Eleanor Rathbone 1872-1946, A Centenary Tribute* (Liverpool, 1974). In April 1943, Winston Churchill confirmed that he was very willing to consider Rathbone's name when forming his proposals for the next Honours list. See letter of Winston Churchill to Violet Markham, 20 April 1943. CHAR/20/93B/149. CAC.

Chapter Two

Eleanor Rathbone: a biographical overview

I

Eleanor Florence Rathbone was born on 12 May 1872 at 14 Princes Gardens, Kensington, London to William Rathbone VI, then Liberal MP for Liverpool, and his second wife, Emily Acheson Lyle. The location of her birth was accidental rather than planned, for the family only lived in London whilst the House was in session each year. The main focus of family life was always 'Greenbank' in Liverpool and it was there that she and her siblings, eleven in all, enjoyed the security and comfort which her father's position provided.¹ Like his predecessors, William Rathbone VI was a successful merchant whose prosperity was matched by his high moral principles and acute awareness of his obligation to others less fortunate than himself.² In this he was following the Rathbone family tradition which stretched back over six generations, and which developed as a consequence of the unique nature of Liverpool.³ From the end of the eighteenth century onward the city, whose success depended largely upon its position as a slave trading port, had flourished, offering unrivalled opportunities for the entrepreneur, and a haven for those who, like the Rathbones, belonged to the Quaker fellowship. Elsewhere in the country such non-conformists were largely excluded from the main current of English life, including admission to Oxford and Cambridge universities, by legal religious discrimination.⁴ Non-conformity effectively forced followers into socially stigmatised pursuits such as commerce and trade, and to settle in places including Liverpool, where a *laissez-faire*

¹ For the most insightful account of Rathbone's early years Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*. For the first biography see Stocks, *Rathbone*.

² A. Birrell, *Records of the Rathbone Family* (Edinburgh, 1913); S. Marriner, *The Rathbones of Liverpool 1845-1873* (Liverpool, 1961); L. Nottingham, *Rathbone Brothers. From Merchant to Banker 1742-1992* (Liverpool, 1992).

³ There are parallels to be drawn here with William Gladstone's background, for he too was born in Liverpool, the son of a successful merchant whose evangelical religious beliefs included constant and natural acts of charity. Gladstone was Prime Minister in the years 1868-74; 1880-85; 1886; 1892-94. See A. Ramm, *William Ewart Gladstone* (Cardiff, 1989).

⁴ The Corporation Act of 1661 and the Test Act of 1673, which excluded nonconformists by demanding an oath of allegiance to the established Church, were not repealed until 1828, at which time dissenters were allowed to hold public office, including seats in Parliament. See R.D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London, 1974) 32.

attitude towards religion prevailed.⁵ There, everyone, regardless of creed, was free to pursue their business interests without compromising their beliefs or straying from their ideals and principles.⁶

The first Rathbone to move to the growing port of Liverpool from his native Gawsorth, near Macclesfield, was William Rathbone II (1696-1746). His son, William III (1726-1789), was responsible for establishing the ship owning business on which the family fortune was founded. Both men were Quakers (members of the Society of Friends) and the religious philosophy disseminated by this sect influenced succeeding generations of Rathbones, even when their affiliation had ceased. The Quakers, who allowed women an equal role in spiritual activities,⁷ considered the ultimate authority came from within rather than from the bible. The 'inner light' or the 'Christ within,' promoted an ethos of personal responsibility for oneself and ones actions. With these precepts to guide them, the Rathbones followed the maxim of 'what ought to be done, could be done': in their case this translated itself into acts of practical philanthropy whereby each member determined, in their own way and as a reflection of their own particular interest and the needs of the time, to improve the health and welfare of those less fortunate than themselves.⁸ For William Rathbone III this was exemplified by his abolitionist activities, being one of the first members of the Liverpool branch of the Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade. Given that the slave trade was considered to be the foundation of prosperity in Liverpool at the time, his stand was a brave one. It not only endangered his business but it brought with it the reproach of his fellow traders for threatening their wealth, and made him vulnerable to mob violence.⁹

William Rathbone IV (1757-1809), Eleanor Rathbone's great, great grandfather, was an educated man with a deep thirst for knowledge and an interest in the same Scottish school of philosophy which was to influence his granddaughter's

⁵ Other towns where nonconformist business dynasties grew included Carlisle (the Quaker Carr family of biscuit fame) and Norwich (the Baptist Colman's Mustard family). See H. McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (London, 1996) 35 and for the Carr family see M. Forster, *Rich Desserts and Captains Thin. A Family and their Times 1831-1931* (London, 1997).

⁶ For a description of Liverpool at this time see M. Simey, *Charity Rediscovered. A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth Century Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1992).

⁷ McLeod points out that Quaker women did not have complete equality, for, in the main, business matters remained a male preserve. See McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 163.

⁸ W. Rathbone, *Social Duties: considered in Reference to the Organisation of Effort in works of Benevolence and Public Utility: by a Man of Business* (London, 1867). EFR, *William Rathbone. A Memoir* (London, 1905).

⁹ EFR, *Memoir*, 8-9. See also J.R. Oldfield, *Popular politics and British anti-slavery: the mobilisation of public opinion against the slave trade 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995).

philosophical studies.¹⁰ He always put principle before popularity, and in common with other Rathbones, insisted upon conducting trade according to certain ethical standards. Following in his father's footsteps, he embraced the abolitionist cause,¹¹ a stance that, once again, met with the opprobrium of those on the Liverpool Exchange.¹² Unlike his father, he was unwilling to accept the religious intolerance exercised by the Quakers, and his personal campaign for religious freedom led to his exclusion from the Society.¹³ As 'a champion of lost causes,'¹⁴ another characteristic inherited by his great great granddaughter, he sought to help the aged and infirm and repress the growth of pauperism by promoting improvements in the administration of the Old Poor Law.¹⁵ He also expended much of his large fortune on releasing poor and respectable debtors from jail.¹⁶

A generation on, the name of William Rathbone V (1787-1868) became a household word in Liverpool. The concerns which this popular man championed were legion and diverse, but all reflected the Rathbone traits of social consciousness and moral integrity. He continued to fight against slavery, even suspending the cotton trade between the Rathbone company and the US for a period in the 1850s.¹⁷ Like his father before him, he could not abide religious intolerance, and lent his support to the cause of Roman Catholic emancipation.¹⁸ He also took a strong stand against bribery and other forms of corruption in municipal elections. His interests in political, parliamentary and municipal reform reflected the shift of the real centre of national interest in the first half of the nineteenth century. At a local level, he and his wife involved themselves in the move to improve elementary education,¹⁹ whilst Mrs. Rathbone's charitable efforts were largely responsible for the establishment of the

¹⁰ EFR, *Memoir*, 10. Edward Caird who was Rathbone's tutor in moral philosophy at Oxford was a follower of this same school of Scottish philosophy.

¹¹ According to Birrell, the organisation which EFR refers to as the Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade was called the Liverpool Committee for the Suppression of the Slave Trade. See Birrell, *Records*, 95 and Nottingham, *Rathbone Brothers*, 108.

¹² Birrell, *Records*, 103.

¹³ *Ibid.* 87.

¹⁴ EFR, *Memoir*, 10.

¹⁵ Birrell, *Records*, 149. It was William Rathbone IV's publication, *Narrative of Events in Ireland among the Quakers* (1786) which led to his exclusion from the Society of Friends.

¹⁶ EFR, *Memoir*, 12.

¹⁷ Marriner, *Rathbones*, 15.

¹⁸ This is interesting given the non-conformist roots of the family. His support of Roman Catholicism was also a fortuitous coincidence given the large numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants in Liverpool.

¹⁹ Birrell, *Records*, 176-7.

first public baths in Liverpool.²⁰ In the customary Rathbone tradition, this William Rathbone never sought credit for his work.

II

The family member to most directly influence Eleanor Rathbone was her father, William Rathbone VI (1819-1902). Like his predecessors, he was a well-educated man but not a scholar, and he determined early on to divide his life between the family business interests and public service. Financial success in the former would, he surmised, enable him to engage in the latter.²¹ Of most concern to him were matters of social reform, a direct reflection of the growing mid-Victorian national interest in and concern over the extent and nature of poverty. The so-called 'condition of the people' debate, which the Oxford philosopher T.H Green (1837-1882) became so preoccupied with, was fuelled by a deluge of literature. This included the results of various surveys and investigations, as well as social commentaries and studies, all of which focused variously on specific or general aspects of working-class life, and upon the quantitative as well as the qualitative reality of poverty.²² The most influential of these studies was that undertaken by Charles Booth, another Liverpool ship owner, and a pupil of William Rathbone VI. Booth's extensive quantitative social study of the metropolis was celebrated as an 'economic and administrative innovation of great importance.'²³ His seventeen volume *Life and Labour of the People of London*, published between 1892 and 1903,²⁴ was indeed pioneering for it not only investigated the extent of poverty, but also attempted to define its nature and analyse its causes.²⁵

²⁰ Birrell, *Records*, 213. The washhouses were opened after the cholera scourge in Liverpool in 1832. Mrs Rathbone worked in conjunction with a mill hand, Kitty Wilkinson. See K. Wilkinson, *The Memoir of Kitty Wilkinson of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1927). See also Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 87.

²¹ Eleanor Rathbone vacillated between using the terms 'social service', 'charitable work', 'public work', 'social reform' and 'philanthropy' to describe 'generally the pursuits which occupied much of William Rathbone's life.' See EFR, *Memoir*, 72, 113, 140, f.1.

²² The first study of note was Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor; a cyclopaedia of the condition and earnings of those that will work, those that cannot work and those that will not work*. no.1-63, vol.1 & parts of vol.2 & 3 (1851) 4 vols. (London, 1861-1862).

²³ Besides his work as a social investigator, Booth was an advocate of tariff reform and non-contributory Old Age Pensions and a member of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. See J.Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914* (Oxford, 1972) 11.

²⁴ Charles Booth: *Life and Labour of the People*, 1st.ed. vol. I (London & Edinburgh, 1889); *Labour and Life of the People*, 1st ed., vol. II (London & Edinburgh, 1891); *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 2nd.ed. (London & New York, 1892-97) 9 vols; *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 3rd.ed. (London & New York, 1902-3) 17 vols. First Series: *Poverty* (1902) vols. I-IV, Second Series: *Industry* (1903) vols. I-V, Third Series: *Religious Influences* (1902-2) vols. I-VII, Final Volume: *Notes on Social Influences and Conclusion* (London, 1903).

There was plenty of scope for William Rathbone VI's philanthropic work in mid-nineteenth century Liverpool: the chronic and self-perpetuating poverty of the mass of the population was palpable and there were few opportunities for people to improve their standard of living. An early issue with which he became involved was the lack of medical care available to the sick poor in their homes. The situation was highlighted by personal circumstances, and prompted him to pilot a scheme of home nursing.²⁶ Applying his customary methodological and organised approach,²⁷ techniques which Booth adopted in his pioneering survey and which his daughter later emulated, his experiment proved highly successful. It was thus extended and led to the foundation, in 1887, of the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nursing, the first and most enduring national organisation to provide home nursing in Great Britain.²⁸ His interest in the health care of the poor also led to his close involvement in the reform of workhouse nursing.²⁹

William Rathbone's years as a Liberal MP (1868-1895) forced him to divert much of his attention away from social issues and into areas including the reform of local government, bankruptcy reforms, licensing, commercial law and Home Rule.³⁰ He did however maintain an hereditary interest in the extension of education: apart from his close involvement with the formation of University College Liverpool in 1882,³¹ he was also actively involved in the establishment of the University College of North Wales in 1884.³² Of personal significance to his daughter Eleanor was his active support of higher education for women.³³ Only later in life, having retired from politics was he able to return to, and concentrate on, the social and welfare issues that were of lifelong concern to him.³⁴ Amongst his achievements was the rationalisation

²⁵ For a recent re-assessment of Booth's work see R.O'Day, & D. Englander, *Mr. Charles Booth's Inquiry. Life and Labour of the People in London Reconsidered* (London, 1993).

²⁶ EFR, *Memoir*, 156-85. G.Hardy, *William Rathbone and the Early History of District Nursing* (Ormskirk, 1981).

²⁷ B.G.Orchard, *Liverpool's Legion of Honour* (Birkenhead, 1893) 580; EFR, *Memoir*, 129.

²⁸ M.Stocks, *A Hundred Years of District Nursing* (London, 1960) and M.Baly, *A History of the Queen's Nursing Institute. 100 Years, 1887-1987* (London, 1987).

²⁹ Workhouse infirmaries had been the subject of much criticism since the first visitors, members of the Workhouse Visiting Society, were allowed in during the 1850s and early 1860s. See N.Longmate, *The Workhouse* (London, 1974) 258. A detailed historical account of pauper nursing and poor law nursing can be found in R.White, *Social Change and the Development of the Nursing Profession. A Study of the Poor Law Nursing Service, 1848-1948* (Kimpton, 1978).

³⁰ This period of William Rathbone's life is covered in great detail in Eleanor Rathbone's biography of him. See EFR, *Memoir*, 187-397.

³¹ EFR, *Memoir*, 325-46.

³² *Ibid.* 346-55.

³³ Simey, *Centenary Tribute*, 6; Stocks, *Rathbone*, 35 and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 35.

³⁴ Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 109-12. EFR, *Memoir*, 364 & 370-4 for reference to his book, *Social Dutie*).

of the existing Liverpool Central Relief Society (LRCS) to the benefit of those in receipt of poor relief.³⁵ William Rathbone believed that Liverpool's poverty would never be eradicated unless an alternative was found to the casual labour system, and he actively concerned himself with Liverpool dock and railway workers in his efforts to force change.³⁶ This was yet another issue with which his daughter Eleanor became involved.

III

Little evidence survives of Eleanor Rathbone's early years but it seems that her childhood was happy and stable, if a little lonely.³⁷ She was brought up in a household where material wealth was not lacking, but where such affluence was considered a privilege. Even as a small girl her father instilled in her a respect for the power of money, for in his view luxury spending and self-indulgence weakened the character, whereas frugal living and philanthropy strengthened it. As 'sweet' as she appeared on the surface, her true character was far more complex: wilful and independent of spirit, she had strong likes and dislikes, and could be very troublesome when she chose to be.³⁸ This was especially evident in the case of her education. Because the Rathbone 'year' was divided between London and Liverpool, interspersed by regular summer holidays in Scotland and elsewhere, her schooling lacked formality and continuity. Except for a brief spell at Kensington High School, she was taught by a series of tutors and governesses, many of whom possessed dubious qualifications, and most of whom the stubborn young girl disliked. The one exception was a German lady, Marianne Muller, whom, according to her friend, Margery Fry, she loved and admired.³⁹ Equally informal, but of considerable influence, was the knowledge she acquired from her parents and from the innumerable interesting and important people who sought their company. Stocks

³⁵ EFR, *Memoir*, 374-8. The LCRS was formed in 1846, combining the three older relief-giving societies. It was the only society for the whole town, investigating and giving charity in cases of distress. The new arrangement, for which William Rathbone was largely responsible, and which was based on the Elberfeld System, was instigated in 1887, and saw the division and subdivision of the area, with committees of 'Friendly Visitors' who acted as investigators. The LCRS was linked to the London-based Charity Organisation Society. See also Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 81ff.

³⁶ EFR, *Memoir*, 389.

³⁷ For her loneliness as a child see Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 63.

³⁸ Transcript of BBC Home Service (Schools) programme given by Margery Fry 'For the Fourteens. "Eleanor Rathbone." ' Broadcast 18 March 1952. BBC Written Sound Archives.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

describes how this social circle embraced 'the leading disciples of Gladstonian Liberalism' and the 'pioneer thinkers of this age of administrative bricklaying.'⁴⁰

Her peripatetic education did nothing to dull Rathbone's insatiable thirst for knowledge, and in 1892, aged nineteen, she persuaded her parents to allow her to learn Greek. She was fortunate to be taught by Janet Case, an ardent feminist and graduate of Girton College, Cambridge, and it was largely Case's influence, and the picture she painted of university life and learning, which fuelled the young woman's determination to study philosophy at university. For months she harboured a secret desire to attend Newnham College, Cambridge but when she eventually broached the subject with her parents, it was her mother who raised serious objections. It was not so much that she disagreed with women being educated, but she considered it a pursuit that was entirely incompatible with, rather than a substitute for marriage.⁴¹ Her father's attitude was somewhat different, for although he had certain reservations about Oxford and Cambridge,⁴² perhaps the outcome of their historic attitude towards nonconformists, he was both enthusiastic and actively supportive of the higher education of women. Given this it is unlikely that he objected to his daughter's plans to attend university, as Alberti has concluded.⁴³ That their daughter had no interest in marriage was quite evident, but before the matter of university was resolved, a long struggle ensued which not only caused great anguish to both women, but put a severe strain on the young Rathbone's mental health. In the end her parents, and her mother in particular, became less concerned about Victorian custom and practice, and more concerned that their daughter actually made a decision over her future. For, as William Rathbone wrote, if she continued to hesitate she would end up with 'a very unhappy wasted life.'⁴⁴ A compromise was finally reached when it was agreed that she could attend university, but at her mother's insistence it had to be Somerville, not Newnham, where the Warden of what was then only a hall of residence, would keep an eye on her daughter. Fortunately for Rathbone, Somerville became a college in

⁴⁰ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 27.

⁴¹ Demographically, Rathbone's chances of marriage would have been slim for the excess of females to males was estimated, by 1913, at 1,200,000 in England and Wales, 18,887,000 females outnumbering 17,687,000 males. As cited in D. Read, *Edwardian England 1901-15. Society and Politics* (London, 1972) 209.

⁴² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 34 and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 34-6.

⁴³ Simey, *Rathbone*, 6; Stocks, *Rathbone*, 35 & Alberti, *Rathbone*, 17.

⁴⁴ Letter of William Rathbone to EFR, 6 Sep 1893. RP IX 4 (188).

1893, the same year as she arrived, so she was truly a pioneer of the new establishment.⁴⁵

By going to Somerville Rathbone not only severed her ties with home, but the move also precipitated a change for the worse in her relationship with her mother. She became even more in her father's mould, and it was his authority which predominated and exerted the most enduring influence on her. It was he who brought her up to respect others and to recognise the value of every individual, regardless of their class, sex or creed, and it was these tenets that remained constant and which informed her philosophy on life. Besides this, her father's religiosity had a direct effect on the way hers developed.

The prevailing atmosphere at Greenbank was nonconformist, and each member of the family was at liberty to practice their faith as they saw fit, so perpetuating the Rathbone tradition, firmly established by William IV, of religious freedom. As Bebbington has noted, there was an inextricable link between religious nonconformity and active concern with social problems, which had a moral dimension at this time.⁴⁶ In Liverpool this had been exemplified by, for example, Josephine Butler's vigorous campaign against the 1860s Contagious Diseases Acts, which brought prostitution into the public eye.⁴⁷ Charles Booth, another Liverpool nonconformist and author of the aforementioned pioneering social survey of London, turned his attention to the 1889 dock strike in London⁴⁸ whilst others concerned themselves with the moral and social implications of overcrowded urban dwellings.⁴⁹ William Rathbone VI's doctrinal views were, as Rathbone later wrote, best described as those of the school of Unitarianism, but she detected elements of the Rathbone Quaker heritage.⁵⁰ So, whilst her father attended the Unitarian chapel and her mother the Anglican church, she never professed an adherence to any theological creed. As a young girl she occasionally attended a Quaker meeting, but soon gave up on these,

⁴⁵ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 39.

⁴⁶ D.W Bebbington. *The Nonconformist Conscience. Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London, 1982) 38.

⁴⁷ J. Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London, 1896) and for a contemporary overview of Butler and her campaign see Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 74-80. In 1883 the Acts were suspended and then repealed.

⁴⁸ C.Booth, *Dock and Wharf Labour* (London, 1892).

⁴⁹ Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 43. Other targets for nonconformists were temperance, gambling and social purity.

⁵⁰ EFR, *Memoir*, 428.

ostensibly turning her back on formal religion.⁵¹ Fry, whose family were also Quakers, later recalled how she and Rathbone followed the fashion and went to New College Chapel whilst they were at Somerville, but remarked that their visit was motivated more by an interest in the architecture and the music than in the famous preacher.⁵² Religious belief did present Rathbone with a philosophical dilemma, which she discussed in depth with her friend, Oliver Lodge.⁵³ She eventually came around to his way of thinking, developing a scepticism about religious faith which enabled her to believe that a person's worth was vested in their moral life, rather than in their spiritual beliefs. Leaving instructions for her funeral, she explained her views on her beliefs and the hereafter:

My own feeling is that whether the soul survives the body – and of that I am not sure – my body is not me and of no more importance than a cast-off garment. Do not take this to mean that I am un-Christian. I do not think I am. But Christianity seems to me a guide for life, but is rather vague about the after-life of individuals.⁵⁴

A profound sense of responsibility to relieve individual human distress rather than the hope of heaven became her guiding principle: humanitarianism unfettered by concerns for race, class or religious prejudice informed the causes she championed, and nowhere was this of greater import than in connection with her later work with Jewish refugees.

IV

The Eleanor Rathbone who entered Somerville in 1893 to study *Literae Humaniores*, or Greats,⁵⁵ was amongst the vanguard of young women to attend the university and benefit from the enlightened ideas of Oxford dons T.H.Green (1837-1882)⁵⁶ and his protégé, Professor Edward Caird, the Master of Balliol.⁵⁷ Both men,

⁵¹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 32-4 and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 19.

⁵² E.H. Jones, *Margery Fry. The Essential Amateur* (London, 1966) 41.

⁵³ She knew Oliver (later Sir) Lodge and his sister through his friendship with her brother. See also E. Lodge, *Terms and Vacations* (Oxford, 1938) 66. Lodge, physicist, was Principal of the University of Birmingham from 1900-1919. For her relationship with Lodge, which is beyond the scope of this overview see Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 28-34, 29, 35-9, 44-5, 54, 63-4.

⁵⁴ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 34.

⁵⁵ For a history of Somerville see P. Adams, *Somerville for Women. An Oxford College 1879-1993* (Oxford, 1996).

⁵⁶ M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience. T.H.Green and his Age* (New York, 1983). For T.H.Green's ideology see G. Thomas, *The Moral Philosophy of T.H.Green* (Oxford, 1987), and A. Vincent (ed.) *The Philosophy of T.H.Green* (Aldershot, 1986).

⁵⁷ H. Jones & J.H. Muirhead, *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* (Glasgow, 1921).

whose teachings were to influence Rathbone, had a generous belief in the intellectual capacity of women, and had spearheaded the campaign for their admission to Oxford.⁵⁸ However, had another radical reform not taken place with the removal of restrictions on the admission of nonconformists to both Oxford and Cambridge, she, like her male predecessors, would still have been excluded.⁵⁹ Although she and her contemporaries were amongst the pioneering women at Oxford, entry was the only concession to women students, for they were still restricted from being members of the University and were not permitted to graduate.⁶⁰ Up until 1893, the year Rathbone entered, women still had to have a chaperone at all lectures.⁶¹ Her pursuit of scholarship was far from easy. Greats was the body of study which included grammar, rhetoric, logic, rudimentary mathematics, Greek, Latin, some religious matter, ancient history, moral and political philosophy as well as study of the history of philosophy, but her earlier peripatetic education had not equipped her with a sound foundation in the Classics.⁶² She remedied these deficiencies through a combination of extra-curricular tuition and, characteristically, hard work and determination. Even though she was never considered to be a very great scholar, Rathbone's tutors at Oxford recognised that she was a talented student whose work was always first class.⁶³ However, the pressure of schools (exams), combined with her illegible handwriting, resulted in her gaining only a second-class degree.⁶⁴ Ultimately, the outcome of these exams was an irrelevance when compared with the profound and enduring effect which Somerville and Oxford exerted upon her developing ideas.

The first of these influences was located within the realm of academia itself. The main foci of Rathbone's studies at Somerville were upon the fundamental

⁵⁸ Somerville was established in 1878, and had just 47 students when Eleanor went there. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 38. For the foundation of Somerville see M. Byrne & C. Mansfield, *Somerville College 1879-1921* (Oxford, 1921) 15 and Adams, *Somerville*. For opposition to women at Oxford see Dr Liddon, *Guardian*, 23 Apr 1884, as quoted in Adams, *Somerville*, 8ff.

⁵⁹ The religious beliefs of the Rathbone family prevented them applying to Oxford or Cambridge before 1871, after which date nonconformists were admitted. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 34.

⁶⁰ See A.M. Rogers, *Degrees by Degrees. The Story of the Admission of Oxford Women Students to Membership of the University* (London, 1938).

⁶¹ Byrne & Mansfield, *Somerville*, 77.

⁶² Richter, *Politics*, 59.

⁶³ See, for example, entries for Summer Term 1894, Summer and Michaelmas Terms 1895 for EFR, Reports of Collections, Somerville Hall 1891, 186-7. Somerville College Archives. See also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 53 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 39-44.

⁶⁴ Report of Mr Cannan, Summer Term 1896, Reports of Collections, Somerville Hall 1891, 186-7. Somerville College Archives. Mr Cannan's prediction was correct, for her final papers were indecipherable and she was forced to dictate her scripts to a typist before they could be assessed. See Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 53 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 47.

problems of human life and existence, the self-same questions to which her father directed his philanthropic work. Noted by her tutors for her 'considerable powers of independent thought'⁶⁵ she soon earned the title of 'Philosopher.'⁶⁶ Through the teachings of Caird, her tutor in moral philosophy,⁶⁷ she encountered the prevailing Oxford ideology of Green, who had become a Fellow in the early 1860's before embarking on his career as a teacher of philosophy in 1871. He had rapidly earned a reputation for his radicalism, being described as 'an extreme man, an ultra-radical in politics, an ultra-liberal in religious opinion,'⁶⁸ and his school of thought encouraged undergraduates to devote considerable attention to social problems.⁶⁹ As Mrs Humphrey Ward later described, Green was 'preoccupied... with the need of leading "a useful life"', a concern which was exemplified by his interest in the contemporary debate about the 'condition of the people', temperance, housing, wages, electoral reform – in fact social reform in general.'⁷⁰ His challenge of liberal orthodoxies included the proposal that an increase in state intervention in the lives of individuals (in, for example, education) could give them greater freedom rather than less. That she came under Caird's wing at this time was fortuitous, for he was personally involved in improving the condition of women's education at Oxford, and not only admitted women students to his lectures, but unusually took essays from them in philosophy.⁷¹

Whilst Caird shared Green's beliefs, he interpreted the doctrine in his own way,⁷² and during his years as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, became a key figure in the drive to relate the subject more closely to real life.⁷³ At Oxford, central to his teaching of ethical idealism was the thesis of personal service and citizenship, whereby the actions of the individual rather than abstract

⁶⁵ Report of Mr Ritchie, Lent Term 1894, Reports of Collections, Somerville Hall 1891, 186-7. Somerville College Archives.

⁶⁶ Lucy Kempson to Stocks, 8 May 1947. RP XIV 4 (40).

⁶⁷ H. Jones & J.H. Muirhead, *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* (Glasgow, 1921).

⁶⁸ R.L. Nettleship (ed.) *The Works of T.H. Green*, vol. III (London, 1888) xlv, as cited in Richter, *Politics*, 93, f. 113.

⁶⁹ J. Lewis, 'Eleanor Rathbone 1872-1946' in P. Barker (ed.) *Founders of the Welfare State* (London, 1984) 83.

⁷⁰ Ward, 248 as cited in Richter, *Politics*, 146.

⁷¹ Jones & Muirhead, *Life and Philosophy*, 150.

⁷² Jones and Muirhead stated that 'Caird and Green held the same views towards the problems of human life but their methods of operation, whether in the speculative or the practical sphere, were in strong contrast.' *Ibid.* 33-5.

⁷³ Caird was Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow from 1866-1893. For this see J. Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (London, 1978) 54.

institutions would create a better society.⁷⁴ Caird's personal contribution was his active involvement in the settlement movement. The paradigm for settlements, which were a product of Greens' influence on social thinking of the period, was Toynbee Hall in London's East End, founded by Samuel Barnett and sponsored by Oxford University. There, graduates and undergraduates bridged the gap between rich and poor by living, for varying periods of time, cheek by jowl with the working classes, and from this position they were able to involve themselves and ostensibly effect improvements in the local social, educational, charitable and governmental structure.⁷⁵ As far as Caird was concerned these institutions were one of the chief means of closing the gap that existed between different classes, and he viewed settlements as efficient centres of social work on modern lines. His ideals and enthusiasm in this respect undoubtedly influenced Rathbone's own developing interest in social problems, and were, at least in part, responsible for her future involvement with the Liverpool Victoria Women's Settlement (LVWS).⁷⁶ Nor was she the only one of Caird's students to be influenced in this way, for William Beveridge, whom Rathbone was later to become involved with politically over the introduction of family allowances, was at one time equally involved in the settlement movement.⁷⁷ Further links came in 1933 when Beveridge instigated the founding of the Academic Assistance Council (later the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning) to meet the special needs of academic refugees from Nazi Germany,⁷⁸ and again in 1943 when he became a member of Rathbone's National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror.⁷⁹

Given the Caird and Green influences at Somerville it is remarkable that Alberti, in her study of Rathbone's ideas, could conclude that there was:

little material to establish any direct links between the philosophy Rathbone

⁷⁴ M. Simey, *The Disinherited Society. A Personal View of Social Responsibility in Liverpool during the Twentieth Century* (Liverpool, 1996), 28.

⁷⁵ J.F.C.Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain 1875-1901* (London, 1990) 194-5.

⁷⁶ For EFR and the Victoria Settlement see Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 82, 85-9, 91-3.

⁷⁷ Beveridge's time at Oxford just post-dated that of Rathbone. He entered Balliol in 1897. See J. Harris, *William Beveridge. A Biography* (Oxford, 1977) 41, 76-7. For Beveridge and settlements see S.Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform 1880-1914* (London, 1987) 130-54.

⁷⁸ See R.M.Cooper (ed.) *Refugee Scholars Conversations with Tessa Simpson* (Leeds, 1992). Also J.Medawar & D.Pyke, *Hitler's Gift. Scientists who Fled Nazi Germany* (London, 2000) xii. For Rathbone's correspondence with Esther Simpson, the secretary of the SPSL, see MSS SPSL 120/2, Bodleian.

⁷⁹ For the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror see Chapter 7.

learned in Oxford and the philanthropic practice she later engaged in...⁸⁰

Moreover, her statement clearly ignores Collingwood's observation that:

The school of Green sent out into public life a stream of ex-pupils who carried with them the conviction that philosophy and particularly that which they had learned at Oxford, was an important thing and that their vocation was to put it into practice.⁸¹

V

Whilst the academic atmosphere of Oxford provided a climate in which Rathbone's own brand of late Victorian Idealism could develop, she was also exposed to the intellectual milieu of her fellow female students. Contrary to her father's biased view of Oxford as a mentally and morally enervating place,⁸² she found the atmosphere energising and emancipating. Included amongst her new, lasting and influential friendships were Ethel Maude Samson (later White), Rose Graham, Lettice Ilbert, Margery Fry, Helen Darbishire, Lucy Papworth, Barbara Bradby (later Hammond) and Hilda Oakeley, all of whom went on to pursue a variety of careers in the spheres of public service, welfare work and humanitarian causes as well as academia.⁸³ The subsequent achievements of these pioneering women were formidable: Samson became a stalwart of feminism and socialism, whilst Graham gained renown as an historian and archaeologist.⁸⁴ Ilbert, who married H.L. Fisher, a young New College, Oxford don,⁸⁵ held the post of tutor in Modern History at St Hugh's College, Oxford between 1902-13⁸⁶ and was chairman of the National Council for the Care of the Unmarried Mother and her Child from 1918-1949.⁸⁷ Fry, who remained a life-long friend of Rathbone's, contributed to public service in innumerable ways, including her work with the Quaker War Victims Relief Mission and her campaign for penal reform.⁸⁸ Besides this, in common with Darbishire, a leading literary scholar, she held the post of Principal of Somerville. Papworth entered Somerville in 1893, the same year as Rathbone, and became a social activist and

⁸⁰ Alberti, *Rathbone*, 18.

⁸¹ R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1939) 17 as cited in Richter, *Politics*, 345, f.2.

⁸² This was his view where the average man and those who had no special stimulus to work was concerned. EFR, *Memoir*, 342.

⁸³ Pedersen only mentions Ilbert, Oakeley, Bradby and Fry. See Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 49.

⁸⁴ V. Brittain, *The Women at Oxford* (London, 1960) 96.

⁸⁵ Adams, *Somerville*, 115.

⁸⁶ Brittain, *Women*, 244.

⁸⁷ Adams, *Somerville*, 362.

⁸⁸ J. Marchant (ed.) *What Life Has Taught Me* (London, 1948) 50-64.

social investigator. During her thirteen year tenure as general secretary of the Women's Industrial Council, the organisation established in 1894 to 'watch over women engaged in trades and all industrial matters which concern women', Papworth was closely involved with a widely publicised enquiry into married women's work.⁸⁹ Bradby and Oakeley also maintained their friendship with Rathbone: the former became an historical writer in collaboration with her husband⁹⁰ whilst Oakeley earned a reputation as a philosopher, and was also the first female warden of the Passmore Edwards Settlement in St. Pancras, London between 1914 – 21.⁹¹

The person whom these and other Somerville students encountered was an attractive, well-mannered young woman of middle height whose clear, smooth complexion, soft dark hair and splendid eyes were often remarked upon. So too was her behaviour, for in contrast to her serious and studious side, there was the vague, absent-minded and sometimes unapproachable persona.⁹² The truth was that when Rathbone exhibited the latter traits she was exercising what Stocks described as a rare capacity for mental concentration.⁹³ Such was her intellectual ability that it was not surprising that Eva, Marchioness of Reading, should later describe Rathbone as 'an intellectual woman, who, according to her friends found pleasure in reading Blue Books even when she lay in bed.'⁹⁴ Clothes and fashion held no interest for her, and her mode of dress, which was inevitably black, remained fixed in the Edwardian era,⁹⁵ creating the impression of a formidable blue-stocking. Her appearance was often smart but this was an accidental achievement which owed more to the intervention of the female members of her family, and later her companion, Elizabeth Macadam, than it did to her own care and attention.⁹⁶

Leisure was always important to Rathbone, but she had no taste for sports or activities that required any degree of manual dexterity or physical strength, both

⁸⁹ C. Black (ed.) *Married Women's Work* (London, 1983 reprint of 1915 edition) iii.

⁹⁰ Brittain, *Women*, 249. The Hammond's publications included *The Village Labourer 1760-1832* (London, 1911), *The Skilled Labourer 1760-1832* (London, 1919) and *The Town Labourer 1760-1832* (London, 1920). For confirmation of the enduring friendship see Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 49, 52, 54, 99, 164 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 42.

⁹¹ See H. Oakeley, *My Adventure in Education* (London, 1939) 159-84. Also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*,

⁹² As noted in Letter of Margery Fry to Dorothy Scott, 4 Sep 1898. Private collection. See also Lodge, *Terms and Vacations*, 67.

⁹³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 40.

⁹⁴ E. Reading, *For the Record. The Memoirs of Eva, Marchioness of Reading* (London, 1972) 185-6.

⁹⁵ Most writers give this description of Eleanor. See, for example, See P. Brookes, *Women at Westminster. An account of women in the British Parliament 1918 -1966* (London, 1967) 83; Stocks, *Rathbone* and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 168.

⁹⁶ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 167-8.

qualities that she lacked. Instead, she derived great pleasure from domestic and foreign travel, walking, boating, cycling and later motoring. Rathbone could never be accused of self-indulgence, except where her smoking habit was concerned. She was already a veteran smoker by the time she went to Oxford in 1893 and despite the unfashionable and scandalous nature of the custom, could never be persuaded to give it up.⁹⁷ Her niece, Noreen, was sure that Eleanor's smoking both affected her health and contributed towards the heart attack which killed her.⁹⁸

University gave Rathbone a unique opportunity to develop the oratorical skills for which she later gained renown. Her distinct and pleasant voice belied a robust personality and she was driven by an emotional energy that infused her speeches with passion.⁹⁹ Whilst all the causes she was later to champion, both inside and outside of Parliament, benefited from the depth and persistence of her arguments, this was especially true where the refugee issue was concerned. It also gained her a reputation as a formidable adversary. As a novice debater at Somerville, she took part in the women's inter-collegiate debates, but early on she and a few fellow students established a small, select college society for more intimate discussions.¹⁰⁰ Called the 'A.P's',¹⁰¹ their remit was to discuss 'things in general,' but the society was characterised from the outset by the high moral earnestness of its members and of the concern which they all showed for the moral issues of the day. Rathbone was launched on her debating career at the third meeting of the 'A.P's', even though the subject she introduced, the Elberfeld System of Poor Law Administration, was neither philosophical nor original.¹⁰² Rather it rehearsed her father's interest in a system that had led him to help establish the LCRS in 1863.¹⁰³ Subsequent topics were more profound – luxury, Plato and the position of women in the Republic, Kidd's recently published *Social Evolution*, freewill and the evolution of morals.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 43, 164, 167-8, 373 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 39.

⁹⁸ Author's telephone interview with Noreen Rathbone, 21 Nov 2000.

⁹⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 48, 57.

¹⁰⁰ Jones, *Fry*, 55. For references to Oakeley's friendship with Rathbone see Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 8, 45, 48-9, 52, 62, 64, 67-9, 77, 81, 164, 264, 304 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 42-4, 47, 52, 245, 248, 281-2, 314. For Oakeley's impressions of the A.P's see Oakeley, *My Adventure*, 69-70.

¹⁰¹ As Stocks describes, only the members of the society knew these initial letters designated the "Associated Prigs." See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 44. See also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 50-1.

¹⁰² Minute Book of the A.P's, 18 Feb 1894. Somerville College Archives.

¹⁰³ Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 81ff.

¹⁰⁴ Minute Book of the A.P's, Somerville College Archives. See also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 45.

VI

Whilst immersed in the intellectual climate of Somerville, Rathbone's passion for, and commitment to the emergent feminist movement grew¹⁰⁵ and was, according to her friend Oakeley, infectious.¹⁰⁶ This affiliation was somewhat surprising for apart from the growing popularity of feminist activities amongst young women of Rathbone's class, she differed in that she never articulated any animosity towards men, nor had she, or any other Rathbone woman, ever been treated unequally at home because of their sex.¹⁰⁷ She was, however, aware of the complacency of Liverpool society towards two local women social reformers, Josephine Butler and Mary Macaulay (later Mrs Charles Booth), and may, as Simey has suggested, been fired by resentment of their treatment.¹⁰⁸ Rathbone was certainly inspired by the pursuit of equality for women but saw emancipation as the means to an end. The 'end' was the 'right to exercise the full responsibilities of citizenship', which Green and Caird's ideology promoted.¹⁰⁹ Whilst Alberti has rightly observed the connection between Rathbone's feminism and the prevailing Oxford ideology, her claim that Rathbone's years at Oxford 'fostered her feminism rather than her intellect'¹¹⁰ is misguided and has been tailored to fit her crude feminist agenda. The evidence of Rathbone's tutors confirms beyond any doubt that it was her intellect and not her feminism which was stimulated and invigorated by her environment: it was this newly discovered state of mind which provided a setting within which she was able to test out new ideas and thoughts, including her interest in the women's cause. Rathbone and her female Oxford contemporaries were, after all, amongst the vanguard of women enjoying the fruits of educational emancipation, so it was not surprising that many of them should have taken an active interest in the wider 'equality' debate.

Even outside of the female enclave of Somerville Rathbone's new acquaintances were invariably women. Although the Victorian notion of separate spheres, public and private, male and female, was beginning to be eroded, as exemplified by the admission of women to university, many aspects of segregation still prevailed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Social contact between the

¹⁰⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 42-3.

¹⁰⁶ Oakeley maintained that no one 'who was privileged to be Eleanor Rathbone's friend could be unmindful of the women's' movement.' See Oakeley, *My Adventure*, 76.

¹⁰⁷ Simey, *Rathbone*, 7 and Simey, *Disinherited Society*, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Simey, *Disinherited Society*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ Simey, *Rathbone*, 14.

¹¹⁰ Alberti, *Rathbone*, 18.

sexes, either formally or informally, was still rare and actively discouraged, and the men whom she did meet, like Oliver Lodge, were either male relatives and their friends, or her tutors.

VII

Oxford completed, Rathbone returned to Liverpool in 1896, and settled back into family life at 'Greenbank' where her financial and social position were such that she was unencumbered by household or employment demands. Never one to indulge in idleness, Rathbone, like many other women of her class, soon found an outlet for her zeal and energy through her involvement with a number of local philanthropic agencies. Collectively, the experience she gained from these voluntary posts served as an apprenticeship in the principles and practice of social investigation and reform.¹¹¹ What set her apart from her female contemporaries was the way she donned the Rathbone family mantle of philanthropy, which in preceding generations had passed almost automatically through the male lineage. Her brothers were somewhat of a disappointment to her father, for none were inclined to follow in his footsteps, but his favoured daughter more than compensated for their failures.

In 1897, putting into practice the ideology of Green and Caird, Rathbone became simultaneously a manager of Granby Street Council School, honorary secretary of the Liverpool Women's Industrial Council (LWIC)¹¹² and a visitor for the LCRS, which her father had helped to reorganise. It remains unclear exactly what her responsibilities were as a manager of Granby Street Council School, but as honorary secretary of the LWIC she would have been involved in publicising the exploitation of women workers, a position that was consistent with her feminist sympathies.¹¹³

Her work as a visitor brought her into direct contact with the 'extremely peculiar constitution of the Liverpool population' that she had described second-hand to the A.P's at Somerville.¹¹⁴ Now she saw for herself the deprivation suffered by the families of the unskilled casual dock and railway labourers, and the consequences of the irregular and poorly paid nature of their employment. The report that she subsequently presented to her father in early 1897 made depressing reading. Even his

¹¹¹ Simey, *Rathbone*, 11.

¹¹² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 50.

¹¹³ Simey, *Rathbone*, 7.

¹¹⁴ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 50.

determined efforts at reorganising the way the LCRS dispensed charity had been ineffectual, for not only had the organisation failed to bring about any permanent material improvement in the lives of the poor, but she was of the opinion that it was also responsible for bringing about some permanent harm.¹¹⁵

In identifying the main cause of the problem, Rathbone singled out the visitors themselves, described by her as mainly 'lower middle-class people, very willing and interested, but not highly educated and quite untrained.'¹¹⁶ They were, in her view, ineffective and gullible, and made a mockery of the principles of the COS, whereby casework was the keynote of the organisation and applicants were subjected to rigorous investigation to ascertain whether they 'deserved' help.¹¹⁷ Only then were they directed to the appropriate charity, or to the Poor Law.

The *raison d'être* of the COS was this: if aid was given indiscriminately then the poor would be deprived of their self-respect and sense of responsibility. It was assumed that those who failed to satisfy the investigators, the so-called 'undeserving' poor, would, in the face of pauperism and the workhouse, see the error of their ways and seek work. Rathbone was, at this time, a strong defender of the principles of the COS and accepted the notion that the 'deserving' poor could be redeemed and made into 'respectable citizens' through the work of the organisation.¹¹⁸ However it was not long before she abandoned their dogma, and was at the forefront of promoting the idea of state intervention in the relief of poverty. The recommendations which Rathbone presented to her father, were based on her belief that matters would only improve if the quality of the visitors was raised, a goal which was achievable if they were given professional training. The concept of a specific course for those undertaking social work was highly innovative but was an idea which Rathbone developed and subsequently put into practice when she became involved with the LVWS. Within a decade Beveridge had turned his attention to the same problem, proposing

¹¹⁵ *Ibid* and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 59-60.

¹¹⁶ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 51.

¹¹⁷ Founded in 1869 as the Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendacity, the remit of the COS was to organise and co-ordinate charitable activity rather than give relief. See H & B. Bosanquet, *Social Work in London, 1869-1912. A History of the C.O.S.* (London, 1914); C.L.Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913. Its Ideas and Work* (London, 1961); G.S. Jones, *Outcast London A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (London, 1992) especially 241-61. The views of the COS were an extension of those expressed by Samuel Smiles who propagated the notion that the poor could be helped, by intelligent charity, to help themselves. S. Smiles, *Self-Help with Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (London, 1859).

¹¹⁸ See Letter of EFR to Hilda Oakeley, undated but *circa* 1901. RP Dec 2002 Accession (being catalogued).

decasualisation as one of many other forms of state intervention in the labour market, just as Rathbone had.¹¹⁹

Having completed this first report on the dispensing of charitable relief in Liverpool, Rathbone looked to her father again for inspiration. Her next project was what she called her 'little Dock Labour Enquiry' in which she investigated and made suggestions for reform of the casual labour system and its concomitant under-employment at the Liverpool Docks.¹²⁰ At this point she turned her back on the principles of the COS which she had earlier defended, and in stark contrast applied techniques which emulated those of her father's protégé, Charles Booth, citing his work within her own.¹²¹ Methodical analysis of the facts was now preceded by observation and the acquisition of detailed background knowledge. She never anticipated that her father would respond positively to her conclusions, which included the suggestion that a change be made in the way payment was made to the workers, but her proposals were, once again, ahead of their time.¹²² The results of the dock labour enquiry represented Rathbone's first important piece of social research, but were not published until 1903, the year following her father's death.¹²³

Rathbone's first-hand contact with Liverpool's poor clearly alerted her to the burden which was placed on the social structure of the city by the numbers of illiterate migrants, immigrants and transmigrants, some of them Jews, who continued to seek work in the city, despite the miserable work prospects. Given that Jewish immigrants had been a prominent feature of Liverpool life during the last decades of the nineteenth century, it is hard to imagine that she was unaware of their presence and of the negative and positive attitudes towards them, for Merseyside, in common with other port cities, had become the destination of thousands of Russian Jews who were fleeing the pogroms of Eastern Europe after 1882.¹²⁴ Many of the immigrants established themselves in an area that acquired the sobriquet 'Brownlow Hill Ghetto'

¹¹⁹ W. Beveridge, *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (London, 1909). See also Harris, *Beveridge*, 138-67.

¹²⁰ EFR, *Report on the results of a Special Inquiry into the conditions of Labour at the Liverpool Docks* (Liverpool, 1903).

¹²¹ EFR, *Liverpool Docks*, 32, 37, 42, 50, in which she refers to Booth's chapter on the London docks in his work, *Life and Labour of the London Poor*.

¹²² Booth, *Dock Labour*. See also D.C Keeling, *The Crowded Stairs. Recollections of Social Work in Liverpool* (London, 1961) 14-15.

¹²³ EFR, *Liverpool Docks*.

¹²⁴ The zenith in transmigration in Liverpool occurred between 27 April and 12 July 1882, when a total of 4422 adults, 1325 children and 527 infants were despatched on 31 steamships to the USA and Canada. See L. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914* (London, 1960) 43.

and between 1875 and the eve of the First World War the Jewish community in the city grew from around 3,000 to an estimated 11,000. Coincidentally, Brownlow Hill was also home to the huge local workhouse with which her father, William, had very close ties.¹²⁵ He was also an advocate of the Liverpool Board of Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor, established in May 1876, which operated on the same lines as the COS, which he so admired.¹²⁶ Such charitable organisations earned the Jewish community a reputation for their independence and self-reliance.¹²⁷ On the negative side, the absence of 'immigrant work', furniture-making, tailoring and the sweated trades, and a serious glut in the local labour market during the 1890s, precipitated an anti-alien campaign by the Liverpool Trades Council in 1890-91,¹²⁸ mirroring campaigns in other areas of the country where immigrants had taken root.¹²⁹ The extent to which these experiences affected and effected Rathbone's admiration for the Jews, repudiation of antisemitism and determined stand against anti-alien immigration policies in the 1930s and 1940s is unquantifiable, but was part of her background which cannot be ignored in the broad scheme of her development.¹³⁰

It is evident from Rathbone's correspondence with Oakeley that this period of her life was one of maturation and psychological challenge as she struggled to reconcile her own privileged position with the magnitude of poverty that surrounded her.¹³¹ As she made clear in a letter to her friend, dated around 1900, she realised that her conscience would not permit her the luxury of further theoretical study. Rather, as the following extract shows, she saw her future in terms of practical philanthropy that was informed by the philosophical ideology she had acquired at Oxford:

When one is young and a newcomer in the world, one looks at it in a detached way, wondering why the inhabitants take themselves and their trivial affairs so seriously, and finding one's chief interest outside it. But by degrees one warms to one's fellow mortals, and the danger becomes that one should lose the power of detaching oneself to the extent

¹²⁵ Brownlow Hill was the largest workhouse in the country, with official capacity for 3000. See Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 76.

¹²⁶ The Board offered financial support to those deemed, after thorough investigation, to be 'deserving', while taking steps to discourage the settlement in Liverpool of 'casual beggars' and the permanent dependence of the resident poor on communal charity. See B. Williams, 'History of Liverpool's Jewish Community'. A Paper presented to Manchester Jewish Museum, June 1987.

¹²⁷ D.C. Jones (ed.) *The Social Survey of Merseyside*, vol.1 (Liverpool, 1934) 73-4.

¹²⁸ P.J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism. A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939* (Liverpool, 1981) 120.

¹²⁹ E.H. Hunt, *British Labour History 1815-1914* (London, 1981) 178-87.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Letter of EFR to Shertok, 27 Oct 1934. Weizmann Archives.

¹³¹ Simey, *Rathbone*, 7.

necessary for serving it effectively. Of course, this does not mean that one almost inevitably has one's sense of proportion spoiled – and in a world where everyone was as well off as oneself, the utilitarian spirit might be a thing to fight against. But in *such* a world with all its wrongs shouting in one's ears and every miserable face claiming kinship, how can one be *sorry* that it is no longer easy to shut one's ears and revel in thought for thoughts sake.¹³²

Her consciousness had been raised by her first-hand experiences in Liverpool, and her perception of the poor changed so that she now saw them as victims of circumstances beyond their control, and as real human beings who led unhappy lives. As the standard bearer of the next Rathbone generation, she now sought, like her predecessors, to establish her particular interests within the field of practical philanthropy, with regard to the needs of the time. Ultimately though no one cause was to engage her continuously throughout her life, for she was always alert to any 'unsuspected obligation', the unplanned-for injustice that she felt compelled to investigate.¹³³

VIII

The death of her father in 1902 was a bitter blow for Rathbone, and was a turning point in her life, signalling both the end of her so-called apprenticeship and the beginning of her role of leadership in Liverpool civic affairs. But before she embarked upon this new path, she was asked to compile a biography of her father, an undertaking that warrants brief attention.¹³⁴ For, as Stocks has commented, Rathbone's affectionate memoir highlights, perhaps unwittingly, the parallels between William and his daughter, and the extent to which she was 'the outcome and the natural continuation of the [Rathbone] lives that had gone before.'¹³⁵ He was clearly her mentor and she his successor, but Simey has concluded that despite this inheritance, Rathbone may well have floundered without the support of equally

¹³² Rathbone had apparently been contemplating a joint philosophical project with her friend, Hilda Oakeley, on the problem of personality. For this, and the letter that is quoted, see Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 62-3 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 53.

¹³³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 125.

¹³⁴ Eleanor wrote to Hilda Oakley describing how she had much practical work of her own to finish, and had been asked to write a memoir of her father, whom she missed dreadfully. See Letter of EFR to Oakeley, n.d. (1903?) RP Dec 2002 accession (being catalogued).

¹³⁵ EFR, *Memoir*, 53.

committed people of calibre from within Liverpool University, with whom William had been closely associated.¹³⁶

Broadly speaking, the three areas of social work that Rathbone had already been introduced to, namely the relief of poverty, education and women's issues, still occupied her mind and actions after her father's death, but in more diverse and industrious ways. Her determination to bring about change made her receptive to new causes, each one leading her on to even greater responsibilities and opportunities. It is important to bear in mind that the causes Rathbone championed, be they feminist, female-related issues or humanitarian activities, were not mutually exclusive. Rather they were, as Simey has described, 'an integral part of an overall process.'¹³⁷ They also provided a climate in which she was able to cultivate her own ideology on social policy, against a background of political and economic change. At the root of all her campaigns, along with their concomitant proposals for reform, was the inspiration Rathbone drew from her conviction that 'dignity was the right of every human being and the fight to ensure it was the reason for their existence.'¹³⁸

None of Rathbone's investigations were undertaken in a vacuum, for studies of poverty, both quantitative and qualitative, were being pursued by innumerable male and female social investigators across the country.¹³⁹ Her next survey, *How the Casual Labourer Lives*, ably demonstrated this, and by her own admission owed much to the pioneering work of Rowntree in York, for it included amongst its stated aims the intention of providing Liverpool with 'a companion picture to Mr. B.S. Rowntree's study of the diet of labourer families in York.'¹⁴⁰ It was also a natural progression from her dock labour investigation. The report, which highlighted the problem faced by the wives of casual workers and the responsibility which they bore for housekeeping on an

¹³⁶ William Rathbone died before his campaign for higher education was rewarded with the granting of a charter to the University in 1903. As Simey points out, people including Frederick D'Aeth (Director of the University School of Social Studies), John MacCunn (Professor of Philosophy from 1881-1910) and Elizabeth Macadam (warden of the Victoria Settlement) accepted as a cardinal principle the University's involvement in the solution of the city's problems, and included Eleanor within their circle. See Simey, *Rathbone*, 8.

¹³⁷ Simey, *Rathbone*, 13.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

¹³⁹ For an overview of social investigation and investigators of the period see S. Cohen, 'The Life and Works of M. Loane', unpublished M.Phil thesis, Middlesex University, 1998, 11-27.

¹⁴⁰ EFR, *How the Casual Labourer Lives: Report of the Liverpool Joint Research committee on the Domestic Condition and Expenditure of the Families of Certain Liverpool Labourers* (Liverpool, 1909) vi. See also B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London, 1901).

irregular wage, was a collaborative undertaking, involving amongst other voluntary bodies,¹⁴¹ the LWIC and the LVWS, of which Rathbone was now honorary secretary.¹⁴²

It is evident from the way in which Rathbone's interests developed at this time that, against a background of concern for the poor, she was particularly aware of, and disturbed by certain specific hardships suffered by the women amongst them. Her sense of injustice was particularly aroused by the inequality of wages paid to both sexes doing the same work. Thus for a while she turned her attention to the relationship between men's and women's labour, publishing a paper on the subject, *The Problem of Women's Wages*, in 1912.¹⁴³ Once again, her interest and activities echoed a national anxiety, and this topical issue remained active for decades to come.¹⁴⁴ Like most of the studies that Rathbone undertook before the First World War her report, *The Condition of Widows under the Poor Law in Liverpool*, published in 1913 under the auspices of the LWIC, was a local case study of a nationwide issue. Here she drew attention to the financial hardship suffered by widows with young children, who fell outside the net of any state provision. Despite the introduction of some welfare reforms by the Liberal government in 1911, neither the Insurance Act, with its limited provision for the unemployed and sick wage earners, nor the Old Age Pensions Act (of which Booth was an early champion), addressed or even acknowledged the plight of widowed mothers. Rathbone's assessment, which advocated a state-aided scheme of payment, was of great significance, for it established the idea of the economics of motherhood. Rathbone's argument, that motherhood was a service to the community and should be recognised as such by way of a state-paid allowance,¹⁴⁵ became fundamental to her long-running campaign for a family allowance to be paid to mothers. Like so many other issues with which she involved herself, she was influenced to a certain degree by contemporary investigators. In the case of both the family allowance and her study of the casual labourer, she

¹⁴¹ The other bodies involved were the Liverpool branches of the Christian Social Union, the Fabian Society and the National Union of Women Workers, as well as the Liverpool Economic and Statistical Society.

¹⁴² EFR became Hon. Sec in 1904. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 62.

¹⁴³ EFR, *The Problem of Women's Wages* (Liverpool, 1912). This was first presented as a paper in 1902 to the Liverpool Economic and Statistical Society. Liverpool was one of the cities included in Clementina Black's subsequent enquiry into women's work and wages was conducted under the auspices of the Women's Industrial Council. See C.Black (ed.) *Married Women's Work* (London, 1915).

¹⁴⁴ For other contemporary surveys of women's wages see, for example, E. Cadbury, M. Mathieson & G. Shann, *Women's Work and Wages* (London, 1906). B.L. Hutchins, *Statistics of Young Women's Life and Employment*. Reprinted from the *Journal of the Royal of Statistical Society*, Part II, 30.6.1909; M. M. Bird, *Women at Work* (London, 1911); Black, *Married Women's Work*.

¹⁴⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 62-3.

acknowledged the effect that Rowntree's study of York had exerted over her. For, as she stated in the introduction to her book *The Disinherited Family*, first published in 1924:

...I do not forget the work of Mr Seebohm Rowntree and of the sociologists and labour leaders who have followed him in pleading for the claim of the wage-earner to a 'living wage' based on the needs of the family.¹⁴⁶

Alongside the social investigation and reports that Rathbone produced in the years following the death of her father in 1902 was her increasing involvement with the LVWS.¹⁴⁷ The Liverpool settlement, which was founded in 1897, was pioneering in that it was run by women for women.¹⁴⁸ In other respects it mirrored similar establishments elsewhere in the country, in that it was a practical exercise of the prevalent ideology of active citizenship and personal service, as promoted by the Oxford philosophers Green and Caird. The stated aims and scope of the fledgling LVWS were somewhat vague:

The primary idea of a settlement is to plant in a centre of vice, squalor and misery, a little oasis of education, refinement and sympathy, to try (to use a Scriptural phrase) to introduce the little leaven which in time - a very long time, of course - may help to leaven the whole lump

and the early years were fraught with problems: Liverpool society was sceptical about the venture on the grounds that it was not a conventional form of charitable effort. It also disapproved of the women involved with it, in the same way as they had censured Josephine Butler and Mary Macaulay for their earlier work. Discontinuity of leadership had an equally adverse affect on the work being undertaken, and was only resolved with the appointment, in late 1902, of Miss Elizabeth Macadam as the paid Warden. Macadam's outstanding qualification was the fact that she had trained as a social worker,

¹⁴⁶ EFR, *Family Allowances* (London, 1924).

¹⁴⁷ The papers of the Victoria Settlement are deposited in the University Archives, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool. For an overview of the establishment and early years of the settlement see Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 130-6. See also 'University Settlement' *The Sphinx*, 12, 6 (24 Jan 1906) 74-7.

¹⁴⁸ As cited in Simey, *Charity Rediscovered*, 131. The first women's settlement to be established was the Women's University Settlement in Southwark, London. See Alberti, *Rathbone*, 21. For a biopic of Dr. Lillias Hamilton, one of the two co-founders of the LVWS see S.Cohen 'Lillias A. Hamilton, (1858-1925)' in C.Matthew & B.Harrison (eds.) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) article 55593.

and had experience in settlement work.¹⁴⁹ At the time of Macadam's appointment, Rathbone, who shared the new warden's belief in the professionalisation of social work, was already active as a voluntary visitor for the LWVS. The two women had an immediate rapport and the working relationship that resulted, led, in 1905, to the foundations of the School of Social Studies and Training for Social Work in Liverpool.

The techniques of casework were exacting, and emphasised the importance of the collection and analysis of information, practices which Rathbone was well versed in. Besides lecturing on civic administration, she was a major fund-raiser. Seen in the wider context, like so many other issues she was then involved with, the local nature of the training scheme had much wider, national implications. At a personal level, her involvement in the provision of opportunities for training in social work was another aspect of her commitment to improving the status of women.

IX

At the heart of the struggle for equality for women was the suffrage movement, and Rathbone, whose fierce commitment to feminism had developed during her Somerville days, expressed this in practical terms by becoming a suffragist.¹⁵⁰ In her view, the achievement of the vote for women would not be an end in itself, but represented the means to an end, that being greater power over government decisions. She talked of suffrage 'with an ardour approaching importunity'¹⁵¹ and was clearly an eminently suitable candidate for the post of Parliamentary Secretary to the non-militant Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society (LWSS), which she accepted in 1897.¹⁵² The LWSS, whether national or regional, rejected violence and law-breaking in favour of a parliamentary approach to achieving the vote, which probably contributed to Stocks's opinion that 'the public was scarcely awake to it as a

¹⁴⁹ E. Macadam, *The Equipment of the Social Worker* (London, 1925).

¹⁵⁰ Fleming, in her introduction to the 1986 reprint of Rathbone's work, *The Disinherited Family*, refers to Rathbone as 'among the most famous of the suffragette leaders.' But Rathbone was a suffragist (non-militant) and her name was not as widely known as, for example, the Pankhursts. It was only in 1919, when she succeeded Mrs Fawcett as president of the NUWSS, that she became more widely recognised in this sphere. See EFR, *The Disinherited Family* (Bristol, 1986) 9. For a recent re-evaluation of the suffrage movement see M. Pugh, *The March of the Women. A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866-1914* (Oxford, 2000). Sylvia Pankhurst refers to a society for the Promotion of Women's Suffrage which was formed in Manchester by Mrs Elmy in 1865. See E.S. Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement. An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London, 1931) 30.

¹⁵¹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 64.

¹⁵² The LWSS adhered to the older federal organisation, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, under the presidency of Mrs Henry Fawcett. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 66.

practical political issue.’¹⁵³ This was in stark contrast to the newly formed militant pressure group, the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU),¹⁵⁴ whose suffragettes, in 1905, changed the face of the campaign with their violence and political agitation, and awakened the public to their demands. As far as Rathbone was concerned, this new phase brought with it an increase in her own responsibilities within the local organisation, as she and her colleagues pursued all the avenues open to non-militant, law-abiding political agitators.¹⁵⁵ But in typical Rathbone fashion, her energies were dissipated, and alongside campaigning for the franchise for women, she sought other channels through which women could achieve greater social and economic freedom. This fact explains why Stocks was able to assert that, at this time, Rathbone was more widely known ‘as an expert on social problems and local government than as a prominent speaker or agitator for the suffrage cause.’¹⁵⁶

Indeed, it was in the sphere of local government, on which she lectured at the LVWS, that she next turned her attention. Encouraged by the success of her cousin Margaret Ashton, who was elected the first woman member of Manchester City Council in 1908, Rathbone replicated this ‘first’ by winning a seat as an Independent Councillor on Liverpool City Council in 1909. This appointment opened the way for her to achieve change in a more visible and tangible way,¹⁵⁷ and in the years leading up to the First World War her social work activities in Liverpool were diverse and numerous. By now, Rathbone had gathered an army of fellow workers around her, always ready to assist in whatever field of work she was involved in: she also had the practical and philosophical support of a number of people of calibre from within the University of Liverpool who were equally committed to solving the city’s problems.¹⁵⁸ As with her earlier social investigations, the issues that she became involved with were to have far reaching consequences. In 1909 municipal housing administration – a non-gendered humanitarian rather than a feminist issue - became a priority, preparing her for her post-war preoccupation with the legislative aspects of

¹⁵³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 63-4.

¹⁵⁴ The WSPU was founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her elder daughter, Christabel. The Pankhursts were audacious in their belief that militancy would succeed where thirty six years of campaigning by more experienced and well-connected suffragists had failed. See Pugh, *March of the Women*, 171ff.

¹⁵⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 65. For a contemporary account see Pankhurst, *Suffragette Movement*. For the relationship between militancy and non-militancy see Pugh, *March of the Women*, 181-7.

¹⁵⁶ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 67.

¹⁵⁷ EFR was councillor for Granby Ward until 1934. See *Ibid.* 67. See also M. Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 1951) 133.

¹⁵⁸ Simey, *Rathbone*, 8.

this problem. Her active role in the establishment of the Liverpool University School of Social Science was a natural progression from her involvement with the training scheme in social work at the LVWS. Similarly, the establishment of the Liverpool Women's Citizen's Association (LWCA) in 1913, which was Rathbone's personal inspiration, emanated from the LWSS, and was a splendid example of her capacity for original thought. The organisation supported the 'votes for women' campaign, but its main intention was to educate them as citizens through lectures and discussions. In respect of its educative capacity, the LWCA was a vehicle through which Rathbone could disseminate the philosophical teachings she had absorbed at Oxford. Once again, what started out as a local initiative soon became a national network, with the Liverpool model being recreated, post-war, up and down the country.¹⁵⁹

X

The pace of Rathbone's pre-war humanitarian and feminist activities and achievements were marred somewhat by her resignation, in April 1914, from the executive of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The dispute over policy which precipitated this action - she had mobilised opposition to the Union's affiliation with the Labour Party - revealed a hitherto undisclosed vulnerability in Rathbone's character, for she became obsessed by the belief, which was totally unfounded, that people thought she had been disloyal or had been party to some sort of conspiracy.¹⁶⁰ The heat quickly went out of this incident, aided on Rathbone's part by a retreat to the Lake District with Macadam, and within a year she was back within the Union fold, thus enabling her to further her feminist career.¹⁶¹

Before this however, other more pressing matters came to the fore as a result of the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. The war caused urgent social problems nationwide, for as the mobilisation of reservists progressed according to plan it became apparent that no attention had been given to their dependants, nor had any financial provision been made for them. Existing rules for the payment of allowances meant that few families were actually eligible, so that vast numbers of women and children, with no other means of support, faced immediate and lasting destitution.¹⁶² One voluntary organisation, the Soldiers and Sailors Family Association (SSFA) was singled out as being appropriate for administering war relief,

¹⁵⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 104.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 69-70.

¹⁶¹ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, 103.

but most branches were unprepared for a disaster of such magnitude.¹⁶³ In Liverpool Rathbone was invited to take over the local SSFA branch and develop its operation, a job that she tackled skillfully and with immediacy.¹⁶⁴ Her ability to fire others with her enthusiasm came to the fore once again,¹⁶⁵ and she was able to muster the support of nearly 1,000 voluntary workers, including colleagues, friends and family.¹⁶⁶ From March 1915, the Separation Allowance was being paid weekly, in advance, directly to mothers through the nationwide network of the Post Office.¹⁶⁷

The conditions of war not only hastened the State payment of allowances to married women, but the call for women to do 'men's work', precipitated by wartime dislocation to the labour force, strengthened the case for equal pay for equal work.¹⁶⁸ For Rathbone, her involvement with the SSFA served to highlight the peacetime *status quo* whereby most married women were financially dependent upon their husbands. Thus by accident rather than design the crisis provided her with the empirical evidence she needed to support her argument for a family allowance that was paid to women, a proposal that had been fermenting since the publication, in 1913, of her report, *The Condition of Widows under the Poor Law in Liverpool*.¹⁶⁹ Following the inclusion of two papers on the subject of separation allowances in the feminist publication, *Common Cause*,¹⁷⁰ Rathbone argued her case for the endowment of motherhood, which was ideologically both feminist and humanitarian, in her article, 'The Remuneration of Women's Services', published in 1917.¹⁷¹

¹⁶² A complex situation existed where, pre-war, only wives 'on the strength' (some 1,100 who had married with the army's blessing) received an allowance. Asquith's announcement, in 1914, of universal eligibility threw the system into chaos, not least of all because there were no lists of wives who were 'off the strength'. See S. Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990) 991-2. For a contemporary account of 'off the strength' marriages see Rev. Stratham, 'Marriages in the Army Without Leave', *The United Services Magazine*, VI (1892-93) 295-305.

¹⁶³ See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 72-76. Also J. Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace 1914-28* (1989).

¹⁶⁴ Pedersen examines the work of the SSFA and refers to Rathbone's participation in the Liverpool branch in Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship', 992-3.

¹⁶⁵ This was another characteristic she inherited from her father. See EFR, *Memoir*, 266.

¹⁶⁶ As cited in Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship', f.27, 992. See also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 71.

¹⁶⁷ See Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship', 990.

¹⁶⁸ A. Holdsworth, *Out of the Dolls House. The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1988) 66-9. G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London, 1989). E. Roberts, *Women's Work 1840 - 1940* (London, 1988); H. Smith, 'The issue of "equal pay for equal work" in Great Britain 1914-1919', *Societas*, 8 (1978).

¹⁶⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 76.

¹⁷⁰ EFR, 'Separation Allowances', *Common Cause* (25 Feb 1916) 611-12 & (17 March 1916) 648-9.

¹⁷¹ EFR, 'The Remuneration of Women's Services', *Economic Journal*, 27, 105 (March 1917) 55-68.

By now Rathbone's views on the dispensing of financial assistance to the needy had undergone a sea change, and she accepted that, in stark contrast to the COS ideology, statutory state intervention in the lives of the poor was both desirable and necessary.¹⁷² So, after outlining her analysis of the topical and highly politicised 'living wage' debate,¹⁷³ she linked this to her argument for the continuation, post-war, of a State allowance paid directly to mothers. This was on the lines of the wartime separation allowance that she had been involved with administering in Liverpool. Rathbone's concept of a family allowance as a universal right was based on her view that there should be special recognition for women as mothers, which, by definition, put a value on their contribution.

There was certainly no consensus amongst feminists for her proposals, and this dissent caused a schism within the movement. Advocates of 'equal rights' opposed the Rathbone case on the grounds that any demands based on the special needs of women would diminish their quest for equal rights with men, especially within employment. Undeterred by such disagreement, Rathbone took the first tangible step in her long-running campaign to promote the economics of motherhood by establishing her Family Endowment Committee (FEC) in 1917.¹⁷⁴ The group included two former colleagues from the NWSS Executive Committee, Kathleen Courtney and Maude Royden. Royden subsequently worked alongside Rathbone with her Indian women's campaign in 1934,¹⁷⁵ and, more pertinent to Rathbone's subsequent involvement in refugee issues, became a lay preacher in the 1930s and was outspoken in her condemnation of antisemitism and the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.¹⁷⁶ The FEC presented its first report, 'Equal Pay and the Family: A

¹⁷² Pedersen attributes this shift in part to Rathbone's professional contact with Elizabeth Macadam, who had already studied child poverty prior to her friend's study of casual labour. Rathbone and Macadam shared a horror of 'haphazard philanthropy', and Macadam wrote of the need for co-operation between voluntary and government services. See Pedersen, 'Eleanor Rathbone 1871-1946', 116-7.

¹⁷³ The concept of a 'living wage' was the subject of considerable political debate, and was later defined by Snowden as 'a wage which will allow the worker to maintain his working powers in the highest state of efficiency, to properly fulfil all his duties as a citizen, and to support his family in decency and health.' See Philip Snowden, *The Living Wage* (London, 1913). The debate should be viewed alongside the pioneering work of Booth who set a notional 'poverty line' and of Rowntree for his definition of primary and secondary poverty. Booth: *Life and Labour of the People*, 1st ed. vol. I & Rowntree, *Poverty*, 170-1.

¹⁷⁴ This became the Family Endowment Council in 1918, and then the Family Endowment Society in 1925. See J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood. Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900 - 1939* (London, 1980) 42. See also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 99-100. Also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 151 ff.

¹⁷⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 169-71.

¹⁷⁶ 'Jews and Christians', Lesson given by Dr Maude Royden, Guildhouse London, 18 Oct 1936.

Proposal for the National Endowment of Motherhood' in 1918.¹⁷⁷ This reinforced Rathbone's already published argument that women would never achieve equal pay while a man's wage was meant to support a family,¹⁷⁸ and therefore the state payment of an allowance to mothers and equal pay for women working outside of the home were two sides of the same coin.

It is worth noting that Pedersen has described how, by launching the family endowment battle in 1917, Rathbone 'opened a new chapter in her life, one marked by information-gathering, lobbying and endless expert testimony.'¹⁷⁹ Following the main argument of this thesis, that Rathbone was basically and consistently a humanitarian activist, it could be said that this was not so much a new chapter as a change of direction which came about because of prevailing circumstances.¹⁸⁰ For, as new humanitarian crises presented themselves in the ensuing years, so her priorities altered, culminating in her almost exclusive devotion to the refugee question from 1933 onwards. Nor were the skills that Pedersen has identified isolated to the years after 1917, for Rathbone had already utilised these in various other contexts, even at university, and continued to do so throughout her career.

XI

It was around this time that Rathbone made a major decision in her personal circumstances for in 1919 she set up home with her companion, Macadam, in her newly acquired house in Tufton Street, London.¹⁸¹ Their cohabitation has fuelled speculation about the nature of their friendship, and led at least one feminist historian to assume that it had a sexual dimension.¹⁸² Cesarani is also inclined to believe that Rathbone was probably 'homosexual' and that in some way this:

encouraged an identification with persecuted outsiders and engendered an appreciation of tolerant societies in which diversity, of all types, was regarded as non-threatening.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ This was written jointly by Rathbone, Mary Stocks, Maude Royden, Kathleen Courtney, Emile Burns, the Radical Liberal, H.N.Brailsford and Elinor Burns, all committee members of the FEC. For Brailsford's life see F.M Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter: H.N.Brailsford and his World* (London, 1985). For Royden's life see S.Fletcher, *Maude Royden: A Life* (Oxford, 1989)

¹⁷⁸ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 85ff.

¹⁷⁹ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 153.

¹⁸⁰ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, 117.

¹⁸¹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 92-3.

¹⁸² Jeffreys, *Spinster*, 153

¹⁸³ Cesarani, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 51-2.

Both are speculative assessments that are not borne out, as Pedersen has noted, by any concrete evidence.¹⁸⁴ Generally, it was not uncommon in the Edwardian period for a highly educated, financially independent woman in the public sphere to live with another female, for adopting this strategy enabled both to pursue their diverse activities, supported by an understanding companion, without the complications of marriage.¹⁸⁵ Rathbone herself had an 'imperturbable unconcern with sex,'¹⁸⁶ not unusual for a woman brought up in the Victorian period for whom the whole question of sexual relationships was veiled behind a culture of privacy and reserve.¹⁸⁷ It is therefore possible to argue that this very culture enabled Rathbone and Macadam to share an intimate relationship behind closed doors, however this contention is firmly refuted by a number of people who knew Rathbone. Her niece, Noreen Rathbone, herself a lesbian, was categorical on this matter,¹⁸⁸ as were Vera Schaerli and Helga Wolff, wartime colleagues in the refugee cause, and Joan Gibson, one of her wartime secretaries.¹⁸⁹ They all confirmed Noreen Rathbone's assessment of her Aunt's attitude towards sex, for they described her as being very prudish, and of adhering to a very strict Victorian moral code which would never have countenanced or even considered such a liaison. Moreover, these women went as far as to say that they thought Rathbone would have been disgusted by the very thought of it. The two women's personalities certainly complemented one another, for Rathbone's demeanour, so often distracted and absent-minded,¹⁹⁰ was balanced by Macadam's organisational skills. Indeed Rathbone was far more dependent on her friend than she cared to admit.¹⁹¹ In the final analysis, the question of her sexuality is less important than the fact that Rathbone possessed emotional forces which were 'conserved to add depth and passion to the intellectual drive with which she served the causes of humanity.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁴ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 174-5.

¹⁸⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 48.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Lewis maintains that many feminists of the time viewed sex with distaste. See Lewis, 'Rathbone', 83.

¹⁸⁷ J.Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit. A Social History of Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1993) 89.

¹⁸⁸ Author's telephone interview with Noreen Rathbone, 21 Nov 2000.

¹⁸⁹ Author's interview with Vera Schaerli, 22 Feb 2000. Author's interview with Joan Gibson, 31 March 2000. See also Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, 100, f 6.

¹⁹⁰ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 120-1.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 93. See also Pedersen, 'Rathbone and Daughter', 115.

¹⁹² Author's telephone interview with Noreen Rathbone, 21 Nov 2000 and also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 48.

XII

Content in her partnership with her like-minded friend, Macadam, Rathbone continued to pursue the campaign for family allowances, of which she was the initiator and leading propagandist, whilst characteristically pursuing many other causes. Her interests were not exclusively female-related or feminist but reflected her humanitarianism and sense of social responsibility. For example, in the aftermath of the First World War, and in her capacity as a Councillor on Liverpool City Council, Rathbone responded to the urgent social problems in the city by zealously renewing her work to ameliorate the acute housing situation in Granby.¹⁹³ But she still remained involved with feminist issues, and in 1919 stood for, and gained presidency of the NUSEC (as the NUWSS became in 1919), described by Pedersen as 'the headquarters of the movement.'¹⁹⁴ With the battle for votes for women partially won in November 1919,¹⁹⁵ and the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in the same year, which ostensibly allowed women to 'assume or carry on any civil profession or vocation',¹⁹⁶ the future of feminism was in jeopardy, and badly in need of revitalising if it was to survive. Under Rathbone's somewhat controversial ten-year leadership of NUSEC, her ideas on 'New Feminism' evolved.¹⁹⁷ Not only did these not meet with universal approval,¹⁹⁸ but by 1921, Rathbone had to admit that 'the whole women's movement' had 'become very unpopular.' She continued to try and revive flagging interest in it through NUSEC, alongside carving her own niche within the newly opened political sphere, for she anticipated that an official position would give her greater and more powerful opportunities to effect social and political change. She was already a member of the Liverpool War Pensions Committee when, in 1920, she became a Justice of the Peace for the County of Lancashire.¹⁹⁹ But greater political status and a more powerful platform were essential if her campaign for family endowment was to become a reality, and it was with this in mind that

¹⁹³ The housing crisis was particularly acute in Liverpool because of the large numbers of Irish Catholic dock labourers. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 90 and also Simey, *Rathbone*, 9.

¹⁹⁴ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 177.

¹⁹⁵ The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Bill received the Royal Assent on 21 Nov 1919, and extended the franchise to women over thirty. In practice the age limit meant that only 40% of women were able to vote. More importantly, it excluded young women who were considered the most likely to destabilise government with their ideas and ambitions. See Pugh, *March of the Women*, 288.

¹⁹⁶ In practice, there were many doors still closed to them. See Holdsworth, *Dolls House*, 69.

¹⁹⁷ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 176-198. Also Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, 103.

¹⁹⁸ See Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 180.

¹⁹⁹ She became a Justice of the Peace for Lancashire. See Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 181 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 90.

Rathbone made her first attempt, in 1922, to gain a seat in Parliament. Her failure to be elected in East Toxteth, Liverpool was due in part to her election appeal for endowment being pitched against Liverpool's notorious popular Toryism, and as Pedersen has discussed, she determined never to contest a Liverpool seat again.²⁰⁰

Her family endowment campaign gained momentum in 1924, with the publication of her book, *The Disinherited Family*.²⁰¹ Described by Stocks as 'one of the finest examples of polemical economic literature ever written.'²⁰² the work was a detailed and well argued analysis of Rathbone's case for the introduction of a state allowance to be paid to mothers, which gained her wide acclaim. Despite the book's influence there was also more than a hint of the popular contemporary eugenicist thought within it, a debate that Rathbone would have found hard to ignore.²⁰³ The ideology of Social Darwinism and the eugenics debate in the early 1900s had been fuelled by revelations of the poor physical conditions of troops in the Boer War, which raised public concerns over the quality and physical with the efficiency of the population.²⁰⁴ These issues were allied to fears over the declining birth rate, and provided the Eugenics movement, headed by Sir Francis Galton and Karl Pearson, with a receptive audience and congenial political climate.²⁰⁵ Whilst the eugenicists were disseminating an ideological belief in 'survival of the fittest' and a superior Anglo-Saxon race, Rathbone had launched her battle for the state endowment of motherhood. There were times during this long-running campaign when she was blatant in her reiteration of eugenic rhetoric. An example was early on, in 1917, when she wrote of her worry that whilst the upper and middle classes were practising birth control and restricting their family size, the impoverished lower classes were 'multiplying as freely as ever' but producing children whose health was poor.

²⁰⁰ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 200-01.

²⁰¹ EFR, *Disinherited Family*.

²⁰² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 96.

²⁰³ Amongst those who were converted to her way of thinking was William Beveridge, who had come under the same ideological influences as her at Oxford. Rathbone's argument 'for distributing part of the total national income not as profits, interests, salaries and wages but as "family allowances," had a profound effect on him. Beveridge reviewed her book for the *Weekly Westminster*. Letter of W. Beveridge to G. Wallas, 29 Apr 1924, Wallas Papers, Box 8. BLPES. In June 1924 he became a member of the Council of the FES and, as Harris has noted, introduced a system of allowances for the children of staff at the London School of Economics later that year. See Harris, *Beveridge*, 332

²⁰⁴ G. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: a study in British politics and political thought, 1899-1914* (Oxford, 1971) and *Eugenics and Politics in Britain, 1910-1914* (Leyden, 1976).

²⁰⁵ The sociologist, Herbert Spencer, coined this term. See A. McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1978) p.142.

The result, she concluded, was that:

we are as a nation, recruiting the national stock from those who have sunk into the lowest strata because they are physically, mentally or morally degenerate.²⁰⁶

Similarly, *The Disinherited Family* was peppered with references to the 'bad habits' of the poor. Like many social investigators of the period who categorised the poor as deserving or undeserving,²⁰⁷ Rathbone adopted discriminatory terms such as 'the cream' and 'the dregs' to distinguish between groups of working class people.²⁰⁸ She could find no better way to describe the homes of the very poor other than as 'slums', but at the same time apologised for using such 'an odious but expressive nickname.'²⁰⁹ Contrasted with derogatory remarks such as these were the more frequent discourses in which she was clearly very sympathetic towards the plight of the poor, and where she was firmly at odds with eugenicist doctrine. For instance, she was adamant in her belief that environmental and not genetic factors accounted for working-class behaviour and habits, and that financial pressures were the major problem.²¹⁰ Her solution was, through her proposed family endowment scheme, to raise the standard of living for the poor by providing mothers with 'the material means for healthy living.'²¹¹ This would enable them to have 'an orderly and self-respecting living' which was 'the best cure for indiscriminate and dysgenic breeding.'²¹² Her address to the Eugenics Society in 1924 on the subject of family endowment and population was intended to allay the fears of its members who argued that a family allowance would encourage poor mothers to have even more offspring, so increasing the number of genetically unfit children.²¹³

²⁰⁶ EFR, 'The Remuneration of Women's Services', *Economic Journal*, 27, 105 (March 1917) 66.

²⁰⁷ C.L. Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913. Its Ideas and Work* (London, 1961) 14. Identifying and distinguishing between the deserving and the undeserving poor was a feature of the stance adopted by the Charity Organisation Society. After thorough rigorous investigation charitable assistance could then be administered to those they considered eligible. The views of the COS were an extension of those expressed by Samuel Smiles who propagated the notion that the poor could be helped, by intelligent charity, to help themselves. S. Smiles, *Self-Help with Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (London, 1859).

²⁰⁸ EFR, *Disinherited Family*, 318-9.

²⁰⁹ EFR, *The Ethics and Economics of Family Endowment* (London, 1927) 110.

²¹⁰ EFR, *Disinherited Family*, 321.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 124.

²¹² *Ibid*, 321.

²¹³ EFR, 'Family Endowment in its Bearing on the Question of Population', *Eugenics Society*, 12 Nov 1924.

Another aspect of early 1900s eugenicist thought that Rathbone could not fail to have noticed was their concern with race issues, the biological consequences of immigration, and their attitude towards Jews, especially those from Eastern Europe. The extent of this position, which manifested itself as antisemitism, continues to be the subject of academic debate: Searle has maintained that the majority of eugenicists viewed Jews as the very model of what they sought to establish:

a closely knit community which had identified religion with a sense of racial destiny and which invested its customary sexual and hygienic regulations with all the weight of religious authority.²¹⁴

and that antisemitism was apparent in only a handful of followers of the movement in Britain, who called for the exclusion of Jews from the country. However, Dan Stone, in his recent study of eugenics in Edwardian and interwar Britain, takes issue with Searle's view, and has argued that antisemitism was far more prevalent than previously acknowledged, and includes plenty of evidence in support of his counter-claim.²¹⁵ For him, eugenics was not some kind of:

free-wheeling amorphous project, but was an aspect of generally-held ideas about social reform... (that)... pervaded social and cultural life in this period.²¹⁶

Rathbone did not articulate her views on Jews until the 1930s, when she openly applauded them, often from the political platform of the House of Commons, for their values and ethics. Less publicly, at a meeting of the Union of Jewish Women which she attended in 1934, she raised the issue of eugenics when she spoke of the 'danger of excessive "racialism"' and of how she was inclined to believe that 'in the long run mongrel races are the best and that there is very great danger from too much in-breeding.'²¹⁷

The conclusion that should be drawn from this brief analysis of Rathbone's links with the eugenics movement is that she flirted with their ideology for purely opportunistic reasons, her aim being to gather together as large a base of support as possible for her family endowment scheme. Like many from her background, she

²¹⁴ Searle, *Eugenics*, 41.

²¹⁵ D.Stone, *Breeding Superman. Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool, 2002) 112-3.

²¹⁶ Stone, *Breeding Superman*, 5-6.

²¹⁷ Report of the general meeting of the Union of Jewish Women, 19 Feb 1934. Union of Jewish Women Papers, MS 129/AJ161/16/4. USL.

adopted a 'soft' version of mainly positive eugenics, and to do this she adjusted her writing and speeches to suit her audience, harnessing some of their arguments, specifically on population, to suit her own purposes.²¹⁸ As has been demonstrated, her views on the subject were confused and often inconsistent, suggesting a lack of commitment to the movement.²¹⁹ She was never party to any sort of antisemitism and her subsequent campaigns for the rights of women in India, Kenya and Palestine were inconsistent with racist ideology. However, she was fiercely nationalistic, and often paternalistic, as exemplified in her notorious and ill-conceived dealings with Indian women in the 1930s, to be discussed in the following chapter, when she was totally unable to understand Indian nationalist aspirations.

Coincidental to the publication, in 1924, of *The Disinherited Family*, Rathbone was invited by the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to present her case for family endowment at their summer conference.²²⁰ This move led to them asking the Labour Party to place family allowances on the legislative agenda. Then, in 1926, the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress's Joint Committee on the Living Wage was established to look into the whole ILP proposal. Rathbone was amongst those who, optimistically, gave evidence to the committee in 1928, only to be totally dispirited when eventually, in May 1930, the Trades Union Congress, and the Labour Party threw out the issue of a family allowance, and did not discuss it again until the Second World War.²²¹ A full discussion of Rathbone's family allowance campaign is beyond the scope of this thesis, but suffice it to say that she pursued her goal for a further two decades, although by the end of the 1930s the proposition had been revived in official circles and moved forward by its own momentum. Rathbone, in turn, had shifted her attention to wider international issues.

XIII

There were a number of interrelated factors that persuaded Rathbone to seek election to Parliament again in 1929. As far as Stocks was concerned, it was a decision stimulated by her preoccupation with Indian affairs,²²² the subject of

²¹⁸ 'Family Endowment in its bearing on the question of population', Speech delivered by Eleanor Rathbone to a meeting of the Eugenics Society. 12 Nov 1924.

²¹⁹ J. Macnicol, *The Movement for Family Allowances 1918-45: A Study in Social Policy Development* (London, 1980) 19.

²²⁰ Sidney M. Potter, 'The ILP Summer School', *New Leader*, 8, 8 (22 Aug 1924) 37-42.

²²¹ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 213-18.

²²² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 129.

the next chapter. Pedersen is of the view that she was driven by the need to represent women in the House, where so many questions relating to women were being aired.²²³ What mattered was Rathbone's determination to remain independent of any political party doctrine, and to this end she stood as a candidate for the Combined English Universities in the 1929 so-called Flapper Election.²²⁴ Of the sixty-nine women candidates, fourteen were returned, including Rathbone, whose success at the poll surpassed even her expectations.²²⁵ Her contemporaries included Nancy, Lady Astor,²²⁶ Ellen Wilkinson²²⁷ and Katherine, Duchess of Atholl,²²⁸ all of whom were subsequently involved in her refugee campaigning activities.²²⁹

Having achieved this major goal, Rathbone was now ready to use her newly acquired status as an MP as the springboard for her campaigning activities. When Rathbone entered parliament she already had a reputation in the world of feminism and social economics, but her new position gained her wide recognition within the national and international political arena. As a female politician Rathbone commanded both respect and fear from those she encountered.²³⁰ Not that this was ever going to be easy, for despite all the advantages which she had – the support of Macadam,²³¹ who relieved her of mundane day-to-day tasks and put order into her otherwise somewhat disorganised lifestyle, a newly acquired secretary and office, money, brains and brawn - she was a woman in a male dominated culture. The House of Commons was essentially a man's world in which the hours and facilities were arranged for the benefit of the male majority, and where the minority of recently admitted women members were tolerated, but often segregated. Whereas some women MP's were ill suited to the combative, assertive and essentially quarrelsome adversarial arrangement of the House, Rathbone appeared to thrive in this

²²³ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 219.

²²⁴ Brookes, *Women at Westminster*, 71ff. The Universities represented were Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Reading and Sheffield.

²²⁵ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 220.

²²⁶ For a biography of Nancy, Lady Astor see M.Collis, *Nancy Astor* (London, 1960) and C.Sykes, *Nancy, The Life of Lady Astor* (London, 1972).

²²⁷ For a biography of Ellen Wilkinson see B.B.Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson* (London, 1982).

²²⁸ For a biography of the Duchess of Atholl see J. Hetherington, *Katherine Atholl 1874-1960. Against the Tide* (Aberdeen, 1989). See also A.Susan Williams, *Ladies of Influence. Women of the Elite in Interwar Britain* (London, 2000) 107-28.

²²⁹ Atholl and Wilkinson visited Spain with Rathbone in 1937 in connection with Spanish refugees.

²³⁰ This is made evident in Harold Nicholson's obituary of Rathbone in the *Spectator*, 11 Jan 1946.

²³¹ Ellen Wilkinson called upon her sister, Annie, for similar support. See B.Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House. The Women MP's, 1919-1945', *Historical Journal*, 29, 3 (1986) 627-8.

environment.²³² This was not entirely surprising, for her academic and philosophical training at Oxford and experience of debating with the Somerville A.P's proved to be an excellent training ground and she found the House responsive to a reasoned approach. She had the added benefit of being able to recall the political experiences of her late father, with whom she had shared such an intimate relationship.²³³ Nor was she daunted by her minority position, even though she, in common with other women MP's, was subject to prejudice and anti-feminist remarks. This was exemplified, for example, in 1942, when one MP sarcastically told Rathbone that she had 'for years ... wasted her life advocating family allowances. I suppose that is a good enough substitute for the absence of a family.'²³⁴ She had no interest in impressing her political colleagues by following fashion or dressing in a particularly feminine way, even if this was expected of female MP's.²³⁵ It was Rathbone's style, consistency, well-informed and rational argument, and her ability to hone her political skills, that enabled her to survive and to move on to fight humanitarian causes at home and abroad. Gaining a seat in parliament was most definitely a watershed in Rathbone's career: it gave her the most powerful platform from which to campaign for government action, and it is hard to see how she could have been as successful and influential as she was had she not become an MP.

The significance of her position became apparent as she became involved with international humanitarian issues, the first of these being in Imperial India which is the subject of the following chapter.

²³² See Brookes, *Women at Westminster*, 83-4.

²³³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 141.

²³⁴ A. Maclaren in *Hansard* HC vol. col.1876, 23 June 1942.

²³⁵ As suggested by Harrison in 'Women in a Men's House', 627-8.

PART TWO

Earlier humanitarian campaigning

Chapter Three

Rathbone, India and other imperial concerns

Overview

The focus of this chapter is upon Rathbone's engagement with a number of humanitarian causes that had colonial, imperial and foreign policy links with Britain, but which were far removed in distance and culture from the domestic sphere. In the first instance she became involved in the campaign against the custom of child marriage in India, which although gender-related by virtue of girls suffering as a result of this practice, had wider implications. As far as Rathbone was concerned, this was an 'unsuspected obligation' that she was compelled and conditioned to respond to.¹ Several aspects marked it out as different. Not only was this the first time that she had become seriously involved with a humanitarian cause which was outside of her personal experience, but it was a legislative and cultural matter within what was, ostensibly, a foreign country, albeit an imperial one. Her sense of right and wrong, and conviction that she, as a British citizen, had a duty to try and change a practice that was deeply entrenched within its society, was a belief that compelled her to react similarly elsewhere in the international arena. And the fact that, after 1929, as an MP she was able to use the House of Commons as a platform for her campaigns undoubtedly enabled her to broaden her horizons.

I

The religious practice of child marriage had a complex history that Rathbone was to describe in a later publication.² It was not uncommon for girls as young as six years old to be married to boys or men much older than themselves. Indians who defended the religious tradition explained this as the first marriage, with the consummation ceremony or *garbhadhan* delayed until puberty. In practice there had been cases of very young girls being forced into pre-puberty sex, with disastrous

¹ See EFR's letters to Mrs Radhabai Subbarayan 20 Nov 1930 - 31 Dec 1936, Box 93, Folder 5, Rathbone Papers, WL. Mrs Subbarayan, who became the first women member of the Indian Central Legislative Assembly, was a student at Somerville in 1912. Her husband was an undergraduate at Wadham College, Oxford. See Adams, *Somerville*, 118, 358 and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 241ff.

² EFR, *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur. An object lesson from the past to the future* (1934) 17-21.

effects on their psychological and physical health.³ In the 1880s the issue of child marriage became the subject of renewed debate, and once again met with opposition from some Indian nationalists who strongly objected to government interference in what they considered a private, religious issue.

It was Behramji M. Malabari, a Parsi journalist and social reformer from Bombay,⁴ who was responsible for putting the debate on the feminist agenda, when, in the 1890s, he extended his Indian propaganda campaign against the practice to Britain. His tactics, as Ramusack has described, included lobbying government, writing lengthy descriptive articles for *The Times*, and mustering the support of feminists.⁵ This combined crusade resulted, in 1891, in the British Government amending the Indian Penal Code of 1860, and raising the age of consent for sexual intercourse from ten to twelve years.⁶ Despite this, the *status quo* remained the same and the difficulties of enforcement persisted: for example, girls forced into illegal acts could never find anyone willing to support their case, evidenced by the lack of any convictions for another thirty years.⁷ Interest in the age of marriage and age of consent was renewed in the 1920s, largely due to a conference held by the League of Nations (LN) in 1921, convened to debate the traffic in women and girls for immoral purposes.⁸ But although the League recommended that the minimum age for consent be raised to twenty-one, other interested parties, including private individuals and the colonial administration, intervened and hindered progress. The introduction, in 1927, of the Sarda Hindu Child Marriage Bill seemed destined for greater success, and led

³ As described in G. Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India. IV.2. Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, 1996) and P. Thomas, *Indian Women Through the Ages* (London, 1964) 338.

⁴ The Parsis (or Parsees) were a minority community of Indians, many of whom were well educated and very Anglo-British. Other Parsis whose names were connected with Rathbone include those of Cornelia Sorabji and Lady Tata. Cornelia Sorabji arrived at Somerville in 1889, and was the first Indian woman to study at a English university, and the first woman to study law at Oxford. She fought for the legal status of women and children in India, and was very close friends with Eleanor's first cousin, Elena Rathbone (later Lady Richmond). See Adams, *Somerville*, 114 and also A. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire. Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (1998) 110-51. For a biography of Cornelia Sorabji see S. Gooptu, 'Cornelia Sorabji 1866-1954. A Woman's Biography.' D.Phil. Oxford, 1997.

⁵ For an analysis of the age of marriage issue see B. Ramusack, 'Women's Organizations and Social Change. The Age of Marriage Issue in India' in N. Black & A. B. Cottrell, *Women and World Change. Equity Issues in Development* (London, 1981) 198-216.

⁶ Ramusack, 'Age of Marriage Issue', 200.

⁷ See T. Sarkar, 'Rhetoric against Age of Consent, Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child-Wife', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28, 36 (4 Sep 1993) as cited in Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 85. See also G. Forbes, 'Women and Modernity. The Issue of Child Marriage in India', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 2 (1979) 407-19.

⁸ See Ramusack, 'Age of Marriage Issue', 201.

to the appointment of a select committee, known as the Joshi Committee after the chairman, Sir Moropant Visavanath Joshi, to assess public opinion.⁹

Concurrently in the 1920s Britain's imperial policy towards India was undergoing momentous change.¹⁰ The declaration made in 1917 by Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, that the British government intended to include more Indians in the governing process, theoretically paved the way for self-governing institutions in India. The British government still held the reins of power, *via* the Government of India Act of 1919, which dictated the speed and nature of political change. But the slow pace of reform inflamed nationalism across India. Widespread civil disorder resulted¹¹ and in November 1927, the outgoing Conservative government announced its intention to convene the already agreed statutory Simon Commission, named after its chairman, Sir John Simon,¹² and with whom Rathbone had many confrontations in the late 1930s when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, nearly two years ahead of schedule.¹³ It was against this background that Rathbone renewed the child-marriage debate in Britain in 1927.

II

Like so many of the issues with which Rathbone became involved during her life, her commitment to improving the status, health and education of Indian women occurred by accident rather than design. The impetus came, as she described, from her reading, during the summer holidays of 1927, of *Mother India*, written by Katherine Mayo, an American journalist with a reputation for sensationalist writing.¹⁴ The content of Mayo's book, with its vivid and lurid descriptions of human suffering, especially where child brides were concerned, shocked Rathbone, who abhorred cruelty in any form.¹⁵ Mayo's motives for writing the book are unclear, but it was

⁹ *Report of the Age of Consent Committee, 1928-1929* (Calcutta, 1929) cited in Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 87.

¹⁰ K. Mayo, *Mother India* (New York, 1927).

¹¹ During the 1920s violent outbreaks between Hindus and Moslems resulted in the death of more than 450 people with a further 5000 injured, whilst strikes at the steel works and on the railways caused widespread disruption. See C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (London, 1968) 377.

¹² For a biography of Simon see D. Dutton, *Simon. A Political Biography of Sir John Simon* (London, 1992).

¹³ For a general history of the Statutory Commission see S.R. Bakshi, *Simon Commission and Indian Nationalism* (Delhi, 1977) as cited in K. Mayo, *Mother India*, edited and with an introduction by M. Sinha (2000) 37. See also D. Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism* (London, 1997).

¹⁴ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 124. For Mayo's background see M. Sinha, 'Reading Mother India: Empire, Nation and the Female Voice', *Journal of Women's History*, 6, 2 (Summer 1994) 6-44.

¹⁵ See Nicolson's obituary of Rathbone in *The Spectator*, 11 Jan 1946.

certainly a direct attack upon Indians and their customs. The author maintained in a letter to Rathbone that the book was never meant to be 'a rounded picture of India' but was written 'for her own people as a practical contribution on certain definite points only.'¹⁶ More recent research has argued that Mayo was encouraged to write her book by the British Government's propaganda machine¹⁷ as a way of reinforcing the imperialist view that Indians were not ready 'to hold the reins of Government.'¹⁸ The polemical nature of the book, which was published within days of the Sarda Act being announced, ensured that it became the centre of an unprecedented international controversy, with Rathbone, unwittingly, at the heart of the discourse in Britain.¹⁹

Rathbone's reaction to *Mother India* was clearly motivated by her concern for the welfare of others, and she made an unequivocal and immediate decision in mid 1927 to help Indian women and children, launching herself into this new campaign with her customary fervor and enthusiasm. By the time that the international storm broke out over the book in November 1927, she had already planned the first stage of her campaign, which was to confirm the veracity of Mayo's claims. To this end, Rathbone gradually established a rapport with the author first through correspondence and later with personal meetings.²⁰ Ingratiating herself with Mayo and praising her for drawing her attention, and that of the world,²¹ to the evils perpetrated on young girls in India,²² proved to be the first of many mistakes that Rathbone made in her Indian campaign. In this instance it gave the impression that she was sympathetic to Mayo's anti-independence political views.²³ Urging Mayo to produce a cheaper edition of *Mother India*, for distribution to members of the Labour Party, as a way of deterring them from blithely promoting self-government in India,²⁴ did little to

¹⁶ Letter from Miss Mayo to EFR, no date, Sorabji Papers, MSS Eur.F.165, Folio 161, 8. OIOC. BL.

¹⁷ M.Jha has produced the only full-length study of *Mother India*. See M.Jha, *Katherine Mayo and Mother India* (New Delhi, 1971). Mrinalini Sinha is of the view that Jha's study 'is important because it lends credence to some of the charges against Mayo made by her nationalist critics.' See Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 8. For details of correspondence between Mayo and members of the India Office in 1925 which confirm that she was encouraged by a Government official to include the subject of child marriage as the central theme of her book see Mayo, *Mother India* (2000) 25.

¹⁸ Mayo, *Mother India* (1927) 32.

¹⁹ Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 36.

²⁰ Rathbone invited Mayo to a private dinner at her London home, 50 Romney Street, in 1928. See Letter of EFR to K.Mayo, 1 May 1928, KM, 345, Series 1, Box 6 (46).

²¹ This was underhand of Rathbone for, as she admitted in 1931, she had acquired some information on the tradition whilst representing the International Women's Suffrage Association on the Child Welfare Committee of the League of Nations years earlier. See *Hansard* HC, vol. 254, col.2369, 9 July 1931.

²² Letter of EFR to K.Mayo, no date but *circa* 1929. KM, 345, Series 1, Box 11.

²³ See Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 29-31.

²⁴ Letter of EFR to K.Mayo, 24 Aug 1927, KM, 345, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 37.

dispel this notion.²⁵ On the contrary, these moves added fuel to the fire of those who thought she was against political autonomy for India.²⁶ This was clearly erroneous, for not only had Rathbone been brought up in a family who traditionally had faith in political self-determination, but she had also fought passionately for the political self-determination of women. She was, as Stocks has pointed out,²⁷ an active supporter of the Indian Nationalist demand for autonomy, but her ineptitude and failure to grasp the complexities of Indian affairs resulted in many aspersions being cast upon her character and beliefs.²⁸

Alongside her personal contact with Mayo, Rathbone utilised her position as president of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) and convened a conference at Caxton Hall, London in November 1927, at which the issues raised in *Mother India* were to be discussed.²⁹ Even though Rathbone did, as Mayo predicted, find it hard to get 'frank and fearless speakers to testify'³⁰ and confessed to being 'very dissatisfied' with the meeting because 'there were far too many set speakers',³¹ two major decisions were made at the conference. The Women of India Survey was set up to establish the exact nature of Indian women's conditions, and it was proposed that a booklet be published which would 'present in a convenient form to British readers the main facts concerning women in India and the various reformative activities at work.'³² Rathbone was more than happy to endorse Lord Lytton's³³ resolution that emphasised the accountability of British women for Indian social problems, for it reflected her own commitment to responsible citizenship.³⁴

Coincidentally, the Simon Commission was just beginning its survey of

²⁵ It later transpired that an anonymous individual had already anticipated the propaganda value of the book and had arranged for a copy to be distributed to every MP. See Letter of Lady Lytton to *The Times*, 14 Jan 1928 and Report in the *New York Times*, 14 Jan 1928, 6 as cited in Mayo, *Mother India* (2000) 37, f. 90.

²⁶ Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 29.

²⁷ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 139.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 136.

²⁹ Brookes, *Women at Westminster* 71-4.

³⁰ Letter from K. Mayo to EFR (no date but pre-21 Nov 1927) Sorabji Papers, MSS Eur.F.165/161. OIOC.BL.

³¹ Letter of EFR to Elena Rathbone, 25 Nov 1927. Sorabji Papers. MSS Eur. F.165/161. OIOC.BL. Elena Rathbone married Bruce Richmond in 1913. He was joint editor of *The Times*.

³² A. Caton, *The Key of Progress: A Survey of the Status and Conditions of Women in India* (Oxford, 1930) v.

³³ Victor Alexander George Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 2nd Earl of Lytton, was a former Governor of Bengal, and in 1940 was appointed chairman of the Advisory Council on Aliens of which Rathbone was a member.

³⁴ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 134.

India, examining the workings of the new political reforms in preparation for the introduction of a new India Act.³⁵ The shortcomings of the commission soon became obvious, for not only was it deficient in Indian personnel, a fact which owed much to the unanimous support from the major political parties in Britain who wanted an 'all-white' group, but it also lacked female representatives. Rathbone, through NUSEC, was amongst those who urged Simon to appoint two women as technical advisors to act as 'assessors' and to give the commission 'some continuous link with that part of India hidden behind the veil',³⁶ but these representations came to nothing and the *status quo* remained unchanged in May 1928.

III

In July 1928 the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Bill gained Royal Assent³⁷ and NUSEC's most significant goal of women's suffrage was achieved. Rathbone seized the opportunity of voicing her own thoughts on the future of the women's movement in an article in the *Women's Leader*, invoking her commitment to Indian women. She was in no doubt as to her patriotic duty

... Some of us are imperialists; some of us are not. But so long as imperialism is an inescapable fact, its responsibilities are also an inescapable fact, and these, for the women of this country, include the welfare of all those women in India and the East whose wrongs, as compared to the worst wrongs of our past, are as scorpions to whips.³⁸

Juxtaposed against this was her gradual realisation that the goals she sought to achieve, especially in connection with India, could be best effected from inside the political machinery. It was this that contributed towards her decision to successfully seek election to Parliament in 1929.³⁹

The questionnaires from the Women in India survey had begun to filter through to India at around this time, and Rathbone became aware of an unexpected deep and growing resentment towards her. First, it never occurred to her that Indian women would not share her albeit well intentioned assumption of responsibility. Nor had she considered that the excessively British nature of the conference initiative

³⁵ *Ibid.* 132.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 135. The Women's India Association also exerted pressure. See Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 106.

³⁷ Royal assent was given on 6 July 1928.

³⁸ *Women's Leader*, 13 July 1928. *Women's Leader* was the official organ of NUSEC.

³⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 125.

might upset the very Indians whom she sought to help. But when social, educational and women's organisations in India became aware of NUSEC's activities, their reaction was passionate: foreign interference in Indian social and cultural issues was intolerable and above all, they were suspicious of Rathbone and her motives. Their mistrust of her was reinforced by her apparent alliance with Mayo. A further crucial mistake, as Stocks has acknowledged, was to deny Indian women any involvement in a campaign that was of such relevance to them, and which ignored their own independent investigations.⁴⁰ There was little excuse for these failings, other than lack of forethought, for there were other British women's organisations already working in conjunction with their Indian counterparts to promote social change.⁴¹ Over and above this, Rathbone had a very narrow view of India, which, until her visit there in 1932, excluded any interest in the 'rich, many-sided personality' of the country itself.⁴²

What is certain is that she made grave errors of judgement in her handling of Indian affairs, and her lack of tact partnered with her condescending attitude was palpable.⁴³ The damage was nevertheless done, and despite Rathbone's efforts at re-establishing her credibility – she subsequently entertained six influential Indian women, including Lady Tata⁴⁴ and Mrs Sen, at home for an informal discussion – they clung to their resentment of her and continued to mistrust her motives.⁴⁵ Rathbone apparently found it very difficult to come to terms with these personal rebuffs, and they certainly highlighted flaws in her character which she had either been unaware of, or had avoided confronting⁴⁶

Within a few months of Rathbone entering Parliament, NUSEC sponsored a further meeting at Caxton Hall, London. The Conference on Women in India, which met in October 1929, was projected as:

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 136-40.

⁴¹ Sinha, in her introduction to the reprint of *Mother India*, cites the British Commonwealth League, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship as examples of co-operation between a British feminist organisation and Indian women. See Mayo, *Mother India* (2000) 51.

⁴² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 140.

⁴³ See, for example, a report of the 1929 NUSEC Conference in the *Indian Daily Mail* which stated that 'Miss Rathbone is somewhat lacking in tact.' *Indian Daily Mail*, 23 Oct 1929. John Simon Papers, MSS Eur. F77/86. OIOC.BL.

⁴⁴ Mehribai Tata, a Parsi (or *Parsee*) who was Anglo-British in outlook and education, married Sir Dorab Tata in 1898. His family were India's most important industrialists, owning the Tata Steel Works. See Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 76-8.

⁴⁵ See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 135 and Ramusack, 'Age of Marriage Issue', 205-6.

⁴⁶ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 136-7.

a gathering of British women's organisations interested in social reform to which Indian women would be invited, but only as advisers.'⁴⁷

Rathbone, who chaired the event, presumed that the leading Indian women whom she knew had accepted these terms of reference. However, her complacency was shattered once proceedings got underway, for her assessment proved to be wrong and the conference turned into an acrimonious affair.⁴⁸ Representatives from the Indian women's organisations felt they were being patronised, and were championed on this occasion by Mrs Rama Rau.⁴⁹ Rau, whose personal offer of service to the conference had already been ignored, verbally attacked Rathbone,⁵⁰ disputing:

the right of British women to arrange a conference on Indian social evils in London, where all the speakers were British and many had never even visited India.⁵¹

Rathbone was outraged by what she considered Rau's audacity, and ungraciously curtailed her speech.⁵² The Indian contingent were also incensed by the effrontery of her provocatively entitled article, 'Has Katherine Mayo slandered "Mother India"?', in which she set out her conclusions on Mayo's book.⁵³ This was, as Stocks commented, like a red rag to a bull, and not surprisingly engendered more mistrust and animosity. As far as Rathbone was concerned, the outcome of the conference, which ended very abruptly, was most unsatisfactory, for the delegates refused to pass the resolutions that her committee had framed. From Rau's perspective, her stance at the conference enabled her to build close ties with British women's organisations, and

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 138-9.

⁴⁸ A report of the two-day conference was published in *The Times* as 'Women in India', 8 Oct 1929, 9 and 'Child Marriage in India', 9 Oct 1929, 9. See also *New Statesman*, 9 Oct 1929, 9.

⁴⁹ Dhanvanthi Rama Rau was the wife of an Indian official who was stationed in London, and who was appointed financial adviser to the Simon Commission in 1928/29. She was also a member of all three Indian women's associations - the WIA, the NCW and the AIWC. See D.R. Rau, *An Inheritance. The Memories of Dhanvanthi Rama Rau* (London, 1977) & Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 31.

⁵⁰ Mrs Rau recounted how she and Hannah Sen visited Rathbone's office and left a message for her in her absence, offering to help at the conference, but Rathbone never got in contact with her. See Rau, *Inheritance*, 170.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 170-1.

⁵² *Ibid.* 171.

⁵³ EFR, 'Has Katherine Mayo slandered "Mother India"?' *Hibbert Journal*, 27, 2 (Jan 1929) 193-214.

ultimately she and Rathbone reached an understanding of sorts and were able to communicate with one another.⁵⁴

In the aftermath of the meeting, the Indian press accused Rathbone of sharing Mayo's political views, and of advocating an end to political moves towards self-government until the 'evil practices', which she wrote about in her *Hibbert Journal* article, were removed.⁵⁵ In London, *The Times* published an accusatory letter in similar vein, signed by seven Indian and seven European women, including Rathbone's major conference opponent, Mrs Rau.⁵⁶ Rathbone was quite unable to resist having the last word, and having drafted a letter of reply for publication in the paper, sought the support of, amongst others, her fellow MP, Ellen Wilkinson. On this occasion Wilkinson refused to undersign Rathbone's letter, exhibiting a sensitivity to British interference in Indian cultural affairs that Rathbone lacked.⁵⁷

Rathbone was not against Indian political self-determination, but she seemed unable to comprehend the difficulty of fighting for social reform against the volatile political background in India. In this respect she was not alone, for Eva Hubback,⁵⁸ her friend and NUSEC's parliamentary secretary, had previously stated that:

British women were not interested in the 'political situation' but simply wanted to 'help' Indian women.⁵⁹

Such statements lend some credence to the argument, put forward by Burton in particular, that British feminists saw their Indian counterparts as the 'White Women's Burden',⁶⁰ and were almost obliged to respond. Nevertheless, it is hard to fit Rathbone

⁵⁴ See Rau, *Inheritance*, 172.

⁵⁵ For example, *Stri Dhurma*, 13, 1-2 (Dec. 1929) 1-5 in Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 51, f.120.

⁵⁶ Letter signed by Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, Hannah Sen *et al* entitled 'Women in India' was published in *The Times*, 22 Oct 1929.

⁵⁷ Wilkinson thought that '... a letter from Ghandi could not only do a thousand times more good than any letter in *The Times* but such a letter could be positively harmful in so far as it seems to press a reform upon them by an alien race,' as cited in J. Alberti, *Eleanor Rathbone* (1996) 107. Rathbone's reply was published 24 Oct 1929, 12. A letter in support of Rathbone, from Eva Mary Bell, was published in *The Times*, 31 Oct 1929. These letters are cited in Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 43, f.99.

⁵⁸ For a biography of Hubback see D. Hopkinson, *Family Inheritance. A Life of Eva Hubback* (London, 1954).

⁵⁹ As cited in Sinha, 'Reading Mother India', 30.

⁶⁰ However, Mrs Rau referred to the assumption that the 'eradication of social evils in Indian society was the responsibility of the British "the White Man's Burden."' See Rau, *Inheritance*, 170. For an examination of the notion of British feminists assuming national and racial superiority, and of British feminism maturing in an age of empire see A. Burton, 'The White Woman's Burden. British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865-1915', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 4 (1990) 295-308.

into this mould for although she did certainly try to assume responsibility for Indian women, she clearly saw herself acting as a responsible citizen, as 'one human being sympathising with another.'⁶¹

Probably the only good thing that resulted from the second NUSEC conference was the advice that Rathbone received from Lady Hartog. The latter had spent many years in India with her husband, Sir Philip, in the service of Indian education,⁶² and her personal experiences enabled her to identify and empathise with Rathbone's strengths and weaknesses, applauding her motives but criticising her incompetence. She could see that the only way forward for the Women of India Survey was for Rathbone to disassociate herself from the editorship of it, advice which she took.⁶³ When the conclusions of the survey were published as an informative booklet in 1930, Rathbone's name only appeared in the index, and there was no reference to Mayo at all.⁶⁴ A further suggestion that Rathbone acted upon came from an Indian lady, Sri Maya Devi,⁶⁵ who wrote to her in 1929 to try and explain why Indian women so resented the interference of British women. Devi urged Rathbone to 'make a political visit to India and meet the different schools of thought to which a number of highly educated and cultured ladies belong,'⁶⁶ so that she might better understand their point of view.

The opportunity for such a journey did not present itself until late 1931, but the timing then was fortuitous as far as Rathbone was concerned, for it coincided with the visit being made by the Lothian Franchise Committee commissioned by the second Round Table Conference of India, to be discussed. Meanwhile, other Indian matters took precedence. The Sarda (Child Marriage Restraint) Act was approved by the Legislative Assembly on 1 October 1929, but was not set to come into effect until 1 April 1930.⁶⁷ Rathbone, who later described this Act as 'ornamental legislation',⁶⁸ doubted the adequacy of law alone: the colonial government had to be persuaded, by Britain, to implement the existing measures, the British and Indian public needed

⁶¹ *Spectator*, 6 Apr 1934.

⁶² Her husband was former vice-chancellor of Dacca University. See Alberti, *Rathbone*, 107.

⁶³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 140 and see Letter of EFR to Lady Hartog, 20 May 1930, Box 5, Folder 4, Rathbone Papers, WL.

⁶⁴ The survey was published as Caton, *Key of Progress*.

⁶⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 137-8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 138.

⁶⁷ Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 87-90 and Ramusack, 'Age of Marriage Issue', 202.

⁶⁸ See EFR, *Child Marriage*.

educating on the subject, and Indians needed persuading that an even more stringent law was required if girls and young women in India were to be adequately protected.⁶⁹ Rathbone directed her parliamentary offensive at Wedgwood Benn,⁷⁰ the Secretary of State for India, bombarding him, and subsequently his successor, Sir Samuel Hoare,⁷¹ with questions, letters and memorandum. His intransigence, or what she politely called his 'vague assurances of sympathy', only strengthened her resolve. Then, as later during her campaign for refugees fleeing Nazi and fascist terror in Europe, examined in later chapters of this thesis, she was tenacious and channelled an enormous amount of energy into her work.

IV

Yet another disturbing cultural practice came to Rathbone's attention in 1929, that of ritual female circumcision, as practised by the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya, and brought her into an unlikely alliance with fellow Member of Parliament, Katherine, Duchess of Atholl.⁷² The two were complete opposites for Atholl was a former anti-suffragist, a staunch Conservative as well as being a determined opponent of Indian nationalism.⁷³ But what united the two women was an abhorrence of cruelty, and it was inevitable, given Rathbone's stand against *Mother India*, that when Atholl initiated the all-party Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Colonies, she should invite her fellow MP to join. Under the chairmanship of the Labour MP, Josiah Wedgwood, a former resident magistrate in South Africa⁷⁴ and a future working partner of Rathbone's on refugee matters, the committee gathered evidence. This must have been a very distressing time for all concerned, but it was especially so for Rathbone: not only was she attempting to deal with the fallout from

⁶⁹ B.Ramusack, 'Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India 1865-1945', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 4 (1990) 315.

⁷⁰ See Mowat, *Britain*, 354. For Rathbone's correspondence with Benn see Box 92, Folder 2, Rathbone Papers, WL.

⁷¹ For Rathbone's correspondence with Hoare see Box 93, Folder 6, Rathbone Papers, WL.

⁷² For Rathbone's involvement in this issue see S.Pedersen, 'National Bodies, Unspeakable Acts: the Sexual Politics of Colonial Policy-making', *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991) 647-80. See also Brookes, *Women at Westminster*, 87-8. For an autobiography of Picton-Turbervill see E. Picton-Turbervill, *Life is Good* (London, 1939).

⁷³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 198.

⁷⁴ For a biography of Wedgwood see C.V. Wedgwood, *The Last of the Radicals. Josiah Wedgwood MP* (London, 1951) & J.B.Stein, *Our Great Solicitor. Josiah Wedgwood and the Jews* (London, 1992).

the second NUSEC conference, but she was now confronted by disturbing and painful descriptions of female mutilation, carried out in the name of a rite of passage. As if this was not enough, more upsetting news reached her from abroad concerning the practice of bride sale and the state of maternity conditions in East and South Africa. The former, which relied upon the native assumption that women were a commodity to be bought and sold, clearly flouted the terms of the Geneva Convention of 1925⁷⁵ and was vividly described in a series of articles in the *Women's Leader* by Miss Nina Boyle, an old campaigner of the militant suffrage movement.⁷⁶ The latter was reminiscent of Mayo's descriptions of childbirth in *Mother India*. Both issues added greatly to the volume of evidence that Rathbone was accumulating but she was, characteristically, indefatigable and undeterred by the ever-increasing workload.

When the House met in December 1929 to discuss the exploitation of coloured races, Atholl bravely tackled the issue of female circumcision with Rathbone rising to her defence in the face of the Independent Labour MP, James Maxton's, hostile interjection.⁷⁷ This marked the start of a campaign in which Rathbone utilised her renowned 'walls of Jericho' technique, whereby she hammered away at an issue to achieve even a small concession in the belief that any gain was better than none and that a small gain opened the door to larger ones.⁷⁸ Whilst the Committee continued its investigations, Rathbone found herself supporting or making parliamentary representation for a number of other organisations concerned with humanitarian issues.⁷⁹ As far as her success in effecting cultural reform in Africa was concerned, the problems that she and others encountered mirrored some of those which dogged her Indian causes, specifically the difficulty of an imperial country attempting to cross cultural boundaries.

In India itself, the political situation had become extremely volatile. By the time the Report of the Simon Commission appeared in 1930, it was clear that their findings, which indicated a gradual handing-over of power to India, were already

⁷⁵ See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 199.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 199-200.

⁷⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol.233, cols. 600-09, 1 Dec 1929. Maxton (1885-1946) was Independent Labour Party MP for Bridgeton division 1922-46, chairman of ILP 1926-31 & 1934-39 as cited in Mowat, *Britain*, 148. For biographies of Maxton see G. McAllister, *James Maxton. The Portrait of a Rebel* (London, 1935) and G. Brown, *Maxton* (Edinburgh, 1986).

⁷⁸ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 146, 190, 201.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 204. Stocks does not name these organisations.

obsolete. Nationalist disorder was widespread with articulate Indians clamouring for immediate self-government, juxtaposed against communal disorder resulting from Moslem-Hindu hostility. The Labour Government, under Ramsay MacDonald, passed the problems of the future government of India on to a Round Table Conference, which was held in three sessions over the course of the next two years.⁸⁰ Of the ninety members, only two women, the Muslim noblewoman Begum Shah Nawaz⁸¹ and the Indian feminist Mrs Subbarayan,⁸² were included as part of the Indian contingent. The WIA were furious because of the arbitrary nature of Nawaz and Subbarayan's selection,⁸³ a choice Candy asserts was not surprising given their close relationship with Rathbone.⁸⁴ Subbarayan had been in correspondence with Rathbone from 1929 onwards, and in confidential letters had accused the Women's India Association (WIA) of being 'the puppet of Congress.'⁸⁵ In response, Rathbone, who considered Subbarayan to be 'a tame Indian woman', shared her correspondent's views on Indian franchise.⁸⁶ So, not only was Rathbone satisfied by the fact that there were two 'friendly' women representatives, but she was delighted by the overwhelming view of the delegates that the British parliamentary system of government should prevail. This provided her with the opportunity, already articulated, of widening the scope of her Indian campaign to include women's suffrage. To this end, and prior to the commencement of Round Table proceedings, Rathbone produced a 'Memorandum on certain questions affecting the status and welfare of Indian women in the future constitution of India, addressed to the Indian Round Table Conference', which was signed by a group of people experienced in Indian and British political affairs, including five women MPs.⁸⁷ The difference now

⁸⁰ The first of three sessions was held in London on 12 Nov 1930, the last on 17 Nov 1932, before the conference was finally adjourned on 24 Dec 1932. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 149-51.

⁸¹ She was included because she was attending the conference as private secretary to her father, Sir Muhammad Shafi. See Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 107.

⁸² Mrs Subbarayan was well known to British suffragists, and had, like Rathbone, attended Somerville College. See Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 107.

⁸³ In Bombay the Rashtriya Stri Sabha and Desh Sevika Sangh demonstrated against the participation of Nawaz and Subbarayan. See R.Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990* (London, 1993) 81.

⁸⁴ Catherine Candy has examined the transnational alliance between Rathbone and Subbarayan (whom she refers to as Subbaroyan). See C.Candy, 'Competing transnational representations of the 1930s Indian franchise question' in I.Fletcher, L.Mayhall, & P.Levine (eds.) *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire. Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London, 2000) 191-206.

⁸⁵ Letter of Subbarayan to Rathbone, 24 Apr 1931, Box 93, File 5, Rathbone Papers, WL.

⁸⁶ See M.Sinha, 'Suffragism and Internationalism, The Enfranchisement of British and Indian women under an imperial state' in Fletcher *et al*, *Women's Suffrage*, 224-39.

⁸⁷ These were Lady Astor, Edith Picton-Turbervill, Lady Cynthia Mosley, Megan Lloyd George and Rathbone.

was that, in contrast to the early days of her Indian campaigning, she kept very much in the background, restricting her activities to 'supplying the motive force or driving the engine.'⁸⁸

V

Concurrent with the situation in India was the political instability in Britain, where the depression of the early 1930s, which reverberated across Europe, had forced up the numbers of unemployed to two and a half million in December 1930. This placed an intolerable burden upon the national unemployment insurance fund, and drained the gold reserve. The financial crisis resulted in the downfall of the Labour government in August 1931, and the emergency appointment of a National government. The general election of 1931 returned a National government which was to remain in power until 1940, after the outbreak of the Second World War. Fifteen women MP's were returned to the House, thirteen Conservative, one Liberal and one Independent – Eleanor Rathbone – an increase of just one over the previous election.⁸⁹ The new government heralded cabinet changes that would affect her current and future campaigning. Sir Herbert Samuel became Home Secretary,⁹⁰ and Sir John Simon replaced Arthur Henderson as Foreign Secretary.⁹¹

With an elected National government now in place, the Round Table Conference continued its deliberations over India. As a part of the investigations, the delegates appointed a Franchise Committee, chaired by Lord Lothian, and in late 1931 he planned a fact-finding tour of India. Rathbone was somewhat disappointed that she was not one of the two women selected as members of the so-called Lothian Committee, but she decided in spite of this, that the time was right for her to make a long overdue visit to India. Her trip, which Devi had urged her to take some three years before, coincided with that of the Lothian Committee, and gave her the chance to discuss the plight of Indian women with the members in advance of their enquiries. It also gave her an insight into the way in which special ordinances sharply restricted

⁸⁸ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 150. For the political careers of these women see Brookes, *Women at Westminster*

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, Brookes, 97-8.

⁹⁰ Herbert Louis Samuel (1870-1963) held this post between Aug 1931– Sep 1932. B. Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life* (Oxford 1991).

⁹¹ Mowat, *Britain*, 373. For biographies of Henderson see M.A.Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson* (London, 1938), C.J.Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (Cardiff, 1990) and F.Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989).

free speech in the country.⁹² Amongst those whom she met *en route* was Mr N.M.Joshi, an influential Indian and member of the Servants of India Society: Joshi subsequently enlisted Rathbone's help in pressuring the British Government to accept the Das Amendment Bill, which sought alterations to the Sarda (Child Marriage Restraint) Act.⁹³ Rathbone agreed to assist Joshi, but, acting in a much wiser fashion than at the outset of her Indian campaign, insisted that her name 'be kept entirely out of it.'⁹⁴ The Bill was finally enacted in 1938, a small measure of triumph for Rathbone who had, as feminist historians acknowledge, played an important role in securing legislation, even though she was unable to render it effective.⁹⁵

Once in India Rathbone was able, through her many contacts, to meet and try to influence people who were giving testimony to the Lothian Committee.⁹⁶ Friends, family and colleagues got news of her progress *via* the circular letters that she sent home.⁹⁷ As far as she was concerned, her campaign to ensure the franchise was extended to as many Indian women as possible was fairly successful, but the outcome was a matter of grave dissatisfaction to many Indian women. For, whilst Rathbone argued that:

we are so used here to working to get what we can and making it the basis for more, that we can only go on that method and hope for the best⁹⁸

Indian women's groups generally called for equality and no special privileges for women, and specifically for full adult suffrage in any new constitution.⁹⁹ Ultimately, Rathbone and the Indian women she sought to help were outraged by the result, for there was a gradual diminution in the proportion of men to women voters from 1:2 in the Simon Report, 1:45 in the Franchise Commission Report, culminating in a further reduction of 1:7 in the White Paper of 1933.¹⁰⁰

⁹² As noted in B.Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers? British Feminists, Indian Women's Rights and Indian Independence' in G.Minault (ed.) *The Extended Family. Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan* (Delhi, 1981) 130.

⁹³ Bhubanananda Das was a Congress legislator. See Ramusack, 'Age of Marriage Issue', 211.

⁹⁴ See Letter of EFR to Joshi, 23 Jan 1934, Folder 8, Rathbone Papers, WL. For this episode see also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 174-5.

⁹⁵ Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers?', 119. See also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 178-9.

⁹⁶ Ramusack, 'Cultural Missionaries', 317

⁹⁷ EFR, Circular letters, Jan-Feb 1932, RP XIV I.

⁹⁸ Letter of EFR to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 9 Jan 1932, Box 93, Folder 12, Rathbone Papers, WL.

⁹⁹ See Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers?', 121.

¹⁰⁰ For this phase of the campaign for female franchise see Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 106-12.

At that time Rathbone was able to claim in the House of Commons that for the past four years she had 'lived almost night and day' with the question of the position of women under the new Indian Constitution.¹⁰¹ Nor was she about to give up her fight. Her response to the White Paper was twofold. She instigated and coordinated the compilation of an angry letter to *The Times*¹⁰² and then, by way of a challenge to the British government, moved for the establishment of a Joint Select Committee to examine the franchise proposals. The resulting organisation, the British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise (BCIWF), of which Rathbone was chairman, swung into action in June 1933 and worked almost continuously until December 1934.¹⁰³

In that same year Rathbone published her book, *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur*, an outspoken study that, as she stated, had two purposes.¹⁰⁴ The first was to promote 'more effective action', the second to act as:

a warning of the frightful risks to which we are exposing Indian women if we give them in the new Indian constitution no better means of self-protection than they have had in the past, during the years of our dominion.¹⁰⁵

Implicit within these assertions was Rathbone's desire to sever any link between her and Mayo, for by attacking the British government's apathetic and intransigent attitude towards child marriage legislation, she could not be accused of being against Indian independence. Her letter to Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, her acquaintance and representative at the Round Table Conference, set out to put the record straight:

I felt I had to write it, because the reply I received from Sir Samuel Hoare to the last of the thirteen questions amounted to this: that the Governments both Central and Local could do nothing in the matter, not even undertake the education of public opinion as to the provisions of the Act and the necessity for them. Frankly I cannot let it go at that. The unnecessary sufferings and deaths of these young wives and widows have become a continuous nightmare to me.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 163.

¹⁰² *The Times*, 25 March 1933.

¹⁰³ See Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers?', 121-4, Alberti, *Rathbone*, 115 & Stocks, *Rathbone*, 163-7.

¹⁰⁴ As described by Rathbone in her letter to Muthulakshmi Reddi, Shareefah Hamid Ali and Raj-Kumari Amrit Kaur, 29 Feb 1934, Box 93, Folder 9, Rathbone Papers, WL and EFR to Menon, 29 Feb 1934, Box 93, Folder 14, 30, Rathbone Papers, WL.

¹⁰⁵ EFR, *Child Marriage*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Letter of EFR to Nawaz, 29 Feb 1934, Box 93, Folder 12, Rathbone Papers, WL.

A number of Indian feminists were asked for their opinion of the book and its proposals, which was generally considered to be 'helpful, fair and forcibly written.'¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Rathbone was still berated for failing to comprehend the impossibility of enforcing the 1929 legislation, especially in rural areas. It is hard to believe that after all her years of work on Indian matters, and having acquired so much first hand knowledge from her visit to the country, that she was still as naïve about the practicalities of enforcement as her Indian critics made out. A more credible answer is that she was still being driven by her 'obligation' to help Indian women, but sought to draw greater attention to the overall situation *vis-à-vis* child marriage: specific problems relating to, for example, rural areas, were perfectly valid but could not be resolved until the main issues were addressed satisfactorily. As a way of maintaining progress on this front, Rathbone offered to subsidise the salary of an AIWC worker who would organise a single-issue campaign on child marriage, but was rebuffed.¹⁰⁸ This refusal highlighted the divergence of Indian opinion in accepting foreign aid, which was bound up within the complex relationship between imperialist Britain and its colony, India. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the AIWC president insisted that the association should undertake this work themselves¹⁰⁹ but Lakshmi Menon, a young Indian lawyer, disagreed, arguing on behalf of herself and others that they could see no reason to discriminate between Rathbone's offer and the financial assistance being accepted from abroad in the aftermath of the recent earthquake in Bihar.¹¹⁰

Even whilst preoccupied with Indian issues, Rathbone pursued various domestic campaigns, many of which had no feminist or female-specific connection. This shift in focus was not surprising, for the 1930s were a lean time for the feminist movement in Britain, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. More political emphasis was put upon the poverty of children, which fitted in well with Rathbone's continuing fight for a family allowance. Social and economic reforms and civil rights issues, all

¹⁰⁷ This description was given by Shareefah Hamid Ali, first chair of the AIWC committee on child marriage in a letter to EFR in 1934. See Letter of Ali to EFR, 8 Aug 1934, Box 93, Folder 12, Rathbone Papers, WL.

¹⁰⁸ Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers?', 118.

¹⁰⁹ See Ramusack, 'Age of Marriage Issue', 210.

¹¹⁰ Letter of Menon to Rathbone, 13 Sept 1934, Box 93, Folder 14, Rathbone Papers, WL. See also Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 188, where Menon is described as 'a teacher.'

of which were humanitarian concerns, featured in her maiden speech in the House.¹¹¹ And her enduring involvement in municipal housing matters in Liverpool motivated her to argue for an amendment to the Greenwood Act, which was concerned with rent subsidies, a campaign which she pursued, successfully, with the support of Sir Ernest Simon (later Lord Simon of Wythenshawe) during the two years 1930-31.¹¹²

Rathbone kept in touch with Indian affairs until about 1935, mainly through contacts with friends in the country.¹¹³ Even before then, other more pressing campaigns came to the fore, so that by 1938 she was able to confess that she was 'absorbed in other perplexing questions in the international sphere.'¹¹⁴ This was a typically understated fact which gave no indication of the extent and nature of her involvement in the rescue of refugees from Fascist and Nazi Europe, the subject of subsequent chapters. The last notable contact that Rathbone had with India was in 1941, and the timing of her powerful 'open letter to some Indian friends' was crucial for it was written in 'the aftermath of the highly destructive Battle of Britain.'¹¹⁵ The purpose of the letter was two-fold: she was able to articulate her fears for Britain's survival in the war against Hitler, appealing to India to join Britain in the fight against the common enemy. And she was also able to express her deep concern for the deadlock over the constitutional issue in that country.¹¹⁶ The co-operation, and tacit approval of Mr Amery, the Secretary of State for India, ensured that Reuters transmitted the letter to the Indian press¹¹⁷ and that the imprisoned Pandit Jawaharlal

¹¹¹ For example, she concerned herself with women and national insurance benefits in 1931, defended the existence of university seats in 1931 when the Labour government proposed to abolish them. With Eva Hubback, she set up the Children's Minimum Campaign Committee in 1934. She involved herself in the debates on equal pay in 1935 and 1936.

¹¹² The Bill was so-called after its proposer, Arthur Greenwood (1880-1954) Labour Minister of Health 1929-31; Lecturer in Economics, Leeds University; Assistant Secretary in Ministry of Reconstruction, 1917-19; MP 1922-31 and 1932-54; Minister without Portfolio in War Cabinet, 1940-42 (in charge of plans for reconstruction); Lord Privy Seal, 1945-47. See Mowat, *Britain*, 83. Although the amendment was lost, Greenwood did allow a permissive clause that enabled local authorities to assess rent subsidies according to family need. The fact that over the next ten years more than 410 local authorities invoked this clause was a credit to Rathbone's tenacity. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 146.

¹¹³ One such contact, whom neither Stocks nor Pedersen mention, was Grace Lankester, wife of a missionary who had lived in Peshawar, and who later became liaison officer for the AIWC in Great Britain. See Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers?', 123. Stocks, but not Ramusack, mentions both Mrs Copeland, Convenor of the AIWC Labour Sub-Committee in Delhi and a Miss Meliscent Shephard. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 175-6.

¹¹⁴ Letter of EFR to Mrs Copeland, 24 June 1938, Box 93, Folder 16, Rathbone Papers, WL.

¹¹⁵ Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers?', 123.

¹¹⁶ This letter, dated May 1941, is reproduced in Stocks, *Rathbone*, 337-41. See also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 323-6.

¹¹⁷ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 295-7. The letters are reproduced in an appendix to Stocks's biography of Rathbone.

Nehru¹¹⁸ received a copy. Thus began an exchange of lively letters between Rathbone and Nehru in which the former criticised India's non-involvement in the war, and the latter berated Rathbone and the British government for imagining that India would give up its struggle for independence:

to fight for and in the name of an Empire which has crushed us and which we have been combating in our own peaceful way all our lives.¹¹⁹

Rathbone had also to contend with the criticism of people like Carl Heath, a colleague of Agatha Harrison, the secretary of the India Conciliation Group (ICG), a liaison group founded by members of the Society of Friends during the second Round Table Conference. Heath lamented that British people like her:

believe that if *they* do things for India which *they* think are good for India, they deserve to be met with thankfulness. They dislike the idea that that this well-wishing towards Indian should be regarded as imperialism and resented as it certainly is... they seem unable to realise how baffling and infuriating insistent paternalism is to grown-up India.¹²⁰

She clearly did have problems in her relationship with India and its people, and even after years of involvement with the child marriage issue and enfranchisement for women, was unable to see that, as Heath remarked, her actions were still considered imperialist. She failed to comprehend that Indian feminists came from a different background and had another agenda to their British counterparts, and that tactics which worked well at home were unsuited to an another culture. Even though Rathbone was undoubtedly motivated by humanitarian concerns, she would have been wiser, as Stocks has maintained, not to have become involved in Indian affairs, given her lack of understanding of, and empathy with, the people and their society.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a comprehensive overview of Rathbone's involvement in Indian affairs within the context of her life and world events, and to demonstrate how she was driven, primarily by humanitarian concerns,

¹¹⁸ For a biography of Nehru see B.R.Nanda, *Jawaharlal Nehru: rebel and statesman* (New Delhi, 1995).

¹¹⁹ Letter of Jawaharlal Nehru to EFR, 22 June 1941, reprinted in Stocks, *Rathbone*, 345.

¹²⁰ Letter of Carl Heath to Rathbone, 17 Sept 1941. For an overview of the ICG see H.Tinker, 'The India Conciliation Group, 1931-50: Dilemmas of the Mediator', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 14, 3 (Nov.1976) 224-41, as cited in Ramusack, 'Catalysts or Helpers?', 123-4.

to involve herself in campaigns which were outside of her personal experience and culture. That issues in India and certain other imperial countries became the subject of her activities when they did is not hard to explain: notwithstanding Rathbone's efforts at creating a 'new feminism' at home, there was a diminishing interest in the feminist movement which coincided with her acquiring knowledge of cultural practices which, from her Western viewpoint, were inhumane and evil. That these were taking place in countries with which Britain still had powerful political connections made it possible for her to become involved, especially once she was an MP. It could be said that as the imperatives of one humanitarian cause diminished, so Rathbone would embark on an even more challenging campaign. Thus Indian, Kenyan and African causes overtook female-related issues at home, and these were, in turn, superseded by the urgent need of refugees, mainly Jews, fleeing Nazi occupied Europe and the threat of extermination. In this respect, Pedersen's description of Rathbone's belief in a 'hierarchy of challenges and crimes'¹²¹ is apposite, for the victims of Nazi oppression, who are the subject of the last two chapters of this thesis, presented Rathbone with the ultimate campaign in her long career as an activist, and the crime which was being committed by the Nazi regime, was the greatest crime perpetrated against humanity in the twentieth century.

Importantly, this chapter has enabled aspects of Rathbone's character to be scrutinised, in particular her attitudes towards race and culture, which emerged as a result of her involvement with Indian issues. She certainly experienced problems in her relationship with the Indian woman question, these being compounded by her unshakeable belief that the colonial Government, and British women in particular, had a major part to play in improving the condition of Indian women. Not all Indian women shared this view, for many of them perceived Rathbone's assumption of responsibility as patronising and condescending, and imperialist interference. They certainly did not take kindly to her 'mother knows best' attitude.¹²² Nor were they enamoured of the tactics that she adopted, for although these had been tried and tested at home, they proved inappropriate in the very different circumstances of an international campaign.

¹²¹ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 327.

¹²² A Burton, *Burdens of History. British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture 1865-1915* (1994) 203.

Her failure to acknowledge Indian women's organisations, and to recognise the continuing work they did for social and political change, did little to enhance the image she wished to promote as a friend and ally.¹²³ With hindsight, some of Rathbone's errors of judgement can be seen as a reflection of the strongly Victorian and Edwardian imperialist society in which she lived. She never considered that Indian feminists might, because of their culture, have a different agenda to their Western counterparts, and this was a shortsighted mistake for someone of her intellect.¹²⁴ Attempting to change the religious and cultural practices of a country which, initially, she had never visited,¹²⁵ and of which she had only limited theoretical knowledge, was, in hindsight, foolhardy.¹²⁶ In this latter respect, she could be seen to fit Burton's description of 'British feminists' who believed, albeit erroneously, that 'their common gender gave them an understanding of Indian women which transcended national and racial boundaries,'¹²⁷ but it is fair to say that it was not necessary to be a feminist to hold such beliefs. For behind Rathbone's campaign was more than a hint of the notion of British superiority, and of national responsibility towards a society that was perceived as less civilized, and in need of educating. These same beliefs informed Rathbone's next humanitarian campaign in Palestine, the subject of the next chapter.

¹²³ Three Indian national women's organisations had been created by 1927. The first, the Women's India Association (WIA) was founded in Madras by two Englishwomen, Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, and an Irish feminist, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, in 1917. There followed the establishment, in 1925, of the National Council of Women in India (NCWI) See Forbes, *Cambridge History*, 72-8. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was founded in 1927, and played a notable part in the campaign for the Child Marriage Restraint Act. For a history of the AIWC see Basu & Ray, *Women's Struggle*.

¹²⁴ This point is made by Basu and Ray who refer to 'a different kind of struggle to the UK' due 'partly because Indian women were encouraged by men social reformers like Gandhi and Nehru. Further the battle in India initially was not so much against male domination as against the forces of superstition, apathy and ignorance that crushed the spirit of men and women alike. See Basu & Ray, *Women's Struggle*, 11.

¹²⁵ Rathbone made her only visit to India in late 1931 - early 1932. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 152-3 & 337.

¹²⁶ The *Indian Daily Mail* accused her of a 'lack of imagination and knowledge of Indian people.' See *Indian Daily Mail*, 23 Oct 1929. John Simon papers, MSS Eur. F77/86. OIOC. BL.

¹²⁷ Burton, 'The White Woman's Burden', 303.

Chapter Four

Eleanor Rathbone and humanitarian causes in Palestine

Overview

Given that Rathbone had involved herself in imperial affairs in India and Africa, it was not entirely surprising that she should have become concerned about humanitarian issues in Palestine, a territory effectively under British colonial rule. In fact the causes that she championed in Palestine, child marriage and the franchise for women, reflected those she had associated herself with in India. There was also her unconscious and previously unchallenged belief in the duty of care and authority that she considered she owed members of the colonial empire, just as she had in connection with her Indian campaigning.¹

What was different was the impetus for Rathbone's involvement in Palestine, and her personal attitude towards the country and its people. Whereas India had presented her with alien religious and cultural practices in a vast and inhospitable geographical location, Palestine was smaller and in closer proximity to Britain and, even for a non-practising Christian like Rathbone, was identifiable by familiar biblical connections and similarities in religion and culture.² Thus she, like other British visitors, developed an affinity and empathy with Palestine that was absent in her dealings with India.³ Furthermore, her relationship with this Middle Eastern territory, which lasted from 1933 until her death in 1946, evolved into a fervent belief in Zionism, an affiliation that will be considered within this chapter.

The significance of Rathbone's involvement with humanitarian issues in Palestine, and the effect that her association with the country had on her subsequent work on behalf of Jews fleeing Nazi and fascist Europe, some of them to Palestine, cannot be understated. However, this aspect of her career has not been the subject of any detailed academic scrutiny, and whilst Susan Pedersen does refer to this phase of Rathbone's activism, she

¹ Sherman describes this same attitude being adopted in respect of Britain and Palestine. See A.J.Sherman, *Mandate Days. British Lives in Palestine 1918-1948* (London, 1997).

² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 208 and N.Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand. British Rule in Palestine 1917-1948* (London, 1999) 6.

³ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*.

³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 208 and Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 6.

has not given it the attention that it warrants.⁴ This is a serious omission, for whilst Rathbone's work in Palestine appears to have generated less correspondence and parliamentary activity than in the Indian case, hindering research,⁵ it nevertheless constituted an important phase in her career, not least of all because of the interconnection with her subsequent campaigning work for Jewish refugees.

By the time that Rathbone became involved with Palestine, Britain had occupied the territory since 1917, but it was not a British colony in the usual sense, and was unique in many respects. The Balfour Declaration, issued by the British Foreign Secretary on 2 November 1917, had set out Britain's intention to establish a 'National Home' for the Jews there, and had also promised self-determination for the Arab population. Until self-government could be assumed, Palestine was to be governed under a Mandate of the LN.⁶ In respect of legislation, the British government had decided that rather than introducing new laws, existing Ottoman (Turkish) practice should prevail, with amendments grafted on, as and where necessary.⁷ Nor, according to Tom Segev, was the government interested in imposing British values or identity upon the Colony.⁸ The reasoning behind this was, apparently, to prevent 'a grave injustice' whereby local traditions were destroyed and the biblical heritage lost.⁹ Whilst Norman Bentwich, writing in 1932, considered the resulting Palestine law-book to be 'a remarkable example of the combination of tradition with creation',¹⁰ more recent historians of the period are generally agreed that the policy was misguided and resulted in a legislative muddle.¹¹

⁴ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 261-3. Alberti has failed entirely to mention Rathbone's campaigning on behalf of Jewish and Arab women, and has reduced her commitment to Zionism to one sentence. See Alberti, *Rathbone*, 135-6.

⁵ There is a lack of extant archive material relating to this episode. The major collection of Rathbone Papers deposited in the Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool did include a large quantity of published literature on Zionism, but this was neither listed nor retained, on the basis that it would be widely available elsewhere. The archive does not hold a list of this collection, nor does the archivist know of the existence of any such list.

⁶ For recent scholarship on British rule in Palestine see Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand* and also T. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete. Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (London, 2000).

⁷ This was, according to Shepherd, common practice in the Empire, and because the ground rules were the same everywhere, it made it easy for colonial officials to move around from one country to another. Variations were allowed for within this framework, depending on whether the colony had been acquired by conquest or settlement. See Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 75-6.

⁸ Segev, *One Palestine*, 167.

⁹ *Ibid.* 169.

¹⁰ N. Bentwich, *England in Palestine* (London, 1932) 278. Bentwich became a prominent figure in Anglo-Jewish refugee work.

¹¹ See, for example, Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 74-5. There were so many ordinances passed annually by the British that the Arab press spoke derisively of the 'law factory'. See Bentwich, *England*, 273.

I

Rathbone's introduction to Palestinian affairs was far less dramatic than in the Indian case, for this time there was no polemical book to spur her into action, but rather a letter from Margaret Corbett Ashby, a fellow feminist and subsequently co-member of the Friendly (later Refugee) Aliens Protection Committee and the Committee for Development of Refugee Industries.¹² Corbett Ashby wrote from Geneva in February 1933 whilst on League of Nations business, alerting Rathbone to proposed legislative change in Palestine, which, if implemented, threatened existing progress toward female equality in the territory.¹³ It was intended that the High Commissioner, General Sir Arthur Wauchope,¹⁴ be given the power to decide whether women might vote or stand for election in municipal elections. Whilst Corbett Ashby recognised that the Government was aiming to 'maintain the delicate balance between the Jewish, Arab and Christian communities,'¹⁵ she argued that the change would not serve the best interests of the community: not only would it remove rights which some women already had but it also meant adopting the social standards of the most backward section of the Palestinian community. Besides this, she pointed out, there was no precedent in any British colony for such action, citing Rhodesia where women still had the vote 'as an example of a colony where there were racial groups.'¹⁶ As a way of mustering support, Corbett Ashby circulated Rathbone's letter to a number of other British feminist organisations, all of whom expressed their concern, and offered to liaise with her.¹⁷

The *status quo* concerning women's franchise in Palestine was, as Rathbone was to discover, complex, due in part to the Ottoman heritage. It was further complicated as there was no consensus amongst the different religious groups of women as to whether they should have the right to vote. The progress of women's groups in Palestine bore little resemblance to that in Britain, as Millicent Fawcett, Rathbone's fellow suffragist

¹² Corbett Ashby was also a member of the IWSA. For a biography of her see M. Corbett Ashby, *Memoirs of Dame Margaret Corbett Ashby* (Horsted Keynes, 1996). Her correspondence, diaries and papers are deposited at the Women's Library, London Guildhall University.

¹³ Letter of Corbett Ashby to EFR, 10 Feb 1933. RP XIV 2.5 (21).

¹⁴ Wauchope (1874-1947) was the 4th High Commissioner to be appointed in Palestine. He held this post between 1931 and 1938. See P. Jones, *Britain and Palestine 1914-1948. Archival Sources for the History of the British Mandate* (Oxford, 1979) 133. There is no published biography of Wauchope.

¹⁵ Letter of Corbett Ashby to EFR, 10 Feb 1933. RP XIV 2.5 (21).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 208-09. In a subsequent letter Corbett Ashby also points out that Turkish and Indian women could vote. Letter of Corbett Ashby to EFR, 14 March 1933. RP XIV 2.5 (16).

¹⁷ These were the British Commonwealth League, the Open Door Council and St Joan's Social and Political Alliance. The BCL was formed in 1925 to carry on the work formerly done by the British Dominions Women's Citizens Union and the British Overseas Committee of the IWSA. The papers of the BCL are held at the Women's Library, London Guildhall University.

campaigner,¹⁸ commented after her visit to Palestine in 1921,¹⁹ on behalf of the IWSA. She concluded that whilst the women of the Palestine Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association (PJWERA) were 'progressive',²⁰ their Moslem contemporaries were, as she described, 'unorganised, inarticulate (and) little-educated.'²¹

In the 1930s the situation had barely altered. As far as Palestinian Moslem Arab women were concerned,²² their culture and tradition denied them any involvement in public affairs: added to this was the fact that their political status was hardly better than that of men, many of whom were also denied the right to vote. Thus the newly-emergent Palestinian women's movement was, as Ellen Fleischmann has explained, devoted to the establishment of a sovereign nation state in British Mandate Palestine, and adhered to the belief that equality for women would inevitably evolve from nationhood.²³ The women of the Yishuv (the Jewish settlement in Palestine) were more politically active than their Arab counterparts, even though their society was in itself highly bifurcated.²⁴ The PJWERA comprised women from all sectors of the community, including the centre and right wing sectors, known as the civic sectors, and women workers. A non-political national women's organisation, their slogan was 'one constitution and the same law for men and women',²⁵ the achievement of equal rights for women being a major concern between 1919 and 1926.²⁶ Legislation introduced in June 1922 had provided women who owned property, and by definition, paid taxes, the right to vote in local council elections, a law which enfranchised women in the Jewish cities of Petach Tikva and Tel Aviv. But in cities with

¹⁸ For Fawcett's life see D. Rubinstein, *A Different World. The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991).

¹⁹ Fawcett made another visit in 1924. See S. Azaryahu, *The Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Ysrael* (Haifa, 1980) 67.

²⁰ See R. Abrams, 'Pioneering representations of the Hebrew People'. Campaigns of the Palestinian Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association, 1918-1948', in Fletcher *et al*, *Women's Suffrage*, 121-5.

²¹ M. Fawcett 'A Glimpse of Egypt and a Journey Through Palestine', *Jus Suffragii*, 15, 9 (June 1921) as cited in L. Rupp, *Worlds of Women. The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Chichester, 1997) 58.

²² As Fleischmann has explained, 'during the mandate period use of the word "Palestinian" to denote only Palestinian Arabs is somewhat problematic considering that Jews in Palestine sometimes referred to themselves as "Palestinian". However, by and large, it was the Arabs who demonstrated an attachment to the concept of "Palestine", whereas the Jews identified more with the Hebrew term Eretz Israel (a biblical term for the land of Israel).' See E. Fleischmann, 'Nation, tradition and rights. The indigenous feminism of the Palestinian women's movement, 1929-1948' in Fletcher *et al*, *Women's Suffrage*, 151, f.14.

²³ See Fleischmann, 'Nation, tradition and rights', 139.

²⁴ Abrams highlights the differences between the Sephardi community and the Ashkenazi Haredi (the ultra-Orthodox), the orthodox Zionists and the non-religious Zionists. See Abrams, 'Pioneering representations', 121-37.

²⁵ H. Herzog, 'The Fringes of the Margin: Women's Organizations in the Civic Sector of the Yishuv' in D. Bernstein (ed.) *Pioneers and Homemakers. Jewish Women in pre-State Israel* (New York, 1992) 286-9.

²⁶ See Azaryahu, *Union of Hebrew Women*. For an overview of this organisation, founded in 1917, see S. Fogiel-Bijaoui, 'On the Way to Equality? The Struggle for Women's Suffrage in the Jewish Yishuv, 1917-1926' in Bernstein, *Pioneers and Homemakers*, 261-83.

mixed Arab and Jewish populations, namely Jerusalem, Haifa, Tiberias and Safat, Moslem law prevailed and women were denied the right to vote. The promulgation of the Municipal Franchise Ordinance of 1926 had extended the range of male electors eligible to vote, seen by some as an improvement in franchise eligibility,²⁷ but it categorically excluded women. This led the PJWERA to agitate vociferously for women's suffrage for both Arab and Jewish women, an unsatisfactory campaign due to the lack of support from the Arabs.²⁸ The 1933 proposal, which Rathbone was alerted to, would give the High Commissioner discretion as to which, if any, women should be allowed to vote, and was, as Dr Rosa Welt Strauss, a reputable medical doctor and president of the PJWERA,²⁹ told Rathbone, anathema to the Jewish women's organisations. There was, she stressed, a wealth of difference between Jewish communities giving rights to their women to vote and this being left to the mercy of the High Commissioner.³⁰ If invoked, the 1933 proposal would, the Association asserted, destroy 'all that Hebrew women had achieved in the area of civil and political life by a snap of the fingers.'³¹

II

Rathbone's reaction to Corbett Ashby's communication was predictable. She wasted no time in writing to Sir Phillip Cunliffe-Lister, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, noting that she considered the situation to be 'so serious' and was certain it would 'cause so much indignation among women's societies' in Britain.³² Included in this letter was a copy of her proposed Parliamentary question, and a request for a meeting with him so she could discuss additional information that she had received from Corbett Ashby and Welt Strauss. Interestingly, and in contrast to her position with India, Rathbone not only freely admitted to her lack of personal knowledge concerning the powers of the government in this matter, but she also sought his advice.³³ It appears, however, that the meeting never took place: the additional information was sent to Cunliffe-Lister in a subsequent letter, to which Rathbone received a lengthy written response. Outside of Parliament, Rathbone

²⁷ See A. Hyamson, *Palestine under the Mandate 1920-1948* (London, 1950) 102-03.

²⁸ Azaryahu, *Union of Hebrew Women*, 37.

²⁹ Welt Strauss had been involved with the American women's movement, was a founder member of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance. See Azaryahu, *Union of Hebrew Women*, 10, who claims that she was an American. However, according to Rupp, Welt Strauss was Austrian by birth. See Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 58. See also R. Abrams, 'Jewish Women in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance 1899-1926', Ph.D, Brandeis University, US, 1997.

³⁰ Letter of Welt Strauss to Corbett Ashby, 28 Feb 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (12).

³¹ Azaryahu, *Union of Hebrew Women*, 37.

³² Letter of EFR to Cunliffe-Lister, 15 Feb 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (1).

³³ Letter of EFR to Cunliffe-Lister, 20 Feb 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (6).

responded to offers of support from Corbett Ashby's contacts, including the British Commonwealth League,³⁴ St Joan's Social and Political Alliance³⁵ and the Open Door Council,³⁶ urging them, and others, to 'send a letter or resolution of remonstrance to the Colonial Secretary' on the basis that 'the more fuss we make about this the better.'³⁷ As far as support for the British campaign from within Palestine was concerned, Corbett Ashby had hoped that Miss Nixon, chief female welfare officer for the Government of Palestine,³⁸ would support them, but was dismayed to report that Nixon had become 'more and more official and anti-feminist.'³⁹ What became of a questionnaire sent out by the British government, and which Corbett Ashby hoped to gain sight of, remains unclear.⁴⁰

When Rathbone raised the issue in the House of the proposed Municipal Franchise Ordinance and its effect on women's suffrage in Palestine, she was far from happy with the answers she received. The British government was, according to Cunliffe-Lister, adamant that 'no general right of voting and membership at municipal elections has ever been granted to Jewish women in Palestine' and that the only voting rights that Jewish women had enjoyed, in accordance with the Local Councils Ordinance of 1921, were confined to committees of local Jewish communities and the Jewish Assembly.⁴¹ But as Rathbone persistently noted, the latter ordinance was about to be superseded by the new Municipal Franchise Ordinance, with all its restrictions, and the status of Jewish women was, indeed, about to be diminished. What she wanted was for legislative changes to be made that would 'raise Arab women to the level of Jewish women, rather than debasing Jewish women to the level of Arab women.'⁴²

³⁴ Letter of the BCL to EFR, 27 Apr 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (20).

³⁵ Letters between Florence Barry (secretary of St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance) and EFR, 13 & 14 Feb 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (1/2).

³⁶ Letters between Elizabeth Abbott (chairman of the Open Door Council) and EFR, 2 & 11 Apr 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (18/19).

³⁷ Letter of EFR to Florence Barry, 15 Feb 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (2).

³⁸ Miss Margaret Nixon, a graduate of London and Leeds Universities, and a student at the London School of Economics, first went to Palestine in 1919 to do relief work. See S.Erskine, *Palestine of the Arabs* (Westport. Conn. USA, reprint 1976) 213. She retired from Palestine in summer 1938, taking up work billeting refugee children for the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany. Letter of N.Bentwich to Mr Matthew, 5 Jan 1939. Box.LXXII, File 4, Jerusalem and East Mission Papers, Middle East Library, St Antony's College Oxford.

³⁹ Letter of Corbett Ashby to EFR, 13 Feb 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (7).

⁴⁰ This is referred to in Letter of Corbett Ashby to EFR, 13 Feb 1933. RP XIV 2.5 (7). The High Commissioner did order a statistical study of the populations age in 1932, although this was, it seems, in connection with the child marriage issue. See M.Simoni, ' "Germs know no racial lines" Health policies in British Palestine' (1930-1939) Ph.D, University of London (2001) 172.

⁴¹ Letter of Cunliffe-Lister to EFR, 21 Feb 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (8).

⁴² Letter of EFR to Cunliffe-Lister, 28 Feb 1933. RP XIV 2.5 (11).

In spite of Rathbone's intervention, the Municipal Corporations Ordinance was enacted on 12 January 1934. However, two Labour MP's, Mr Rhys Davies, Rathbone's most bitter family endowment opponent,⁴³ and Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, who became her staunch fellow refugee activist,⁴⁴ would not let the matter rest, and as the *New Judea* reported, continued to raise questions concerning the disenfranchisement of women in Palestine in the House of Commons for some months.⁴⁵ By then, however, Rathbone had another burning issue to champion in the Middle East, namely the practice of child marriage.

III

It was a letter from Welt Strauss, in June 1933, which alerted Rathbone to paragraph 182 of the Criminal Code Bill, 1933,⁴⁶ and the Mandatory government's plans to amend the law by setting the minimum legal age for female marriage at thirteen.⁴⁷ Although, as Rathbone discovered, child marriage was less prevalent in Palestine than in India, girls as young as ten or eleven, from Arab, Jewish and Christian communities, were being married off to men much older than themselves, with the same type of disastrous physical and mental results as Mayo had exposed. The PJWERA had been pressing the mandatory government to end the 'social evil' almost since their inception in 1919. They had sent memorandum to the government offices in Jerusalem in 1928, 1930 and 1932, and the 1930 Arab Congress of Women in Damascus had moved for the practice to be made illegal.⁴⁸ But, as Welt Strauss outlined to Rathbone, in line with established practice the British government were reluctant to tamper with Ottoman law or interfere with cultural traditions, even though they had admitted, in 1930, that there were 'evils attendant upon the system of child marriage.'⁴⁹ In the wake of this admission, an attempt was made in late 1930 to raise public awareness. This took the form of an unattributed article published in the *Palestine Post*. The author warned the Government that it would be better to 'do what it could to remedy a real evil'⁵⁰ before someone produced a *Mother Palestine* exposé like

⁴³ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 216.

⁴⁴ Wedgwood made a visit to Palestine in late 1933/early 1934. See *Palestine Post*, 22 Jan 1934. He returned home on 28 Jan 1934. For an assessment of his 'rescue' role see Cesarani, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 33-4.

⁴⁵ *The New Judea*, March 1934. Wedgwood's question was 20 Feb 1934, that of Rhys-Davies 12 Apr 1934.

⁴⁶ Published in Jerusalem in the *Official Palestine Gazette* on 5 June 1933.

⁴⁷ Letter of Welt Strauss to EFR, 21 June 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (23).

⁴⁸ Letter of PJWERA to Chief Secretary, Government Offices, Jerusalem, 9 May 1932. RP XIV 2.5 (24).

⁴⁹ Letter of Acting Chief Secretary, Government Offices, Jerusalem to Welt Strauss, 19 March 1930. RP XIV 2.5 (32).

⁵⁰ Published in *Palestine Bulletin*, 18 Nov 1930. RP XIV 2.5 (23).

Mayo's *Mother India*. For, as anyone who had knowledge of the subject knew, 'child marriage both takes its toll of human lives and carries with it the usual train of misery.'⁵¹ There was the added problem of accurate demographic information for there was no consistent system of birth or marriage registration and doctors could not be trusted to correctly certify a bride's age.⁵² The 1931 census did shed some new light on the problem of child marriage but, as Simoni has remarked, with the exception of the Moslem community, the data was far from complete or reliable.⁵³

Above all, the British government tried to avoid situations that would leave them open to criticism or attack. They were also mindful of the need to preserve the precarious balance between the different religious communities. Just as they used these as excuses for avoiding the franchise issue, so they invoked them in respect of the child marriage issue. In an effort to please everyone, and with age at marriage being the only common denominator amongst the diverse communities of Palestine, the proposal was to set a minimum number of years attained, 13, before a girl could be betrothed. However, there were provisos attached, which allowed for marriage at a younger age if the girl had reached puberty, if her family consented, or if it could be proved that no physical effects would follow consummation. It was these provisos that critics like the PJWERA knew would render the legislation wide open to abuse. As far as Welt Strauss was concerned, the empirical evidence that she had gathered left her in no doubt that young girls suffered considerable mental and physical damage as a result of premature marriage. Nor would this, given the revelations concerning the practice in India, have surprised Rathbone. Besides this, there was no consensus as to when puberty was reached: Welt Strauss's evidence put this at between 14 and 15 for Arab girls, whereas Miss Freda White of the LNU considered it to be earlier.⁵⁴

To those who maintained that child marriage was not very prevalent in Palestine, Welt Strauss argued that 'few cases reach the public press, almost all are transacted and remain in the privacy of the family and religious courts.'⁵⁵ Nixon, the government chief woman welfare officer, was certainly able to substantiate the continuing practice, for she had worked in close contact with a number of medical and law enforcement officers in Hebron, and had reported back on the cruelty inflicted on young girls, many under twelve, by their husbands. Whilst the Moslem authorities stated that a girl should be 16 before she

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Simoni, 'Germs', 173.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ The views expressed in White's letter may not have been representative of other members of the LNU, as Segev suggests. See Segev, *One Palestine*, 166.

was married, Nixon affirmed that 'such rules are dead letter in the Hebron district and also in many other villages in Palestine.'⁵⁶

As Welt Strauss hoped, Rathbone responded immediately to her call for support, for she considered the matter to be a humanitarian concern and very serious indeed.⁵⁷ Rathbone's initial contact with Colonial Office officials were strictly off-the-record, and she made it clear to Welt Strauss that nothing she reported could be quoted, printed or discussed. Welt Strauss's claim that the Age of Consent had been fixed in Palestine by the Amendment Law of 1926 at the age of 16 was challenged by Rathbone's contact, who requested authority for her assertion, and concluded that it probably alluded to Age of Consent outside of marriage. In any event, the official made the government position clear that 'the law covering Mandates prohibits interference with local laws' and that to do so would offend the religious communities.⁵⁸ It was also asserted that 'child marriage was not of frequent occurrence in Palestine, and was at any rate tending gradually to disappear,'⁵⁹ a claim which Welt Strauss had already answered.

Rathbone's next move was to raise the issue in Parliament. Had Cunliffe-Lister had his attention drawn to the Criminal Code Bill, 1933 and did he have any idea of the level of opposition in Palestine to this proposal? What did he intend to do about it? Would he enable a committee to be established which would assess the medical and social effects upon young girls? And would he furnish the House with a return showing the minimum age of consent (inside and outside of marriage) in all the colonies under his jurisdiction?⁶⁰

Matters moved slowly and Rathbone did not receive a reply to the 'return' question until January 1934: the government had indeed conducted enquiries and compiled a return which Mr Lee, of the Colonial Office, suggested she examine before asking to move for the return in the House, in case there were any minor amendments to be made.⁶¹ What she did ask for was supplementary information on other Moslem, non-colonial countries including Turkey and Egypt, to establish whether they had made better progress than countries under British rule.⁶² The implication here was clear: she wanted facts that would highlight the extent to which the colonial government, she believed, was hindering the progress of

⁵⁵ Letter of Welt Strauss to EFR, 21 June 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (23).

⁵⁶ 'Child Marriage in Palestine'. Memorandum by Miss Margaret Nixon, 12 Feb 1933. ISA J202/35 as cited in Simoni, 'Germs', 173

⁵⁷ Letter of EFR to Welt Strauss, 29 June 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (25).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 210.

⁶⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol. 280, cols.1068-69, 12 July 1933.

⁶¹ Letter of Lee to EFR, 25 Jan 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (36).

⁶² Letter of EFR to Lee, 16 Feb 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (37).

'backward' races. In fact she already knew what the information would show, for Welt Strauss had furnished her with details of the strict laws in force in Egypt and Turkey the year before,⁶³ clear enough evidence that more could be done by the British government if it had the will.

Whether this additional information was forthcoming is uncertain, but Rathbone was under pressure from Welt Strauss in Palestine, to 'raise the question again in Parliament' for, as she wrote, 'the time is short the case is urgent.'⁶⁴ In the interim period she, characteristically, set about gaining facts about Palestine for herself, for, as she freely admitted, she lacked knowledge of the country, its people and its customs. It is evident from White, of the LNU, that the information she was given was not always objective, being biased by either pro-Arab or pro-Jewish feeling.⁶⁵ In fact, Rathbone remarked of her subsequent visit to Palestine that she was 'hearing Arab *versus* Jew questions from every possible angle.'⁶⁶ White was keen to defend child marriage assuring Rathbone that Arab girls did mature at an earlier age than their Western counterparts, and that it was essential to link the age of marriage to puberty to avoid even greater immorality. Arab families would never tolerate an unchaste daughter and their custom demanded that she be punished by death.⁶⁷ Her assertion, that she had never come across any Arab girl under the age of seventeen who was married, was clearly at odds with the evidence collected by Welt Strauss. White's pro-Arab feeling was confirmed by her claim that 'Jewish inspired agitation against the ordinance' and 'the action of Jewish feminists may have the effect of rousing Arab defence of the ordinance,'⁶⁸ whilst according to Segev, some leading figures in the British government, who lent their names to an organisation which defended Arab child marriages, warned Rathbone that 'protests against the practice (of child marriage) were part of the Zionist movement's plot to take over the country.'⁶⁹

Ultimately, the protracted efforts of the PJWERA, Rathbone and others, to have the minimum age of marriage for girls in Palestine raised to sixteen failed, for in August 1934, Cunliffe-Lister confirmed, much to the satisfaction of Lord Lugard,⁷⁰ that 'with the consent

⁶³ Letter of Welt Strauss to EFR, 7 July 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (32) in which she stated that the 1926 law in Egypt set the minimum age at 16 for women and in Turkey, Article 88 of the Civil Code set the age of marriage at 18 for men and 17 for women.

⁶⁴ Letter of Welt Strauss to EFR, 8 July 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (39).

⁶⁵ Segev suggests that the views expressed in White's letter may not have been representative of other members of the organisation. See Segev, *One Palestine*, 166.

⁶⁶ Postcard written by EFR from Palestine. No date. RP XIV 2.5 (46).

⁶⁷ ISA, J202/35 Memorandum of Eric J. Mills, 20 Feb 1933 as cited in Simoni 'Germans', 176, f.52.

⁶⁸ Letter of Freda White to EFR, 6 July 1933, RP XIV 2.5 (33).

⁶⁹ David Lloyd George was one such member. See Segev, *One Palestine*, 168.

⁷⁰ *The New Judea*, 1 June 1934, 6.

of the heads of the religious communities in Palestine' the minimum age had been set at fourteen.⁷¹ In the light of Welt Strauss's data, this was only a marginal improvement, but while Wauchope was still expressing concern over child marriage six months later, he was also cautiously optimistic when he stated:

I think that I may claim to have made an appreciable advance in the provisions of the new Criminal Code, especially as those provisions have the whole-hearted support of all the Religious Heads. At least the law will not be a dead letter and to that extent progress in this important direction is assured, while there is nothing to prevent us from attempting a further step forward as soon as we can.⁷²

IV

Rathbone, in the meanwhile, had finally decided to undertake her own fact-finding tour of Palestine, and the summer recess of 1934 provided the perfect opportunity for this visit.⁷³ On hearing of Rathbone's impending visit to the Holy Land, Millicent Fawcett told her that the best guide she could take was the bible, which amused Macadam, who accompanied her friend. She recorded that Rathbone took this advice literally, ignoring the implied religious connections, and used it literally as a guide book.⁷⁴ The trip not only had the blessing of the Colonial Office, but they also provided Rathbone with a number of useful official introductions.⁷⁵ Two agencies provided the women with help and advice. For Arab conditions, Rathbone had the services of Nixon, who, despite Corbett Ashby's earlier reservations, proved cooperative. She took the two women on visits to Arab schools⁷⁶ and villages where they were entertained most hospitably by the sheikhs. They were also permitted, albeit reluctantly, a glimpse of the contrasting village life of the womenfolk and children, which left Rathbone with abiding images of poverty and squalor.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Letter of Cunliffe-Lister to EFR, 30 Aug 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (41).

⁷² Letter of Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, 15 Jan 1935, PRO CO 733 (37332/34).

⁷³ It appears from a letter written by Welt Strauss to EFR in July 1933, in which it was said that 'a trip to Palestine can safely be undertaken from Sep 15-Oct 15', that Rathbone had been contemplating the visit for some time. See Letter of Welt Strauss to EFR, 7 July 1933. RP XIV 2.5 (32).

⁷⁴ Notes made by E. Macadam of visit to Palestine. RP XIV 2.5 (45).

⁷⁵ Letter of EFR to Williams, Colonial Office, 1 Sep 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (42) 211. A number of letters written in Sept 1934, and pertaining to Rathbone's visit, are noted as having been 'destroyed under Statute.' See PRO CO 793/21 Folio 317, no.37332.

⁷⁶ Rathbone visited the totally independent High School at Bir Zeit, established and run by Miss Nahiba Naser, a Christian Arab from an influential family, and an activist on behalf of Palestinian Arab women. See I.M. Okkenhaug, 'The Quality of Heroic Living, of high endeavour and adventure. Anglican mission, women and education in Palestine 1888-1948', D.Art. University of Bergen, 1999. 'The two Naser ladies' are mentioned in letter of EFR to Nixon, 17 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (53).

⁷⁷ Notes made by E. Macadam of visit to Palestine. RP XIV 2.5 (45).

Whilst some influential Arab men whom she met urged her to press the mandatory government to increase educational opportunities for men and women, her meeting with the Grand Mufti, Amin Eff. el Husseini, the most powerful Arab in Palestine, was far less harmonious. In an encounter that was similar to her disastrous Indian debacle, Rathbone mistakenly, or naively perhaps, assumed that he would be objective about a local social phenomenon. She attempted to discuss recent statistics with him, which highlighted a predominance of males amongst the Arab population, evidence that she translated as indicating a lack of value in female life, and a concomitant neglect in the care of baby girls such as she had come across in India. This accusation inflamed the Grand Mufti, who could not be placated by Nixon's attempts at a more reasonable interpretation of his guest's patronising remarks, and he immediately ended the meeting. A later explanation of what the Grand Mufti claimed was an anomaly in the census return – according to him no high-class Arab would want to tell a young male enumerator how many daughters he had – only served to confirm Rathbone's inference, that many Arabs considered women to be second-class citizens.

Rathbone's investigations into Jewish conditions were greatly assisted by the Jewish Agency (JA), which had been founded at the same time as the Mandate. The organisation was accepted by the British Government as the official body under the Mandate, with which it was supposed to confer all questions affecting the establishment of a National Home. The two British ladies were put under the care of a Miss Goldie Myerson (sic)⁷⁸ whose name, as Macadam noted, had been 'conspicuous in United Nations negotiations.'⁷⁹ Nixon later remarked that Rathbone's 'clear brain and direct character' made it easier 'for her to meet the clever Jewish leaders on equal terms.'⁸⁰ What really impressed Rathbone were the Jewish colonies:

with their curious experiments in collective organisations (which) seem to me to be the most interesting and hopeful things I have seen in years.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Mrs Golda Meyerson, labour Zionist leader, diplomat and Israel's fourth Prime Minister - was born Golda Mabovitch in Kiev (Ukraine) in 1898. Aged 8, her family emigrated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She later joined a Zionist youth movement, married Morris Myerson, and, in 1921, emigrated to Palestine, joining Kibbutz Merhavia. In 1924 she moved to Jerusalem, and began a series of positions as an official of the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor) and became a member of its "inner circle." Over the next three decades, and as Golda Meir, she was active in the Histadrut, in trade union and welfare programs, Zionist labour organization, fund-raising abroad, and in political roles. She was appointed chief of the Histadrut's political section, designed to use the Histadrut's growing power to advance Zionist aims such as unrestricted Jewish immigration.

⁷⁹ Notes made by E. Macadam of visit to Palestine, 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (45).

⁸⁰ Letter of Nixon to Stocks, 30 July 1948, RP Dec 2002 Accession (being catalogued).

⁸¹ Letter of EFR to Shertok, 27 Oct 1934. Weizmann Archives. Jerusalem.

She was equally struck by the achievements of the settlers, and admired the way in which they were making progress in education, agriculture, business and the professions.

Despite Rathbone's often repeated assertion that Jews and Arabs were equal, she nevertheless favoured the former, and considered them more advanced, trustworthy and entrepreneurial. What is quite shocking is the extent of Rathbone's racist attitude towards Arabs.⁸² Whilst being driven to Jaffa and Tel Aviv by Nixon, Rathbone asked 'in a quiet and meditative voice' whether it would matter 'to the progress of civilisation if all the Arabs were drowned in the Mediterranean,' a suggestion which totally shocked Nixon. Rathbone reluctantly agreed with her host that the Arabs had, in the past, made valuable contributions to the world, but by then she had revealed her true colours.⁸³ Despite this, she was concerned about the way in which Jewish advances were widening the cultural gap between the Arabs and themselves, and was an issue that she was to raise on her return home.

Since the aim of the trip was to learn and to observe, Rathbone did not undertake many public engagements.⁸⁴ However, she did present one notable speech to the PJWERA.⁸⁵ The subject matter, the women's movement in England and the Dominions, was perhaps less significant than the palpable effect which the audience's generous reception had on Rathbone. In sharp contrast to the animosity that accompanied her discussions with Indian audiences, she was fired with enthusiasm,⁸⁶ and revealed that her interest in Zionism had been influenced by her reading of Arnold Toynbee's, *A Study of History*, with its emphasis on examining why some great civilizations developed whilst others decayed. The philosopher in her was evident when she wrote about pondering on the Zionist experiment: was this the 'first day's progress of a new civilization,' were there identifiable elements to it, how much did it owe to Western and Eastern European ideals, and would it be corrupted by these other cultures? A parallel can be drawn here between Rathbone's ideas of Empire, with Britain as a civilising force in 'backward' regions, and the Jews in Palestine performing a similar role in respect of the Arabs. Beyond this, and much to Macadam's amazement, Rathbone confessed that:

If I believed in the reincarnation of souls and could choose the place of

⁸² Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 262. Stocks excluded any mention this bias in her biography of Rathbone.

⁸³ Letter of Nixon to Stocks, 5 Aug 1948, RP Dec 2002 Accession (being catalogued).

⁸⁴ She also addressed the Jewish Palestine Association of University Women as reported in *Palestine Post*, 30 Sep 1934, 5.

⁸⁵ This lecture took place in Jerusalem on 8 Oct 1934. See *Palestine Post*, 9 Oct 1934, 5.

⁸⁶ The *Palestine Post* confirmed the PJWERA's gratitude to Miss Rathbone 'for her interpolation in Parliament on the questions of child marriage and women franchise in Municipal Elections in Palestine.' See *Palestine Post*, 30 Sep 1934, 5.

my next incarnation, I am not sure that I should not choose to be a Jew in Palestine.⁸⁷

Above all, she hoped that if Jewish and Arab women could learn to work together it might:

make just that difference to the future without which the great and wonderful experiment of a National Home may be a failure, or at best, a partial (sic) and dearly bought success.⁸⁸

These remarks provide an early glimpse of Rathbone's curiosity about Zionism, and confirm that this visit to Palestine was the catalyst for what developed into a commitment to the Zionist aim 'to create a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, secured by public law.'⁸⁹ This took on a special resonance especially after 1943, when refugees fleeing Nazi occupied Europe were seeking safe havens abroad. Her emerging interest was certainly evident to the Zionist leader, Chaim Weizmann, for in correspondence sent in November 1934, after her return home, she was described as a useful ally for the Zionist cause, who could be used to promote Zionism 'later on.'⁹⁰ That her dedication grew was reasserted by Victor Gollancz, the left-wing publisher, founder of the Left Book Club and fellow refugee activist,⁹¹ to whom she later confessed that she would have been especially satisfied 'to be chosen as one of the British members of the Enquiry Commission.'⁹² And one of her unachieved projects was to write a pamphlet on the lines of 'A Gentile's Plea for Zionism.'⁹³

More numerous were the private invitations which Rathbone accepted during this visit, and no person impressed her more than the ageing Henrietta Szold, social worker and reformer who had trained in the US in COS methods. Szold had become responsible, albeit inadvertently, in December 1933, for organising the rescue and transfer of children from

⁸⁷ This is what Rathbone wrote in the draft of a speech to be given in Palestine. See Draft of speech. No date. RP XIV 2.5 (44). However, in notes made by E. Macadam on a trip to Palestine this claim is stated thus: 'if she had not been born an English woman she would wish to have been born a Jew.' RP XIV 2.5 (45).

⁸⁸ EFR, Draft of speech given to the ERA. 8 Oct 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (44).

⁸⁹ The goal of Zionism was stated by the first Congress under a four-part declaration of principles known thereafter as the Basle Program. See B. Tuchman, *Bible and Sword* (London, 2001) 289.

⁹⁰ Letter of Jewish Agency, London to Chaim Weizmann, 16 Nov 1934. Weizmann Archives, Jerusalem.

⁹¹ The standard work on Gollancz is R.D. Edwards, *Victor Gollancz, A Biography* (1987). For the book club see S. Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1, 2 (1966) 65-86 and J. Lewis, *The Left Book Club* (1970).

⁹² Presumably Gollancz was referring to the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry into the Palestine question, proposed by Britain in 1945. Victor Gollancz, 'Eleanor Rathbone', *AJR Information*, Feb 1946, 13.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Nazi Germany to Palestine.⁹⁴ There is no doubt that Rathbone's meeting with Szold had a profound effect on her, for her humanitarian work with refugees had a special resonance for her own devotion to this cause in the ensuing years.⁹⁵

V

Immediately upon her return to Britain, and in typical fashion, Rathbone set her campaigning wheels in motion. First she reported her findings to the Colonial Office. Her memorandum, described by Stocks as 'brief but emphatic'⁹⁶ landed on the official desk on 5 November 1934, and became the forerunner of numerous communications, official and unofficial, which passed between Rathbone, Wauchope and Cunliffe-Lister. Child marriage, the education of Arab girls and the lack of women doctors all received Rathbone's scrutiny. In respect of the former, and since the exact terms of the enactment of the Criminal Code had, apparently, still to be finally decided, she hoped that her report would influence the government's decision. The prevalence and 'disgusting cruelties' of child marriage, especially in Hebron were expounded, and Rathbone invoked the Sarda Act as an example of how transparent defects in legislation left it wide open to abuse. If the law failed, as she predicted, discredit would be heaped on the 'sincerity of the British authorities in their desire for social reform'.⁹⁷ Rathbone also called for a compulsory system of registration of marriage to aid the effectiveness of legislation. So great were her concerns over the new amendment that she concluded it would be far better to 'abandon the whole enactment than to include the proviso.'⁹⁸ Of considerable concern too was the poor education that Arab girls received, and she lamented the attitude of the government, who blamed the problem on the lack of trained women teachers. In respect of the medical care that was available to Arab women, Rathbone found it hard to credit that 'in a predominantly Moslem country where in the towns a large proportion of poor women are still heavily

⁹⁴ Notes made by E. Macadam on trip to Palestine. RP XIV 2.5 (45) and as cited Stocks, *Rathbone*, 215 in which she refers to Rathbone meeting Szold who was surrounded by 'her child refugees.' The child rescue mission which she founded was known as Youth Aliyah. The first group of children arrived in Feb 1934. See M. Lowenthal, *Henrietta Szold: Life and Letters* (New York, 1942) 258-63 and J. Dash, *Summoned to Jerusalem: the Life of Henrietta Szold* (London, 1979) especially 237-45. Szold played a crucial role in the founding of the Hadassah Medical Organisation and in the consolidation and management of medical and welfare services in Palestine. There is an extensive bibliography of literature on her life and work in M. Simoni, 'At the Roots of Division: A New Perspective on the Arabs and Jews, 1930-39', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36, 3 (July 2000) 85, f.3.

⁹⁵ This speech was given to the PJWERA in Jerusalem on 8 Oct 1934. EFR, 'The Women's Movement: At Home and In the British Commonwealth', typed with hand written notes. RP XIV 2.5 (44).

⁹⁶ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 215.

⁹⁷ Notes by EFR, Nov. 1934, RP XIV 2.5 (47).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

veiled' there were no women doctors whatever employed in government service either in hospital or in district work.

A lengthy response was forthcoming in January 1935, with the caveat that Wauchope's 'composite memorandum', which included references to new provisions, was not yet public knowledge and should be treated in confidence.⁹⁹ He did not take issue with Rathbone on her comments on certain social and educational problems in Palestine but instead noted that they had 'long engaged his attention': his proposals were the outcome of consultation 'with the Directors of Medical Services and Education' (in Palestine) and were allowed for within his budget estimates for the following year. The government planned for the provision of six new village schools, to remedy, in part, the problem of inadequate facilities, particularly in rural areas. The establishment of a rural training centre for women teachers would, in the longer term, help rectify the staff shortages. Provision was also to be made within the budget for the appointment of two women doctors from England, who would be replaced by two Palestinian women who it was anticipated would be undertaking medical training in Beirut.¹⁰⁰

VI

When, on 19 June 1936, the British government announced its intention of setting up a Royal Commission of Inquiry on Palestine, known as the Peel Commission,¹⁰¹ Rathbone's consciousness was once again aroused.¹⁰² The Commission was established to investigate the Arab Revolt of 1936, an uprising which Shepherd suggests was as much against the British as it was against the Jews.¹⁰³ The causes of the revolt, launched in the aftermath of the murder of two Jews by Arabs and the reprisal killing of two Arabs by Jews,¹⁰⁴ were very complex, but were intimately bound up within the issues of the national rights of Arabs. The latter situation had been exacerbated by the surge in immigration of Jews from Germany into Palestine in 1935 and the sale of Arab Palestinian land to Jews.¹⁰⁵ Besides drafting in a military force to protect the authority of the mandatory Government,

⁹⁹ Letter of Cunliffe-Lister to EFR 15 Jan 1935, RP XIV 2.5 (48). This letter followed correspondence that passed between Wauchope and Cunliffe-Lister. See Letter of Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, 3 Jan 1935 & Letter of Cunliffe-Lister to Wauchope, 15 Jan 1935. PRO CO 733 37332/34

¹⁰⁰ Letter of Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, 3 Jan 1935. PRO CO 733 37332/34.

¹⁰¹ Lord Peel was a former Secretary of State for India.

¹⁰² This was, according to Stocks, in the course of the Debate in Committee of Supply on the Colonial Office. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 218.

¹⁰³ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 117.

¹⁰⁴ Stocks gives the dates of these murders as 15 and 16 Apr 1936. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 218.

¹⁰⁵ R. Zweig, *Britain and Palestine during the Second World War* (London, 1986) 2. See also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 218.

the Peel Commission was set up to investigate and attempt to resolve the issues. Rathbone, who still had a keen interest in improving the rights of Arab girls and women, especially in the areas of child marriage, health issues and education, saw the commission as a vehicle for improving their status,¹⁰⁶ in much the same way as she had viewed the Simon Commission in respect of India. Once again, the thrust of her campaign was for female representation on the commission, and she fought for this both inside and outside the House, directing her action at William Ormsby-Gore, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Ormsby-Gore became the recipient of innumerable official and private letters, the first of which appeared immediately following the Commission announcement in the House.¹⁰⁷ Rathbone forewarned him that she intended to have 'someone else' table a question in the House on the matter of female representation, and that this person was a man. This, she explained, was to ensure 'that this question should not be regarded merely as a bit of feminism.'¹⁰⁸ In interpreting this latter statement, Rathbone was aware of the prejudice that many male Members of Parliament harboured against feminist issues, and no doubt hoped that a man putting forward the question would add gravitas to it. She certainly considered it to be a matter of humanitarian concern, and was motivated, as always, by her desire to right what she perceived as an injustice. It is also worth reflecting on the fact that by the mid-1930s the mounting crisis in international affairs overshadowed most other concerns, thus reducing the significance of them. Bearing in mind that the commission was likely to focus its attention on 'Arab grievances concerning Jewish immigration' she was convinced that 'the woman's side of the immigration question should get some attention'.¹⁰⁹ After all, as she pointed out, there had been complaints about insufficient quotas of women allowed entry in certain categories and also about marriages of convenience. It was Mr Lovat-Fraser, the MP for Lichfield, who put Rathbone's question to the Secretary of State on 30 June 1936:

Whether, in view of the special needs and disabilities of women, especially Arab women, in Palestine, and the importance of paying attention to those needs in considering all questions bearing on the future administration of the country, he will include in the proposed Royal Commission women qualified to ensure fulfilment of this purpose?¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Okkenhaug, 'Heroic Living', 18.

¹⁰⁷ Letter of EFR to W.Ormsby-Gore, 19 June 1936. RP XIV 2.5 (50).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Hansard* HC vol.314, col.236. 30 June 1936.

However dismayed Rathbone may have been with Ormsby-Gore's reply, she can hardly have been surprised by it, given the resistance she had met in regard to a similar request *vis-à-vis* India. Not only did he believe that the appointment of a woman would be incompatible with Arab sensitivities, and thus impede the work of the commission, but he had also been advised, by Wauchope, that devout Moslems, and possibly some orthodox Jews, would refuse to appear before a Commission which included women.¹¹¹

This infuriated Rathbone and she challenged Ormsby-Gore's rationale, arguing that she had been reliably informed, by her own contacts¹¹² that his contentions were spurious - they all maintained that the presence of women on the commission would not give such offence to Arab opinion as to impede the work of the commission.¹¹³ Even if Ormsby-Gore's argument was true, the matter could easily be overcome, as Miss Pye, vice-chairman of the WIL, pointed out. All that was needed was for a woman appointee to hear evidence separately from the men, and *vice-versa*.¹¹⁴ Rathbone's suspicion, that there was 'a good deal of prejudice among those whom Ormsby-Gore consulted',¹¹⁵ was a fair assessment according to Miss Emery, an Englishwoman with seventeen years of teaching experience in Jerusalem and Haifa. Emery not only challenged the Secretary of State's views concerning a woman on the Commission, but maintained that his advisers were indeed 'all elderly and willing to believe anything.' She also ventured to suggest a compromise if the government were 'too hidebound to appoint a woman on the Commission' that 'perhaps one or two chosen fair-minded women could go unofficially.'¹¹⁶

At this point, Emery's views on the Arab/Jewish conflict were opposed to Rathbone's, for in attempting to answer her supplementary question as to whether it was:

an index of the fitness of the Arabs for self-government that they would not appear before a Commission which included a woman?¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Her sources were two of the Arab leaders who had addressed a meeting in the House of Commons, and Arab and Jewish ladies attending the International Conference on Social Work.

¹¹³ Letter of EFR to W.Ormsby-Gore, 17 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (52). In a subsequent letter Rathbone included copies of letters in a similar vein that she had received from Miss Nasir, the head of Beir Zeit school (visited in 1934). She also included extracts from Emery's letter about Ormsby-Gore's advisers. Letter of EFR to Ormsby-Gore, 24 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (64).

¹¹⁴ Letter of Miss Pye to EFR, 23 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (54).

¹¹⁵ Letter of EFR to Nixon, 17 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (53).

¹¹⁶ Letter of Emery to EFR, 22 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (55).

¹¹⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol.315, col.425, 22 July 1936.

she took a very strong pro-Arab line, which did not endear her to Rathbone. The very notion that the government should yield to 'organised terrorism' by putting a halt to immigration, as Emery suggested, was anathema to Rathbone, and was quite evident in the tone of her reply, and her pointed refusal to discuss the subject.¹¹⁸ More constructive support came from women's organisations and politicians at home. The WIL,¹¹⁹ the Women's Freedom League, the Equal Citizenship and the British Commonwealth League all fought the case,¹²⁰ as did the MP's Mr George Lansbury,¹²¹ Colonels Cazalet, Milner and Wedgwood.¹²²

When the composition of the Peel Commission was finally announced on 29 July 1936 there was considerable consternation in Parliament, especially from Rathbone and her supporters.¹²³ Not only were there no members of the House of Commons included, but the chairman, Lord Peel, was accused by Wedgwood of being 'strikingly pro-Moslem.' Once again, Rathbone raised the issue of a woman member, suggesting that he:

at least undertake to appoint a woman as technical expert... so that half of the Palestinian population may not be left wholly out of account?¹²⁴

In the aftermath she wrote again to Ormsby-Gore, almost pleading with him to give further consideration to her suggestion that he appoint two women technical experts. 'Without them one is bound to fear that the Commission will represent just the limitations of the colonial people on the spot and share all their prejudices' she wrote.¹²⁵ At the same time she put forward the name of Miss Margery Fry, her friend and fellow Somervillian, as a person who was eminently qualified for the job.¹²⁶ By early August 1936 it was clear that Ormsby-Gore was not going to adopt any of Rathbone's suggestions, and he left it to a secretary to inform her of his decision. The only hope left open was Ormsby-Gore's remark, communicated to

¹¹⁸ Reply of EFR to Emery, 6 Aug 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (59).

¹¹⁹ Letter of WIL to EFR, 29 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (60); Letter of WIL to Ormsby-Gore, 30 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5.61; Letter of WIL to EFR, 6 Aug 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (62).

¹²⁰ Articles were sent to the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Chronicle* and the *Herald*. Letter of Miss Pye (vice-chairman of the WIL) to EFR, 23 July 1936, RP XI 2.5 (54).

¹²¹ Mr Lansbury, former leader of the Labour Party, was MP for Bow and Bromley.

¹²² All badgered Ormsby-Gore to include a woman member on the Peel Commission. See *Hansard* HC 315, cols.1511-16, 29 July 1936.

¹²³ *Hansard* HC 315, cols.1511-16, 29 July 1936.

¹²⁴ *Hansard* HC 315, cols.1513, 29 July 1936.

¹²⁵ Letter of EFR to Ormsby-Gore, 30 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (56).

¹²⁶ Fry was by then former principal of Somerville and former honorary secretary of the Howard League for Penal Reform and had an impeccable *Curriculum Vitae* that Rathbone sent Ormsby-Gore. See Letter of EFR to Ormsby-Gore, 30 July 1936, RP XIV 2.5 (56).

Rathbone in a private letter, that he had:

no doubt that the Commission would welcome any authoritative expression of the women's point of view in these matters, if it should be thought to differ from that presented other wise to the Commission.¹²⁷

This prompted Rathbone to contemplate offering to give evidence herself,¹²⁸ an idea that it must be assumed, she dropped.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to examine the range of issues that Rathbone championed in Palestine, a task that has not previously been undertaken. Only Stocks and Pedersen have considered it within their biographies, but have not given it the consideration it warrants.¹²⁹ With the exception of Okkenhaug, who has considered Rathbone's role in respect of the Peel commission, her work in the territory has not come under detailed academic scrutiny.

Once again, the question of what compelled Rathbone to pursue issues in Palestine has been raised. On the one hand the common factor appears to have been improving the position of women within the spheres of child marriage, votes for women, immigration, education and welfare provision, all commonly perceived as feminist concerns. But these were also humanitarian matters, and as Rathbone viewed it, were wrongs that had to be set right. Ultimately, her feminism and humanitarianism were not totally incompatible. For even though she clearly preferred Jews and Judaism to Arabs and Islam, the former being more 'advanced' in her view, she nevertheless championed causes regardless of race, religion and gender.

It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of her activities in Palestine, but to claim, as Segev has done, that her intervention in respect of child marriage had little effect,¹³⁰ misses an important point. Whilst Rathbone may have failed to persuade the government to change the legislation, something she was still trying to do in 1936,¹³¹ it is significant that

¹²⁷ Letter of E.Boyd to EFR, 1 Aug 1936, RP X1V 2.5 (57).

¹²⁸ See Letter of EFR to the WIL, 5 Aug 1936, RP X1V 2.5 (58).

¹²⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*. Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*.

¹³⁰ Segev's conclusion is based on reference to just two letters in the Rathbone Papers and pays no heed to other historical or contemporary sources.

¹³¹ When Wauchope wrote to Cunliffe-Lister in Jan 1935, enclosing his draft memorandum, he referred to the question of woman's franchise, and the fact that he proposed, in the elections for the Legislative Council, to allow for female suffrage in the case of any community desiring to extend the vote to its women. However, this information was not to be 'fully disclosed' to Rathbone at the time. See Letter of Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, 3 Jan 1934. PRO CO 733 (75132/35)

she was a thorn in the side of government, persistently cajoling and pressurising them, and could always be relied upon to support unpopular causes. Her success in respect of the franchise for women was bound to be limited, given the attitude of the Arab population and their overriding concern for nationalism.

The question of immigration into Palestine was to occupy Rathbone's mind a good deal over the ensuing years, especially when it came to finding a haven for Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. Bentwich, writing eighteen years after Rathbone's death, praised her for giving her 'heart and brain' to two aspects of the Jewish problem, one of these being:

the opening of the doors of Palestine. In her capacity as head of an all-party Palestine committee, she and her co-members aimed to keep the British government faithful to their promises about the Jewish Home.¹³²

Palestine was indeed intimately linked with Hitler's regime: the planned national homeland attracted increasing numbers of Jewish immigrants as the repression in Germany and elsewhere intensified, exacerbating tension between Arabs and Jews within the colony.

It was, as Bentwich has noted, a source of great disappointment to Rathbone that she was not invited to participate in any of the Commissions on Palestine.¹³³ However, from the time of her introduction to issues in Palestine, and her subsequent visit to the country, she became a firm friend of the Jewish people, and an ardent Zionist. These factors were to prove crucial in the coming years as she involved herself in the rescue of refugees from Nazi and Fascist Europe. International events, and Rathbone's involvement with foreign affairs in the 1930s, leading up to her engagement with the refugee question, are the subject of the next chapter.

¹³² N. Bentwich, *My 77 Years. An Account of my Life and Times 1883-1960* (London, 1962) 146-7.

¹³³ Bentwich, *England*, 147.

CHAPTER FIVE

Eleanor Rathbone, foreign policy and collective security

Overview

The aim of this chapter is to examine Rathbone's commitment to the ideology of collective security, and to consider her involvement with and responses to related foreign policy issues during the inter-war years. This period was, it will be argued, a crucial time in her life, for the response of the British government to international events challenged her deeply rooted sense of Britishness¹ and her concept of right and wrong. It also brought her face-to-face with the humanitarian crises that developed in Europe, involving her in activities which were directly related to the rescue of refugees, and thus setting the scene for her subsequent campaigns on behalf of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Before examining Rathbone's role within these spheres, a brief overview of the contemporary international events will be provided so that her work can be contextualised.

I

The starting point was the establishment, at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, of the League of Nations (LN).² In Britain, the League of Nations Union (LNU) was created in October 1918,³ to act as a pressure group, exerting influence over British government foreign policy-making, as well as promoting and supporting the work of the LN.⁴ Whilst the nature and extent of the LNU's influence is

¹ It is not clear whether Rathbone felt more British than English, but given the greater preponderance of the word 'Britain' and its variations in her discourse I have used the more inclusive word to describe her loyalty.

² The armistice, 11 Nov 1918, was based upon American President Woodrow Wilson's so-called 14 point plan, the establishment of the LN being one of these points. Even though Wilson was largely responsible for the establishment of the LN, the US was not a League member, mainly because he and the Senate were unable to agree over the terms under which the US would join. The subsequent rejection by the US Senate of the Treaty of Versailles in March 1920 precluded them from joining the League. G.Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations* (London, 1979).

³ E.Bramsted 'Apostles of Collective Security. The League of Nations Union and its Functions', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, XIII (1967) 347-64.

⁴ See M.Ceadel 'Attitudes to War: Pacifism and Collective Security' in P.Johnson (ed.) *Twentieth Century Britain. Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London, 1994) 222-4 (henceforth Ceadel, 'Attitudes').

debatable, and beyond the scope of this thesis,⁵ it was nevertheless, for a time, the largest peace association in the world, with a membership that peaked in 1931 at 406,868, only to decline to 46,607 by 1945.⁶

The cornerstone of LN ideology, and indeed the LNU of which Rathbone was a member, was the policy of collective security.⁷ Progressive international disarmament was a fundamental aspect of this and was actively promoted by the LN from its early days. Following a preparatory commission in 1925 to investigate the ways in which disarmament could be achieved, the Disarmament (Geneva) Conference finally opened in Geneva in February 1932, but its progress was threatened as a result of the Japanese advance into Manchuria (which comprised the three provinces of North East China) in the winter of 1931. US Secretary of State, Henry Stimson (1867-1950) responded by urging President Hoover, unsuccessfully,⁸ to impose an economic boycott on Japan.⁹ The British government distanced itself from the conflict on the grounds that the dispute was between two independent countries, and refused to intervene, a reaction that not only brought the effectiveness of the LN machinery into question but also rendered its future uncertain.

The combined failure of Stimson's efforts, the US's subsequent isolationist stand, and most particularly the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon's announcement, in February 1933, that His Majesty's Government did not intend to take any action against Japan, despite the country having been denounced as an aggressor by the LN Assembly,¹⁰ caused consternation in the House of Commons. The Geneva conference was still under way when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany on 30 January 1933, and within a month it was evident that the country, admitted to the LN in 1925 under the terms of the Treaty of Locarno, was preparing to rearm. When challenged at Geneva, Germany argued that if world disarmament, to the German level, was not accomplished, then it had the right to rearm and achieve military equality. Deadlock ensued and the disarmament conference was abruptly adjourned in June 1933. When

⁵ For this debate see D. Birn, 'The League of Nations Union and Collective Security', *Journal of Contemporary History*, IX (3 July 1974) 133ff. (henceforth Birn, 'Collective Security').

⁶ M. Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists. The British Peace Movement and International Relations 1854-1945* (Oxford, 2000).

⁷ The term was coined in the 1930s, whereas previously the terms 'pooled security' and 'collective defense' had been in use. See Birn, 'Collective Security', 131. My thanks to Clive Fleay for this reference.

⁸ EFR, *War Can be Averted* (London, 1938) 27-32. It was not until 1940-41, when Stimson was President Roosevelt's Secretary of War, that economic sanctions against Japan were introduced.

⁹ Britain and Japan were allies until 1922, when the US forced the end of this alliance.

¹⁰ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 223.

it reconvened in October 1933, Germany withdrew from the talks and from the LN. Japan left the LN in the same year.

Hopes of international disarmament continued to fade during 1934, whilst another international disaster was looming as Italy threatened to attack Abyssinia. Sir Samuel Hoare, the new Foreign Secretary,¹¹ was responsible for handling this impending crisis and his famous declaration at Geneva on 11 September 1935, in which he claimed to embrace the obligations of the LN, was encouraging.¹² Public optimism was, however, short-lived, for Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia a month later, on 3 October 1935, put Hoare's recent endorsement of League policy to the test. The 'steady and collective resistance' which Hoare had so recently boasted of lasted a mere three months. Economic sanctions imposed on Italy's supply of oil were ineffectual, and there were critics at home who believed that Hoare's measures were designed merely as a vote catcher.¹³ Such cynicism was not without foundation, for when Stanley Baldwin, who had succeeded Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister in June 1935, decided to call a general election in November 1935, his government was able to present a seemingly flawless foreign policy. They claimed in the election Manifesto that 'The League of Nations will remain, as heretofore, the keystone of British foreign policy.'¹⁴ Meanwhile, Hoare entered into discussions with Monsieur Laval, the French Prime Minister.¹⁵ The Hoare-Laval Plan, as it came to be known, was intended to end the war in Abyssinia, by endorsing the transfer of the fertile Ethiopian plains to the aggressor, Italy. The betrayal of Abyssinia through these proposals caused such a public outcry in Britain, that, as Rathbone later described, the Government were compelled 'temporarily to reverse engines, even at the cost of losing one of its ablest and most influential Ministers.'¹⁶

¹¹ A political loss of confidence in Sir John Simon in the spring of 1935, brought about in part by his mishandling of disarmament, and compounded by his failure to condemn the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, resulted in his being replaced as Foreign Secretary by Hoare. N. Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers. Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1971) 65 and W.R. Rock, *British Appeasement in the 1930s* (London, 1977). For more recent scholarship on appeasement see R.A.C. Parke, *Chamberlain and Appeasement. British Policy and the coming of the Second World War* (Basingstoke, 1993) and R.J.Q. Adams (ed.) *British Appeasement and the Origins of World War II* (Lexington, Mass. 1994). For a revisionist view see J. Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (Chicago, 1990).

¹² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 230-31. See also EFR, *War*, 43. Thompson describes Hoare's speech as 'electrifying'. See Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers*, 75.

¹³ EFR, *War*, 46.

¹⁴ Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers*. 77.

¹⁵ According to Rathbone, Laval replaced Sir John Simon at the Geneva conference as 'devil's advocate.' See EFR, *War*, 40.

¹⁶ EFR, *War*, 23.

Hoare's short tenure as Foreign Secretary ended abruptly with his resignation on 19 December 1935, but the Abyssinian crisis was far from over. In June 1936, Britain abandoned existing sanctions, leaving the way open for Mussolini to continue his war. Abyssinia's fate was officially confirmed in April 1938,¹⁷ when Mr Neville Chamberlain, who had replaced Baldwin as Prime Minister on 31 May 1937, finalised an agreement with the Italian dictator that recognised Italy's conquest of the country. Meanwhile, there were separate conflicts simmering in Europe.

The first of these occurred in Spain, when, in July 1936, the democratically elected Popular Front government, which had been elected in February that year, faced a *pronunciamiento*¹⁸ by army officers, including General Franco. This rebellion marked the opening phase of the Spanish Civil War between the Republic (proclaimed in April 1931 with the fall of the monarchy) and the insurgent Nationalists. Whilst a detailed examination of the Spanish conflict is beyond the scope of this thesis, it can be said that it differed from the Abyssinian crisis in that there was no clear aggressor and victim, and there was a less obvious argument of right and wrong. Also, it posed a less complicated case of League obligations, for as far as the British public were initially concerned, it was seen as an essentially Spanish problem, possibly because no vital national interests were apparently at stake.¹⁹ However, as the war progressed, so too did a humanitarian catastrophe which evoked an unprecedented response in Britain, embracing people of all classes. In a surge of practical support, citizens went to fight as volunteers whilst others organised food supplies, medical support and the evacuation of refugee children from Bilbao in the Basque country, humanitarian activities with which Rathbone became involved.²⁰ These campaigns also gave rise to a deluge of rallies, committees, pamphlets, debates and books: many of the latter were published by the Left Book Club,²¹ founded by

¹⁷ The country had been occupied since late 1936.

¹⁸ There is no equivalent term in English, but might best be described as a coup. My thanks to Clive Fleay for this information.

¹⁹ For a scholarly account of Britain's role in Spain see T. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997).

²⁰ For aid to Spain specifically see J. Fyrth, *The Signal was Spain. The Aid Spain Movement in Britain 1936-39* (London, 1986).

²¹ The club proved to be an important forum for, amongst others, left-wing socialists, many of whom were deeply involved in Spanish aid. By the end of 1937 there were 57,000 members buying a specially selected book every month, then meeting to discuss the publication at one of the 750 national groups. See .Samuels, 'Left Book Club' & Lewis, *Left Book Club*.

Victor Gollancz (who subsequently worked closely with Rathbone on the refugee question) in June 1936.²²

Against the background of civil war in Spain another, not wholly unexpected, international crisis was unfolding in Europe. As part of his programme of territorial expansion, Hitler marched his troops into Austria in March 1938, annexing it to Germany.²³ Czechoslovakia was next in line for assault. Britain now faced a dilemma. Should Hitler be allowed to take the territory by aggressive action, thus destroying the country and allowing the dictator free reign to expand to the east and south? Or should she support the French guarantee of Czechoslovakia and prevent the German domination of Europe?²⁴ A fundamental difference of opinion between the Prime Minister, who wanted to enter into talks immediately, and the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, who refused to support a decision, resulted in the latter's resignation on 20 February 1938.²⁵ Months of debate at home and abroad ensued, with Britain and France exerting pressure on the Czech government to make concessions and so avoid war. Both states made it clear to Hitler that if he ignored the negotiations and invaded Czechoslovakia they would be forced to fight. At a special Executive Committee meeting held on 23 September 1938, the LNU bitterly opposed the proposal to permit territorial concessions to Germany, berating His Majesty's Government for discrediting the country without securing peace.²⁶ Despite such protestations, a settlement was reached with the signing, by Chamberlain, Mussolini, Daladier and Hitler, of the Munich agreement on 29 September 1938, when Germany was granted the strategic Sudeten northern frontiers of the Czechoslovak Republic. In return, Hitler made a promise, empty as it transpired, not to attack the rest of the Republic, and to keep the peace in the future.

II

It was against this setting of inter-related world events, as outlined, that Rathbone's involvement in international affairs and the collective security debate

²² This was coincidental to the election of the Popular Front government in France.

²³ The annexation of Austria, with its 180,000 Jews, became known as the *Anschluss*.

²⁴ This is, of necessity, a simplified overview of the very complex events of 1938.

²⁵ For a recent examination of this see R.Lamb, *The Ghosts of Peace 1935-45* (Salisbury, 1987). See also A.Eden, *The Eden Memoirs, Facing the Dictators* (London, 1968)

²⁶ LNU Executive Committee Minutes, Special Meeting, 23 Sep 1938. BLPES, as cited in C.Lynch, *Appeasement. Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (New York, 1999) 121.

developed. Her commitment to collective security was as a 'pacifist',²⁷ that is to say she wanted peace, but not at any price, in contrast to the pacifist, absolutist view, which opposed all forcible resistance to aggression. The proponents of the pacifist movement were, in Rathbone's opinion, a 'queerly assorted group' whose political and religious rejection of collective security would, she feared, result in a major war.²⁸ Her vision of the route to peace included wholeheartedly supporting the LNU's promotion of progressive international disarmament as an element of collective security during the 1920s and up until 1933,²⁹ and she agreed, for a time at least, with the process of appeasement.³⁰

She certainly believed, naively as it turned out, that disarmament was possible and that it would result in an enduring world peace. This was a view that was endorsed during a visit she made to Berlin in the summer of 1929, in the brief period between gaining her seat in Parliament and the opening of the new session in the October.³¹ Although she was there primarily on official business, to lead the British delegation to the triennial conference of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, she made good use of her free time, sightseeing and socialising. She mixed with ordinary German people whom she found to be 'liberal, feminist, pacific and lavishly hospitable.'³² She was impressed by the palpable measure of goodwill towards England, and of the progress towards European pacification and prosperity that she identified.³³ Conversely, she was acutely aware of how inhibited the Italian delegates were, and of the control which Mussolini, the Italian fascist dictator, exerted over their every move.³⁴ Stocks expressed the view that, in 1929, Mussolini was not regarded as a world menace, and that Germany was, at that time, enjoying 'a passing prosperity on the crest of the inter-war boom which deflationary finance had denied

²⁷ Coined by A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers* (London, 1957) 51n as cited in Ceadel, 'Attitudes', 223.

²⁸ EFR expounded her view of 'The Pacifist' Way to Peace' in her book, *War Can be Averted*, 132-53.

²⁹ Stocks is quite clear in her assertion that in 1929 Rathbone was 'an ardent advocate of progressive international disarmament'. Stocks, *Rathbone*, 222. Yet Harrison maintains that Rathbone opposed disarmament. See Harrison, *Prudent*, 114.

³⁰ Thompson has described appeasement, up until the end of 1938, as suggesting accommodation, conciliation and the removal of just grievances. Only after this date did it carry the stigma of weakness, fear and retreat by diplomats. Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers*, 27.

³¹ I can find no reference to this visit in Pedersen's biography of Rathbone, but do not doubt the veracity of Stocks account.

³² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 130-31.

³³ This was largely the result of the Kellogg Peace Pact that had been followed, in 1929, by a new settlement of German reparations under the Young Plan. See Mowat, *Britain*, 372.

³⁴ For Mussolini see P. V. Cannistraro (ed.) *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy* (London, 1982).

to Great Britain'.³⁵ It was in fact the last occasion on which Rathbone made a relatively untroubled trip to Europe, and would no doubt have been recalled by her many times over the next decade when her illusions of peace were shattered, and she was absorbed in her work for Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe.

The false sense of security that this trip may have induced, and Rathbone's confidence in the possibility of universal harmony was shattered as a result of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in the winter of 1931, and advocacy of disarmament was replaced by pressure on the LN to adopt a tough foreign policy.³⁶ More than anything she was shocked by the response of the British government to this act of aggression, and it had a profound effect on her thoughts, actions and deeds. It precipitated what Stocks described as Rathbone's 'intellectual pilgrimage',³⁷ and was indeed a turning point in Rathbone's life. For not only did her views on the achievement of world peace undergo a process of re-evaluation, but she also became cynical and deeply critical of the government. Even though she found it very painful to accuse them of being cowardly and dishonourable in their foreign policy, and to blame politicians for the lack of understanding of cause and effect that they displayed, Rathbone was never afraid to speak her mind, especially when matters of principle were concerned. Thus she now embarked upon a multi-faceted campaign that greatly increased her political profile.

The action she pursued was typically relentless: at every available opportunity she put down questions on a wide range of armament-related topics, including savings to be made by disarmament,³⁸ the private manufacture of and trade in arms,³⁹ air limitation contention,⁴⁰ air defence,⁴¹ exports of materials used in the production of arms,⁴² arms exports,⁴³ and economic sanctions,⁴⁴ including discouraging British tourists from visiting Germany.⁴⁵ For example, on 27 June 1932, she raised the

³⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 131.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 222.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Hansard* HC, vol.268, col.1265, 13 July 1932; vol.273, cols.182-4, 13 Dec 1932; vol.274, col.1025, 15 Feb 1933; vol.275, col.159, 13 March 1933; vol.277, cols.515-6, 1 May 1933.

³⁹ See for example *Hansard* HC, vol.293, col.1300 & 1331 8 Nov 1934; vol.298, col.2126-8, 7 March 1935; vol.300, cols.796-7, 8 Apr 1935; vol.301, col. 689, 3 May 1935.

⁴⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol. 289, col.1434, 14 May 1934.

⁴¹ *Hansard* HC, vol.299, col.23, 11 March 1935.

⁴² *Hansard* HC, vol.283 col.671-2, 28 Nov 1933.

⁴³ *Hansard* HC, vol.304, cols.734, 15 July 1935.

⁴⁴ *Hansard* HC, vol.289, cols.2074-82, 18 May 1934; vol.299, col.7-8, 11 March 1935; vol.304, col.2306, 29 July 1935.

⁴⁵ Letter of EFR to the Editor, 11 Aug 1933, RP XIV 2.6 (5).

question of HM's government policy towards disarmament and how it differed from President Hoover's proposals, only to be told, by Sir John Simon, that the government was aware of the importance of the proposals and that they were receiving immediate consideration.⁴⁶ Still pursuing the matter, she prepared an address for the 12 July 1932, only to be refused leave to give it by the Speaker and Deputy-Speaker,⁴⁷ on the grounds that the Geneva Conference was apparently not for discussion. This infuriated her for she protested that the Lord President of the Council had evidently proposed a debate on the subject some days previously.⁴⁸ Her anger was fuelled further when Mr Mander, MP for East Wolverhampton, was allowed to discuss Geneva unhindered. Undaunted, she proceeded to compare the Geneva conference to a game of chess, whereas Lausanne, which was being freely discussed, was more like a game of football.⁴⁹ Rathbone's major concern was not that the Government had failed to treat seriously the matter of multilateral disarmament, but rather the way in which they failed to regard armaments as potential instruments of deterrence to aggressors.⁵⁰ What, she asked, was the use of agreeing in principle with US ideas concerning the reduction in the numbers of capital ships, if the Government proceeded to disagree with the practical application of those plans in nearly every particular?⁵¹ Outside of the House she wrote letters to the press, canvassed colleagues and lent support to many committees. The Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon's attitude towards Japanese aggression, and the apparent ease with which Britain could retreat from the League Covenant seriously disturbed Rathbone. Her distrust of the government's foreign policy grew⁵² for they seemed bent on ignoring what seemed obvious to her, that an accumulation of similar retreats would result in international anarchy.

The opportunity for voicing her very real concerns came on 13 April 1933, during the course of the Foreign Affairs Debate on the Easter Adjournment. She delivered an awesome and prophetic speech, for which she was long remembered,

⁴⁶ *Hansard* HC, vol. 267, cols. 1459-60, 27 June 1932.

⁴⁷ Stocks was somewhat generous as she maintained that Rathbone merely 'failed to catch the Speaker's eye'. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 223.

⁴⁸ *Hansard* HC, vol. 268, col. 1252, 12 July 1932.

⁴⁹ The Lausanne Conference, which ended on 9 July 1932, was convened to discuss the payment of reparations.

⁵⁰ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 223.

⁵¹ *Hansard* HC, vol. 268, col. 1252, 12 July 1932. RP XIV 3 (8).

⁵² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 223.

in which she vociferously denounced the newly elected German Chancellor, warning the House of Commons of:

the re-emergence of an evil spirit (in Germany) which bodes very ill for the peace and freedom of the world.⁵³

She also used this speech to urge the Government, and the League of Nations, to satisfy themselves, and reassure the country, that Germany was not violating Article 162 of the Treaty of Versailles which forbade or limited them rearming.⁵⁴ Nothing could be worse than sanctioning any measure of German rearmament, for, as she wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* shortly afterwards, she believed that ‘the chief and ultimate aim of Nazi policy is revenge and military aggrandisement abroad.’⁵⁵ The unanimous all-party support which her Parliamentary speech had attracted was regrettably short-lived, and it was not long before she became aggrieved that many Ministers of State were prepared to grant concessions to Hitler’s regime, thus giving the dictatorship a foothold in Europe. To her astonishment they were also quite happy to continue entertaining the German ambassador at Carlton House Terrace, London.⁵⁶

III

By 1934, with the hopes of disarmament evidently failing, Rathbone turned her attention towards actively promoting the application of carefully planned and supervised economic sanctions as an additional aspect of collective security. She was on her feet again during the Whitsuntide Debate on Foreign Affairs on 18 May 1934, urging Parliament and the press to treat the matter of economic sanctions seriously. These were, as she reminded her audience, represented in Article 16 of the League Covenant, a fact that seemed to be overlooked. She considered sanctions and disarmament to be ‘kindred subjects’ and saw the former to be a potential method of dealing with ‘would-be aggressors or violators of international covenants.’⁵⁷ In

⁵³ *Hansard* HC, vol.276, col.2761, 13 Apr 1933.

⁵⁴ *Hansard* HC, vol.276, col.2763, 13 Apr 1933. In the same debate, Brigadier-General Spiers, stated that Germany had already violated the terms of the Treaty by making enormous additions to their police forces. *Hansard* HC, vol.276, col.2778, 13 Apr 1933.

⁵⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 224 and EFR, ‘Democracy’s Fight for Life’, Letter to the Editor, *Manchester Guardian*, 15 May 1933.

⁵⁶ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 226.

⁵⁷ EFR, Draft of House of Commons speech on economic sanctions, not given. 13 July 1934, RP XIV 3 (17).

view of the failure of the Disarmament Conference, the failure of the LN in the Sino-Manchurian dispute and the move towards rearmament and isolationism, she urged government to adopt a set of 'articulated measures' before the ultimate recourse was made to war.⁵⁸ As to the viability of such measures, she invoked the authority of Sir Arthur Salter, the chief financial adviser to the LN, who, in 1919, had stated that careful preparation was needed in advance of the introduction of sanctions if they were to work.⁵⁹ She foresaw the impending collapse of the Disarmament Conference having a most negative effect on public opinion, and considered preparation for the introduction of economic sanctions as the next logical step in the peacekeeping programme. But the Government, and Stanley Baldwin in particular, took a different view. Baldwin told the Commons that 'there was no such thing as a sanction that will work that does not mean war.'⁶⁰

Like a dog with a bone, Rathbone continued to harangue government in Parliament,⁶¹ to plan economic sanctions alongside supporting the Peace Ballot campaign, as well as writing letters to the press.⁶² Anthony Eden would not accept her premise that 'other forms of collective security' could not be relied upon, only going as far as conceding that sanctions had been considered.⁶³ On the matter of publicity, she confided in Viscount Cecil that, despite the extensive LNU network and the immense output of literature she thought that the executive:

were not always in touch with the value of general propaganda, and consequently when the time comes for putting pressure on governments the pressure has still to be created.⁶⁴

What other reason could there be she asked for the government's 'apparent ignoring of the economic sanctions problem compared with the volume of popular support for the Air Force idea' that Lord Davies was boosting?⁶⁵

⁵⁸ *Hansard* HC, vol.289, cols.2078-82, 18 May 1934. Also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 228.

⁵⁹ *Hansard* HC, vol.289, cols.2080, 18 May 1934.

⁶⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol. 289, col. 2139, 18 May 1934.

⁶¹ EFR, Speech on economic sanctions written for Committee of Supply, Foreign Affairs, 13 July 1934. RP XIV 3 (17). This speech was not given.

⁶² One such letter to the *Manchester Guardian* is referred to in Letter of Cecil to EFR, 27 Apr 1935, Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add MSS 51141, f.266. BL.

⁶³ *Hansard* HC, vol.299, cols.7-8, 11 March 1935.

⁶⁴ Letter of EFR to Cecil, 3 May 1935, Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Add MSS 51141, f.267/8. BL.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* David Davies, later Lord Davies of Llandinam, was a committed sanctionist and advocated that the LN be equipped with an international air police force. See M.Ceadel, 'The Peace Movement between the wars: problems of definition', in R.Taylor & N.Young (eds.) *Campaigns for Peace: British Peace movements in the twentieth century* (Manchester, 1987) 73-99.

The future of Abyssinia soon overtook other concerns, for whilst Hoare's famous, or as Rathbone called it, infamous declaration at Geneva on 11 September 1935 concerning the country's fate inspired her with great confidence, her optimism was short lived. Much to her horror, the Hoare-Laval plan to settle the war by the division of Abyssinia had the approval of the British cabinet.⁶⁶ With the country's fate still in the balance in April 1936, Rathbone's deeply ingrained sense of morality, her fear of war and her belief in the inherent powers of collective security were passionately expressed in the *Manchester Guardian*.⁶⁷ The LN was due to hold a vital meeting the following month and she believed this would be the last chance to save Abyssinia. She pleaded for Britain, and the Government, to face up to their responsibilities and to persist in efforts to avert abandonment of the country. Juxtaposed against this she articulated her sense of shame at 'the intolerable disgrace of betrayal', especially by Eden, who was still making idle promises and prevaricating about the imposition of sanctions.⁶⁸ In the meantime she had plenty of evidence of German rearmament, supplied by Churchill⁶⁹ and other informants,⁷⁰ which she broadcast in the press.⁷¹ And as part of a plan to maximise the Government's embarrassment over Abyssinia, she joined Sylvia Pankhurst's party in welcoming the exiled Emperor, Haile Selassie, to Britain in June 1936.⁷² Later on in the year she was urging Churchill to lead 'a really big campaign in favour of collective security' – he preferred the phrase 'combined defensive strength'⁷³ – certain that his qualities of leadership would be very influential.⁷⁴

The fate of Abyssinia, and the British government's subsequent abandonment of the country to Mussolini in April 1938,⁷⁵ had a profound effect on Rathbone's

⁶⁶ D. Birn, *The League of Nations Union 1918-1945* (Oxford, 1981) 162.

⁶⁷ Letters of EFR to the editor, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 March, 7 & 9 Apr 1936, 20. For replies see Letter of R. Toynbee, *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1936, 20 and Letter of EFR to Toynbee, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Apr 1936, 20. Letter of C. Padel, *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Apr 1936, 20. Letter of H. Sand, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Apr 1936, 20.

⁶⁸ Letter of EFR to the editor, *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Apr 1936, 20.

⁶⁹ Letter of EFR to Winston Churchill, 17 Apr 1936, CHAR/2/266/A. CAC. This correspondence, in which Gilbert erroneously describes Rathbone as a Labour MP, is referred to by Martin Gilbert in *M. Gilbert Winston S. Churchill Vol. 5, 1922-1939* (1976) 722.

⁷⁰ Letter of T. Plaut to EFR, 17 Apr 1936, CHAR/2/274/16-17. CAC.

⁷¹ EFR, 'British Public Opinion and the crisis', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 March 1936, 7.

⁷² *New Times and Ethiopia News*, 13 June 1936, as cited in M. Pugh, *The Pankhursts* (London, 2001) 439. Other members of the party included Philip Noel-Baker and Norman Angel. Rathbone later commented on the value of the paper as a 'very useful watchdog in the interests of Ethiopia.' *New Times and Ethiopia News*, 25 March 1944, as cited in Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, 463.

⁷³ Letter of Winston Churchill to Lady Houston, 18 Nov 1936. CHAR/2/260/115. CAC.

⁷⁴ Letter of EFR to Winston Churchill, 8 Nov 1936, CHAR/2/260/109-11. CAC.

⁷⁵ The country had been occupied since late 1936.

hitherto intense loyalty to, and national pride in Britain: tolerance and decency were characteristics that she ascribed to her country, and she expected the government to act honourably. Whether this was misplaced trust or naivety on her part, she was nevertheless shaken to the core, so much so that when the country's fate had been sealed, she was convinced that it:

was unlikely that anything could happen to make us feel more ashamed or more wounded in our racial pride than we did already. But we were mistaken; there was worse to follow.⁷⁶

Rathbone's choice of words are of interest, for there was a certain irony in her using a race discourse to articulate her sense of pride in national identity, for it suggests that she was not without racial prejudice, and nor was she totally immune to eugenicist ideology. And her prophecy that 'there was worse to follow'⁷⁷ was correct, for as Stocks later recalled, there was Spain.⁷⁸

IV

The Government adoption of, and adherence to, a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, was, as far as Rathbone was concerned, another example of Britain abdicating her moral responsibilities. The government line, that this was the only way to prevent the war in Spain becoming a general war, did not persuade her. Rather, she argued, it would be highly inadvisable to let Spain fall into Franco's, and by implication, Hitler and Mussolini's hands. Her view was that a general war was unlikely unless the two dictators had already decided on conflict, and were looking for an excuse. The other scenario was that if Franco's success was so important to Fascist dictators they would risk war rather than see him defeated.

At the heart of Rathbone's reaction to Britain's response to events in Spain was her profound belief in peace, liberty and democracy. Every action and statement she made on foreign policy was carefully considered and contributed to the pro-Republican, pro-collective security and anti-non-intervention campaign that sought to safeguard these fundamental rights.⁷⁹ Within the House, she took every opportunity of expressing her dismay at the way in which government was portraying the situation

⁷⁶ EFR, *War*, 42.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 233.

⁷⁹ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 279-80.

in Spain, and refusing to abandon non-intervention in favour of collective security.⁸⁰ Outside of the House her attack was multi-faceted. When the LNU General Council met in June 1937 Rathbone implored delegates to do more than pass a resolution on the Spanish situation, which had, by then, developed from a civil war into flagrant aggression and terrorism.⁸¹ There were also the numerous pro-Republican committees with which she became associated, including the Bristol Committee for Defence of Spanish Democracy⁸² of which she was a vice-president, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR) formed in November 1936 to co-ordinate the work of the many Aid Spain bodies,⁸³ and the National Committee of the Friends of Spain (NCFS). When the NCFS was wound up the Liberal MP, Wilfrid Roberts,⁸⁴ who later became honorary treasurer and a vice-president of Rathbone's refugee group, the NCRNT, set up the all-party Parliamentary Committee for Spain (PCS) in January 1937.⁸⁵ The function of the PCS was to prime MPs with information, and of the thirteen members, five significantly were women – Rathbone, Katherine, Duchess of Atholl, Megan Lloyd George, Edith Summerskill and Ellen Wilkinson.⁸⁶ An important platform was the Committee of Enquiry into Breaches of International Law Relating to the Intervention in Spain, set up by the Communist party in August 1936. The inclusion of Rathbone and Professor J.B.Trend, was a clever move on the part of the committee for both were Independent pro-Republicans, and added balance, weight and influence.⁸⁷ The members sought to change public opinion away from non-intervention by providing evidence from witnesses of the way in which the policy was severely disadvantaging the Republicans. One of these witnesses was Arthur Koestler, the Hungarian-born refugee who was working in Spain as a correspondent for the *London News Chronicle*,⁸⁸ and with whom Rathbone later worked on the refugee issue.

⁸⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol. 326, cols. 1896-1900, 19 July 1937; vol.337, cols.1371-6, 23 June 1938; vol.338, cols. 3015-21, 26 July 1938.

⁸¹ Report by L.Aldous, *Headway* (July 1937) 129.

⁸² RP XIV 2. 13 (7).

⁸³ Fyrth, *Signal*, 202. See also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 286-7, 295, 298-9, 330 for EFR's role.

⁸⁴ Liberal MP for North Cumberland, and the leading figure in the political and humanitarian campaign on behalf of the Republic, and of the NJC. See Buchanan, *Britain*, 85.

⁸⁵ S.Bruley 'Women Against War and Fascism. Communism, Feminism and the Peoples Front' in J. Fyrth (ed.) *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London, 1985) 145.

⁸⁶ Fyrth, *Signal*, 217.

⁸⁷ Buchanan, *Britain*, 27. Other members of the Committee were Lord Farringdon, John Jagger MP, Mr. Mallalieu and R.McKinnon Wood.

⁸⁸ For Koestler's role see D.Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (London, 1999) 118-35.

Beyond this political involvement, there was a far more personal and humanitarian aspect to Rathbone's involvement with Spain which involved her in the rescue of refugees, and which had important implications for her future campaigns on behalf of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Her abhorrence of hardship and cruelty had already been demonstrated in the work she had undertaken for women in India, Africa and Palestine, but now she was involved with the saving of lives, which she considered to be 'a labour of love.' She found it much more satisfying to be doing something constructive rather than 'hurling invective week by week against a wall of unresponsive Front-bench faces.'⁸⁹ A fact-finding tour of war-ravaged Spain in April 1937, in the company of her left-wing MP colleague, Ellen Wilkinson,⁹⁰ Atholl and Dame Rachel Crowdy,⁹¹ alerted Rathbone to the overwhelming Republican need for arms, equipment and medical supplies and she also saw the devastation caused by German planes.⁹² Her response was to become a member of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee,⁹³ and a sponsor, alongside the Duchess of Atholl, of the fund-raising International Brigades' Dependants and Wounded Aid Committee.⁹⁴

More specifically she became chairman of the British Committee for Refugees from Spain,⁹⁵ which brought her into working contact again with the Duchess of Atholl and Wilfrid Roberts on the Basque Children's Committee (BCC). The committee was set up in the spring of 1937 specifically to take responsibility for the care of children rescued from war-torn Spain, and was a cause that became very dear to Rathbone's heart.⁹⁶ The removal of some 4000 children from the combat zone in 1937 to the safety of Britain, albeit temporarily, was a logistical and political challenge which Rathbone and her colleagues worked tirelessly to achieve.⁹⁷ It was no easy task to persuade the government to allow this relatively small number

⁸⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 244.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 241.

⁹¹ Crowdy trained as a nurse, commanded VAD's in France and Belgium in World War 1 and was Head of Social Questions Section of the LN. Her long experience in the service of the League Secretariat at Geneva gave her expert insight into the problems affecting international relations. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 241 and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 285, for this visit.

⁹² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 242.

⁹³ Created in July 1936. For references to the membership see Fyrth, *Signal*, 46-7. For details of the committee see Buchanan, *Britain*, 101-09.

⁹⁴ Established in June 1937. See Buchanan, *Britain*, 142.

⁹⁵ This was a sub-committee set up by the NJC, to deal with International Brigaders who were held in camps in France. Wilfrid Roberts was the Honorary Secretary. See Fyrth, *Signal*, 297.

⁹⁶ D.Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (Reno, Nevada, 1984)

⁹⁷ For the evacuation of children see Fyrth, *Signal* and K.Myers, 'History, Migration and Childhood: Basque Refugee Children in 1930s Britain', *Family and Community History*, 3, 2 (Nov 2000) 147-57.

of refugees into the country,⁹⁸ and was only accomplished by the NJC promising to assume responsibility for their selection, care and evacuation.⁹⁹ There are direct comparisons here with the situation *vis-à-vis* the limited numbers of Jewish refugees whom the government allowed to enter Britain from 1933 until the outbreak of the Second World War. For during that time the Jewish refugee organisations assumed total financial responsibility for such people, ensuring their safety whilst avoiding any drain on the public purse.

The full story of the evacuation of children from the Basque country is beyond the scope of this thesis, but what was significant from Rathbone's point of view were the implications that the campaign had for her later refugee work. These were two-fold. She learnt the value of intense public pressure and of imaginative and brave individuals who would stop at nothing to achieve their goal of rescuing people from war torn countries. Pedersen has also stated that Rathbone discovered that even though the British public might have appeared reluctant to welcome refugees into the country, they were magnanimous in their generosity once they had arrived.¹⁰⁰ This may well have been the case in respect of children from Spain, whose stay was, from the outset, intended to be limited,¹⁰¹ and was also valid in regard to Jewish children who arrived on the *Kindertransport* in 1938 and 1939.¹⁰² However some caution should be exercised when considered in regard to adult Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe, for their 'foreignness' made them far less attractive and appealing, and they were perceived in some circles to pose a threat to the fabric of society.

Rathbone's disenchantment with the British government's negative attitude towards humanitarian relief continued, and was not enhanced by the change in leadership when Neville Chamberlain replaced Baldwin as Prime Minister on 31 May 1937. Her opinion of Chamberlain was partly informed by his physical appearance:

⁹⁸ Pedersen has noted, that in comparison at this time France was supporting somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 Spanish refugees. See Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 432, f.71.

⁹⁹ For these negotiations see PRO FO 371/21370/W9147, W9446, W9496 and W9705.

¹⁰⁰ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 287.

¹⁰¹ Only half the children were repatriated by 1939, and 100s remained in Britain permanently. For arguments over repatriation in 1937 & 1939 see MSS/308/3/RO/46-7 and 308/3/FO 11,13,20,24,29,35. Roberts Papers, MRC.

¹⁰² By August 1939, 9354 children, the majority of whom were Jewish, had been rescued from Germany on *Kindertransports*, 7800 of them arriving in the United Kingdom between Jan and Aug of that year. *Movement for the Care of Children from Germany: First Annual Report, 1938-1939*, PRO HO 213/302. The literature on *Kindertransport* is forever expanding but for a good overview see M.J Harris & D.Oppenheimer (eds.) *Into the Arms of Strangers. Stories of the Kindertransport* (London, 2000).

her comments about the shape of his head, 'narrow, suggesting a narrow mind' were a reminder of her tenuous involvement with the eugenics movement and race science, and she was convinced that this change in leadership would have disastrous results.¹⁰³ He was certainly not the strong leader whom she had hoped for, nor did she anticipate that he would be able to avert war.¹⁰⁴

More refugee-related appeals followed, this time in respect of naval activities and the government refusal to protect ships taking refugees from Bilbao in May 1937. She made an appeal to Clement Attlee, the Leader of the Opposition, to debate the situation in the House,¹⁰⁵ and sent a stream of condemnatory letters to Eden, Cranborne and Duff Cooper.¹⁰⁶ She was subsequently incensed by Sir Duff Cooper's statement in the Commons on 22 July 1937, and his refusal to countenance rescuing or feeding starving women and children in Northern Spain. Either action would, he claimed, be military assistance and breach non-intervention.¹⁰⁷ How, she later wrote to Lord Lytton in a passionate display of humanity, could it be a breach of non-intervention or neutrality for British merchant or war ships 'to pick up drowning men, women or children, or those clinging to rafts, even within territorial waters?'¹⁰⁸

An ongoing aspect of the Spanish conflict that concerned Rathbone was the paucity of published information broadcast in Britain even in 'the Liberal and Labour Press.'¹⁰⁹ She accepted that the situation was partly due to the lack of press correspondents in Spain, and also to the loss of public interest since the Bilbao crisis, and she made strenuous efforts to right the situation. Of her sources in Spain, Commander Pursey, the NJCSR representative in Santander,¹¹⁰ kept her well informed of events,¹¹¹ especially during July 1937, when the farce of the naval blockade of Bilbao was being played out.¹¹² The systematic bombing of Basque towns by German aircraft and the evidence of Italian troops in Spain prompted her to

¹⁰³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 244.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 246.

¹⁰⁵ RP XIV 2. 13 (26).

¹⁰⁶ Letters of EFR to Eden, Lord Cranborne and Duff Cooper, 7 July 1937. PRO/FO371/23.

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Fyrth, *Signal*, 243.

¹⁰⁸ Letter of EFR to Lytton, 27 Oct 1937. RP XIV 2.13 (33). Duff Cooper's contentions were challenged on grounds provided by the legal firm, Elwell and Binford Hole, who said he had been poorly advised. He was the only Cabinet Minister to resign over Munich. RP XIV 2.13 (34).

¹⁰⁹ Letter of EFR to unknown recipient, 22 July 1937. RP XIV 2. 11 (8).

¹¹⁰ Fyrth, *Signal*, 163.

¹¹¹ See collection of letters and telegrams between Rathbone and Pursey in RP XIV 2. 11 (9-12), mostly dated July 1937.

¹¹² Buchanan, *Britain*, 58.

ask Eden, in the House, whether 'the Government would secure the appointment of an international commission to check on, and act a check on further breaches of non-intervention.'¹¹³ She made no bones about challenging Eden in the House over the Non-Intervention Agreement, although he thought it, and by implication the Committee, was a 'leaky dam', he maintained that 'Better a leaky dam than no dam at all'. As far as Rathbone was concerned the Committee was disastrously ineffective, and the Non-Intervention Agreement itself, an exercise in 'shutting the stable door after most of the horses had been stolen.'¹¹⁴ When she addressed the International Peace Conference (IPC) at Caxton Hall in October 1937 the government's defeatist attitude led her to describe their behaviour as 'ignoble at best'. By then her faith in the Peace Movement was severely diminished for, as she wrote, it was not 'that it has abandoned hope, but that it behaves as though it had years ahead of it to realise its hope.'¹¹⁵

By 1938 the Spanish conflict had deteriorated and the insurgent forces were on the verge of entering Barcelona, when Rathbone received information from the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction,¹¹⁶ and the Dean of Canterbury, confirming that German bombers were being sent out to Spain.¹¹⁷ This precipitated a series of parliamentary questions which reflected her concern about the implications this would have for the refugee mission, due to the bombing of British ships.¹¹⁸ She was incensed when it became clear that, despite the gravity of the situation, and the loss of life,¹¹⁹ the government were doing nothing other than 'send verbal protests of the kind that General Franco invariably disregards.'¹²⁰ Personally she had absolutely no faith in anything that Franco said,¹²¹ and had no hesitation in making her views known *via* the press, in published letters to the editors of a number of papers, including the *Manchester Guardian*, *Birmingham Post*, *Yorkshire Post*¹²² and

¹¹³ *Hansard* HC, vol.324, col.991, 2 June 1937.

¹¹⁴ EFR, *War*, 56.

¹¹⁵ Notes for speech, 22 Oct 1937, RP XIV 3 (43).

¹¹⁶ Letter dated 4 Apr 1938. RP XIV 2. 13 (37). The Council had a Parliamentary Group to which Rathbone belonged.

¹¹⁷ See Letter of Dean of Canterbury to EFR, 14 Apr 1938, RP XIV 2. 13 (38).

¹¹⁸ *Hansard* HC vol.332, cols. 1953-7, 9 March 1938. *Hansard* HC, vol.347, col.1616, 18 May 1938.

¹¹⁹ The bombing killed twenty seven men, injured thirty seven and caused great damage to the ships.

¹²⁰ EFR, 'British Shipping and the Spanish War. The Government's attitude', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 May 1938, 5.

¹²¹ Letter of EFR to R.A.Butler, 16 Apr 1938, RP XIV 2. 13 (38).

¹²² EFR, 'The Bombing of British Ships. Does the government intend to act?' *Manchester Guardian*, 14 June 1938, 22; *Birmingham Post*, 14 June 1938, 5; *Yorkshire Post*, 14 June 1938, 8.

Liverpool Daily Post.¹²³ She also urged the National Union of Seamen to organise a delegation to the Prime Minister.¹²⁴

The refugee issue in Spain was still burning in 1939, with Rathbone pressing the government to send more food, medical and nursing personnel, medicine and camp equipment – and asking why it was that the Red Cross had not acted to help with the ‘deplorable lack of medical necessities and personnel.’¹²⁵ Her loss of faith in the ability of the medical agency was obvious when she asked ‘What is the Red Cross for if it is never on the spot?’¹²⁶ Where the welfare of Spanish refugees was concerned, secrecy was sometimes of paramount importance.¹²⁷ As late as 1941, whilst deeply immersed in the Jewish refugee crisis, she sought the help of R.A. Butler, then Parliamentary under Secretary at the Foreign Office, to ensure the safety of 140 of the most important Republican figures who had escaped from Spain. £600 in sterling was needed to secure their admission to Argentina, but Foreign Office support was required before the money could be released from NJCSR funds.¹²⁸

V

Rathbone was, as Stocks remarked, ‘living night and day’ with foreign affairs for, alongside Spain there was the grave political situation unfolding in Eastern Europe in late 1936, the outcome of which was to profoundly effect Rathbone’s future campaigning.¹²⁹ The Little Entente, comprising the small countries of Rumania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, faced a potential threat of invasion by Germany, but had inadequate defences to deal with such incursions, and Rathbone believed that Czechoslovakia would be the first victims. The fact that even intelligent people in Britain knew so little about the country and its precarious geopolitical position

¹²³ EFR, ‘British Shipping and the Spanish War. The Government’s attitude’, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 May 1938, 5 and EFR, ‘British Shipping and Spain. Miss Rathbone’s reply,’ 11 June 1938, 5.

¹²⁴ Letter of EFR to the National Union of Seamen, 14 June 1938, RP XIV 2. 14 (89).

¹²⁵ *Hansard* HC, vol.343, cols. 1347–9, 13 Feb 1939.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Rathbone involved herself campaigning on behalf of ninety-two International Brigaders incarcerated by Franco at St Pedro prison in Burgos in mid-1939. It is evident from her correspondence that the rescue of these men, who were Austrian, German, Czech and Sudeten refugees, was a significant issue. She was certain that unless Britain or France were willing to intervene, these men would be sent to Germany and to certain death, and enlisted the help of numerous influential people to help secure entry visas for them to Britain, albeit temporarily. Confusion over an apparent agreement by the Swedish government to grant visas to the Burgos prisoners, subsequently denied by the Swedes, resulted in deadlock by early July 1939, and increased the urgency of the men’s plight.

¹²⁸ Letter of R.A. Butler, 21 Jan 1941. RAB 912/51. Trinity College Library. Cambridge University.

¹²⁹ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 246.

shocked her,¹³⁰ precipitating a concerted effort on her part to raise public awareness and mobilise support for the country. To further this campaign, she joined Katherine, Duchess of Atholl¹³¹ and Lady Layton,¹³² on a three-week, Foreign Office approved but unofficial visit to the Balkans in February 1937.¹³³ The trip was gruelling, but successful in that the women met a wide section of the public as well as government officials in Prague, Budapest and Belgrade.¹³⁴ Rathbone made some interesting assessments of those she met, describing the British legations as 'very aloof from democratic sections of opinion' and the *Chargé d'affaires* in Prague 'completely pro-Henlein.'¹³⁵ More pertinent in view of her subsequent activities on behalf of Jewish refugees was her opinion of the British Minister in Bucharest, whom she described as 'strongly anti-Semite (sic)'¹³⁶ which did not bode well for Jews who were attempting to flee the country. It also highlighted Rathbone's own awareness of the prevailing negative attitude towards Jews, which she certainly did not share. On the contrary, she was full of admiration for them, and took great pleasure in a visit she made to the School for Jewish Girls run by a Christian Mission to the Jews in Bucarest (sic).¹³⁷ Miss Gedge, former warden of the University Settlement for Women at Bombay, was with her on this visit, and recalled how Rathbone spoke to the children at prayers and said 'what a pleasure it was to her to meet Rumanian Jews', adding that many of her best friends were Jewish.¹³⁸ The latter comment warrants brief attention, for it was so often by people who were making attacks on Jews or their behaviour, as a rider. But in Rathbone's case of course it was true.

Even more revealing were the comments she made in a letter sent to Miss Boyd, the school's headmistress, on her return home:

They (the pupils) will know that in our Parliament some of the most

¹³⁰ She reached this conclusion having addressed six meetings in late October 1936, attended by LNU members, university graduate etc. See Memo of E.Rathbone, 3 Nov 1936, Rathbone File, 910. BBC Written Archives Centre. There is a possibility, unconfirmed, but suggested in another memo in this file, that Wedgwood Benn gave a report on Czechoslovakia in Nov 1936.

¹³¹ J.Hetherington, *Katherine Atholl 1874-1960. Against the Tide* (Aberdeen, 1989) 180-2. See also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 238-9 and Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 283-5.

¹³² The archive for Rathbone's Balkan Tour in 1937 is contained in RP XIV 2.9 (1-56). Layton's husband, Lord Layton (1884-1966) was an economist, editor of *The Economist* from 1922-38, and proprietor of the *News Chronicle*.

¹³³ RP XIV 2.9 (22).

¹³⁴ RP XIV 2.9 (19).

¹³⁵ Henlein was the self-appointed leader of the Sudeten-Deutsch Partei. See EFR, *War*, 94-7.

¹³⁶ Letter of EFR to Winston Churchill, 18 Apr 1938, CHAR/2/374/66. CAC.

¹³⁷ Letter of EFR to Miss Boyd, 3 March 1937. RP XIV 2.9 (44).

¹³⁸ Note of Miss Evelyn Gedge, 13 Feb 1937. RP XIV 2.9 (31).

honoured and useful members belong to the Jewish community, which also includes some of my most intimate friends. But I feel that my little visit to your school helped to bring home to me how much the presence of members of the Jewish community in every country, makes a link which should help to bind these countries together and is a constant reminder of all we owe the Jewish race.¹³⁹

It is surprising, given the significance of this letter in terms of Rathbone's opinion of Jews and her future commitment to saving them from Nazi persecution, that there does not appear to be any reference to it in Pedersen's biography of her. In Rathbone's view, articulated in 1945, but equally valid in 1937, the debt that society owed the Jews extended from providing the basis of Christianity through their contributions to medicine, literature and philosophy, all which were of incalculable value to mankind.¹⁴⁰ Nor was it entirely surprising that she should admit to having Jews amongst her most intimate friends¹⁴¹ for she had a strong identification with them, through familiar biblical connections and similarities in religion and culture, and she much admired their values and ethics.¹⁴² Nor was this the first time that Rathbone had paid tribute to the Jews: besides her passionate and prophetic speech in the House of Commons in 1933, when Hitler came to power,¹⁴³ she had reiterated her praise when she visited Palestine in 1934.¹⁴⁴ Such overt empathy cannot be disassociated from her admiration of and affiliation to Zionism, which was also articulated in 1934, nor, more importantly, from her subsequent humanitarian work for Jewish refugees fleeing Fascist and Nazi Europe.¹⁴⁵

The most significant result of Rathbone's visit to the Balkans was to confirm her worst fear, that Czechoslovakia was in imminent danger of a German attack, and that the resulting conflict would be 'another Spain.'¹⁴⁶ Thus she was eager to put her signature on a letter to *The Times* on 10 March 1937, in which Germany's propaganda campaign against Czechoslovakia was denounced. Besides this, she included

¹³⁹ Letter of EFR to Miss Boyd, 3 March 1937. RP XIV 2. 9 (44).

¹⁴⁰ *Hansard HC*, vol.413, cols.364-5. 20 Aug 1945.

¹⁴¹ Two such friends were Eva Hubback and Victor Gollancz. For a biography of Hubback see D.Hopkinson, *Family Inheritance. A Life of Eva Hubback* (1954). See also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 457. For Gollancz see Edwards, *Gollancz*. She would have had friends amongst the wider Jewish community through her connections with the BDBJ. Jewish MPs included Sidney Silverman, Leslie Hore-Belisha, and Daniel Lipson.

¹⁴² Stocks, *Rathbone*, 208 and Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 6.

¹⁴³ *Hansard HC*, vol.276, cols.2761, 2763. 13 Apr 1933.

¹⁴⁴ Report of the General Meeting of the Union of Jewish Women, 19 Feb 1934. UJW Papers, MS 129/ AJ161/16/4. USL.

¹⁴⁵ This is discussed in Chapter Four, 'Eleanor Rathbone and humanitarian causes in Palestine'.

warnings about the dangers of the Fascist powers in every speech she gave.¹⁴⁷ Nor was it surprising that she should agree, in January 1937, to become a member of the Committee For Intellectual Liberty (CIL) a pressure group formed to counter the fascist threat.¹⁴⁸

In notes she made for a speech at the IPC conference to be held at Caxton Hall, London on 22 October 1937 she warned that:

Unless some great change happens which at present there seems no sign, the other European democracies (excluding France) appear destined to fall, one by one, either as victims of armed aggression, or because they have not waited to be attacked but have put themselves under the sheltering wing of one or other of the great totalitarian powers.¹⁴⁹

As the downward spiral in foreign affairs continued into 1938, Rathbone presented her views on Eden's resignation as Foreign Secretary in an address to the Manchester Union Convocation. She was convinced that he was right to insist that formal talks should be preceded by some indication of Mussolini's good faith, and that Italy was a question of principle, not a matter of debate.¹⁵⁰ By way of support, which he greatly appreciated, she wrote to him on 24 February letting him know the extent to which her constituents backed him:

I have received more telegrams and letters in the time urging me to oppose the Government's policy and support you – and none in the contrary sense – than I have ever received on any one subject during the eight years I have been in Parliament, except in protest against the Hoare-Laval proposals.¹⁵¹

She warned the Left Book Club Protest Meeting held at Queen's Hall, London on 1 March 1938, that Hitler and Mussolini would take full advantage of Eden's resignation to disseminate the claim that they were responsible for dislodging a British Foreign Secretary – it would also confirm their impression that they could get

¹⁴⁶ WG/LON/4. William Gillies Papers. Labour History Archive, JRL.

¹⁴⁷ For example, *Hansard* HC, vol.321, cols.3119-22, 25 March 1937; EFR, Notes for Summer Adjournment Debate, 30 July 1937, RP XIV 3 (42). EFR, Notes for Debate on Foreign Affairs, 21 Dec 1937, RP XIV 3 (45).

¹⁴⁸ Letter of Hon. Sec to EFR, 9 Jan 1937. Add 9369, B1/90. CUL.

¹⁴⁹ EFR, Notes for speech at IPC conference, Caxton Hall, 22 Oct 1937, RP XIV 3 (43).

¹⁵⁰ Meeting of 25 Feb 1938, RP XIV 3 (47).

¹⁵¹ Letter of EFR to Eden, 24 Feb 1938 and reply of Eden to EFR, 2 March 1938. RP 2002 Accession (being catalogued).



Great Britain to give them something for nothing.¹⁵² Germany marched into Austria on 12 March 1938, and Rathbone's attacks in the House continued unabated. Notes that she made for the Foreign Affairs Debate on 24 March 1938 confirmed her unequivocal condemnation of the government's 'litany of failure.' She wrote prophetically that 'Whatever form the subjugation of Czechoslovakia takes it will lead to hegemony of Germany over Europe.'¹⁵³ In speeches made to various LNU and IPC meetings, she described April 1938 as 'the blackest month since 1914.'¹⁵⁴ Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, was still pursuing a policy of appeasement with Hitler, and when the House adjourned for the Summer Vacation in July 1938, Rathbone gave a lengthy and carefully considered view of the dire state of foreign affairs. There were, in her view:

no signs of real appeasement. After every fresh concession the arrogance of the aggressive powers becomes more marked and more openly expressed... We go away in deep anxiety, wondering how many passes the Prime Minister will have sold before we return.¹⁵⁵

And days before the Munich agreement was signed on 29 September, sealing Czechoslovakia's fate, she declared at a meeting of the Cambridge Peace Council that:

there (must) be no more concessions... Hitler's terms are not only of a bully, but a sadist who is determined to torture those he has vanquished.¹⁵⁶

Rathbone most definitely did not breathe a sigh of relief after Munich, for she knew instinctively that the agreement only offered a temporary respite from war, and had not averted it. Appeasement was in her opinion, 'a clever plan of selling your friends to buy off your enemies – which has the danger that a time comes when you have no friends left, and then you find you need them, and then it is too late to buy

¹⁵² Meeting held 1 March 1938. RP XIV 3 (49).

¹⁵³ RP XIV 3 (51).

¹⁵⁴ LNU meetings Warrington and Chester. IPC meeting Leeds. RP XIV 3 (53).

¹⁵⁵ EFR, Notes for Foreign Affairs Debate, 26 July 1938. RP XIV 3 (56). Also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 246-7.

¹⁵⁶ EFR, Notes for speech, 26 Sept 1938. RP XIV 3 (57).

them back.¹⁵⁷ Whilst on 30 September 1938 Chamberlain was hailed in London as 'the angel of peace with honour,'¹⁵⁸ Rathbone later spoke of the 'angel of death.'¹⁵⁹

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate the significance of the inter-war period on Rathbone's activities and to examine the way in which world events shaped her career. It has also demonstrated the breadth and depth of her involvement in international affairs and foreign policy, and shown how, latterly, these transcended home affairs and imperial responsibilities. It has also served to contextualise her campaigning work for refugees fleeing Nazi and Fascist terror in Europe, by providing an overview of world events prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

At a personal level it was a crucial phase in Rathbone's life, which makes it all the more surprising that so little attention has been paid by historians to her thoughts, actions and deeds during this time. Once again, this raises the question of feminist or gender interest, or disinterest in an area of Rathbone's life that has no obvious connection with women's rights, and where her commitments were not specifically gender orientated. As ever, at the heart of all Rathbone's activities was her fervent desire to speak out for and defend those who had no voice, regardless of creed, culture or religion. Philosophically she was a 'pacifist' so that when it became clear that collective security, in which she put so much faith as a means of averting war, was no longer a realistic aim, she was willing to modify her views and support a tough government stand against aggressors. This was also a period during which Rathbone's patriotism and pride in Britain were severely tested, bringing her into direct conflict with the government. The global events outlined in this chapter forced her to conclude that they had dealt with foreign policy matters - Japan, Italy, Abyssinia, Austria, and Czechoslovakia - in a cowardly and dishonourable way. She did not reach this opinion in haste, but suffered much soul searching and anguish in the process, but it hardened her indomitable resolve to right the wrongs of the world. The failure of Britain to live

¹⁵⁷ Address of EFR to the University of Manchester graduates, 24 Feb 1939, and 'A common front would save the day', *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Feb 1939, 18.

¹⁵⁸ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 259.

¹⁵⁹ EFR, Notes for meetings on 1,2 & 3 Apr 1939. RP XIV 3 (53).

up to the ideals of honour which she so valued and which she ascribed to her country was a huge blow to her. Although Alberti claims that:

her shame for her own country was transformed after 1939 into a passionate moral pride, declaring 'Britain has expiated her sin'¹⁶⁰

this statement fails to take account of Rathbone's disillusionment with government over its attitude towards refugees fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany from 1933 onwards.

The majority of the refugees whose cause she was to champion were Jews, her guiding principle, ingrained through her upbringing and university education, was the duty of personal service. Her opinion of the Jewish race developed during this time, and although her trip to Palestine in 1933 confirmed her as a Gentile Zionist, further encounters in Prague in 1939 reaffirmed her admiration for the Jewish race. By March 1939 Rathbone was overwhelmed with 'the mass of urgent work arising out of recent events.' In her annual address to her constituents, she confirmed that:

the League as an instrument of collective security has been shelved: even its humanitarian activities curtailed.¹⁶¹

Conversely, her humanitarian activities were accelerating at an unprecedented rate, for as the following chapters will show, in respect of her work for refugees, these were to consume her for the rest of her life.

¹⁶⁰ See J. Alberti, *Eleanor Rathbone* (1996) 130.

¹⁶¹ EFR, Letter to the Graduate Electors of the Combined English Universities, March 1939. RP XIV 3 (3).

PART THREE

Refugee Work

CHAPTER SIX

Eleanor Rathbone and the refugees, 1933-41

Overview

The emphasis of this chapter is upon Rathbone's work for refugees, especially Jews, fleeing Nazi Europe, the period covered extending from 1933 until the end of 1941. This phase was remarkable in two respects: first it marked a shift in the focus of her earlier campaigning, and moved her away from domestic social and welfare issues, consolidating her involvement with foreign affairs, as discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis. Her commitment to the twin aims of welfare and rescue of refugees became of paramount importance as Britain moved closer to war, with the two often running concurrently. Central to her humanitarian activism was her ideological belief in national and personal responsibility, juxtaposed against a growing commitment to Zionism, Jews and the Jewish cause, all themes that will be explored throughout this chapter. But it was also notable that the end stage, when rescue became the focus of Rathbone's campaign, coincided with a change in Nazi policy, for during the latter part of 1941 emigration as a solution to the 'Jewish question' was halted, and an exterminatory programme fully implemented.¹

In the first instance an overview of the contemporary domestic and international political situation will be provided to contextualise Rathbone's activities. The body of the chapter will explore a number of specific and interrelated themes. These will include her public response to Hitler's accession to power in Germany in 1933, and her prescience concerning the threat this posed to world peace and, more specifically, the survival of Europe's Jews. Consideration will be given to her earliest campaign to aid the rescue of Jewish refugees, in this instance from Czechoslovakia following the Munich settlement of September 1938. This will be undertaken alongside a review of her political engagement with government officials over the so-called Czech loan. Her perspective on the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR) will also be examined. Special attention will be paid to the establishment and work of the all-party Parliamentary Committee on Refugees (PCR), founded by

¹ For the most recent study of this phase see C. Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution: the Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 - March 1942* (Lincoln & Jerusalem, 2004).

Rathbone in December 1938, and to her role within it. The impact of internment policies on Rathbone's humanitarian work from 1940 will be examined, and a number of case studies will be included, in an appendix, to demonstrate the extent of her personal engagement with this issue.²

Reference will be made to the small coterie of refugee activists who supported her, including the Labour MP, Josiah Wedgwood,³ the Conservative MP, Victor Cazalet,⁴ and the National Labour MP, writer and journalist, Harold Nicolson.⁵ Alongside this, the relationship between Rathbone and Home and Foreign Office officials will be examined, and the way in which their responses affected her work will be evaluated.

I

From the moment that Hitler came into power in 1933, it became apparent to many people that antisemitism was to be a major theme of Nazi policy.⁶ Cumulative and increasingly draconian legislation and strategies intended to disenfranchise and dispossess Jews were implemented, and many perceptive German Jews who feared for their future began to seek safe havens abroad, recognising that emigration offered the best chance of survival.⁷ But gaining entry to other countries, and specifically to Britain, proved far more difficult than many believed possible, for in 1933 Britain did not have a formal refugee policy. What it did have was a continuing aliens policy through the instrument of the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act of 1919. Alien immigration was severely restricted and there were sweeping powers in place that provided for deportation. The act had also abolished all rights of appeal to the Immigration Boards so that no trace of legal protection for refugees remained on the statute book. The possibility of an influx of refugees presented the government with

² Case studies of Alfred Richard Weyl, Gerasimos Stephanotos, Feiwei Willner and Minna Specht are to be found in Appendix One.

³ For an assessment of Wedgwood's 'rescue' role see Cesarani, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 33-4.

⁴ Cesarani 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 37-8. For Cazalet's life see R.R. James, *Victor Cazalet. A Portrait* (1976).

⁵ For Nicolson's life see J. Lees-Milne, *Harold Nicolson. A Biography*, vol.1, 1886-1929 (1980); vol.2, 1930-1978 (London, 1981), N. Nicolson (ed.) *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters 1930 - 1939* (London, 1966); 1939 - 1945 (London, 1967) and for an overview of his refugee work see Cesarani, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 41-3.

⁶ S. Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews. The Years of Persecution 1933-39* (London, 1997).

⁷ For this period of Nazi history see M. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (London, 1987) There were some Jews who had already seen the writing on the wall and either left Germany before 1933, or, like Albert Einstein, decided not to return there from elsewhere in Europe. See Friedlander, *Nazi Germany*.

an unwelcome challenge that soon left them no option but to reluctantly place immigration policy and procedures on the political agenda.⁸

Following the *Anschluss* in March 1938,⁹ the situation in Greater Germany rapidly deteriorated, with Jews becoming the target of an overt reign of antisemitic violence, intimidation and humiliation intended to dehumanise them. Consequently, the refugee problem escalated exponentially, and in Britain the Home Office came under increasing pressure from activists to adopt a more humane and generous admissions policy. The Anglo-Jewish refugee organisations, which, in 1933, had given an unlimited guarantee of financial support for Jewish refugees fleeing Europe, announced that they would have to impose a selection process to conserve dwindling resources. Juxtaposed against this was the British government's response to their renewed fear of a flood of refugees. Hopeful immigrants had, from April 1938, to apply for an entry visa at the point of exit rather than entry, a change that was justified on the grounds that a pre-selection policy would save them the disappointment of being turned away on reaching Britain. But in reality the policy had more to do with controlling the quality of would-be entrants. It was also seen as a way of preventing anti-alien feeling at home by avoiding the admission of so-called 'unsuitable' refugees. Shifting the problem overseas did alleviate the pressure on Home Office officials at the ports of entry, where chaos was the norm. But conversely it precipitated an ever-increasing burden upon staff in London, who became inundated with pleading letters, referrals and personal visits from desperate relatives. Besides this, the Foreign Office had to handle the pandemonium created at consular offices in Germany and Austria by the overwhelming numbers of applications for visas.¹⁰

A further response from the British government was their contribution to the international debate on places of refuge and refugee policy, due to be discussed at the intergovernmental conference at Evian in July 1938.¹¹ An outcome of the conference was the establishment of the IGCR, 'for the purpose of facilitating the

⁸ For the most comprehensive and an incisive examination of the complexities and nuances of this situation see L.London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948. British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 2000) 16 ff.

⁹ The annexation of Austria, with its 180,000 Jews, became known as the *Anschluss*.

¹⁰ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 59-96.

¹¹ President Roosevelt called for the conference in March 1938.

emigration from Austria, and presumably from Germany, of political refugees.’¹² However, Louise London’s detailed examination of the IGCR has indicated that the impact on rescue was largely negative, and even undermined other initiatives to save refugees.¹³

The Munich Settlement in September 1938 created a new problem for the IGCR, for it now had to face the additional dilemma of huge numbers of people fleeing Czechoslovakia. The fear of a German invasion had already precipitated a flow of refugees from the Sudeten areas, and once the region was ceded to Germany the numbers fleeing to the provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia increased dramatically. The settlement included some complicated provision for refugees, ostensibly guaranteeing them a future in the dismembered Czechoslovakia. However, certain groups of people, notably Sudeten Germans, Communists and Jews, were afforded no such protection, and sought salvation from foreign governments. Britain’s response, which has been examined in detail by Louise London, was complicated: as a part of their responsibility for implementing the Munich Settlement, Britain was committed to ensuring that the rights of people in German controlled areas were upheld. In practice this meant choosing Czech nationality, living in Czech areas and having personal and property rights protected. Britain’s solution took the form of financial help, known as the Czech Loan, whereby the country agreed, in early October 1938, to make an early payment to the Czech government of £10 million, as ‘an advance... to meet urgent needs’ and for ‘submitting to the sacrifice demanded of her to save peace.’ £4 million of this was designated as a gift to aid the relief and resettlement of refugees within Czechoslovakia, and overseas.¹⁴

II

The refugee crisis gained even greater momentum after Kristallnacht, the pogrom against Jews that erupted throughout Germany and Austria on the nights of the 9th and 10th November 1938.¹⁵ Britain responded with outraged protests, and within days the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, told the Commons that the

¹² US Embassy, memo, 24 March 1938; Nobel to A. Shillito, 28 March 1938. PRO T 160/842/F13577/01/1.

¹³ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 91-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 145-6.

¹⁵ For an assessment of Kristallnacht see Friedlander, *Nazi Germany*.

government would be 'taking into consideration any possible way in which we can assist these people.'¹⁶ But it became evident, as Louise London has explained, that although action was seen as necessary, the government had no clear idea of what to do about Jews fleeing persecution.¹⁷ The full Cabinet discussed the so-called 'Jewish Problem' and the immediate need for large-scale refuge on 16 November 1938,¹⁸ precipitating various suggestions as to places of safety in British colonies. Countries mooted included Northern Rhodesia, British Guiana and Kenya, but very little came of these proposals.¹⁹ The Home Office continued to oppose the mass immigration of refugees, and maintained its policy of pre-selection, admission being linked to employment or re-emigration. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, warned the House of Commons of the dangers of allowing a 'stagnant pool' of refugees to grow in the United Kingdom.²⁰ Only in the case of children were entry restrictions eased considerably, and the admissions procedure streamlined, with Hoare agreeing that children could enter 'without the slow procedure of passports and visas.'²¹

As Germany stepped up the pressure on military preparations, it became clear that the Munich Settlement, ostensibly meant to maintain the peace, was worthless. Final proof came on 15 March 1939 when Hitler's troops seized Prague and occupied the rest of the Czech state.²² A flood of refugees from the Sudetenland, who had already fled to the unoccupied areas of Czechoslovakia, were now driven from this place of refuge by the advancing German army.²³ Finally, at the start of September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, forcing Britain to declare war. Persecuted Jews in Nazi Europe were certainly not a British wartime priority and this led to further changes in entry policy for refugees to the United Kingdom. First, any visas that had already been issued to enemy nationals were immediately cancelled, for, as Tony Kushner has explained, it was assumed that anyone emigrating from German-

¹⁶ *Hansard* HC, vol 341, col. 505, 14 Nov 1938.

¹⁷ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 100.

¹⁸ Cab. 55 (38) 5, 16 Nov 1938, PRO CAB 23/96.

¹⁹ For Guiana see *Hansard* HC, vol.346, col.1886, 3 May 1939.

²⁰ *Hansard*, HC, vol.342, col. 3082, 22 Dec 1938; vol.345, cols.2455-7, 3 Apr 1939.

²¹ Herbert Louis Samuel (1st Viscount Samuel) *Memoirs* (1945) 255. By August 1939, 9354 children, the majority of whom were Jewish, had been rescued from Germany on *Kindertransports*, 7800 of them arriving in the United Kingdom between January and August of that year. See *Movement for the Care of Children from Germany: First Annual Report, 1938-1939*, PRO HO 213/302. The literature on *Kindertransport* is forever expanding but for a good overview see M.J Harris & D.Oppenheimer (eds.) *Into the Arms of Strangers. Stories of the Kindertransport* (London, 2000).

²² R.Overy, *The Inter-War Crisis 1919-1939* (London, 1994) 88-9.

²³ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 155.

controlled lands would have needed Nazi permission to leave and therefore was automatically suspect.²⁴ Then, many refugees who had already settled into the country, and had already been subjected to the laborious pre-selection process, found themselves being encouraged by the Home Office to re-emigrate. The official excuse was that there were already far too many refugees in Britain, a situation that was complicated by the fact that the main Jewish organisations were no longer able to financially support them. In an extraordinary turn of events, Government ministers were even able to persuade the Home Office to provide subsidies to help Jews re-emigrate. This prompted Sir Alexander Maxwell, Parliamentary under-Secretary at the Home Office, to remark that it would:

reverse the historic practice by which governments have borrowed money from Jews and will introduce a new procedure by which the government will lend some money to the Jews!²⁵

A new, Home Office approved, non-sectarian body, the Central Committee for Refugees (CCR) was set up to distribute a monthly grant amongst the various organisations, but such was the desire of the Home Office to persuade as many Jews as possible to move elsewhere, that special subsidies, kept secret from the House of Commons, were made available to aid re-emigration and administration. Equally surreptitious was the extra funding loaned to the Jewish organisations by the Home Office in 1941.²⁶

III

By this stage in the war Rathbone was entrenched in her campaign to help refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe. The first indication of her concern for the future of European Jewry came in her statement in the House of Commons on 13 April 1933: this marked a turning point in her long career as a humanitarian activist, with the emphasis henceforth focused on domestic and then international refugee issues. As the first woman MP to speak out against Hitler's newly appointed regime, the

²⁴ T.Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination* (Oxford, 1994) 151.

²⁵ Memo from the Home Secretary, 22 Sep 1939. CAB 98/1, CRP (39) 17.

²⁶ Correspondence, Nov 1939 – Jan 1946, PRO T 161/997/S45629/1.

warnings she articulated were prophetic:

A spirit has come over Germany. One speaker called it a new spirit, but I would rather call it a re-emergence of an evil spirit which bodes very ill for the peace and freedom of the world... there is one dreadful fact beyond doubt, that is that the (Herr Hitler's [*sic*]) party... is now in uncontrolled power in Germany and is inflicting cruelties and crushing disabilities on large numbers of law-abiding peaceful citizens, whose only offence is that they belong to a particular race or religion or profess certain political beliefs... Herr Hitler and his colleagues have let the world see plainly their feelings which they cherish about questions of blood and race ...²⁷

Amongst the wider public, knowledge of the early atrocities aimed at German Jewry received fair coverage in papers such as *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. But as Rathbone observed in a letter to *The Manchester Guardian*, the paper that was particularly supportive of her views:

Unfortunately, everybody does not, although everybody should, read the 'Manchester Guardian'. The little that appears on the subject in most journals is insufficient to bring home to their readers the real significance of these events. The general public, jaded with horrors and pre-occupied with its own distresses, only knows vaguely that the German government is persecuting the German Jews feels sorry about it, and turns to its own affairs.²⁸

It was at about this same time that Rathbone became acquainted with the women's franchise issue in Palestine, and the threat it posed to Jewish women in particular, as discussed in a previous chapter. The connection between these events might, at first sight, seem tenuous, but Rathbone's introduction to Palestine fostered a deep and lasting respect for the Jews and to Zionism, which developed and endured to the end of her life. It could also be argued that her reputation as the 'MP for refugees' had as much to do with her admiration for the Jews as it did with her humanitarianism. Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than in a talk she gave to the Union of Jewish Women in February 1934, shortly before her first visit to Palestine, on the

²⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol.276, cols.2761, 2763. 13 Apr 1933.

²⁸ EFR, 'Democracy's Fight for Life' *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1933. RP XIV 2 (6).

subject of the German refugee problem. She spoke of:

The feeling of gratitude that we all owe to the Jewish people and the consequent desire to do reparation for the undeserved insult that they have suffered. All of us should understand what the world owes to Judaism.²⁹

Juxtaposed against this were the collective imperial responsibilities of Britain, and Rathbone's view that all subjects of the Empire were bound to resent 'the arrogant and wholly unjustified racial doctrine in which these persecutions have taken their origin.'³⁰

She was, at this time, deeply involved with the LNU and her active campaign for collective security, as discussed in the previous chapter. One aspect of this was to try and impose an economic and social boycott on Germany by vigorously discouraging her fellow countrymen from visiting there.³¹ This campaign was hampered by King Edward VIII's actions, for he was urging the British Legion to 'go to Germany and make friends with the Germans.'³² Ultimately she was unable to persuade any of the tourist agencies whom she regularly used, even the Jewish-owned Wayfarers, to stop promoting German tours.³³ Whilst they put business criteria before any moral responsibility, Rathbone took her own ethical stand and severed her connections with the company in protest. Within months, Rathbone was using the columns of *The Times* to urge British tourists not to travel to, or through, Germany, invoking the words of Sir Austen Chamberlain³⁴ during the recent Foreign Affairs Debate on the Easter Adjournment in support of her plea:

We stand for something in this country. Our traditions count, for our own people, for Europe and for the world. Europe is menaced

²⁹ Report of the General Meeting of the Union of Jewish Women, 19 Feb 1934. UJW Papers, MS 129/ AJ161/16/4. USL.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Reply of EFR to Robert Fenn, 29 Oct 1935, RP XIV 2.6 (11).

³² Letter of M. Franklin to EFR, 7 Feb 1936, RP XIV 2.6 (16). For the Duke's Nazi sympathies see F. Donaldson, *Edward VIII. A Biography of the Duke of Windsor*, (New York, 1974).

³³ Support for this came from F. Rodgers of the British Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council. See Letter of Rodgers to EFR, 5 Feb 1936, RP XIV 2.6 (16). Also Stocks, *Rathbone*, 227. The agencies included the Workers Travel Association, Cooks and the Wayfarers Travel Agency.

³⁴ As Foreign Secretary in Baldwin's second government from 1924-29, Chamberlain was involved with drawing up the Locarno Pact, which it was hoped would ensure peace.

and Germany is afflicted by this narrow, exclusive, aggressive spirit, by which it is a crime to be in favour of peace and a crime to be a Jew.³⁵

Such a boycott was, she believed, a tangible way by which ordinary citizens could demonstrate their abhorrence of the present German government, and of the country that she described as 'the leper camp of Europe, which healthy people avoid because they cannot separate the sound from the corrupted.'³⁶ Similarly, her belief that the Nazi government could be induced, through a boycott, 'to give up its persecutions of Jews, by convincing them that persecution does not pay' was, with hindsight, naïve on her part.³⁷

But her remarks also provided a very strong insight into her feelings of nationalism and of British national identity, of the 'good' traditions of being English *versus* the 'bad' character emerging from German society. Throughout her years of campaigning for refugees she retained a fundamental belief in the innate good within British society, invoking it whenever she could in support of rescue measures, always trusting others, especially those in government, to abide by the principles of responsible citizenship which she held so dearly.

IV

International affairs, as examined in earlier chapters, continued to engage Rathbone through the mid 1930s, notably the crisis in Abyssinia, the looming civil war in Spain and the mounting threat to Czechoslovakia. As far as refugees were concerned, the war in Spain involved her in the rescue of children from Bilbao, but it was not until May 1938, just weeks after the *Anschluss*, that the whole refugee issue came to a head. Rathbone's concern about the way in which the Home Office were handling these humanitarian matters led her to demand the creation of a more formal refugee policy-making machinery in Britain, what she described as a 'new thought-out and co-ordinated policy – national, imperial and international.'³⁸ The Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, gave her proposal short shrift, informing her that the government were satisfied with the current collaborative arrangement and were going

³⁵ Letter of EFR to the Editor, *The Times*, 11 Aug 1933, RP XIV 2.6 (5).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Notes by EFR on Commander Locker-Lampson's Letter, 6 Feb 1936. RP XIV 2.6 (12).

³⁸ EFR, 'Great Britain and the Refugees. The Government's Niggardly Policy.' *Manchester Guardian*, 23 May 1938, 16.

to rely upon the recently formed Co-ordinating Committee to produce constructive policy proposals.³⁹ This was hardly surprising for it absolved them of any responsibility, financial or otherwise, a situation that was reinforced at the Evian Conference in July 1938. Rathbone deplored Britain's uncompromising refusal:

to depart from or ask other States to depart from the fatal principle laid down at the Evian Conference... that whatever is done (by Britain) must be limited by the capacity of the voluntary organisations to initiate, finance and carry out schemes of long-term settlement.⁴⁰

Nor had she any doubt that a human tragedy would result from the Munich Settlement, signed on 29 September 1938. As the crisis in Czechoslovakia deepened, she convened a group of MP's who pledged to do their individual best on behalf of the country, and by the time the House resumed sitting in November 1938, the government had bowed to pressure, largely from the newly established, non-sectarian British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (BCRC)⁴¹ and agreed to grant a single quota of 350 special, limited-stay visas to 250 Sudeten Germans and 100 Old Reich refugees.⁴² But this meagre gesture left untold numbers of Czech refugees in danger of being driven back into enemy hands, and only hardened Rathbone's determination to try and save at least some of them.

One approach was to her friend, the Czech feminist Senator Frantiska Plaminkova, whom she hoped would be able to exert some pressure to stop the deportations of ethnic Germans. Had she given more careful consideration to the matter, Rathbone would surely not have written to Plaminkova in the way she did, for she was acutely aware of Britain's role in creating the crisis in Czechoslovakia⁴³

³⁹ *Hansard* HC, vol.336, cols.834-6, 23 May 1938. This committee was an umbrella organisation, set up, with Home Office encouragement, by the main refugee organisations. It provided a new vehicle for the articulation of grievances by refugee organisations. London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 67-8.

⁴⁰ EFR, 'A Personal View of the Refugee Problem', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 15 Apr 1939, 569.

⁴¹ The BCRC was formed in late October 1938 to handle the allocation of all funds raised at home as well as helping settle refugees who might arrive in the country. It was formally wound up in late July 1939 and its liabilities and assets transferred to the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. See PRO HO 294/39/50 and for the Trust Deed, PRO HO 213/397. See also London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 147-68.

⁴² Sir Walter Layton to Halifax, enclosing memo, 'Emigration of refugees from Czechoslovakia', 28 Oct 1938, PRO T160/1324/F13577/05/1.

⁴³ A feminist, Mme. Frantiska Plaminkova was a member of the Senate of the Czechoslovak Republic. She refused to leave Czechoslovakia and was amongst one of 5000 people arrested by the Gestapo in Prague in March 1939. She was later executed by the Nazis. See A. Bishop (ed.) *Chronicle of Friendship. Vera Brittain's Diary of the Thirties 1932-39* (London, 1986) 346. For earlier correspondence, in which Rathbone had written of the difficult task of making 'our public recognise their duty and responsibility towards Czechoslovakia – not easy as people know so little about the

Plaminkova did not mince her words, and severely reprimanded Rathbone, reminding her that it was England (sic) who had given the Czechoslovakian territories to Germany, Poland etc. and it was England (sic) who now, had a responsibility to help those who were deprived of their homes.⁴⁴ Rathbone could hardly disagree with these sentiments.

In the House of Commons she challenged what she saw as the unnecessary rigidity and torpidity of the Government in respect of immigration quotas, entry permits, financial aid and the Czech loan. Both Hoare and Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, stuck by the official line that a:

general principle in this country that the maintenance of refugees is a matter for voluntary contributions and is not an object to which it would be proper to appropriate public funds.⁴⁵

The government would only agree to make 'adequate provision in foreign exchange for all refugees from Czechoslovakia emigrating to other countries', but would not commit any financial provision to the cash-strapped voluntary organisations.⁴⁶ Nor did they intend the Czech loan to finance the settlement of refugees in Britain, but, as Louise London has pointed out, the money came to be seen as a means to this end.⁴⁷ There was also a plea from the Information Service of the International Bureau for the Right of Asylum and Aid to Political Refugees in Paris for visas to enable German and Austrian refugees, threatened with imminent expulsion, to reach safety.⁴⁸ Immediate evacuation, as she subsequently wrote, was urgent.⁴⁹

V

The establishment of the PCR, in November 1938, was in direct response to the refugee crisis, and its remit was to act as a pressure group to 'influence the Government and public opinion in favour of a generous yet carefully safeguarded

country' see Letter of EFR to Plaminkova, 5 March 1937. RP XIV 2.9 (37) and Plaminkova's reply, 23 March 1937, RP XIV 2.9 (38).

⁴⁴ Reply of Plaminkova to Rathbone, 28 Oct 1938. RP XIV 2.15 (5).

⁴⁵ *Hansard* HC, vol.340, cols.369-70, 380, 3 Nov 1938.

⁴⁶ *Hansard* HC, vol.342, cols. 2904-05, 21 Dec 1938.

⁴⁷ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 146.

⁴⁸ Information Service, no 38, Jan 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (6).

⁴⁹ EFR, 'Note on Situation in Prague', PCR, 20 Jan 1939. FO 371/24081 duplicated in HO 294/39.

refugee policy...'⁵⁰ Despite the official sounding title, the group was entirely voluntary, and included many of Rathbone's stalwart supporters amongst its members. For example, co-founders were the Labour MP for Gower, David Grenfell, her ally from the NJCSR, Sir Arthur Salter, Independent MP for the University of Oxford and her associate from the LNU,⁵¹ and her staunch supporter, Victor Cazalet, a member of her 1929 Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Crown Colonies.⁵² Cazalet, the appointed chairman, had come to admire Rathbone enormously, and was, like her, a Gentile Zionist.⁵³ He had been galvanised into action following a visit to Vienna in April 1938, where he witnessed the dire condition of the city's Jews.⁵⁴ Lord Marley and H.Graham White, MP for Birkenhead East, were appointed Vice-Chairmen, and Rathbone the Honorary Secretary.⁵⁵ Cazalet summed up Rathbone's pre-eminent role within the committee when he remarked that she was '... a saint for doing everything and paying for most things...'⁵⁶ By July 1939 the committee, which was meeting almost daily at this time,⁵⁷ comprised over 200 cross-party MPs.⁵⁸

Rathbone's commitment to the PCR was far from exclusive, for she had many other strings to her bow. Besides her parliamentary duties, she was involved with many other refugee-related organisations. These included her role as patron of the

⁵⁰ Letter of EFR to the Graduate Electors of the Combined English Universities, March 1939. RP XIV 3 (3).

⁵¹ Salter was Director of the Economic and Finance Section of the League of Nations, 1922-30.

⁵² Minutes of Refugee Committee, point 25, 28 Nov 1938. LNU5/53. BLPES. Blanche Dugdale referred to a meeting at the House of Commons on 6 Dec 1938 where 'Victor and Miss Rathbone were forming a Parliamentary Refugee Committee.' See N.Rose (ed.) *Baffy. The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale 1936-1947* (London, 1973) 117. Dugdale was a niece of Arthur James Balfour, and a close friend of Chaim Weizmann. She was a founding member of the LNU, and a Gentile Zionist.

⁵³ Cazalet, Diary Entry, no date, but late 1938. By courtesy of Sir Edward Cazalet.

⁵⁴ Cesarani 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 37-8.

⁵⁵ Minutes of Refugee Committee, 18 Jan 1939, LNU5/53. BLPES. *The Manchester Guardian* published a letter signed by EFR, Cazalet, Salter & Grenfell on 4 Jan 1939, in which they outlined the work of the PCR.

⁵⁶ Diary entry 14 Oct 1942, Cazalet Diary 1942. By courtesy of Sir Edward Cazalet. There were donations from individuals which helped supplement Rathbone's financing. A regular contributor from the outset was Sigmund Gestetner, a successful Jewish businessman and member of the Committee for Development of Refugee Industries. Correspondence relating to donations can be found in CBF Files, 113/3/44/56-7/100/106-7/110. Wiener Library. Also PCR Report up to March 1941. 24 March 1941, 3. MS 122, HLRO. Cazalet also wrote about a D.Wolf, 'a very rich Jew (in Holland) who is giving his money and time to our Refugee cause.' Cazalet Diary 1938, no date, but late 1938. By courtesy of Sir Edward Cazalet.

⁵⁷ This was according to Victor Cazalet. See Cazalet Diary 1938. No date, but late 1938. By courtesy of Sir Edward Cazalet.

⁵⁸ See Note submitted by the PCR, July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (20).

Youth Relief and Refugee Council,⁵⁹ and her membership of the Friendly (later Refugee) Aliens Protection Committee,⁶⁰ the Council of Aliens,⁶¹ the Committee for Development of Refugee Industries,⁶² the Central Committee on Refugees, which dispensed Government grants,⁶³ the Advisory Committee of the Czech Refugee Trust and the Advisory Council on Aliens.⁶⁴ That she was able to summon up the energy for all these commitments was a reflection of her deeply rooted need to 'do what could be done' to help others. Never had the need been greater, and there was an urgency about saving lives and ameliorating the harshness and injustice of internment policies that impelled her as never before. Her concern for the plight of refugees in Czechoslovakia was at the top of the PCR agenda in January 1939. The tone of the committee's ensuing campaign, which Rathbone spearheaded, was set out in her letter to *The Manchester Guardian*:

Christmas had been darkened for all thoughtful citizens by the suffering endured by these victims of racial, religious and political persecution, but charity, which would salve their consciences, was, like patriotism, not enough.⁶⁵

This was followed by her challenge to the government to initiate immediate financial assistance and set up places for the temporary reception and maintenance of refugees, as Sir John Hope Simpson, director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs' Refugee Service, had proposed in December 1938.⁶⁶ Rathbone's plea, that Czech

⁵⁹ Fellow patrons were Wyndham Deedes, another Gentile Zionist, and D.N.Pritt. See GW/10/3/17, HLRO. For a biography of Wyndham Deedes see J.Presland (pseud. Gladys Skelton) *Deedes Bey. A Study of Sir Wyndham Deedes 1883-1923* (London, 1942).

⁶⁰ Of which Margaret Corbett Ashby and H.Butcher were members.

⁶¹ Noel-Baker was a fellow member of the COA. In a letter to EFR he apologised for not being able to help her 'against that beast, Newsam, at the last meeting of the Council on Aliens.' See Letter of NBKR to EFR, 16 Apr 1941. NBKR 4/581.CAC. He resigned from the COA in Feb 1942, having been appointed Minister of War Transport. See Letter of NBKR to Emerson, 6 Feb 1942. NBKR 4/581. CAC.

⁶² The major concern of this committee was the effect of the recent government regulations upon the refugee industries. Fellow members included Wilfred Roberts, Lord Marley, Megan Lloyd George, Margaret Corbett Ashby and Sigmund Gestetner (a financial supporters of the PCR). GW/10/2/21. HLRO. See also Minutes of meeting, 17 July 1940, GW/10/3/9. HLRO.

⁶³ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 278.

⁶⁴ *Jewish Chronicle*, 9 Aug 1940. This council was connected to the Home Office. There are minutes of some meetings in GW/13/5/16,20. HLRO.

⁶⁵ V.Cazalet, D.Grenfell, A.Salter, EFR, 'The Problem of the Refugees. A Suggested Policy for the Government.' *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 Jan 1939.

⁶⁶ 'What Our Policy Might Be', 258. RP XIV 2.15 (no date).

refugees be given special consideration and assistance,⁶⁷ motivated her to visit Prague again, this time to assess the refugee situation for herself.⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that whilst government officials may have claimed, perhaps as a way of deflecting her persistent pressure, that Rathbone did not really understand the complexity of the refugee crisis, Doreen Warriner, the BCRC representative in Prague,⁶⁹ proved to be a much more astute observer when she remarked:

... She, unlike so many who came out to Prague, did realise that the Czech Government was absolutely powerless, and that there was no protection for the refugees if Hitler really wanted them.’⁷⁰

During the course of this brief but harrowing trip,⁷¹ Rathbone also met Nicholas Winton, a young English stockbroker, whose personal crusade facilitated the rescue of hundreds of Czech children.⁷² Winton recalled showing her around the camps, and was impressed by the great interest she took in the condition of the refugees. But his abiding memory was of an absent-minded lady who left her handbag behind, rather mirroring an earlier trip to Bucharest, when she mislaid her coat and umbrella.⁷³ Such anecdotes serve as a reminder of Rathbone’s character, outwardly unworldly and forgetful, but inwardly so preoccupied with her work and innermost thoughts that she was oblivious to mundane matters. Reference to Winton and his actions also raises the question of where Rathbone fitted into the specific rescue of children from Nazi occupied Europe. Frank Field, in his review of Susan Pedersen’s biography of Rathbone, asserts that, in 1996 ‘... the Holocaust Education Trust reunited some of the children whose lives she saved’, implying a significant level of

⁶⁷ Cazalet, Grenfell *et al*, ‘The Problem of the Refugees’.

⁶⁸ Rathbone may also have met Miss M. Hughes, an ex-Somervillian working with refugees in Prague. Hughes knew Miss Warriner and expressed a wish to meet Rathbone about more refugee work. Letter of M. Hughes to EFR, 14 Jan 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (10) and Letter of Secretary to Sir Hector Hetherington, 18 Jan 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (13). Rathbone had turned down an invitation from Jan Masaryk to visit Prague in June 1938. See RP XIV 4 (17-18).

⁶⁹ Warriner’s activities as the BCRC representative came to an untimely end after the Gestapo found out she was giving cards (visas?) to political refugees from Czechoslovakia. See Letter of Kennard to Halifax, no date but pre April 1939. PRO FO 371/24083 W73358/5/39.

⁷⁰ Warriner, ‘Winter in Prague’, 220-1.

⁷¹ See Letter of Sir Hector Hetherington to EFR, 17 Jan 1939, warning her that her visit to Prague would be ‘rather a painful experience.’ RP XIV 2.15 (13).

⁷² M. Emanuel & V. Gissing, *Nicholas Winton and the Rescued Generation* (London, 2002).

⁷³ Nicholas Winton, telephone interview with Susan Cohen, 19 Jan 2001. For the earlier loss of possessions see Letter of EFR to Mr Hadow, 15 March 1937. RP XIV 2.9 (47).

personal involvement.⁷⁴ However, this is an example of the mythology surrounding Rathbone's rescue work, and is not substantiated by evidence. There is no doubt that Rathbone was in close contact with innumerable people connected with Winton's rescue, for example Sir Walter Layton,⁷⁵ Beatrice Wellington and Warriner, refugee officers for the BCRC,⁷⁶ but according to Winton, she was not involved with his mission. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that she was directly involved with the *Kindertransports*, organised under the auspices of the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany (MCCR),⁷⁷ an umbrella organisation of numerous aid groups responsible for saving children from Germany and Austria.⁷⁸ What can be said is that she was well acquainted with Sir Wyndham Deedes, another Gentile Zionist and one of the joint chairmen of the MCCR, and she had a working relationship, through the PCR, with Wilfred Israel, scion of a wealthy Anglo-German family, who was responsible for setting up the infrastructure of this rescue scheme. One 'kinder', Bertha Engelhard (later Leverton) who arrived in England in July 1939, did write to Rathbone in 1943, but this was in connection with helping her parents gain permission to enter Britain from Lisbon.⁷⁹ In the light of this uncertainty it would be prudent to conclude that Rathbone was probably directly or indirectly involved in helping one or two child refugees coming to Britain, but not necessarily on the *Kindertransport*.

VI

Rathbone's comprehension of the many nuances of the refugee problem was substantially increased as a result of her visit to Prague, and on her return she set about demanding immediate aid for the doomed Czechs. She fired Parliamentary Questions⁸⁰ and compiled a 'very urgent and strictly confidential' report for the

⁷⁴ F.Field, 'The mother of child benefit', *Prospect*, May 2004, 77-8.

⁷⁵ Lord Layton (1884-1966) was an economist, editor of *The Economist* from 1922-38, and proprietor of the *News Chronicle*.

⁷⁶ Emanuel & Gissing, *Nicholas Winton*, 86.

⁷⁷ The MMCCR became known as the Refugee Children's Committee from 1940.

⁷⁸ Sybil Oldfield found no evidence of EFR's role in child rescue. See S.Oldfield, ' "It is usually she": British Women's role in the rescue and care of the *Kindertransport Kinder*' in W.Benz, C.Curio & A.Hammel (eds.) *Kindertransport, Shofar* (Special edition) Indiana, Fall 2004. My thanks to Sybil Oldfield for alerting me to this article.

⁷⁹ Bertha Leverton, telephone interview with Susan Cohen, 15 Jan 2001. Letter of EFR to B.Engelhard, 28 June 1943, by kind permission of Bertha Leverton. She later went on to found the *Kindertransport Reunion* organisation.

⁸⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol.343, col.151, 31 Jan 1939; cols.827-8, 7 Feb 1939; cols.1200-01, 9 Feb 1939; vol.345, col.615, 16 March 1939; col.888, 20 March 1939.

PCR, in which she pleaded with the BCRC to take 'bold action and persuade the government to agree to their taking it.' Added to this was her warning that:

both the BC(RC) and the British Government will incur a frightful responsibility if through the interminable delays the opportunity [for rescue] is lost and these men perish.⁸¹

And she reasserted Plaminkova's caveat of the Czech susceptibility to German pressure to surrender refugees, and fear which underscored her demand for immediate evacuation.⁸² The profound effect of her visit was also clear in the celebrity lecture she delivered to Sheffield University Union of Students in mid-February 1939. Here she made a complete break with tradition, eschewing a philosophical bias in favour of a broad ranging, hard-hitting and critical lecture which addressed the issue of racial persecution, and reflected her deeply seated feelings of responsibility for its victims. The most chastening feature was her conclusion that:

nearly every receiving country has raised high walls with narrow, closely guarded doors, the highest walls and narrowest doors have been around Great Britain.⁸³

Equally candid was her unpalatable view of a country whose inaction diminished national self-esteem and whose generosity and hospitality was, to say the least, questionable. The sincerity of Rathbone's personal feelings on the refugee problem were reinforced far more publicly in an article published in *The New Statesman and Nation* in April 1939:

For forty years I have been successively in close touch with many forms of human maladjustment, destitution and injustice. But never - except perhaps over certain Indian questions - have I dwelt in such a Heartbreak House as the Refugee problem. It is just as though one stood hour after hour, day after day, with a small group of people outside bars behind which hordes of men, women and children were enduring every kind of deliberately inflicted physical and mental torture. We scrape at the bars with little files. A few victims are dragged painfully one by one through gaps. And all the time we are conscious that streams of people are passing behind us unaware of or indifferent to what is happening, who could if they united either push

⁸¹ EFR, 'Note on Situation in Prague'.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ EFR, Speech notes: Refugees. Sheffield University Union of Students Celebrity Lecture, 17 Feb 1939. RP XIV 3 (60).

down the bars and rescue the victims, or – much more dangerously – stop the torturers.⁸⁴

Like so much of Rathbone's writing and speeches, this was almost poetic in its prose, and only the hardest heart could have failed to be moved by its poignancy. Her language was not insincere for she was passionate about the plight of refugees, and nor was it employed purely to engage her audience. Neither was it exaggerated for she laid great emphasis upon supporting any claims with carefully researched facts and figures. Rather, the *New Statesman* piece was a well-crafted combination of rhetoric in which she argued about the practical politics of rescue and criticised the government's standpoint. The question of responsibility for the plight of the Jews was complex, but had as much to do with individuals, as it had to do with the consequence of political actions. The Jews, she wrote, were not to blame for the persecution that was being heaped upon them for they, unlike political refugees who chose danger, 'had it thrust upon them as a consequence of their race.' Her readers, she argued, were the collective 'we', who were not responsible for creating:

... anti-Semitism (sic) or Nazi-Fascism, except so far as these are the products of Versailles, of non-enforcement of the Minority Treaties, or of the abandonment of collective security...⁸⁵

But this same 'we' had brought about 'the destruction of Czechoslovakia through Munich, and of Spain through the hypocrisies of the Non-Intervention policy' and were 'most directly responsible for those [refugees] in or from Czechoslovakia or Spain.'⁸⁶

Her philosophical views on the nature of personal responsibility are worthy of recounting, for they reflect the various influences which shaped her ideology:

As to responsibility, some people apparently feel it only for the evil they actually do: others feel guilty of every bit of evil in the world which they or their nations – with which they identify themselves - fail to prevent, provided it was possible to prevent or try to prevent

⁸⁴ 'Heartbreak House' appears to be a reference to George Bernard Shaw's play and book of the same name. Written between 1916 and 1917, it was Shaw's indictment of the generation responsible for the First World War. EFR 'Personal View', 568 –9 & EFR, 'The British Government and Refugee Policy', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 Apr 1939.

⁸⁵ EFR 'Personal View', 568. This is a rather curious reference to collective security, since no policy was ever adopted, so could hardly have been abandoned.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

it without creating a greater evil or neglecting a more important duty.⁸⁷

Rathbone accepted her own measure of guilt, equating it to the principle inherent in Christian teaching concerning individual duty to one's neighbour. Once again, her writing was infused with references to the way in which her sense of pride in being British had been challenged, even seriously undermined. For despite its 'resources of wealth, land and influence' she was ashamed that her country could be so ungenerous in contributing towards a solution to the refugee crisis, accusing them of 'petty meanness.'⁸⁸ The scorn she heaped upon government ministers, whose responses to questions in Parliament were a litany of rehearsed conciliatory statements, excuses and platitudes, was unrestrained. Of the 'serried row of rather uninspiring personalities upon the Treasury Bench' she wrote:

... I am tempted to wish that they had indeed a collective soul, which could be condemned to spend eternity in seeing and feeling the torments which their policy has caused others to continue enduring, while their individual souls reposed blissfully in some insipid Paradise, listening to music played upon antiquated instruments.⁸⁹

The only people to be exonerated from blame in this diatribe were 'the kindly, courteous, overworked officials of the Government departments responsible for carrying out policy,' amongst whom was included William Horace Montagu-Pollock, a First Secretary at the Foreign Office up until May 1939.⁹⁰ But her sound proposal of:

reasonably generous admission of those known to be in serious danger, for safe-keeping under supervision, coupled with the speeding up of arrangements for large-scale settlement overseas, financed by an international or colonial development loan...⁹¹

was clearly not on the British political agenda.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Thus Rathbone did make a distinction between political refugees and those escaping racial persecution, but nevertheless worked tirelessly on behalf of refugees from the Spanish Civil War. See London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 130.

⁸⁹ EFR, 'Personal View', 569.

⁹⁰ He wrote of how he found himself regarded as the 'guardian angel of refugees' who was 'inundated with (a) daily bunch of letters from Miss Rathbone MP.' See Letter of Montagu-Pollock to E.N.Cooper, 7 March 1939. PRO FO 371/24153. Pedersen gives the impression that Montagu-Pollock was a long-time supporter, but in fact he was transferred to Stockholm in May 1939. See *Foreign Office List*, 1964, 318. See also Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 300, for this reference.

⁹¹ EFR, 'Personal View', 569.

VII

For Rathbone, Hitler's incursion into Czechoslovakia in March 1939 confirmed her worst fears and precipitated a diatribe against the government officials who, for two and a half years, had ignored her prophetic warnings.⁹² In the most heated of her numerous telephone conversations with Mr Randall of the Foreign Office, she cautioned that government ambivalence was costing men, women and children their lives.⁹³ Recognising that such a desperate situation called for desperate measures, she begged him to allow the transfer of small sums of money in the diplomatic bag, and so facilitate a small rescue mission, remarking cynically that:

most of the men might have been saved if the government had been as prompt in its action in rescuing them as it has been this week in rescuing the remnant of the Czech loan.⁹⁴

With an added note of sarcasm, she wrote that:

this would be 'irregular' and your legation at Prague may be trusted to countenance no irregularities for an object towards which they have always shown complete indifference.⁹⁵

Randall's minuted response demonstrated his disdain for her cause and for the refugees, and here, as on other occasions, he exhibited a defensive and narrowly nationalistic attitude in his dealings with her:

Having consulted Treaty and Passport Control Departments I am going to try and soothe Miss Rathbone's injured feelings by conversation. She is particularly indignant because I refused to transmit English currency to Prague by the Foreign Office bag, ostensibly for British subjects but really for refugees in hiding. It is difficult to persuade people like Miss Rathbone that the consciousness of the necessity for an all-round view, and for maintaining good faith or at least good relations between us and the Germans is not cynical, inhuman indifference.⁹⁶

⁹² Letter of EFR to Randall, 23 March 1939. PRO FO 371/24081, W4984/520/48.

⁹³ *Ibid.* The phone call had taken place on Tuesday 21 March 1939.

⁹⁴ Letter of EFR to Randall, 23 March 1939. PRO FO 371/24081, W4984/520/48.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* Rathbone had been told whilst in Prague that the PCO staff were 'completely aloof, uninterested and unhelpful over refugee questions.' See Letter of EFR to WSC, 18 Apr 1939. CHAR/2/374/66. There is a curious anomaly here, for Stocks refers to Warriner as 'working away at visas and transport arrangements with "the extremely helpful" British Consul.' See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 261.

⁹⁶ Notes of Randall, Minutes, re: evacuation of refugees from Czechoslovakia. 28 March 1939. PRO FO 371/24081, W4984/520/48.

His impatience with her and other activists was demonstrated in remarks he subsequently made about her staunch activist colleague, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, and how impossible it was to keep pace with his letters etc. for 'we already have sufficient difficulty with the recognised members of the PRC (sic) who are in a special category.'⁹⁷ Indeed his lack of sympathy with the plight of Jews was only matched by the zealous and ingenious way in which he tried to outmanoeuvre campaigners, Rathbone included.⁹⁸

More successful was Rathbone's approach to another Foreign Office official, Parliamentary under-secretary, R.A. Butler, to whom she stressed the urgency of her requests:

they may seem trivial, but if you heard the tragic stories of suicides, men irrevocably lost to the Gestapo etc. which have already occurred through delays in the working of the British machinery, you would not think the matter trivial.⁹⁹

He was asked for extra staff and office space to be provided in Prague to deal with the increased demand for visas etc., a request that was acted upon.¹⁰⁰ And her suggestion that representation be made to the Polish government, asking them not to hand refugees over to the Germans, was also undertaken.¹⁰¹ But it was an impassioned letter from Miss Wellington, the only experienced refugee officer left working in Prague in April 1939, which described the overwhelming workload, the miseries endured by the Jews at the hands of the Gestapo, the obstacles created by the PCO, the interminable delays and, crucially, the lack of time left in which to save lives, that precipitated an even more intense campaign.¹⁰² Now Rathbone pleaded with Butler to instruct the PCO in Prague to disregard the German pre-requisite of a British visa and

⁹⁷ Randall, Minutes, 15 July 1939. PRO FO 371/24084.

⁹⁸ London explains how, in 1963, Randall, a Catholic convert, published *The Pope, the Jews and the Nazis*, in which he defended Pope Pius XII against charges that he failed to do enough to save the Jews. He also expounded his own view of rescue attempts, claiming that efforts by governments 'were bound to be puny compared with the horrible reality.' See London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 246.

⁹⁹ Letter of EFR to Butler, 17 May 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (19).

¹⁰⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol. 345, cols. 888-9, 20 March 1939 and Letter of EFR to Butler, 23 March 1939, PRO FO 371/24081, W4984/520/48.

¹⁰¹ Letter of EFR to Butler, 18 Apr 1939; Minutes, Reilly, 21 Apr 1939; Letter of Butler to EFR, 26 Apr 1939. PRO FO 371/24082 W6400/520/48. Also Minutes, Reilly, 18 Apr 1939. PRO FO 371/24082 W5806/520/48.

¹⁰² Letter of Miss Wellington to Miss Courtney and Elizabeth, no date but *circa* Apr 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (16), and extracts from this letter, Apr 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (17). The letter was sent on to EFR by Miss Courtney on 28 Apr 1939. See RP XIV 2.15 (16)

give visas to would-be immigrants.¹⁰³ She urged that diplomatic bags be sent more frequently between Prague and London to minimise delays,¹⁰⁴ and pleaded that the PCO be empowered to grant visas to a very small number of people recommended by Wellington.¹⁰⁵ Much to the chagrin of Reginald Parkin, deputy head of the Passport Control Department, it seemed that a precedent for this course of action had been set by the PCO in Warsaw, strictly against Foreign Office regulations.¹⁰⁶

Rathbone was also busy in other quarters, asking Osbert Peake, Parliamentary under-secretary for Home Affairs, if he would authorise the PCO to grant up to five visas per week off his own bat.¹⁰⁷ This question resulted in some extraordinary minuted notes between officials, whereby Rathbone was deliberately misled. She was to be told that unless the Czech committee sponsored the proposal it would be impossible for the Home Office to consider it. But in reality, as E.N Cooper, an under Secretary in the Aliens Department dealing with refugee matters, reminded Randall in July 1939:

As a matter of fact, the PCO has, as you know, a limited discretion with regard to the grant of visas, and the Home Office would not wish to oppose an arrangement of the kind contemplated in Miss Rathbone's letter if the PCO found no reasons against it.¹⁰⁸

VIII

Rathbone was simultaneously spearheading a vigorous campaign against the British government and the way it was handling the Czech loan, founded on her belief that Britain had a moral obligation to help the desperate Czech refugees. The case she put to Lord Winterton, the British representative at Evian and chairman of the IGCR, detailed 'the necessity for Governmental assistance... towards the settlement of refugees.'¹⁰⁹ She argued that almost every British expert on the refugee problem,

¹⁰³ Letter of EFR to Butler, 17 May 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (19)

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Mary Ormerod had made a similar request in respect of the diplomatic bags between London and Vienna in June and July 1938. See London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ Recommendation 2: Conference of PCR & Principal Refugee Organisations. 15 May 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (18). Letter of EFR to Butler, 17 May 1939. FO 371/24083 W8047.

¹⁰⁶ Letter of Randall to Cooper, 6 June 1939. PRO FO 371/24083. W8047.

¹⁰⁷ Letter of Cooper to Randall, 12 July 1939. PRO FO 371/24084. W 10698.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Note submitted by the PCR to Lord Winterton, July 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (20).

excepting Ministers, agreed that it was:

impossible for any large-scale, even partial, treatment of the problem without State assistance in the planning, financing and carrying out of schemes for the eventual settlement of refugees.¹¹⁰

The scale of rescue plans was of great importance once Rathbone began her campaign to save Jews from elsewhere in Nazi Europe after 1941. Now, the authority of Lord Lytton, Sir Neill Malcolm¹¹¹ and Sir Arthur Salter were invoked, as well as the observations of the Prime Minister and Home Secretary in a Commons Debate.¹¹² But it was the Chancellor, Sir John Simon, who bore the brunt of her 'agitating.'¹¹³ How much of the Czech loan and grant was left and still under the control of the Treasury, she wanted to know?¹¹⁴ Simon's announcement, that the whole loan was to be reclaimed by the Treasury, the expended portion presumably out of Czech assets under its control, appalled Rathbone for it meant that:

the British Treasury will make a nice little saving of six (or eight, including the intended addition) million pounds out of the destruction of the Republic whose frontiers we had guaranteed but were unable to protect.. This will be done apparently at the cost of abandoning those unhappy refugees who failed to get out in time, many of them owing to the extremely slow and cautious action of the British Government during the winter months when they could easily have been got out.¹¹⁵

Gathering support for her anti-Government publicity campaign, she wrote personal letters to Dr Benes, whom she had met in Prague in February 1937 and to Jan Masaryk, the exiled Czech leader.¹¹⁶ She also canvassed Hugh Seton -Watson, the scholar on Eastern Europe, Henry Wickham-Steed, the journalist and political commentator,¹¹⁷ Leo Amery, Unionist MP for the Sparksbrook (formerly South)

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Former High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany.

¹¹² Note submitted by the PCR to Lord Winterton, July 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (20). The debate took place on 25 Nov 1938.

¹¹³ Letter of EFR to Cazalet, 20 July 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (30).

¹¹⁴ EFR, Parliamentary question 88, 20 July 1939. PRO FO 371/24100. W 10944/1873/48.

¹¹⁵ Letter of EFR, 'Refugees from Czechoslovakia; A Government Economy at their Expense', 20 July 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (29).

¹¹⁶ Letter of EFR to Dr.Benes, 19 July 1939, RPXIV.2.15 (28).

¹¹⁷ Letters of EFR to Seton-Watson & Wickham Steed, 21 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (34).

division of Birmingham¹¹⁸ and Robert Boothby, MP for East Aberdeenshire.¹¹⁹ Fellow refugee activist MP's Captain Cazalet¹²⁰ and David Grenfell¹²¹ were sounded out on raising the question of finance and the Czech refugees in a Home Office debate, in case the debate on Foreign Affairs, which the Opposition wanted to have before the adjournment, did not happen. As she concluded in her letters to Amery and Boothby, 'It will be too late by the time we re-assemble.'¹²² At the same time she was critical of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund (CRTF) for 'its extreme caution in financial matters and its poor publicity.'¹²³

Trying to arrange for Sir John Simon to meet a PCR deputation proved difficult, but may not have surprised Rathbone, for her relationship with him was precarious. On many occasions in the past she had been critical of him,¹²⁴ and she found him to be quite insensitive to humanitarian considerations, showing little sympathy over Czechoslovakia.¹²⁵ In fact, by the time that he did meet them, on 2 August 1939,¹²⁶ a final decision about funding had already been made. For at a meeting held on 29 July 1939, attended by Cooper,¹²⁷ Bunbury, Margaret Layton, secretary of the BCRC,¹²⁸ and Captain V.C. Farrell, the Passport Control Officer from Prague, it was agreed that 'no further financial assistance should be made, except under binding Settlements satisfactory to the government and the trustees.' As London explains, those present anticipated that Adolf Eichmann,¹²⁹ who was in charge of organising Jewish emigration in Vienna, Bohemia and Moravia, would:

¹¹⁸ Letter of EFR to Amery, 20 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (31).

¹¹⁹ Letter of EFR to Boothby, 20 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (33).

¹²⁰ Letter of EFR to Cazalet, 20 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (30).

¹²¹ Letter of EFR to Grenfell, 20 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (32).

¹²² Letter of EFR to Amery, 20 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (31) and Letter of EFR to Boothby, 20 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (33).

¹²³ Letter of EFR to Bunbury 21 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15(35). The CRTF was set up by the Home Office *circa* May 1939, at which time Bunbury, a retired senior civil servant and authority on public expenditure, was director-designate. See London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 68. For examples of those whom the CRTF helped see T.Kushner & K.Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide. Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London, 1999) 141-3.

¹²⁴ Letter of EFR to Cazalet, 28 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (37).

¹²⁵ Letter of EFR to Lord Balfour, 28 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (37).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* Rathbone had written to Sir John on 14 July 1939, asking for a deputation. See Letter of EFR to Sir John Simon, 14 July 1939, RP XIV 2.15 (23).

¹²⁷ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 14.

¹²⁸ According to Randall, Rathbone did not see 'eye to eye' with Miss Layton. See Letter of Randall to Cooper, 12 July 1939. PRO FO 371/24084. W 10698.

¹²⁹ For the most recent assessment of Eichmann see D.Cesarani, *Eichmann. His Life and Crimes* (London, 2004).

conduct his planned speeding-up of Jewish emigration from the Protectorate – designed to reduce numbers by 60,000 over twelve months – in a disorganised way, using the same oppressive methods he had employed in Austria.¹³⁰

They went further by asserting that Rathbone's campaign for extra money to finance another exodus was a grave mistake in strategy¹³¹ and would 'play into the hands of Gestapo and would be far more likely to encourage persecution and terror than avoid it.'¹³² Bunbury undertook to discuss the subject at once with Sir Herbert Emerson, the Director of the IGCR, and then to put Rathbone 'in possession of this point of view which it was thought she probably did not fully appreciate.'¹³³ The fate of the refugees in Czechoslovakia was soon sealed: the CRTF pulled out of Prague as everything there was:

to be closed down and their representatives are to leave at once... They have to consider not only the well-being of the refugees but also the Czech government and their relations to the German government.¹³⁴

IX

All the while Rathbone had other refugee-related issues closer to home to deal with. There was the position of those who fell foul of the inadequate staffing levels at points of entry, and despite holding visas, were likely to be refused admittance.¹³⁵ Then there were pleas to the Home Office for them to adopt a more liberal policy in granting permits to married couples in domestic work, as well as allowing agricultural workers under the age of 18 to stay in the country after training.¹³⁶ In the House she pressed strongly for a concession whereby elderly parents and relatives entering Palestine should be excluded from the immigration quota, imposed by the controversial White Paper of May 1939,¹³⁷ on the basis that those who could not work, and were not setting up a family,

¹³⁰ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 167.

¹³¹ See Letter of Randall to Cooper, 12 July 1939. PRO FO 371/24084. W 10698.

¹³² Memo of 29 July meeting. 30 July 1939. PRO HO 294/7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Case cited was that of Mr Paul Wulkan who arrived at Croydon on 26 Nov 1938. Letter of Graham White to EFR, 13 Jan 1939, GW/10/1/8, HLRO.

¹³⁶ Recommendations II & III: Conference of PCR & Principal Refugee Organisations. 15 May 1939. RP XIV 2.15 (18).

¹³⁷ *Palestine: A Statement of Policy*, Cmd 6019, May 1939.

should be treated as a special class outside of the quota regulations.¹³⁸ Besides these concerns there was also an urgent plea to the Prime Minister to expedite the passage of the British Nationality and Status of Aliens (Amendment) Act, so that British women would have the right restored to them to retain British nationality on their marriage to an alien.¹³⁹

When the House resolved, on 4 August 1939, to adjourn for eight weeks, Rathbone was amongst those who voted with the Opposition, for she was of the same mind as Churchill that given the precarious political situation it was very odd for MPs to be taking two months holiday.¹⁴⁰ From the outset of the debate she was vociferous on a number of refugee issues, all of which were supported by her belief in Britain's obligation to help these refugees whose plight 'arose directly out of events of last March,' a reference to the march into Prague in March 1939.¹⁴¹ Mr MacDonald, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was pressed on the possibility of refugees being admitted to Trinidad, and asked whether he had been able to organise asylum in Palestine, Cyprus or other British colony for the seven hundred Czech refugees quarantined in Beirut. The latter group were, according to MacDonald, illegal immigrants: the British government could not accept responsibility for refugees outside of the regulated scheme, and his concerns for the impact of refugees on the local inhabitants in British colonies sat uneasily against his expressions of regret. Once again Rathbone made a plea that the £8 million loan promised to Czechoslovakia be used to assist refugees from that country,¹⁴² but it was her final contribution to the debate which was the most emotive. In an impassioned speech she called for a more humane refugee policy, and rather than acting on Government advice, which as Churchill cynically remarked was 'to go away and play, taking our gas masks with us', she suggested to MPs:

Let us take something else; the thought that while we are enjoying ourselves by sea or mountain, there are hundreds of thousands of men and women who are wondering about in the utmost destitution, many of them hiding by day, many of them already in the hands of the

¹³⁸ *Hansard* HC, vol.350, col.1454 and reported in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 June 1939, 24.

¹³⁹ A British woman possessed this right up until 1870, and was a significant issue because of the current international situation. Letter to the Prime Minister, July 1939, GW/10/1/12.

¹⁴⁰ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 264.

¹⁴¹ *Hansard* HC, vol.350, cols.2828-29. 4 Aug 1939.

¹⁴² PRO FO 371/24100 W11673/1873/48. *Hansard* HC, vol.350, cols. 2892-2906. 4 Aug 1939.

Gestapo and being beaten up daily in concentration camps and prisons.¹⁴³

The next two weeks of August were, Rathbone wrote, 'desperately full of very urgent refugee questions'¹⁴⁴ One such was the case of about 100 women left in Prague, 85 of whom had British visas, who were still prevented from joining their husbands in Great Britain. Rathbone's interference on behalf of Miss Wellington and a volunteer enabled the two workers to return and help the women, with the Settlement of the BCRC.¹⁴⁵

Rathbone's summer holiday, and that of all MPs, was cut short by international events and she was in fighting spirit during the opening debate of the reassembled Parliament. Her strong appeal to the government 'before it is too late to strengthen their forces, and to make this a real National Government' was reinforced by her call to 'form a government which really represents the people, the whole people and nothing but the people.'¹⁴⁶ She had already anticipated that war would be declared when she wrote to Lord Reading in late August, suggesting a meeting to discuss refugees.¹⁴⁷ Her concern was how they could be safeguarded in wartime, and how they could be used in British national service, civilian or military, matters she understood he had been talking to the Home Office about. Ideas that were discussed included Cazalet's suggestion of small single-nationality committees, including members of the Spanish International Brigades, each with a leading personality as advisor. This would be a valuable way of collecting information and 'vetting' the names, qualifications, and political reliability of those refugees willing to take up employment, data that could in turn be passed on to government. Inevitably the matter of finance was raised. Rathbone took the view that anti-refugee feeling was much more likely to grow if the voluntary organisations had to continue begging for support, unless it could be made clear that it was to help refugees work. It would be altogether more satisfactory if 'government financial provision were quietly made for this.'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ *Hansard* HC, vol.350, cols. 2893-6, 4 Aug 1939. For the longer draft of this speech see RP XIV 3 (62).

¹⁴⁴ Letter of EFR to Elfrida, 19 August 1939, RP XIV 2.19 (2).

¹⁴⁵ Letter of EFR to Delevigne and Letter of EFR to Bunbury, 9 Aug 1939. PRO HO 294/7.

¹⁴⁶ *Hansard* HC, vol.351, col.35, 24 Aug 1939.

¹⁴⁷ Letter of EFR to Lord Reading, 30 Aug 1939. CBF Files, 113/96. Wiener Library.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

As prescient was Rathbone's conviction that, as far as security allowed, every MP should be in possession of detailed information concerning the war situation, regardless of their departmental affiliation. Wartime, she observed astutely, called for the adoption of special techniques so that Britain's democratically elected Parliament could continue to exercise its critical and constructive powers unhindered. To this end, the Emergency Powers (Defence) Acts 1939 and 1940 conferred the widest powers upon the government to deal with the wartime emergency. Rathbone's response, on 4 September 1939, the day after war was declared, was to convene a group of cross-party members to form the All-Party Parliamentary Action Group (APAG).¹⁴⁹ The work and activities of this group are beyond the scope of this thesis, for the rescue of refugees was not part of its remit. However, it is worth noting that amongst the founder members were the familiar names of fellow refugee activists David Grenfell, Graham White, Salter and Harold Nicolson. Besides gaining the support, once again, of such reliable, eager and critical colleagues, it is also worth noting that there were non-activists who were willing to help the defenceless, for Rathbone utilised the knowledge of anti-Nazi refugee experts¹⁵⁰ and refugee sources in the course of her work with the committee.¹⁵¹

X

Until the outbreak of war, most of Rathbone's 'refugee' work was concerned with the rescue of people in Europe, earning her a formidable reputation as the friend and champion of refugees. But the outbreak of hostilities added a new and more intimate dimension as she became deeply involved with enemy aliens at home, and came into personal contact with innumerable individuals. This campaigning began in earnest on 4 September 1939, when Sir John Anderson, the newly-appointed Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, announced the imposition of mobility restrictions on everyone from the Reich territories.¹⁵² Most Jewish refugees, many

¹⁴⁹ Letter of EFR, 4 Sept 1939. RP XIV 2.16 (1). By November 1939 there were more than fifty members. The archive for APAG is contained in RP XIV 2.16. For an overview of the work of the group see Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 307-8 and Stocks, *Rathbone*, 269-70.

¹⁵⁰ Letter of EFR to Nicolson, 25 Sept 1939. RP XIV 2.19 (45). Minutes of meeting of APAG, 3 Oct 1939. RP XIV 2.19 (35). Letter of EFR to G le M.Mander, 30 Nov 1939 and Mander, Notice of meeting, 6 Dec 1939. RP XIV 2.19 (63).

¹⁵¹ Letter of EFR to Vansittart, 18 Sept 1939. RP XIV 2.19 (45).

¹⁵² *Hansard* HC, vol.351, cols.366-70. 4 Sep 1939.

of whom were stateless in fact or law, were now classified as enemy aliens although Anderson did express the hope that there would be 'a general desire to avoid treating as enemies those who are friendly to the country which has offered them asylum.' Eschewing a strategy of mass internment in favour of a more liberal policy,¹⁵³ he instigated a system of local tribunals to examine the cases of all enemy aliens, to categorise them according to the degree of risk and to establish whether the alien was friendly or hostile to Britain. Of the 73,800 screened, less than one per cent were designated Category A and interned, 64,200 in Category C were exempt from any restrictions, and the remainder, classified as Category B, had restrictions imposed upon them.¹⁵⁴ The treatment of these enemy aliens struck at the heart of Rathbone's sense of justice, right and wrong, and severely challenged her belief in Britain's tradition of liberty, generosity and asylum. These were principles that, even in wartime, were of profound importance, so that there was never any question in her mind that refugees should be demoted before the national interest.

Henceforth it was Anderson who bore the brunt of her unrelenting questioning in the House of Commons as she challenged nearly every aspect of his refugee policies. Of specific concern was the categorising of aliens and the problems they faced as a result of the tribunal system. She wanted all Austrians put in the same category as Czechs, on the basis that they too had had their country forcibly taken from them, but as sympathetic as Anderson was, he informed her that 'sweeping distinctions... automatically applied, would not be compatible with public interest.'¹⁵⁵

The rhetoric of public *versus* national interest was to be reiterated time and time again over the next few years.¹⁵⁶ Now it was used as the main reason for not altering the restrictions on the mobility of aliens, which Rathbone argued had a severe effect on their work opportunities.¹⁵⁷ Her contention was that:

refugees who are idle, desperately hard up for money, and suffering from a burning sense of injustice (were) more likely than others to be suborned by the enemy; at least to become centres of anti-British propaganda.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Letter of Anderson to Lord Halifax, 7 Nov 1939, PRO HFO 371/22941.

¹⁵⁴ P. Gillman & L. Gillman, *'Collar the Lot!'* *How Britain interned and expelled its Wartime Refugees* (London, 1980) 45-6.

¹⁵⁵ *Hansard* HC, vol. 351, col. 369, 4 Sep 1939.

¹⁵⁶ Letter of Anderson to EFR, 15 Nov 1939. PRO HO 219/1732.

¹⁵⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol. 352, col. 1043, 19 Oct 1939.

¹⁵⁸ Letter of EFR to Anderson, 29 Nov 1939. PRO HO 213/1732.

Given the government's obsession with avoiding the financial maintenance of refugees, she tried appealing on the basis that:

financially they are a burden on refugee organisations and when refugee funds are exhausted must become a burden on the rates or the taxes.¹⁵⁹

Amidst this early campaigning against internment, Rathbone's concern for the safety of would-be immigrants from Czechoslovakia, some with relatives in Britain, others with British visas, all of whom were destitute and threatened with deportation, became even more urgent in early 1940.¹⁶⁰ She pursued Anderson, Peake and Herbert Morrison, the Labour MP and Minister of Supply, urging them to facilitate rescue by a minor modification in the law.¹⁶¹ Nothing would persuade Anderson to help these endangered souls, and his response to Rathbone, in March 1940, followed an established pattern:

it is my duty as Home Secretary to regard this problem from a more objective point of view, and considerations of sympathy with the unfortunate persons on whose behalf the deputation made their plea, cannot be allowed to override considerations of what is best for the security of the country and for public interest.¹⁶²

And to suggest, as he did, that a further influx of refugees would add to the 'uneasiness about the number of aliens in this country' and would therefore not be in the interest of relatives already here, demonstrated the government-perceived existence of anti-alien feeling within the country and the pressure that this was placing upon decisions in respect of immigration policy.¹⁶³ It is difficult to be certain about the real level of unease in British society, for there was no mass observation until after April 1940, but it is unlikely that the situation was as grave as Anderson implied.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ EFR, Notes on divided families, 22 Jan 1940, RP XIV 2.15 (1). Report on Dependents in Czechoslovakia of Refugees already in the UK, Feb 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (6).

¹⁶¹ *Hansard* HC, vol.356, col.1269, 1 Feb 1940. Letter of EFR to Anderson (& Peake), 3 Feb 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (3) & 7 Feb 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (5). Supplementary notes, 16 Feb 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (4). Letter of EFR to Bunbury, 17 Feb 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (6). Notes on Deputation to Home Secretary, 19 Feb 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (7).

¹⁶² Letter of Anderson to EFR, 6 March 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (8).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

XI

The rules of the game changed dramatically with the appointment of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister of the wartime coalition Government,¹⁶⁴ for unlike Anderson, who still thought internment 'unnecessary on security grounds and inexpedient on grounds of general policy',¹⁶⁵ Churchill was determined upon this course of action.¹⁶⁶ Public opinion, an alleged German 'Fifth Column' in Britain¹⁶⁷ and the fall of France were enough reasons for him to introduce a policy of mass internment in the second week of May 1940.¹⁶⁸ The established categories were extended and in total some 27,000 aliens, including Jewish refugees, Italians, non-Jewish Germans and Austrians were interned.¹⁶⁹ Rathbone was once again on the attack, firing questions at Anderson, asking him how soon he could review the cases of aliens who had recently been interned under a general order, especially where they were urgently needed in the labour force? And could he speed up the censorship of internees' letters?¹⁷⁰ Similarly Peake was subjected to a barrage of requests when he met a deputation in June 1940.¹⁷¹ When her fellow MP, Sir Annesley Somerville, asked if it was right for interned aliens to be kept in 'luxurious idleness... at a greater cost than the allowance paid to men with dependants,' she accused him of cruelly insulting people 'who were longing to do active work in or out of internment',¹⁷² a point which she reiterated days later.¹⁷³

But the main thrust of her parliamentary questions came on 10 July in the Adjournment Debate on Refugees and other Aliens, a session which lasted nearly six hours.¹⁷⁴ This debate, along with a further three concerning enemy aliens held before

¹⁶⁴ Rathbone later commented that she wished Churchill had been made PM sooner. See EFR, Speech to LNU Lambeth, 5 June 1940. RP XIV 3 (65).

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, memorandum, 'Control of Aliens', WP (G) (40) 115, 29 Apr 1940, PRP CAB 67/6.

¹⁶⁶ For an overview of the pressure exerted upon Churchill by MPs and the military establishment see Ronald Stent, *A Battered Page? The Internment of His Majesty's 'most loyal enemy aliens'* (1980) 69-81.

¹⁶⁷ Lafitte highlighted the *Sunday Express* and the *Daily Sketch* as the worst offenders at publishing unsubstantiated allegations about refugees acting as spies and saboteurs. See F.Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (1940) 69-70.

¹⁶⁸ Stent, *A Battered Page?* 69-73.

¹⁶⁹ Anderson, memorandum, 'Control of Aliens', WP (G) (40) 115, 29 Apr 1940, PRO CAB 67/6

¹⁷⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol.361, cols. 294-5, 23 May 1940.

¹⁷¹ Others present included Emerson, Clare-Martin, Blanche Dugdale, Ernest Cove, Bunbury, Marley and Dorothy Buxton. See Note of reception by Osbert Peake of deputation from the PCR, 24 June 1940. Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/1. BDBJ, LMA.

¹⁷² *Hansard* HC, vol.361, col.981, 6 June 1940.

¹⁷³ *Hansard* HC, vol.361, col.1114, 11 June 1940.

¹⁷⁴ *Hansard* HC, vol.362, cols.1218-1223, 10 July 1940.

the end of December 1940, consumed a total of fourteen hours of parliamentary time: it was quite remarkable that the debate should have taken place at a time when Britain still faced the threat of invasion, a fact which undoubtedly reflected the pressure on, and concern felt by Parliament.¹⁷⁵ Rathbone was more than prepared to do battle, having acquired and accumulated all the evidence and data she needed to argue against internment and its attendant policies. Much of this information came from Wilfred Israel, who played a unique and almost anonymous role on behalf of the refugees, being the main link between them and the various refugee organisations, including the PCR.¹⁷⁶

Whilst Rathbone was only one of nineteen MPs to speak, the force of her arguments and the emotion with which she spoke marked her speech out as outstanding, a definite highlight in her oratorical career. But she had also, during the course of this debate, to deal with a great divergence of support from fellow MPs. On the one hand there was Cazalet, her staunch supporter, who paid tribute to her by remarking that:

All refugees in this country, and indeed many refugees in other countries as well, owe her a deep debt of gratitude, and I am glad to have the opportunity to pay tribute to her work today.¹⁷⁷

Conversely, there was the verbal attack made by Mrs Tate, MP for Frome, who accused Rathbone of being an MP 'who lost all sense of reason when the word 'Jew' was mentioned.'¹⁷⁸ In Tate's opinion, the material needs of fighting men came before the simple bare necessities of internees, all of whom she wanted rounded up. And to her way of thinking, Rathbone's appeal was a 'piteous and pathetic' one that could lead people to be carried away by sentiment.¹⁷⁹

But Rathbone was not seeking a response based on sentiment. She sought to awaken the individual conscience to what she perceived as the injustice of internment, and to the inhumanitarian way in which the British government was treating

¹⁷⁵ Cooper, *Refugee Scholars*, 155.

¹⁷⁶ N. Shepherd, *Wilfrid Israel. German Jewry's Secret Ambassador* (London, 1984) 174.

¹⁷⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol.362, col.1027, 10 July 1940.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, col.1222.

¹⁷⁹ It seems likely that Mrs. Tate was selected as a member of the parliamentary delegation that visited Buchenwald in 1945, because of her known scepticism about Nazi atrocities against Jews. Tragically she later committed suicide. See *The Times*, 6 & 11 June 1947. For an overview of her career see Brookes, *Women at Westminster. The Time*, HC, 1935, 116 refers to her as Mrs H.B.Tate.

individuals. Her speech hammered home every hardship suffered by the internees, from the case of young people whose studies were interrupted, to the sick, invalid and old. She decried the fund of ability wasting away in the camps, much of it previously involved in work of national importance, and she highlighted the case of the German professor of chemistry who committed suicide rather than face being interned.¹⁸⁰ And she complained about the lack of provision for schooling, to say nothing of the injustice of internees being deprived of newspapers and wireless, books and personal musical instruments.¹⁸¹

It must have been some consolation to the internees with whom Rathbone corresponded to know that, with two or three exceptions:

every speech (given by MPs) indicated strong sympathy with the position of refugees, and anxiety that everything possible should be done to alleviate the hardships and anxieties and sense of injustice from which they are suffering.’¹⁸²

Exactly how they felt about her pleas for patience and her request that they ‘make allowances for the difficulties of those who are controlling you’ remains unclear, but their appeal for an official visit was answered sooner than anyone, even Rathbone, could have expected.¹⁸³ Following the surprise confirmation by Sir Edward Grigg, the Joint under-Secretary for War, on 10 July, that MPs could visit internment camps,¹⁸⁴ Rathbone, in the company of Graham White, made the first of many such tours, in this instance to Huyton, near Liverpool.¹⁸⁵ His recollections of this experience deserve quoting at length for the insight they provide into the impact of Rathbone’s presence:

There was practically no furniture – literally people had to sit on the bare steps or on the floors, and as one alien told us there was not even any toilet paper in the camp... Many of the people interned had been refugees from Austria from the time of the Anschluss, and others from Germany. Some of them had done, and after their release continued to

¹⁸⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol.362, col.1215, 10 July 1940. Also ‘Diary of an Austrian Refugee at Huyton Camp’, July 1940. RP XIV 17 (16).

¹⁸¹ *Hansard* HC, vol.362, cols.1216, 10 July 1940.

¹⁸² Other dissenting voices were Maurice Petherick (MP for Penryn and Falmouth, Cornwall) and David Logan (Scotland, Liverpool). Letter of EFR to Weissenberg, 12 July 1940. RP XIV 2.17(11)

¹⁸³ Telegram of Weissenberg to PCR, 7 July 1940 & reply of EFR’s reply, 10 July 1940. RP XIV 2.17.

¹⁸⁴ *Hansard* HC, vol.362, cols.1269-70, 10 July 1940.

¹⁸⁵ EFR, Suggestions etc. 17 July 1940, GW/14/1/2/HLRO. As a relief worker, Israel had already visited camps in Liverpool and the Isle of Man in early July 1940. See Shepherd, *Wilfrid Israel*, 174.

do, valuable work for the Allied cause... It was at once clear that something had to be said to these unhappy people. Eleanor spoke first. I have always regretted that I did not make notes at the time of what she said, but she spoke to them with moving sympathy of our concern for the state in which they were living and our anxiety to do everything that we could to improve conditions in every way possible. She then, as always, showed her keen sense of reality by asking them not to forget in the midst of their troubles that we were in a terrible crisis of the war and that from day to day we might be invaded. She assured them that the action from which they were suffering was foreign to the spirit of the British people. It was quite obvious that her speech had much encouraged and comforted these unfortunate people. I felt it was one of the most remarkable speeches that I had ever heard -made entirely without preparation...¹⁸⁶

But as Rathbone found out on 10 August, conditions at Sutton Park, Sutton Coldfield were immeasurably worse than Huyton. For reasons best known to the War Office, the camp had hurriedly been transferred there from Kempton Park racecourse, and was totally unprepared to receive the 700 or so internees:

Under canvas on peaty ground, very apt to be water logged... elderly internees Category C (most of them between 45-69 years of age) we sleep on ground sheets without palliasses. These conditions as well as insufficient medical attention endanger health and life of already ailing people... we are in desperate plight relying upon promises given to us in Parliament we ask your immediate help.¹⁸⁷

She did respond, raising the matter with Eden ten days later. This, combined with the pressure already exerted by the PCR, resulted in the almost immediate closure of the Sutton Coldfield camp.¹⁸⁸ Another camp that was successfully 'given up' through Rathbone's efforts was Warth Mills Camp, Bury,¹⁸⁹ whilst the conditions at Strachur Camp, in Scotland, improved markedly after Rathbone visited there in mid-August 1940.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 285-6. For camp conditions see also EFR, 'How British Policy towards Refugees helps Hitler', 6 July 1940, RP XIV 2.17(10). See also Letter of Dr F.R. Von Boschan to EFR, 17 May 1941. RP XIV 2.17 (49) and Letter of Redlich to *The Times*, 14 Oct 1946. Boschan, whose case was taken up by Noel-Baker, had been authorised for release from internment in Dec 1940. See Letter of Peake to Noel-Baker, 19 Dec 1940. NBKR, 4/582.

¹⁸⁷ Telegram of H. Wedriner, Camp Leader to EFR, 10 Aug 1940. GW/13/3/26 HLRO.

¹⁸⁸ Letter of Graham White to Aline MacKinnon, 21 Aug 1940. GW/13/3/30. HLRO.

¹⁸⁹ Letter of Philip Cass to S. Salomon, 5 August 1940. Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/1. BDBJ.

¹⁹⁰ Stent, *A Bespattered Page?* 154.

XII

There is no doubt that internment created an immense workload for Rathbone and the PCR, borne out by figures compiled by the committee for the period 15 July 1940 to 6 September 1941. Of 4526 cases dealt with, 1693 applications for release from internment were submitted to the Home Office: 1069 of these were granted, 53 refused and 571 were still pending. 1750 cases were passed on to other appropriate committees, and 1083 cases were related to issues other than release from detention. Over 7000 letters were sent, 8500 telephone calls were taken and 3500 made, whilst the office had 4700 visitors.¹⁹¹ Whilst the day-to-day running of the PCR office was undertaken by Vera Craig and her assistants, the case studies, located amongst previously closed Home Office files, are evidence of Rathbone's personal involvement with an unquantifiable number of individuals.¹⁹²

Another matter that arose out of the 10 July 1940 debate was the possibility of a single Minister being put in charge of the whole refugee question, but this was a prospect that, at this juncture, really worried Rathbone. Her fear was that it might result in:

the Home Office, which does thoroughly understand, and is really sympathetic, being set aside and someone being appointed (for example Lord Swinton) who is quite new to the subject and far less progressively minded.¹⁹³

She had voiced her concerns to the Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee, her acquaintance from the settlement house movement decades earlier, and it was he who, the day after the debate, daringly raised the House's concerns over internment, in Cabinet.¹⁹⁴ His subsequent suggestions closely echoed Rathbone's own, but his bold proposal, that the government abdicate responsibility for reviewing cases and finding work for internees, and hand the work over to a new 'really strong committee' made up of well-known refugee campaigners including Rathbone, the Labour MP, Philip

¹⁹¹ CBF 113/51. Wiener Library.

¹⁹² See Appendix One for these case studies.

¹⁹³ Letter of EFR to Graham White, 11 July 1940. GW/10/3/8. HLRO. Stent describes Lord Swinton as supporting a War Office idea to transport internees and prisoners-of-war overseas, and how he warned the Cabinet, on behalf of the Home Defence (Security) Executive, about the danger of retaining aliens in the UK in view of the help they might render to invading forces. WP (40) 423, as cited in Stent, *A Bespattered Page?* 95-6.

¹⁹⁴ PRO CAB 65/8 War Cabinet 200 (40) 11 July 1940.

Noel-Baker, her fellow campaigner over Ethiopia's independence, and Graham White, was a step too far for the Cabinet.¹⁹⁵

The redraft he was asked to prepare ensured that the Home Office retained control by the establishment of two new bodies: an Advisory Committee of three known as the 'Asquith (Internment) Committee' after its chairman, whose remit was to assist the Home Secretary in dealing with 'enemy aliens', and an Advisory Council on Aliens, attached to the Refugee Department of the Foreign Office. Rathbone, Graham White and Noel-Baker were amongst the MPs who were appointed members of the latter, under the chairmanship of Lord Lytton.¹⁹⁶ Their remit was to advise on individual cases and to make recommendations about the camps, and Rathbone lost no time in sending the Asquith Committee a detailed memorandum suggesting categories most suitable for early release. At the same time the PCR put together a plan to streamline applications by internees, their friends and employers wanting workers released.¹⁹⁷

Many of the 80 internment questions that Rathbone put to the House¹⁹⁸ were precipitated by her liaison with the BDBJ, as in the case of Galician-born Jews interned as Austrians.¹⁹⁹ Then there was her outrage at the 800 or so aliens who had been imprisoned for months without charge, and denied the opportunity of a tribunal to plead their case for release,²⁰⁰ which Anderson claimed would not help them anyway.²⁰¹ She also worked very closely with Noel-Baker, who held Rathbone in high esteem, crediting her with being 'really the only person in the country who understands the Refugee question and knows the facts,' a compliment which she played down as an over-estimate.²⁰² As a valued colleague she was able to confide

¹⁹⁵ PRO CAB 67/7. War Cabinet 'Aliens, Memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal, 16 July 1940.

¹⁹⁶ PRO CAB 65/8, War Cabinet 209 (40) 22 July 1940. A. Stevens, *The Dispossessed* (London, 1975) 213-14.

¹⁹⁷ See Letter of EFR to Weissenberg, 5 Aug 1940. RP XIV 2.17 (9). The idea of a form was put too late to be implemented. See *Hansard* HC, vol.365, col.6, 5 Sept.1940.

¹⁹⁸ R.Stent Papers, 80/6/1. Part 1, 56. IWM. Her parliamentary colleague, Wedgwood, put 78 questions.

¹⁹⁹ Letter of secretary of BDBJ to EFR, 19 July 1940. Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/2. BDBJ. Letter of secretary of BDBJ to Blanche Dugdale, 26 July 1940; Letter of Philip Glass to S.Salomon, 5 Aug 1940 and unsigned letter to Brodetsky, 7 Aug 1940, Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/1. BDBJ. The list of cases mentioned appears not to have survived. *Hansard* HC, vol,365, col.185, 19 Sept. 1940.

²⁰⁰ Many had criminal records for very minor offences, like pilfering, and posed no threat to security. Report on Visit to Brixton, 5 Oct 1940. RP XIV 2.17 (26).

²⁰¹ *Hansard* HC, vol.364, col.1439. 22 Aug 1940.

²⁰² Letter of Noel-Baker to EFR, 31 Oct 1940. NBKR, 4/581. Letter (reply) of EFR to Noel-Baker, 2 Nov 1940. NBKR, 4/580. The extent of material in the Noel-Baker Papers 4/572-95 shows that he was very involved with refugees, especially internees, and personally dealt with thousands of cases.

in him in November 1940, and unburden her anger at Herbert Morrison, the recently appointed Home Secretary.²⁰³ What Home Secretary, she asked, could 'justify the indefinite imprisonment of unconvicted men without any opportunity of self-defence?'²⁰⁴ And the analogies she drew:

Are these not these exactly the methods of the Gestapo, of French *lettres de cachet* under the *Ancien Regime*, of banishment by administrative order under the *Czar*?²⁰⁵

were equally uncompromising. In the same letter, she also expressed her shock at Peake's attitude towards the treatment of detenus, which seemed 'evasive and unimaginative, to put it mildly.'²⁰⁶ Promising an increased membership of the Birkett committee and more panel meetings,²⁰⁷ was insufficient to mollify Rathbone,²⁰⁸ for detenus were still prevented, by law, from writing to MPs, or appealing to the Home Secretary, a rule that, in her view damaged 'our country's reputation for humanity, justice and humane conditions,' and which she wanted rescinded.²⁰⁹ She herself had been inundated with letters from individuals in prison,²¹⁰ and had found her own cunning solution to the official ban, by advising detenus to address their cases to Miss Craig, 'a lady who is interested in refugees, but who cannot, I think, be regarded as coming within the restriction.'²¹¹ Nearly nine months later there were still detenus in Leeds prison, in conditions which Rathbone told Morrison were 'only suitable for convicted prisoners,'²¹² and a further two months passed before he informed her that he had given instructions for these people to be moved to Brixton prison, which had been adapted for remand prisoners, whilst their case were under review.²¹³ It is interesting to note that B. Donoghue, Morrison's

²⁰³ Morrison replaced Anderson as Home Secretary in October 1940.

²⁰⁴ Letter of EFR to Noel-Baker, 2 Nov 1940, NBKR 4/580.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol.365, col.365, 9 Oct. 1940 & vol.365, cols.586-7, 15 Oct.1940.

²⁰⁸ *Hansard* HC, vol.367, cols.390-1, 3 Dec 1940; vol.367, cols.853-4, 10 Dec 1940.

²⁰⁹ *Hansard* HC, vol.367, col.489, 3 Dec 1940.

²¹⁰ Rathbone sent a representative sample of over 30 letters to Noel-Baker in Dec 1940. These are to be found accompanying Letter of EFR to Noel-Baker, 5 Dec 1940 in NBKR 4/580. CAC. A German woman, Gerda Dames, imprisoned in Holloway as an enemy alien, was recommended to write to EFR by Manfred Vanson, in 1940. Vanson wrote and spoke to EFR, who eventually managed to get Dames released. Letter of M.Vanson to Susan Cohen, 10 May 2001.

²¹¹ EFR 'Circular letter to internees in prison', 14 Nov 1940. RP XIV 2.17 (31).

²¹² *Hansard* HC, vol.373, col.1021, 23 July 1941.

²¹³ *Hansard* HC, vol.374, col.327, 11 Sept 1941.

official biographer, made no mention of Rathbone or the relationship between her and his subject. His limited references to Morrison and wartime detention present a picture of a benevolent Home Secretary who acted swiftly and generously once appointed to release certain categories of internees. Had Donoughue been able to consult Home Office documents that have been opened since the compilation of his work, and were available for the purpose of this research, it is hoped that he might have reached a rather different and accurate conclusion.²¹⁴

XIII

No discussion of Rathbone's work for interned aliens can ignore the relationship that developed between her and the Jewish community in Britain, represented by the BDBJ. Both Professor Brodetsky, the Board's president, and the Executive Committee were keenly aware of, and immensely grateful to her for the pressure she brought to bear on government officials.²¹⁵ For example, Brodetsky wrote to her personally on 12 July 1940 thanking her for her part 'in initiating the debate on refugees in the House, and the fruitful results achieved thereby.'²¹⁶ The Board were equally impressed by her November 1940 memo that 'summed up in a masterly way the whole situation concerning those aliens detained in prison'²¹⁷ Brodetsky or Adolf Brotman, the General Secretary of the BDBJ, regularly attended Executive Committee meetings of the PCR, presenting their suggestions regarding subjects to be discussed.²¹⁸ Her role, and that of other MPs and Lords, was vital if the Board were to get Questions put to the House in a hurry. But equally, they were aware of the onus of responsibility that she shouldered for:

though willing to take on every-thing, they (Rathbone and Cazalet) must find it physically impossible to do all that they are required to do and intend to do.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ B. Donoughue, *Herbert Morrison. Portrait of a Politician* (London, 1973) 302-3, 306.

²¹⁵ Letter of secretary of BDBJ to EFR, 23 July 1940. Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/1. BDBJ.

²¹⁶ Letter of Brodetsky to EFR, 12 July 1940. Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/2. BDBJ.

²¹⁷ Meeting on Aliens in Prisons, 22 Nov 1940. Acc 312C/2/3/5. BDBJ. Margery Fry, Rathbone's friend from Somerville days, was involved with this group, in her capacity as a member of the Howard League for Penal Reform.

²¹⁸ See, for example, Note on Executive Committee Meeting, PCR, 4 June 1940. Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/1. BDBJ.

²¹⁹ Unsigned Letter to Brodetsky, 19 July 1940. Acc 3121/C/2/3/5/2. BDBJ.

It was this assessment that precipitated the suggestion that personal contact with more MPs and Lords be cultivated, thus providing more opportunities for Questions, and so ease the burden on Rathbone and Cazalet.²²⁰ Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the efficacy of the Board's activities in respect of refugees, it is fair to say that they were in a very difficult situation, constantly trying to balance the national interest against that of their brethren who were suffering at the hands of the Nazi regime. There was also the fear of raising the level of domestic antisemitism, so that having a Gentile activist like Rathbone helped deflect criticism of self-interest.

Rathbone's work, and that of the PCR, continued unabated throughout 1941, and it was certainly a credit to Vera Craig and the volunteers who assisted her that they were able to undertake as much casework as they did, given the conditions they were working in. An 'obstinate time-bomb' had forced them out of the Marsham Street premises for two weeks, and on their return the staff had to manage in a half-wrecked building.²²¹ During the first three months of 1941, Rathbone reflected carefully upon the domestic refugee situation.²²² Generally speaking, she felt that the situation had improved immensely, and continued to do so steadily, but ultimately her aim was to get as many detainees released as quickly as possible. To this end she produced a lengthy memo in March 1941 summarising the 'black spots' on the refugee situation, which were 'both urgent and immediately remediable, yet little known.'²²³ Much to Morrison's annoyance, she proceeded to raise these issues in the House. Amongst others, there were Questions in the House about the finer points of distinction between categories, and the inequitable situation that resulted, causing Morrison to retort sharply that 'I have already explained the distinction.'²²⁴ Then there was his fury over her suggestion, supported by other evidence, that in one instance a six-month delay over release was due to carelessness on the part of his department.²²⁵

Nowhere was Morrison's lack of sympathy for detainees more evident than

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ PCR Report up to March 1941. 24 March 1941. MS 122, HLRO.

²²² EFR, Report on the PCR, presented at the Refugee Conference, 26-28 Jan 1941 on Rathbone's behalf. MS 122, HLRO

²²³ Memo by EFR, 'Black Spots on the Refugee Situation', March 1941, GW/13/4/15/4-5. HLRO.

²²⁴ Point 4 in the Memo, 'Black Spots'. *Hansard* HC, vol.371, cols.243-5, 24 Apr 1941.

²²⁵ For the case of Felix Mayer (Meyer) see *Hansard* HC vol.369, col.1406, 13 March 1941.

in his attitude towards refugees interned in Australia who were banned from communicating with relatives, a regulation which Rathbone described as 'cruel'. He tried to avoid becoming involved in this matter, referring to it as 'a long-distance business', but his contention, that Rathbone was 'rather exaggerating the gravity of the situation'²²⁶ confirmed his lack of compassion and empathy. Nor could he have been pleased to be reminded by Rathbone that the Canadian authorities had not found it necessary to impose such a prohibition. The ban was only one aspect of the Australian 'black spot'²²⁷ and even after it was lifted,²²⁸ Rathbone had still to fight for the release of these internees. Here she drew on the confidential support of Lord Cranborne, the Secretary for the Dominions, in the hope that he would be able to exercise some 'private and informal influence on the subject with the Australian High Commissioner.'²²⁹ But this was never going to be easy, for besides being antagonistic towards Rathbone and her campaign, Morrison's stated aim was to ensure that as few refugees as possible were freed, either at home or abroad.²³⁰

As the internment crisis diminished, so Rathbone's workload in this field reduced. By mid 1940 she had, as will be noted, already become re-engaged more specifically with the rescue of Jews: saving lives took on a new urgency after the outbreak of war precipitating the establishment of a new organisation, the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror (NCRNT), which is the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to show the change in the focus of Rathbone's work, and the way in which, from 1933, she moved away from gender-related issues to the rescue of victims of Nazi persecution. Within this context, it has also attempted to demonstrate the nature, extent and value of Rathbone's campaigning on behalf of refugees from Nazi Europe, from 1933 to late 1941.

²²⁶ Point 5 in the memo, 'Black Spots'. *Hansard* HC, vol.371, col.1983, 24 Apr 1941; col.1982, 29 May 1941.

²²⁷ For PQs on this matter see, for example *Hansard* HC, vol.367, col. 1223. 19 Dec 1940.

²²⁸ Morrison told her on 19 June 1941 that the ban on cables had been lifted. *Hansard* HC vol.372, col.804. 19 June 1941.

²²⁹ *Hansard* HC vol.372, col.806. 19 June 1941; vol.373, col. 1519, 31 July 1941; vol.374, cols.1480-82, 16 Oct 1941; vol.376, col.2052, 18 Dec 1941. Letter of EFR to R.Kidd, National Council for Civil Liberties, 26 July 1941. DCL/S/6. University of Hull Library. See also George Bell Papers, vol.31, part 2, folios 313-24. LPL.

As has been discussed, her participation in foreign affairs began with her campaigning on behalf of Indian women, from 1927. As a newly appointed MP in 1929, she then championed certain rights for African women. Her subsequent involvement with women's franchise issues in Palestine coincided with Hitler's accession to power in Germany in 1933, the latter being a defining moment in her career, and the point at which humanitarianism, in its broadest sense, became of paramount importance. Identifying this as the point at which Rathbone's priorities changed has not been taken arbitrarily. Susan Pedersen, in her recent biography of Rathbone, locates the change to 1935, at the time of the Abyssinian crisis. However, it would be more accurate to identify 1933 as the pivotal date, given that she presciently, confronted the threat of Nazism on democracy and the lives of the Jews of Europe at that time.²³¹

As has been demonstrated, it was at this time that the scope and nature of Rathbone's humanitarian activities expanded. Whereas, before 1933, women at home and abroad had been the main beneficiaries of her representations, talents and skills as a fighter for justice, the rise of Nazism and the global threat to peace presented new challenges. But what mattered, and indeed what was always of primary concern to Rathbone, was her inherent need to respond to the suffering of others. Her concept of right and wrong had never been so severely challenged, and she became vociferous in foreign policy debates surrounding Britain's response to the Abyssinian crisis and its reaction to the Spanish Civil War. Her deeply rooted sense of what it meant to be British, and what Britain stood for was at the core of her engagement with the collective security debate and the anti-appeasement lobby, but it was Britain's declaration of war on Germany in September 1939 that crystallised her dedication to relieving human suffering.

Unravelling the reasons why Rathbone embraced the cause of Jewish refugees so passionately is complex, and a combination of interrelated factors. Pedersen has argued that in calling for a 'comprehensive effort to save the Jews, Rathbone was urging Britain to take responsibility for populations not tied to it by political obligation or control.'²³² There was, as she rightly points out, Rathbone's innate

²³⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol.373, col.1516. 31 July 1941.

²³¹ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 276.

²³² *Ibid.* 301.

sense of personal responsibility, which was spelt out in April 1939.²³³ Thus her conscience impelled her to try and mitigate the evils being meted out to Europe's Jews, and to save as many as possible from annihilation. As she often pointed out, other individuals, as well as the government, shared this responsibility, but not only did their failure or reluctance to act not absolve her from acting, it impelled her to strive even harder. There was also her humanitarianism, which transcended political boundaries. And her actions were certainly underpinned by the philosophical idealism she had absorbed from her family upbringing and tradition, and imbibed from her Oxford tutors.

Pedersen has also asserted that despite Rathbone's 'admiration for Jewish culture and for the idealistic Zionists she had met in Palestine' her conviction [to save Jews] was not 'grounded in some foundational sense of communal identity.'²³⁴ The latter, when considered alongside several other factors, provides a compelling argument that Rathbone was, despite Pedersen's assertion to the contrary, motivated by her identification with Jews. The roots of this included her admiration for their many attributes, as well as her empathy with them as 'Europeans', people whom she could consider as kin. And despite being a non-practising Christian, she recognised familiar biblical connections and similarities in religion and culture.²³⁵ Transcending this was the fact that the Jews of Europe were, without doubt, the most vulnerable and helpless victims of an evil regime. Their helplessness resonated with the Victorian ideology of the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving', only now it was not the worthy poor who were being helped, but Jews, whose cultural and societal contributions Rathbone admired, and which contributed towards their status of deserving of help. This mind-set would, to an extent, explain why she did not support the cause of other minority groups, like Gypsies, who despite being singled out by the Nazi regime, had not made their mark on society in a similar fashion as had the Jews.

Rathbone's involvement came about because the British government, in whom she had previously held such faith, were, as far as possible, denying these people succour and a means of survival. She could be described as the conscience of the nation. Whilst her admiration for, and personal identification with the Jewish race

²³³ EFR, 'Personal View', 568-9.

²³⁴ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 301-2.

²³⁵ Stocks, *Rathbone*. 208 & Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 6.

increased from the 1930s onwards, so did her support for Zionism and its ideals, a point which Gollancz made in his final tribute to her in 1946, but her humanitarian activities were neither confined to, nor defined by these affiliations.²³⁶ Rathbone's undertaking was monumental, not least of all because there were opponents, both inside and outside of government, who thought that she was being disloyal by deflecting attention away from the war effort itself. She never considered there to be a conflict of interest, but instead saw saving the lives of those threatened with extermination by the Nazis as a moral obligation, not an option. She harboured an unprecedented degree of personal guilt for the actions of others, and this deeply ingrained sense of individual responsibility impelled her to campaign even harder. She used every means at her disposal in her fight for justice. Her sources of independent information were legion, and her network of political and international contacts was extensive: these were all utilised to the full, and were expanded wherever and whenever possible. As has been demonstrated, she was relentless in her campaigning: she was uncompromising in her attacks on recalcitrant officials, and unrelenting in the pressure she exerted upon them. It was thus appropriate that Harold Nicolson should have referred to her as 'the Britomart of 1939',²³⁷ or that junior ministers tried to avoid catching her eye in the Lobby, lest she commandeered their help.²³⁸ It is doubtful that any other approach would have achieved anything, for Rathbone was not only a woman in a male dominated environment, but she was fighting for a cause which was seen by many, as incompatible with the war effort.

Assessing the qualitative effectiveness of this work is far from straight forward, but Pamela Shatzkes' unequivocal conclusion that Rathbone was 'a less influential figure than they [the Anglo-Jewish refugee organisations] may have assumed,'²³⁹ appears crude and uninformed in the light of the detailed evidence presented in this chapter. Rathbone's own comments, made in 1941, that '... privately, we have reason to know that not only the refugees and their friends but the Home Office officials chiefly concerned in this work do find our office really helpful,'²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Victor Gollancz, 'Eleanor Rathbone', *AJR Information*, Feb 1946, 13.

²³⁷ A reference to Edmund Spenser's warrior queen. H.Nicolson 'People and Things', *Spectator*, 20 Jan 1939.

²³⁸ H.Nicolson, 'Marginal Comment', *Spectator*, 11 Jan 1946.

²³⁹ P. Shatzkes, *Holocaust and Rescue. Impotent or Indifferent Anglo-Jewry 1938-1945* (Basingstoke, 2002) 226.

²⁴⁰ Letter of EFR to Gestetner, 8 Oct 1941. CBF 113/57. Wiener Library.

indicate that refugees and Jewish organisations were reliant upon Rathbone's support. They were more than satisfied with the influence she brought to bear through her persistent campaigning, accepting the limitations of her position.²⁴¹ Nor do Shatzkes's comments take account of the quantitative extent of Rathbone's caseload, for no reference is made to the innumerable cases found within the Home Office files, represented in Appendix Two, or to the lists of individual refugees included in, amongst others, the papers of Graham White. Besides this, not all of Rathbone's refugee work took place under the PCR umbrella, for, as noted, she was involved in a vast number of other related committees. The latest of these in this period, was her appointment, in 1941, as a vice president of the NCCL.²⁴²

The question remains as to the efficacy of Rathbone's activism during this period. The outcome of the Evian conference, in July 1938, left her in no doubt that the British government was avoiding involvement, financially or otherwise, in the refugee crisis. This evasion of national responsibility pushed her to exert more pressure on officials, and her campaigning gained momentum as the refugee crisis escalated, especially from November 1938, just months after the Munich Settlement, as persecuted Jews tried to escape from Czechoslovakia. Her persistence, both in and out of the House, helped keep the impending human catastrophe on the minds of officials and in the public eye, and to this extent impacted upon their consciences, if not upon their actions. For not only was Rathbone concerned with saving lives on humanitarian grounds, but she was also desperate for Britain to act honourably and thus restore her national pride and reputation.

In respect of her challenges to internment policies it is clear that she was the leading light in the anti-Government campaign that reached its apogee in the Adjournment Debate on Refugees on 19 July 1940. She was also the person who fought the hardest to get the interned freed. The fact that the July 1940 debate took place when it did was remarkable, for even though Britain feared imminent invasion, the Government were no longer able to avoid the mounting controversy engendered by their policies. And it was Rathbone's voice that was invariably heard above all others. Viewed against contemporary evidence, many of the supporting arguments against internment, set out in her paper 'How British Policy Towards Refugees Helps

²⁴¹ Shatzkes, *Holocaust*, 226.

²⁴² MSS G.Murray, 91, folio 84, Bodleian Library. Oxford University.

Hitler', were well founded.²⁴³ Examples included the expelling and dispersing of aliens under supervision on the coast that left them beyond official control, and how interning useful employees, be they doctors, dentists or agricultural workers, damaged the industrial war effort. Families who were separated by internment were left without a breadwinner, putting unnecessary financial strain on government and refugee agencies. This was to say nothing of the hundreds of military, police and civil servants who were deployed to take charge of the whole effort.

It is important to remember that Rathbone was not alone in denouncing the general policy of internment. John Maynard Keynes referred to the widespread outrage within government circles, claiming he had 'not met a single soul, inside or outside government departments who is not furious at what is going on.'²⁴⁴ And Francois Lafitte's denunciatory and best selling Penguin special study, *The Internment of Aliens*, compiled with the support of impartial civil servants, corroborated her view that mass internment caused needless suffering and dislocation.²⁴⁵ Samuel Hoare (1st Viscount Templewood, 1944) subsequently described the internment of refugee intellectuals and others as enemy aliens thus, 'Never was there a more obscurantist act, which tore scholars and scientists away their work and deported them to the Isle of Man, Canada and Australia.'²⁴⁶ Rathbone's opposition was further vindicated once the harsh reality of internment policies became apparent. The most palpable instance was the death of hundreds of internees being deported on the *Arandora Star* which was torpedoed in mid-Atlantic *en route* for Canada. Anderson's oppositional attitude to general internment as:

an inappropriate method of dealing with the problem both because it would be a wasteful method and because it would be wrong to treat as enemies refugees who are hostile to the Nazi regime, unlikely to do anything to assist the enemy and often anxious to assist the country which has given them asylum,²⁴⁷

²⁴³ EFR, 'How British Policy Towards Refugees Helps Hitler', 6 July 1940, RP XIV 2.17 (10)

²⁴⁴ John Maynard Keynes to Francis C.Scott, 23 July 1940, in D.Moggridge (ed.) *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, vol. XXII, *Activities 1939-1945: Internal War Finance* (Cambridge, 1978) 190-1.

²⁴⁵ Lafitte, *Internment of Aliens*.

²⁴⁶ Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (1954) 241. Hoare was Lord Privy Seal and member of the War Cabinet between 1939-40, Secretary for Air 1940 and Ambassador to Spain 1940-4.

²⁴⁷ Letter of Anderson to Lord Halifax, 7 Nov 1939. PRO HO 371/22941.

reflected Rathbone's own view, but was one that was countermanded by Churchill, under pressure from the military leadership and the secret service. The fact that the government White Paper, issued in July 1940, heralded a shift to a policy of release was further confirmation that her initial reaction was not hyperbole. The pressure that she exerted on the government was unquestionably of value: not only did she keep the political debate alive, but she never wavered from her commitment to the humanitarian aspects of internment and her overt concern for the rights and welfare of the individual refugee. The closure of unsuitable camps, the improved communications between internees and families, and better conditions for those detained all owed much to Rathbone's dedication to their cause.

Of her rapport with officials, Rathbone faced considerable opposition from within government circles, and the rift that developed between her and Home and Foreign Office officials, especially Morrison, grew exponentially as the refugee crisis deepened. In the light of this relationship it is relatively easy to evaluate her role as the champion of refugees. She was the most vociferous of the parliamentary refugee activists and without her continued haranguing, Morrison would have found it much simpler to avoid refugee related issues. As far as her relationship with Churchill was concerned, she was highly critical of his government's policies towards refugees and aliens, but her loyalty to, and admiration of him grew once he was elected Prime Minister. She identified with his forthright approach and was mesmerised by his speeches, later telling him 'that not only this nation but the world owes more to you than to any other British statesman who has ever lived.'²⁴⁸ The support she received from her fellow activists, including Cazalet, Wedgwood, Noel-Baker and Graham White, was undeniably important, and their unequivocal praise for her indefatigable commitment to the refugee cause is significant in assessing the value of her work.

Initiating the establishment of the PCR was a brilliant move on Rathbone's part. Its all-party composition enabled MPs of all political shades to exert pressure on the government, and since the majority of its members, indeed of the government itself were Christians, it could never justifiably be said that there was influence from within in favour of Jews. From the recipients point-of-view, it provided an invaluable humanitarian service, and proved to be a worthwhile and effective conduit through which refugee matters could be dealt with. Indeed it is hard to imagine how the

thousands of troubled individuals who put their cases to the PCR would have coped without its help.

There is no doubt that after the outbreak of the Second World War the bulk of Rathbone's time, in 'man-hours', was given over to refugee issues, but it is important to remember that between 1933 and 1939 she was absorbed in a number of inter-related issues of foreign policy. The collective security debate, the Abyssinian crisis, the developing civil war in Spain and her active opposition to appeasement, discussed previously, occupied her mind and time, both inside and out of the House. The APAG, which she set up, was just one of the many committees whose meetings she attended. But domestic women's issues, which had formed the major plank of her pre-1933 career, became relatively unimportant.²⁴⁹ The exception was her commitment to the introduction of a family allowance,²⁵⁰ but the advent of war altered the nature of this battle, and it was soon taken out of Rathbone's hands.²⁵¹ But it was a testimony of Rathbone's energy, skill and commitment that, at the height of the internment crisis in spring 1940, she was nevertheless able to produce a one hundred-page Penguin Special, *The Case for Family Allowances*. There was also a brief but notable foray into Indian affairs in 1941, in the wake of Indian nationalist refusal to cooperate in the war effort.²⁵²

The quantitative effect of Rathbone's campaigning, particularly in respect of her press articles and published letters is simpler to assess. Average circulation figures for the *Manchester Guardian*, the newspaper champion of refugees,²⁵³ and the most frequent publisher of her material, were only 50,000 a day in 1937, compared with a daily distribution of around 2 ½ million copies of the *Daily Express*.²⁵⁴ Thus the audience she reached through this medium was numerically limited and already politically sympathetic to her liberal views. Whilst it could be argued that this

²⁴⁸ Letter of EFR to Churchill, 26 March 1943. CHAR 20/102/74. Churchill Papers. CAC.

²⁴⁹ There was the subject of women police patrols in Liverpool. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 288. She was also briefly involved with the wartime feminist lobby group known as the 'Woman Power Committee'. Papers of the WPC, Coll. Misc. 548, BLPES. See also H. Smith, 'The Womanpower (sic) Problem in Britain during the Second World War', *Historical Journal*, 24, 4 (Dec 1984) 925-45.

²⁵⁰ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 278.

²⁵¹ Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 360 ff.

²⁵² *Ibid.* 322-7.

²⁵³ Up to the end of 1940 the paper published over 54 editorials and articles and printed more than 110 letters, all concerned with the fate of internees. See Stent, *Bespattered Page?*, 79.

²⁵⁴ M. Curtis, *The Press* (London, 1951) 57,63. My thanks to Clive Fleay for drawing my attention to these facts and figures.

readership was of a more influential and committed calibre, it is clear that her message would, potentially, have had a far greater impact, had the paper reached a wider audience. To summarise, this first phase of Rathbone's involvement in refugee issues did bring about tangible results, and prepared the way for a campaign of a very different sort from 1942 onwards.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Eleanor Rathbone and the rescue of refugees, 1940-46

Overview

The focus of this final chapter is upon Rathbone's wartime commitment to the international rescue of Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe, the period covered extending from June 1940 until her death in January 1946. The chronological overlap with the previous chapter, which concentrated on her activism on behalf of interned aliens until late 1941, is unavoidable, for Rathbone made her first, albeit brief foray into international wartime rescue during this period. However, to have discussed a specific rescue mission within the overall context of internment issues would have lost the full integrity of this work. And in contrast to previous chapters, which have been introduced by a brief overview of contemporary events, in this instance Rathbone's activities will be examined within the context of the domestic and international political situation and general issues concerning the Home Front.

In terms of Rathbone's campaigning on behalf of Jews, this was the most crucial phase of her involvement, for unlike the majority of her refugee work from 1933, it was now specifically concerned with the saving of lives, rather than ameliorating the position and condition of internees. As has been demonstrated, the change in focus of Rathbone's work in mid-1941 coincided with the Nazi implementation of programmes of mass murder of Jews. This raises a number of very significant issues, all of which will be addressed in this section. Foremost is the question of what impelled Rathbone to change direction and take on the mantle of rescuer, an issue that is directly related to when and how her knowledge of the 'Final Solution' was acquired, and what her understanding of this human tragedy was. Intimately linked to this was the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror (NCRNT) which Rathbone established in 1943. Questions to be addressed here relate to the efficacy of the group, the viability of the schemes proposed, and the response of the Anglo-Jewish community and the British government and its officials, to Rathbone, the committee and its work. Considered against this will be the significance of Rathbone's association with the US and their War Refugee Board.

The importance of her connection with Arthur Koestler,¹ the Hungarian-born refugee and writer, and Victor Gollancz, the left-wing publisher and founder of the Left Book Club,² will be discussed. So too will her relationship with government officials, especially Osbert Peake, the parliamentary under secretary for Home Affairs and Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary. Consideration will also be given to her perception of 'the deserving' in relation to refugees. Where appropriate, Susan Pedersen's recent appraisal of Rathbone's rescue work will be discussed and evaluated.³

The other vital aspect of this period, and one that will be scrutinized alongside other issues, was the effect that the official British response to the refugee crisis had upon Rathbone's concept of national identity and pride in Britain, and the challenge that this presented. In conclusion, an evaluation will be made of this final phase of Rathbone's career as a humanitarian activist.

I

One of the first instances of Rathbone's efforts at aiding the rescue of refugees from war-torn Nazi Europe was in June 1940, when Britain was facing the real risk of invasion. Germany's incursion into France threatened the lives of large numbers of refugees, included amongst whom were many world-famous distinguished scientists, academics and others.⁴ Blanche Dugdale, Arthur Balfour's niece and a close friend of Chaim Weizmann,⁵ and Richard Reitzner, Deputy Group Leader of the Thomas Mann group of the Czech Refugee Trust, enlisted Rathbone's help with a planned rescue mission,⁶ which she then put to R. A. Butler, parliamentary under secretary at the Foreign Office. Not for the last time she posited the notion of evacuating refugees by sea. And as she was to do time and again, she was prepared to pursue any chance of rescue, however slim that might be. But she knew that it was unlikely that Butler

¹ For the most recent biography of Koestler, see D. Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler. The Homeless Mind* (London, 1999).

² Edwards, *Gollancz and Lewis, Left Book Club*.

³ Pedersen. *Politics of Conscience*.

⁴ See Letter of W. Sternfeld (of the Czech Refugee Trust) to EFR, 23 June 1940. PRO FO 371/24326 C7400/7304/17.

⁵ Dugdale was a founding member of the LNU, and a Gentile Zionist. For this period of her life see N. Rose (ed.) *Baffy. The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale 1936-1947* (London, 1973).

⁶ Rathbone was sent lists of names by Blanche Dugdale and Richard Reitzner. See 3 letters of EFR to Butler, 24 June 1940. PRO FO 371/24326 C7400/7304/17.

could sanction such a scheme, for as she wrote 'I know it is only a 1-20 chance that you can do anything to save them, but one has to take 1-20 chances nowadays.'⁷

Indeed, as Butler regretfully wrote:

the speed of the German advance, and the appalling confusion at Bordeaux made the evacuation of such people on a large scale impossible.⁸

As later rescue proposals indicate, Rathbone would actually have been satisfied with a successful small-scale initiative, but she did not pursue this as an option at this time. This may well have been because she was well aware that Britain was in a precarious position itself, and apprehensive about the possibility of a German invasion.

Apart from this brief foray into the rescue arena, Rathbone spent most of the intervening period, from mid-1940 to mid-1941, dealing with the urgent humanitarian concerns that resulted from mass internment at home, and from the deportation of detainees to Australia. But she still maintained a close eye on matters related to international rescue, for in the spring of 1941 she raised concerns about the condition of internees in Le Vernet camp in France⁹ with Sir Herbert Emerson, the High Commissioner for Refugees.¹⁰ She had tried to involve John Winant, the US Ambassador, in a move to improve the situation, but even though he had referred the matter to Washington, the *status quo*, in October 1941, was unchanged.¹¹ What is important to note is that Rathbone had direct contact at a personal level with US officials, and was able to discuss refugee-related issues with them. This was to prove valuable later, in 1944, when President Franklin Roosevelt initiated the establishment of the US War Refugee Board (WRB), the only organisation ever set up by any Allied government with the specific aim of rescuing Jews from the Nazis.

The opportunity of revitalizing the Le Vernet campaign came about after she read *Scum of the Earth*, written by Arthur Koestler.¹² The book, a combination of reportage and autobiography, included Koestler's personal experiences of detention

⁷ Letter of EFR to Butler, 24 June 1940. PRO FO 371/24326 C7400/7304/17.

⁸ Letter of Butler to EFR, 1 July 1940. PRO FO 371/24326 C7400/7304/17.

⁹ Le Vernet, in the department of Ariège near the Spanish border, had been established to hold Spanish Republicans who had fled into France when the civil war ended. See Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 157

¹⁰ Letter of EFR to Koestler, 14 Oct 1941. MS 2371/2/68. Koestler Archive, UE.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Koestler had arrived in England as a refugee in Nov 1940. See Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 170.

in Le Vernet, France and those of his fellow internees, especially the International Brigaders (IBs). There were two aspects of the book that Rathbone identified as important. There was its propaganda value, which she considered:

... could be used as a crowbar to prise into the consciences of people such as Winant, others in the USA (sic), and the Vichy people if one could get it to them directly or making a loud stink in the Press...¹³

And there was the potential benefit of forging a stronger working relationship with Koestler. The two had previously met in late 1940,¹⁴ and had discussed Rathbone's interest in the question of refugees with special qualifications serving in the Pioneer Corps.¹⁵ The current meeting occurred whilst Koestler was on leave from his Pioneer Corp unit between 30 October and 6 November 1941, and now Rathbone made clear her support of his plan to rescue some of the 80-100,000 internees and stateless aliens in France. 45,000 of these, mostly Jews, were in internment camps. The scheme was dependent upon the US offering to intern the aliens on territory under their control, possibly the Virgin Islands, for the rest of the war. Rathbone, in the company of Lady Violet Asquith,¹⁶ Lady Cripps¹⁷ and the journalist David Astor, attended several important meetings¹⁸ with Winant and Gustav Kullmann, a Swiss citizen and Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees under Emerson, in the hope of persuading the US to take up the plan.¹⁹ Koestler kept in touch with Rathbone, and within days of his return to his company in Gloucestershire he sent her a lengthy memorandum in which he detailed the position of the refugees, the threat to them, and suggestions for the next practical steps and a proposed rescue scheme.²⁰ Official

¹³ Letter of EFR to Koestler, 14 Oct 1941. MS 2371/2/68. Koestler Archive, UE.

¹⁴ Rathbone was amongst the people whom Koestler's wife, Dorothea, wrote to in 1937, in an effort to secure his release from prison in Seville, Spain. See Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 128-35.

¹⁵ Letter of Koestler to EFR. 7 Jan 1941. MS 2372/1/156. Koestler Archive, UE.

¹⁶ Violet Bonham-Carter was H.H. Asquith's daughter and was a member of the wartime feminist lobby group known as the 'Woman Power Committee', with which Rathbone was briefly involved. Papers of the WPC, Coll Misc. 548, BLPES. See also H. Smith, 'The Womanpower Problem in Britain during the Second World War', *Historical Journal*, 24, 4 (Dec 1984) 925-45.

¹⁷ Public servant and wife of Sir Stafford Cripps.

¹⁸ For Astor, journalist and future newspaper proprietor, see R. Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer* (London, 1991) 2-59 and D. Wilson, *The Astors. 1763-1992* (London, 1993).

¹⁹ Koestler was on leave in London from the Pioneer Corps during these dates. See Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 184.

²⁰ David Astor and Paul Sturge, the Secretary of Friends Service Council, were also sent the memo. As a way of publicizing the plan, Astor got Koestler to write an 800-word article for *The Observer* which his father had bought from Lord Northcliffe in 1911. See Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 185.

reaction from the Refugee Department to the plan was mixed: Lady Cheetham was not against Washington being approached, but Edward Alan Walker, whose dislike of Rathbone and her campaigning was overt, described it as:

a somewhat utopian one, or in any case ambitious, more particularly at the present time as the States, like ourselves, have numerous other fish to fry. ²¹

Winant's initial reaction to this memo was rather more optimistic, and certainly encouraged the two campaigners, ²² but it was not long before Rathbone was the harbinger of bad news, as it became clear that the deterioration in relations between the US and Vichy France would prevent their scheme being adopted. ²³ The depression in Rathbone's letter to Koestler on 12 December 1941 was clear, for she had to concede that things were 'looking very badly for our project for obvious reasons' (i.e. the US's entry into the war). He, meanwhile, had suffered a serious breakdown in his health and was incapacitated. It was left to Rathbone to maintain pressure on the US to take up the scheme, and in customary fashion she pursued every possible angle, involving as many sympathisers as possible. Miss Bracey of the Society of Friends wrote to her compatriots in the US, suggesting that they bring pressure to bear on Roosevelt, whilst Rathbone sent copies of Koestler's memo to Richard Law, the Junior Foreign Office minister, and to Alec Randall, the head of the Refugee Department in the Foreign Office. Reporting to Koestler again in late December, she told him that since her last letter she had spoken to Randall about the scheme. The most serious obstacle seemed to be the difficulty with shipping, a problem that he and Winant confirmed, but this was not sufficient for Winant to want to drop the idea. ²⁴ And it certainly did not deflect Rathbone from pursuing it, in the same way as she had with Butler in June 1940.

By the time she wrote to Koestler again in late January 1942, his health had improved sufficiently for her to anticipate his renewed support. She and David Astor

²¹ EFR. 'Scheme for the Rescue of Alien Refugees in Unoccupied France and French North Africa', 13 Nov 1941. Note by Cheetham, 5 Dec 1941, Note by Walker, 8 Dec 1941. All PRO FO 371/29233 W14514.

²² Letter of Koestler to EFR, 9 Nov 1941, MS 2413/2. Koestler Archive, UE. The memo was passed on to Winant by Astor.

²³ Letter of EFR to Koestler, 28 Nov 1941, MS 2371/2/139. Koestler Archive, UE.

²⁴ Letter of EFR to Koestler, 18 Dec 1941, MS 2371/2/178. Koestler Archive, UE.

had, meanwhile, met again with Lewis Einstein, an embassy official appointed by Winant, and had come away 'greatly discouraged and feeling that progress through that man was impossible.'²⁵ As the US were now belligerents, Astor and Einstein thought that the country would want Britain to share the responsibility of receiving the refugees for internment. Rathbone did not entirely agree with this argument, on the basis that Britain already had so many internees and was in a more immediately dangerous position than the US. Nevertheless she told Koestler of the strategic action she had taken in securing a meeting with Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security.

The relationship between Rathbone and Morrison was already acrimonious, having deteriorated steadily since the internment crisis in 1940. His barely disguised lack of humanity towards refugees was to haunt her to the end of her days, and it must have required a supreme effort on her part to go cap-in-hand to him. But rescuing people was her principal aim, and she was prepared to use every means at her disposal to achieve this goal, adapting her approach to meet the situation. If she needed to be deferential, then she tried to be so, and *vice versa*. As pro-active as she was, she was a trustworthy confidante. Her hammering technique may have infuriated its recipients, but she was shameless in her pursuit of action and answers. Now she begged Morrison to consider giving some of the thousands of now-empty places in the Isle of Man camps to the refugees, but in a deliberately shrewd move, suggested that the principal beneficiaries should be IB's, on the grounds that:

they had suffered the longest and had the greatest moral claim on us through our part in the non-intervention scheme.²⁶

The argument was one she anticipated would appeal to Morrison and Jagger, his personal parliamentary secretary. Ultimately what was important was to get the principle of rescue accepted and a start made, to pave the way for 'some of the more important politicals other than I.B's to be slipped in.'²⁷ Morrison's attitude may have appeared to be sympathetic, and his promise to really consider the whole matter genuine, but private notes written by Randall after this meeting unequivocally rejected

²⁵ Rathbone described Einstein as 'a newcomer to the refugee question (who) will need to be kept fed with information.' Letter of EFR to Koestler, 24 Jan 1942, MS 2371/3/57-8. Koestler Archive, UE.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

her rescue plan on numerous familiar grounds: it was too ambitious, impracticable even on a smaller scale, and would only be considered if the US led the way.²⁸ This was an avenue that Rathbone continued to pursue, even coming up with a solution, proposed by Koestler, to overcome the major obstacle of the apparent shipping difficulty.²⁹

II

Rathbone was now totally immersed in the refugee catastrophe to the exclusion of anything else. When the Ministry of Information invited her to undertake a short lecturing tour in Sweden, aimed at promoting certain aspects of the British war effort, she refused because, as she wrote, her current subjects were 'in crisis' and 'ought not be deserted during the next few weeks.'³⁰ Amongst these was her anguish over the fate of the 769 Jewish refugees from Roumania traveling on the *Struma*. The ship had left Constanza on 12 December 1941 *en route* for Palestine, but had become stranded in the sea off Istanbul. For two months Turkey refused leave for the passengers to land or the ship to proceed, and the British government resolutely ignored pleas to authorise the refugees admission to Palestine. All but two of the refugees drowned when the ship sunk after the Turks towed it out into the Black Sea in late February 1942.³¹ When Rathbone raised the matter during a deputation in mid March, she could hardly believe it when Lord Cranborne told her that the refugees could not be admitted into Palestine as the Jewish quota under the 1939 White Paper had been exhausted. It was inconceivable to her that this restriction had been adhered to in such extenuating humanitarian circumstances,³² and must have been even more disturbed to discover, days later, that the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee of America had actually offered £ 6000 for the settlement of the 769 Struma refugees in

²⁸ EFR, Notes on Internees in unoccupied France, 24 Jan 1942. PRO FO 371/32654 W1204/107/48

²⁹ Letter of EFR to US Ambassador, 6 Feb 1942. PRO FO 371/32654 W2305/107/48.

³⁰ Letter of Ministry of Information to EFR, 5 March 1942. RP XIV 2.19 (3) Letter of EFR to Bracken, 10 March 1942. RP XIV 2.19 (4).

³¹ B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1988) 143-63, 340.

³² Nor did Cranborne know that the only two survivors of the tragedy were in danger of deportation from Turkey. One was a former passenger who had been allowed to leave the ship as she was pregnant. The other was David Stoliar. See Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews*, 155-6. The deputation, which included Rathbone, Lord Melchett, Victor Cazalet and Wedgwood, met Lord Cranborne and Harold Macmillan *circa* 20 March 1942. See Letter of J.Linton to the Political Department (of the Jewish Agency) 23 March 1942. Z4/14882. CZA.

Palestine, making them eligible for entry on the grounds of ensured maintenance alone.³³

Over the course of the next few months Rathbone continued dealing with innumerable individual internment cases and refugee employment issues. But as the internment crisis diminished, so the sceptre of Nazism grew. Information about atrocities against Jews in Nazi occupied Europe was beginning to trickle through, and on 25 June 1942, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that 700,000 Polish Jews had been killed, some by mobile gas chambers.³⁴ Then there was news of the escalating crisis in France, for in July 1942 the Vichy regime agreed to hand over 10,000 Jews to the Germans, with thousands more French and foreign Jews fearing imminent death. Those who risked trying to escape to Switzerland were, in the main, thwarted, as the Swiss government closed its frontiers to most refugees, especially Jews, and stepped up military measures to prevent illegal entry.³⁵ More disturbing was a report, passed on to the Foreign Office in August 1942 by a representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, which indicated that Germany's leaders had plans for the wholesale extermination of European Jewry.³⁶ By late August 1942, it was clear to British officials that deportation to the 'east' was a euphemism for mass murder.³⁷

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely when Rathbone realised that the Nazi policy towards Jews had changed, and that annihilation was their goal. However, given that she was in very close contact with William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the summer of 1942, it is very likely that he would have told her about the reports he received from the YMCA representative in Geneva in August, September and October 1942, detailing the treatment of Jews in non-occupied France.³⁸ Another likely source of information, but slightly later, was Jan Karski (Kowielski), a member of the Polish underground movement.³⁹ Karski had been asked by the Jewish leaders in the Warsaw ghetto to report to the Government-in-Exile on the plight of the Jews there

³³ Letter of J.Linton to EFR, 26 March 1942. Z4/14882. CZA.

³⁴ S. Ward 'Why the BBC ignored the Holocaust' *The Independent*, 22 Aug 1993.

³⁵ For a detailed account of this episode see Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews*, 108-14.

³⁶ L.London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948. British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 2000) 198-9. See also S. Brodetsky *Memoirs. From Ghetto to Israel* (1960), 218. For the most recent studies of this period see C.Browning, *Fateful Months. Essays on the emergence of the Final Solution* (2003) and *Origins of the Final Solution: the Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 - March 1942* (Lincoln, USA & Jerusalem, 2004).

³⁷ See Cooper, 'Memorandum on Post-War Problems', 29 Aug 1942, PRO HO 213/1347, para.12.

³⁸ The reports to Temple are to be found in Temple Papers, 54/157-66. LPL.

³⁹ E.Thomas Wood & S.M. Jankowski. *Karski: How One Man Tried To Stop the Holocaust* (New York, 1994).

and of the mass killings at Belzec extermination camp.⁴⁰ His mission in the West, and in London in late 1942-43, was to try and alert the Government and activists to the fate of Polish Jewry.⁴¹ Although Rathbone was not introduced to Karski until early 1943, Koestler first met him in November 1942, at around the time of his wife's plight in occupied France. Given Rathbone's help in securing a transit visa for Dorothea to go to Portugal⁴² and her subsequent contact with Koestler, it is reasonable to assume that she would have been apprised of Karski's information in late 1942.⁴³

III

As the threat of Nazi policy towards the Jews increased, so the pressure from activists in Britain and the US grew to such an extent that the British government had little option but to address the question of immigration into the country.⁴⁴ In a well-rehearsed fashion, Morrison's suggestions all reflected his intention, and that of the British government, to do as little as possible for refugees, whilst appearing to be generous. He was initially of a mind to promote a scheme whereby children and old people were allowed into Britain, but Foreign Office minutes record the growing reluctance of officials to agree to a plan which seemed to involve 'giving priority in the grant of UK visas to Jews over all other categories of Allied nationals' which would 'be resented by the Allied governments.'⁴⁵

The situation gained greater urgency after Pierre Laval, who had recently been re-appointed as the head of the Vichy government by Marshal Petain, issued a public statement, on 10 September 1942, announcing his intention to 'cleanse France of its foreign Jewry,' thus threatening the lives of some 100,000 people.⁴⁶ At a general level, this explicit warning did arouse a degree of sympathy in Britain, but more specifically, it had a very profound effect upon Rathbone, who was foremost amongst

⁴⁰ See 'Extermination of the Polish Jewry. What Happened in the Warsaw Ghetto', *Polish Fortnightly Review*, no.57, 1 Dec 1942. NBKR 4/578. CAC.

⁴¹ Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 202-3.

⁴² The visa came too late for in Nov 1942 the Germans occupied the Free Zone and all chances of extricating Dorothea faded. See Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 201-02.

⁴³ Koestler introduced Rathbone and Gollancz to Karski at a party given by the Polish émigré artist, Feliks Topolski. See Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler*, 202-3.

⁴⁴ Minute by Randall, 7 Sept 1942. PRO FO 371/32683 W11681/4993/48.

⁴⁵ Minutes by F.K.Roberts, R.L.Speight and Randall, 8 Sept 1942. PRO FO 371/32683 W11681/4993/48.

⁴⁶ Statement of Laval, quoted in A.Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators 1922-45* (1973) 316, as cited in Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews*, 111.

the active non-Jewish refugee sympathisers.⁴⁷ The depth of her concern, which was driven as much by her personal humanitarianism as it was by her deeply held conviction that Britain should react to this crisis honourably, generously and with compassion, was evident in the letters and conversations which passed between her and Morrison.

One proposal, discussed with Morrison, was for a collective approach to be made, by the refugee bodies, to the Latin American governments, in the hope that they would try to persuade the Vichy government to change their minds about the deportation of Jews. Morrison, having consulted with Mr Penrose of the US Embassy, thought that it very unlikely that these governments might succeed where the US had failed. Whilst he could find no reason for the Foreign Office to intervene with the despatch of any appeal from the refugee bodies in their private capacity, he was most anxious to disassociate the British government from the venture. He thus arranged for a message to be sent to the official representatives in fifteen such countries on 6 November 1942, asking each of them to 'take any opportunity of dispelling any idea that His Majesty's government instigated this step.'⁴⁸ However there was no suggestion that the appeal was unworthy, for the telegram also referred to the petitioners as:

people of the highest reputation and their feelings over a peculiarly distressing situation, which measures taken by Vichy authorities under German pressure have brought about, are entirely comprehensible.⁴⁹

Having first consulted with Emerson,⁵⁰ Rathbone then arranged for a deputation to meet Morrison. The calibre of the large and influential group that he received on 28 October 1942 reflected the gravity of the current situation.⁵¹ The fact that the majority of its members, and indeed of the PCR, were not Jewish was also significant, given Morrison's barely concealed dislike of Jews, and open hostility towards refugees. These were not a group of Jews campaigning for the lives of their co-religionists, a cause which, the anti-alien lobby would argue, would create more

⁴⁷ For the pressure exerted on Morrison by Otto Schiff, chairman of the Jewish Refugee Committee, see Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews*, 112-13.

⁴⁸ Note on refugees in unoccupied France, 28 Oct 1942. PRO FO 371/32680 W14410/4555/48.

⁴⁹ Telegram, 6 Nov 1942. PRO FO 371/32681 W14915.

⁵⁰ Memo of Emerson in advance of deputation. 26 Oct 1942. Temple Papers, 54/126. LPL.

⁵¹ There is a considerable amount of correspondence between Rathbone and William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, concerning refugees in France around this period. See Temple Papers, 54. LPL.

domestic antisemitism and be perceived as conflicting with the war effort. Rather they were a group of humanitarian activists, from a wide section of the political and religious spectrum, united in their fight to rescue people in danger of annihilation.⁵² It was therefore a tactical move for William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with whom Rathbone had a very close working relationship, to lead the group. Temple was deeply moved by the persecution of the Jews, and proved to be a valuable campaigner, renowned for his tact and diplomatic skills. But these attributes were not enough to prevent the meeting deteriorating into an ideological and verbal battle between Rathbone and Morrison. Any hopes Rathbone had harboured of a positive outcome for the French Jewish children were soon shattered, for, despite her eloquent representation, Morrison stood his ground.⁵³ The reply he gave was:

completely negative in substance and ungracious in form (some thought it offensive). He neither made nor held out any hopes of any concessions whatever.⁵⁴

His responses were full of the usual anti-alien rhetoric that asserted that Jewish refugees were not the only consideration, and that Britain could not, in wartime:

open the door (to refugees) any wider... the general body of opinion in this country was humanitarian, but there was also a body of opinion which is potentially anti-Semitic (sic)... that Hitler could always make more victims than the country could absorb.⁵⁵

The notion that a few refugee children would heighten domestic antisemitism outraged the members of the deputation, as did Morrison's attempt to hide behind a spurious argument that Britain was already doing its share for refugees.⁵⁶ Over and

⁵² Besides Rathbone, members included Dr Temple, Cazalet, the Moderator of the Free Churches, Miss Bracey, Mr. Sorenson, Cardinal Hinsley, Astor and Corbett Ashby. See notes, written from memory, by M. Sibthorp, on deputation, 28 October 1942. MSS 2/1 Sibthorp Papers. 96/30/1. IWM (also in Temple Papers 54/129-32. LPL).

⁵³ As noted by Cazalet in his diary entry for 28 Oct 1942. By courtesy of Sir Edward Cazalet.

⁵⁴ The government proposed to admit approximately. 250-300 children with close relatives in the UK. Handwritten letter of EFR to Temple, 29 Oct 1942, Temple Papers, 54/136. LPL. See also Letter of Mary Sibthorp to 'His Grace', 3 Nov 1942. MSS 2/1. Sibthorp Papers. MS 96/30/1. IWM. See also Memo of Emerson in advance of deputation, 26 Oct 1942, Temple Papers, 54/126. LPL.

⁵⁵ M. Sibthorp, Notes written from memory on deputation, 28 October 1942. PRO FO 371/32681 W14673/4555/48.

⁵⁶ Letter of Temple to EFR, 29 Oct 1942. Temple Papers, 54/134. LPL. Margaret Corbett Ashby, vice-chairman of the Friendly Aliens Protection Society, remarked on the deputation, 'In 40 years I have not seen a worse-handled deputation by any responsible Minister. No smallest concession was made.' See Letter of Corbett Ashby to Temple, 29 Oct 1942, Temple Papers, 54/135. LPL.

above all these excuses, Rathbone was appalled that he would think that:

public opinion would resent admitting a few thousand children and old people in danger of terrible death.⁵⁷

What Rathbone did not know was that Morrison had already made up his mind a month earlier, in September 1942, about admitting more refugees, and was determined:

to resist any other appeals [other than for the few children with relatives in the UK] and refuse all further concessions.⁵⁸

This information would have utterly depressed her and reinforced her view, and that of other campaigners, that Morrison was, without any shadow of doubt, an antisemite.

That neither Rathbone nor any of the other members of the deputation made 'a parliamentary issue' of Morrison's rejection astonished Randall. Equally surprising was her refusal to release any press reports, for she had agreed with Temple that this could jeopardise 'work' in France.⁵⁹ Indeed Rathbone's caution and sensitivity in this instance are worthy of note for, judged on past experience of such confrontational situations, it was uncharacteristic. However, it is clear that she had weighed up the pitfalls of pursuing Morrison, for she confided in Mary Sibthorp, then secretary of the Friendly (subsequently Refugee) Aliens Protection Committee⁶⁰

... it is all rather difficult as we cannot publicly reproach the Home Secretary for doing so little for fear of injuring our efforts to persuade other people to do more.⁶¹

As to Temple's suggestion of a House of Lords debate, she thought this 'might do good in forcing Morrison to give further attention to the deputations request' and was

⁵⁷ Handwritten letter of EFR to Temple, 29 Oct 1942, Temple Papers, 54/136. LPL.

⁵⁸ War Cabinet memo by Morrison, 23 Sept 1942, PRO CAB 66/29 W.P.(42) 427 and 28 Sept 1942, PRO CAB 65/27 W.M 130 (42) 4.

⁵⁹ Handwritten letter of EFR to Temple, 29 Oct 1942, Temple Papers, 54/136. LPL.

⁶⁰ Mary Sibthorp was initially 'loaned' by the Friendly Aliens Protection Committee. See Acc 3121 E3/536/1, 7 Apr 1943. BDBJ.

⁶¹ Letter of EFR to Sibthorp, 9 Nov 1942, Sibthorp papers, MS 96/30/1. IWM. Temple described Morrison as having them in 'a cleft stick because the only thing that would make a difference would be public action, which, for these people's sake, we must avoid.' See Letter of Temple to Corbett Ashby, 3 Nov 1942, Temple Papers, 54/142. LPL. See also Letter of EFR to Bell, 16 Nov 1942, in which she reluctantly agreed to continue abstaining from press publicity a little longer, on advice forwarded by Kullmann. Bell Papers, 31/495. LPL.

a better option than a Commons debate, where she thought 'foolish speeches might be made.'⁶²

Ultimately Morrison's attitude served to harden Rathbone's resolve to seek help elsewhere. Having sought advice on points from Emerson and Kullmann, and final approval from Temple,⁶³ she went ahead with the PCR appeal to the Presidents of all the Latin American Republics that she had talked to him about weeks before. The telegram, signed by Lloyd George and the Archbishop of Canterbury amongst others, was sent out in early November 1942 and appealed to all its recipients 'to grant visas for children in unoccupied France liable to particular hardship and persecution.'⁶⁴ Rathbone then drafted a confidential memo in which she sketched out suggestions to aid rescue, and sent it, on 12 November 1942, to the Lord Privy Seal, Sir Stafford Cripps, Richard Law, the junior Foreign Office minister, Alec Randall, Head of the Foreign Office Refugee Department, Winant, Temple, as well as the heads of most of the principal refugee organisations in London. The Spanish and Swiss frontiers still offered the best hope of escape, and she asked whether the Madrid embassy could be instructed to 'maintain and intensify its efforts for refugee immigrants, including Germans and Jews', whom they had hitherto neglected. Spain would be offered incentives in the form of concessions of food, petrol etc., whilst she questioned whether the Swiss would respond to an Allied governments promise of money, food and financial support for illegal immigrants, and, in return, continue to intern them rather than send them back. Argentine and Chile remained possible places of refuge, especially as the Argentine Ambassador had showed a 'marked interest and sympathy,' and Rathbone's query here was whether the two countries could aid rescue by granting visas and obtaining exit permits.⁶⁵ The question of visas, permits and transit visas was one that Rathbone was to pursue relentlessly for months to come.

IV

On a personal level, Rathbone was once again involved with Koestler, whose

⁶² Letter of EFR to Temple, 4 Nov 1942. Temple Papers, 54/142. LPL

⁶³ Letter of EFR to Temple, 2 Nov 1942. Temple Papers, 54/140. LPL.

⁶⁴ As noted in Minutes of Randall, 3 Nov 1942, PRO FO 371/32681 W14915. For copy of telegram, 3 Nov 1942, see Temple papers, 54/149. LPL.

⁶⁵ There were also several thousand Jews in concentration camps in Morocco, the 900 or so International Brigaders in Camp Djelfa in South Algiers, and others for whom she sought relief. See PCR, 'Note by EFR on changes in refugee situation resulting from USA invasion of French North Africa.' 10 Nov 1942, Temple Papers, 54/167. LPL. Confidential report of EFR, 12 Nov 1942. MSS 2/1 Sibthorp Papers, 96/30/1. IWM.

estranged wife, Dorothea, a stateless Jew, was amongst those about to be rounded up in unoccupied France and deported to the 'East'. Koestler made approaches to Peake through Harold Nicolson, the National Labour MP, writer and journalist,⁶⁶ for a UK entry permit for Dorothea. Meanwhile Rathbone and the Relief Committee of the Friends Service Council successfully obtained a transit visa for her to go to Portugal.⁶⁷ But the visa came too late, for in late November 1942 Germany had occupied the whole of France: not only was there no longer any chance of extricating Dorothea, but the whole refugee situation was dramatically altered. Rathbone was already concerned about the occupation, and wrote to Temple on 10 November 1942:

Don't know how yesterday's news about German occupation of all France may affect issue. Great thing is to secure that our and USA govts. don't overlook the whole problem.⁶⁸

Rathbone steeled herself to tackle Morrison again. The chance of saving the Jewish children for whom visas had eventually been procured was now completely lost and she made no effort to hide her anguish from him: she would have been more aggrieved had she known that this tragedy had caused consternation in some government circles, but for very different, and less humane reasons than hers. Official minutes note that Randall was concerned about the depressing publicity generated by the aborted rescue, and the difficulty Britain would have, in its wake, of adhering to a negative rescue policy.⁶⁹

In an emotive and revealing letter to Temple, written on 3 December 1942, Rathbone discussed news of the 'reported horrors' of the extermination of Jews in Poland, and the validity of supporting evidence. Her belief in the information, which heralded the so-called 'Final Solution', was overwhelmingly clear, even though:

obviously no cast iron proof of events in enemy occupied countries (is) available. But I think that the attached cable from Chaim Weizmann and the attached paragraph from the *Evening Standard* are justification for assuming – if not Hitler's alleged order for complete massacre by

⁶⁶ For Nicolson's life see J. Lees-Milne, *Harold Nicolson. A Biography*, vol. 1, 1886-1929 (London, 1980); vol. 2, 1930-1978 (London, 1981); N. Nicolson (ed.) *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters 1930 - 1939* (1966); 1939 - 1945 (London, 1967) and for an overview of his refugee work see Cesarani, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 41-3.

⁶⁷ See D. Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler, The Homeless Mind* (London, 1999) 202.

⁶⁸ See Letter of EFR to Temple, 10 Nov 1942. Temple Papers, 54/154. LPL. Also 'Refugees in Unoccupied France. Points of immediate urgency resulting from German occupation. 12 Nov 1942, Temple 54/169, LPL.

⁶⁹ Notes of Randall, 9 Sept 1942. PRO FO 371/32683.

December 21st - at least massacre on a great scale. The *Zionist Review* for November 27th adds a great deal of detailed information from underground sources...⁷⁰

She expressed her concern that the governments concerned were 'taking the whole terrible question too coolly,' evidenced by the lack of information passed on to the public. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were especially culpable, for even though most Britons viewed the corporation as the most reliable source of news, they failed to report on the atrocities.⁷¹ As Rathbone wrote:

One would think that the mass extermination of "the chosen people" or a few millions of them was a quite minor incident, tragic but impossible to influence or entirely the responsibility of the German perpetrators... Apart from the horror of it all, it is thoroughly bad for the morale of our own people to encourage them in such callous disregard of the sufferings of others.⁷²

There was more than a hint of the Victorian ideology of the deserving and undeserving poor within her remarks, only now it was the Jewish refugees, rather than the poor, who were worthy of help. This was evident in the following statement about the Jews, whom she thought 'suffer under such an inferiority complex that they are excessively timid about pressing their own grievances and seem to prefer others to take the initiative.'⁷³ Her empathy with the dilemma that the Jewish community in Britain faced was undeniable, but it is arguable whether she really understood the nature of their position. It is true that their leaders may have been cautious about exercising themselves in a more powerful political way, but this was because they felt insecure rather than inadequate within society. They were unwilling to raise their public profile partially for fear of arousing antisemitism. And if their behaviour was, at times, deferential, this was because they were fearful of creating the impression that

⁷⁰ Letter of EFR to Temple, 3 Dec 1942. Temple Papers, 54/185-6. LPL.

⁷¹ S. Ward 'Why the BBC ignored the Holocaust' *The Independent*, 22 Aug 1993. This is more incisively corroborated by Nicholas who stated 'the BBC News Department ended the war with the most enhanced report... of any wartime BBC department' but further qualified this 'although the motives for the BBC's role in playing down the Nazi extermination policies appear mixed (and indeed confused), the outcome remains a tragic blot on the BBC's wartime record.' See S. Nicholas, *Echo of War. Home Front Propaganda and the wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester. 1996) 159.

⁷² Letter of EFR to Temple, 3 Dec 1942. Temple Papers, 54/185-6. LPL.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

the war was a Jewish rather than an international one.⁷⁴ As Tony Kushner has pointed out, the net result was that their 'moderate' and 'reasonable' demands were easily deflected.⁷⁵

A call from another quarter prevented Temple aligning himself with Rathbone's plans for vigorous action,⁷⁶ and she, once again, approached Morrison. She made an impassioned appeal to his elusive moral conscience, and in the light of the situation which was 'at once more hopeless for the majority and more urgent for the few who could conceivably be rescued' she again begged:

Has not the time come when our Government should modify its regulations and adopt a more generous policy? It cannot now be argued that this would lead to a great influx of refugees, or would merely encourage (as you suggested to the deputation) Hitler to unload his Jews upon us. His object now is extermination, not expulsion...⁷⁷

The published words of the Archbishop of Canterbury, that:

any Jews who were able to escape from the Nazis and make their way to British shores be given a safe haven... in comparison with the monstrous evil confronting us, the reasons for hesitation usually advanced by officials have an air of irrelevance...⁷⁸

were invoked to add weight to her plea. And in a conciliatory tone, she pandered to his ego by pointing out that she had seldom troubled him personally, realising the weight of his duties and the 'relatively small importance' of this matter in his eye.⁷⁹

In the absence of a written reply from Morrison, Rathbone put a short but very

⁷⁴ For evaluations of the behaviour of the Anglo-Jewish community at this time see T.Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination* (Oxford, 1994) and R.Bolchover, *British Jewry and the Holocaust* (new ed. Oxford, 2003).

⁷⁵ Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 191.

⁷⁶ He had received an urgent call for support from the Council of Christians and Jews that same day, and had to give them priority. He nevertheless said he would try and see Eden. See letter of Temple to EFR, 5 Dec 1942. Temple Papers, 54/190. LPL. For deputation on 16 Dec 1942 by representatives of this council with Law, see Temple Papers, 54/197. LPL. There was a further deputation of British Jews with the Foreign Secretary on 17 Dec 1942. See Temple Papers, 54/219. LPL.

⁷⁷ Letter of EFR to Morrison, 5 Dec 1942, PRO HO 213/1827 470/12/64. The link between the wholesale murder of Jews and the overall intention of the Nazis had been established by Dec 1942, and was known to British officials. See London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 199, also Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 167-72.

⁷⁸ Letter of EFR to Morrison, 5 Dec 1942, PRO HO 213/1827 470/12/64.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

direct question about visas to aid rescue to him in the House on 10 December:

Whether in view of the situation brought about by the mass deportation and massacres of Jews in Poland and other Axis-controlled countries, he will revise the Regulations which have hitherto restricted the issue of visas and transit visas to certain very small and rigidly defined categories of refugees, so as to facilitate the rescue of the few (Jews) who do have a chance of escaping massacre?⁸⁰

His response incensed her for it was both patronising and insulting. Morrison told her that she was under a misapprehension in believing that a change in the policy concerning the issue of visas would have any substantial effect in saving lives. There are several points to be raised here. Rathbone expressly referred to helping a few Jews, so that by rejecting what was, in fact, a very limited request, Morrison made it clear that neither he nor the Home Office were going to be influenced by humanitarian pleas. Nor was this the last time that he was to reject the possibility of small-scale rescue, for, as will be noted, he refused to countenance the admission of any of the surviving Hungarian Jews into Britain in July 1944.⁸¹ Thus, as far as Rathbone was concerned, Morrison's lack of humanity and overt animosity towards her and other rescue campaigners was an unequivocal manifestation of his prejudice towards Jews, and his explicit hostility towards refugees. This is further confirmed by evidence of his persistent intolerance of Jews in the post-war refugee policies that he promoted, and which he began to discuss as early as 1942,⁸² making it hard to conclude that he was not an antisemite. But this is a view with which W. Rubinstein, in his study, *The Myth of Rescue*, would disagree, for according to him, Morrison was being realistic rather than xenophobic or inhumanitarian in denying the issue of more visas, for the Jews whom Rathbone sought to help were, he argues, not refugees, but prisoners of the Nazis, and never had a chance of survival.⁸³ However, this ignores the fact that there were some Jews who managed to escape deportation to Auschwitz

⁸⁰ Hansard *HC*, vol.385. cols.1704-5. 10 Dec 1942. Rathbone had also put the question of the 'generous issue of visas' to Eden the day before. Hansard *HC*, vol.385. cols.1584-5. 9 Dec 1942.

⁸¹ Morrison, 1 July 1944, PRP FO 371/42807 WR 170, as quoted in Yehuda Bauer, *Jews For Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933-1945* (New Haven, 1994) 188.

⁸² Newsam 'British attitude and policy in relation to refugees and other foreigners after the war', 6 Feb 1942; Morrison to Peake and Maxwell, 6 March 1942. PRO HO 213/1347.

⁸³ W. Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue. Why the democracies could not have saved more Jews from the Nazis* (London, 1997) 146.

from Budapest in 1944, and for whom a transit visa was the key to safety.⁸⁴

V

With evidence of the Nazi atrocities having reached officials, and Rathbone, by November 1942, as noted, her remonstrations became part of a much wider debate in Britain, and one that the government found it increasingly difficult to ignore.⁸⁵ Anthony Eden was the recipient of a sharp letter from Temple, who, in agreeing with Rathbone that concerns over publicity were now outdated,⁸⁶ wanted to know:

why the press (are) so silent about this abomination... the knowledge ought to become public property now.⁸⁷

The urgency of the situation had led the British section of the World Jewish Congress to launch a campaign for a United Nations Declaration on the Jews. The intention of the declaration was not to elicit sympathy but to stir the consciousness of all civilized people, and to impel them and their governments into action.⁸⁸ The British government was to be asked, as Kushner has described, not only to do its utmost to prevent further annihilation, but also to help the very limited numbers of surviving Jews find a place of refuge and safety.⁸⁹ It was a landmark victory when the British government finally succumbed to pressure from Rathbone, other Christians, Jews and particularly Polish campaigners, and reluctantly accepted the declaration. For the first and only occasion during the war, the fate of the Jews in Nazi Europe was explicitly emphasised, and hopes were raised amongst the pro-refugee lobby that some lives might still be saved.

Such hopes were brief though, for the joint United Nations declaration that Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, read to the House on 17 December 1942 had

⁸⁴ See Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews*, 267-70.

⁸⁵ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 204 ff.

⁸⁶ Letter of EFR to Temple, 10 Nov 1942. Temple Papers, 54/154. LPL.

⁸⁷ EFR noted that 'I believe Schiff has been pleading against publicity. I think he is out-of-date about this and Kullmann – formerly afraid of publicity – seems to agree.' See Letter of Temple to Eden, 3 Dec 1942, Temple Papers, 54/181. LPL.

⁸⁸ Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 169.

⁸⁹ British section memorandum, 4 Dec 1942, and memorandum, Dec 1942, in C2/540, CZA, as cited in Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 169.

been drawn up specifically to sidestep promises of rescue. Eden's rhetoric included condemnation of the Nazi 'bestial policy of cold blooded extermination'⁹⁰ and promises about post-war punishment for the perpetrators, but excluded any commitment to aid rescue or provide a safe haven for any victim who managed to escape Hitler's clutches.⁹¹

Rathbone anticipated and feared that the declaration would fail to offer any hopes of salvation, and had prepared a powerful speech for the expected post-declaration Debate on the refugee question. But Eden denied MPs the chance of a discussion on the basis that he thought further dialogue of no value, and ignored her straightforward call for a debate.⁹² Her own comments on her draft speech notes bear testimony to her frustration at being excluded from speaking in the House, for it was marked, like others 'one of many not given on this (the Jewish) question.'⁹³ What she did do was to include much of the speech text in an article that was subsequently published in the *New Chronicle*, under the title of 'Let the Hunted Come in.'⁹⁴ and in the *New Statesman and Nation* entitled 'The Horror in Poland.'⁹⁵ What the draft notes and the article show was the remarkable grasp of the Jewish plight that Rathbone possessed at this time. She acknowledged that a large proportion of Europe's Jews had already been massacred which confirmed the reliability of her informants, for it only became evident later that about three-quarters of the eventual total had already been annihilated.⁹⁶ Anyone reading her article could not have missed her deep disappointment at the government's apathetic record on rescue, but conversely would have been impressed by her spirit of generosity and hope. In a totally pragmatic way, she was prepared to put the past behind, provided Britain faced up to her 'more direct and immediate responsibility'. The question she posed, 'What

⁹⁰ Hansard HC, vol.385. cols.2082-9. 17 Dec 1942. 'German Outrage on Humanity', *Sunday Times*, 20 Dec 1942 described how members of the House of Commons spontaneously rose to their feet to mark their appalled recognition of the mass murder of Jews.

⁹¹ Crozier, of the *Manchester Guardian*, later remarked to Rathbone that it was evident from Eden's speech that 'the attitude of the government had been entirely half-hearted.' Letter of Crozier to EFR, 17 May 1943. B/R45/4. *Manchester Guardian* Archive. JRL

⁹² Hansard HC, vol.385. cols.2082-9. 17 Dec 1942.

⁹³ EFR, Speech Notes on the Jewish Question, 17 Dec 1942. RP XIV 3 (85).

⁹⁴ EFR, 'Let the Hunted Come In', *News Chronicle*, 27 Dec 1942, 2. The House of Commons did not get to debate the refugee question until 19 May 1943.

⁹⁵ EFR, 'The Horror in Poland', *New Statesman and Nation*, 26 Dec 1942.

⁹⁶ Raul Hilberg, who suggests a final total of 5.1 million, provides an estimate of Jewish deaths by year. He posits that 2.7million Jews were killed in 1942, giving a cumulative figure of 3.9 million dead by 1 Jan 1943. See R.Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, vol.3 (revised and definitive edition, New York, 1985) 1120, as cited in Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 321,f.2.

can we do as a Nation and in union with other nations?’ was answered with her call for a concerted plan in which the most significant feature was the crucial role that the Balkan states of Hungary, Roumania and Bulgaria would have in providing a safe haven for Jews.

Unlike the government, Rathbone was not prepared to assume that ‘Hitler’s unwilling Allies’ were immune to external influence, even though these countries had an appalling record when it came to the treatment of Jews:

... By this time they must know in their hearts that the United Nations are going to win the War. They must be haunted by fear of retribution. If the Voice of Christianity, of compassion for tortured humanity, appeals to them in vain – and there are men and women in every country to whom it will appeal – they may listen to a voice which tell (sic) them that before it is too late, they had better buy off some of the vengeance that will otherwise overtake them, by showing a reluctance to participate in this last and worse of Nazi crimes – the extermination of a whole people.⁹⁷

But if the Balkan states were to be convinced of the benefits of rescue, Britain would have to demonstrate that:

... we and our Allies *really care* - care passionately, care to the extent of being willing to make great efforts and sacrifices ourselves.⁹⁸

Testimony to Britain’s failure in this regard was what Rathbone described as the prevailing ‘Conspiracy of Silence about this dreadful tragedy – silence in the Press, silence in Parliament.’⁹⁹

Her text also reinforced the ideological gulf that existed between Rathbone and the government concerning rescue. She did not consider rescue and the war effort to be incompatible aims: indeed in her opinion the benefits that Britain would accrue from setting an example to other nations by implementing schemes of rescue were legion. Not only would others be inclined to follow suit, but Britain’s reputation as a humanitarian, liberal state, which Rathbone perceived as badly tarnished, could be redeemed. But the government adhered to its view that winning the war would resolve the crisis, and that rescue was incompatible with this aim. In any case they would not accept that wide-scale rescue schemes were possible, either because they feared the

⁹⁷ EFR ‘Speech notes on the Refugee Question’ 16 Dec 1942. RP XIV 3.85.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

consequences of raising hopes unrealistically, or because they feared the antisemitic backlash of an influx of refugees. Rathbone had, in fact, a far more realistic view of the *status quo*, for by late 1942 she knew that the remaining numbers who could possibly be rescued were small, as she wrote 'The best we can do now will be too little too late. Let us see that even that little is not left undone.'¹⁰⁰ And of the oft-repeated official concern about domestic antisemitism, she had this to say:

It would be an insult indeed to suggest that there is anything to fear from Anti-semitic (sic) influence here. Anti-semitism (sic) is an ugly infectious disease, like scabies or leprosy (sic), born of dirt. But our people, even the anti-semites (sic) amongst them are not so callous that they would rather let Jewish men and women and children be tortured to death than see them admitted here. Until recently they have been kept in ignorance of the terrible facts. They are not to blame if they seemed indifferent,¹⁰¹

demonstrating a greater faith in their humanity than the government. Once again Rathbone was correct, for Mass Observation surveys carried out in 1941 and 1943 indicated that domestic hostility towards Jews had declined from 26% to 13%, and as Kushner has noted, continued to decline during the remaining war years.¹⁰²

Although Rathbone invoked the 'Voice of Christianity' in her December draft speech notes, she was not a practising Christian, but was nevertheless imbued with the importance of the Christmas message of peace and hope, using a Christian discourse to put her point across. To reinforce her view that Britain's war aims and the rescue of Jews were not incompatible she argued that it would be a mockery to ring the Christmas bells, a sign of joy, when the very nation who gave the Bible to mankind were being exterminated.¹⁰³ She was no killjoy, but she could not understand how British people, particularly the older ones, with any heart or sense of right and wrong could celebrate with a clear conscience. She wrote poignantly of the difficulty people would have in expiating their shame:

If peace came tomorrow, we could not forget the millions for whom it would come too late, nor wash our hands of the stain of blood.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ EFR 'Speech notes on the Refugee Question', 16 Dec 1942. RP XIV 3.85.

¹⁰² Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 187-8.

¹⁰³ The question of church bells being rung was raised in the house in Dec 1942. See *Hansard HC*, vol.385, col.1695. 10 Dec 1942.

¹⁰⁴ EFR 'Speech notes on the Refugee Question', 16 Dec 1942. RP XIV 3.85.

Nor was she able to hide her shame at Britain's myopia, for she was convinced that with:

... greater foresight, courage (sic) there would have been no war, and if our policy towards refugees had been less miserably cautious, selfish and unimaginative, 1000s of those already dead or in danger of death, might now be free and happy, contributing from their rich store of talent and industry to the welfare of mankind.¹⁰⁵

This statement was a direct reference to her belief in collective security as a means of preventing war, as well as her earlier work on behalf of refugees, policies that the government had eschewed. It was also a tribute to the talents, skills and enterprise of Jews that she so admired, and confirmation that these were people who, in her view, deserved to be saved.

Here, as on other occasions, Rathbone adopted a tactic that government officials disliked, by exemplifying personal cases. It was far easier for civil servants to argue against responsibility for a group of faceless individuals, but Rathbone hoped to moralise and strengthen her case against the harshness of official regulations by giving names and personal details of refugees. Importantly, and as further evidence of her humanity, was the way in which this technique gave people the dignity of recognition, the very commodity that the Nuremberg laws and Nazi persecution were systematically destroying.¹⁰⁶

VI

Having spoken at a public meeting held by the Board of Deputies of British Jews on 20 December 1942,¹⁰⁷ Rathbone then spent Christmas Eve writing to her colleague, Graham-White, expressing her fears and outlining her plans. One fear was that her reputation, which she described as being 'tainted with the refugee brush,' was an impediment to the rescue cause.¹⁰⁸ That she was viewed, in certain quarters, as polluted by her contact with Jewish refugees, was a depressing reflection of the claim being widely disseminated in Nazi Germany, that Jews were contaminated and

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ The Jewish community held a week of mourning and prayer from 13-20 Dec 1942. See Brodetsky, *Memoirs*, 220. The Foreign Secretary also met a deputation from the Board of Deputies on 22 Dec 1942, when he was urged to do his utmost to allow escaped Jews into the UK. PRO CAB 65/27 WM172 (42) 5.

¹⁰⁸ Letter of EFR to Graham White, 24 Dec 1942. GW10/3/52. HLRO.

could infect other people, and therefore could be eliminated. And it was for this reason that she suggested that MPs with a lower 'refugee' profile should pressure the government.¹⁰⁹ From this evolved the conclusion that a specific pressure group or committee, devoted to 'salvage work', was needed. To this end, she and Professor A.V.Hill, the physiologist, MP and founder member of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL), convened a meeting of interested parties on 7 January 1943.¹¹⁰ Rathbone was adamant that the rescue campaign be kept separate from domestic refugee issues, currently dealt with by the PCR, and on this basis rejected the idea, apparently made by Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld, that another special parliamentary committee keep a watch on the situation.¹¹¹

Alongside this Rathbone and her fellow refugee campaigners had become outraged by the failure of the UN declaration to offer any hope of rescue, and became more determined than ever to force the government's hand. The only feasible option left was to embarrass government by mustering public support in favour of action, the means to this end being a publicity campaign. It was Victor Gollancz, Rathbone's close friend and ally, who, in his capacity as a writer and publicist, initiated the propaganda drive, with the publication of his speedily compiled polemic '*Let My People Go.*'¹¹² The booklet was produced within a week of the declaration in December 1942, and as Kushner has described, had a powerful and immediate impact upon society in general, with a quarter of a million copies sold within three months.¹¹³

As private meetings with reference to the establishment of a new committee continued in early 1943, Rathbone persisted, both in and out of the House, to raise refugee concerns with the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden¹¹⁴ and Morrison.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Report of meeting held at the Royal Institution, London on 7 Jan 1943. Acc 3121/E1/74. BDBJ. Included were Violet Bonham-Carter, Sir George Jones, Josiah Wedgwood MP, Leonard Stein, Mr Bert Locker, Norman Bentwich, Professor Brodetsky, Lord Perth, Lord Farringdon, Simon Marks, a founder of Marks and Spencer, and Adolf Brotman, General Secretary of the BDBJ.

¹¹¹ Letter of Schonfeld to Brodetsky, 12 Jan 1943, & memo 19 Jan 1943. Acc 3121/C/2/2/5/3. BDBJ. Letter of Schonfeld to Dr Hertz, Jan 1943. MS 183/3/4. Schonfeld Papers, USL.

¹¹² V.Gollancz, *Let my People Go* (1942/3). See also Dudley-Edwards, *Victor Gollancz*, 374-6.

¹¹³ The first print run of 10,000 was sold within days, and a further 50,00 copies were sold by the end of Jan 1943. See Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 176-7, also Dudley-Edwards, *Victor Gollancz*, 375.

¹¹⁴ *Hansard* HC, vol.386, cols.184-5. 20 Jan 1943.

¹¹⁵ *Hansard* HC, vol.386, cols.184-5, 20 Jan 1943; cols.289-91, 21 Jan 1943; col.863-7, 3 Feb 1943; cols.1446-7, 11 Feb 1943; col.1927, 18 Feb 1943; vol.387, cols.284-5, 25 Feb 1943; vol.387, cols.638-40, 654-5, 10 March 1943; vol.387, cols.846-49, 11 March 1943; vol.387, cols.1319-20, 1343, 18 March 1943; vol.388, cols.189-90, 31 March 1943; vol.388, cols.319-21, 1 Apr 1943. Letter of EFR to Morrison, 25 Jan 1943 in which she suggested that over 70 civilian internees on the Isle of Man might possibly be exchanged for endangered Jews on the Continent. Acc 3121/C/2/2/5. BDBJ.

Officials resisted requests to receive deputations, with the exception of an all-party group that included Rathbone.¹¹⁶ This party was received by Eden, Morrison and Oliver Stanley, the Colonial Secretary, on 28 January 1943. The outcome was depressingly unproductive, and would have been even more so had Rathbone and her colleagues known that a secret War Cabinet Committee on the Reception and Accommodation of Jewish Refugees (WCC) had been recently established, and had pre-determined the line to be taken by the three officials, that of encouraging the defence of the British policy of inaction.¹¹⁷ Rathbone's previous suggestion to Morrison, that Jews in Germany might be exchanged for Belgian or Dutch internees, or Germans waiting to be repatriated from the Isle of Man, was not well received. If such a scheme were possible, she was told that priority would be given to some of the thousands of British and Allied nationals left in great hardship in Germany. And the WCC wanted it emphasized 'to the utmost degree' that any activist asking for large-scale action to rescue refugees would 'be asking for the diversion of shipping and other resources from the war effort.' In an all too familiar way, the rhetoric of such action prolonging the war was invoked, but it was the final phrase in this sentence which was so extraordinary for the WCC asserted that neither 'refugees or the suffering peoples of Europe' would desire this.¹¹⁸ Their attitude towards Jews, and their reluctance to acknowledge the Jewish dimension of Nazi atrocities, became all too obvious in early January 1943, when the word 'Jewish' was erased from the title, in line with the official view that:

it is not the policy of HMG to regard the Jews as belonging to a separate category. It is felt that discrimination of this kind savors too strongly of the Nazi attitude towards Jews.¹¹⁹

Nowhere was Rathbone's despondency more palpable than in a letter she sent to her close colleague, fellow Gentile Zionist and PCR chairman, Victor Cazalet, in early February 1943. 'Dear Victor' she wrote 'It is good you are back as I want your

¹¹⁶ Deputation consisted of Melchett, Rathbone, Quintin Hogg, A.V.Hill, Silverman, Graham-White and Holdsworth. See *The Times* 28 & 29 Jan 1943. PRO FO 371/36651 W2215/49/48.

¹¹⁷ Minutes of 3rd meeting of WCC, 27 Jan 1943. PRO CAB 95/15. Eden mentioned the Cabinet Committee during the course of the debate on 19 May 1943. See *Hansard* HC, vol.389, col.1198.

¹¹⁸ Letter of Eden, 21 Jan 1943. PRO FO 371/36651 W2339/49/48.

¹¹⁹ For the change in the title see Eden, note, 9 Jan 1943, PRO CAB JR 43(4).

help and advice badly.’¹²⁰ The advice she sought was related to her paper, ‘The Nazi Massacres of Jews and Poles. What rescue measures are practically possible?’¹²¹ which she had distributed widely, along with other documents on the subject of rescue, to government officials and others.¹²² The key problem, which she discussed with Noel-Baker, a critic of government inactivity, and now Minister of War Transport,¹²³ was moving people, a concern that he inevitably shared with her. But Rathbone was wise enough to know that it was useless to put ‘totally impracticable suggestions’ to government, and she looked to Noel-Baker for feasible ideas, on the basis that he was ‘the one Minister – probably with Lord Selborne- who combines the expert knowledge with the keen sympathy necessary’.¹²⁴ One specific proposal, which, in the light of the current climate, Rathbone concluded was ‘the key to the whole matter’ was that a new Minister (or High Commissioner) be appointed to deal specifically with the refugee problem.¹²⁵ Although not her idea,¹²⁶ she had discussed it with numerous people, including Temple, who commented ‘it holds out some prospect of getting past the block caused by the multitude of departments which at present have to do with the Jewish question.’¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Letter of EFR to Cazalet, 13 Feb 1943. Vol. Annex to Israeli Supreme Court Opening, 1992. Cazalet Papers. By kind permission of Sir Edward Cazalet. In July 1940, and in connection with interned refugees, she had taken the opposite view. See Letter of EFR to Graham White, 11 July 1940. GW 10/3/8. HLRO.

¹²¹ Copies of this document, by EFR, dated 12 Feb 1943 are in MSS 2/1. Sibthorp Papers 96/30/1. IWM; GW/10/3/58. HLRO.

¹²² ‘Jewish Massacres. The case for an offer to Hitler’ was distributed at the preliminary meeting held on 7 January, but the idea of any approach to the German dictator was dismissed by many members as inadvisable or impractical. See Memo by EFR, 7 Jan 1943 ‘Jewish Massacres. The Case for an offer to Hitler’ MSS2/1 Sibthorp Papers 96/30/1/IWM. Other papers included ‘Nazi mass murders - what you can do about it’, ‘Nazi Massacres of Jews’ Draft, 14 Jan 1943, Acc 3121/C/2/2/5. BDBJ; Amendments to ‘Suggested steps etc.’, 19 Jan 1943. Acc 3121/C3/536. 19 Jan 1943. BDBJ; ‘Note, with examples, of the harsh working of Home Office regulations regarding the issue of visas to refugees’ EFR, 24 Feb 1943. MS 6015/57/1. Parkes Papers. USL.

¹²³ He had been appointed Minister of War Transport by early 1942. See Letter of NBKR to Emerson, 6 Feb 1942. NBKR 4/581. CAC.

¹²⁴ Letter of EFR to NBKR, 8 Feb 1943, NBKR 4/578. CAC.

¹²⁵ Letter of EFR to Cazalet, 13 Feb 1943. Cazalet Papers. By kind permission of Sir Edward Cazalet.

¹²⁶ She wrote that the suggestion had been put to her from an unnamed source in ‘high quarters’. The suggestion was certainly put to her by Noel-Baker, for she wrote to him in Feb 1943 ‘I am increasingly in love with your suggestion as to a High Commissioner ...’ See letter of EFR to Noel-Baker, 12 Feb 1943. NBKR.4/581.CAC. Noel-Baker had sent Law a list of practical proposals for help to European Jews by the United Nations in Jan 1943, and had already suggested the appointment of a new high commissioner to put these into effect. See Letter of Noel-Baker to Law, 8 Jan 1943. NBKR, 4/578, CAC. Prior to this, the Rev James Parkes had identified the need for a special minister for Jewish affairs, suggesting that he might be an eligible candidate. See Letter of Parkes to Temple, 25 Jan 1942, Temple Papers, 54/59. LPL.

¹²⁷ See Letter of EFR to Temple, 13 Feb 1943, Temple Papers, 54/252. LPL. Bell, Bishop of Chichester, was also consulted. He suggested Sir Hubert Young, who had great experience in Palestine, Iraq and as governor of Nyasaland, North Rhodesia and Trinidad. He said ‘I am sure that until you get

One such branch was the Refugee Department at the Foreign Office, under Randall, whose response to Rathbone's paper is notable for the insight it gives into his attitude towards her. He described her, in minutes, as 'the impatient idealist who cannot bear to think that there is not a ready solution for a particular human problem on which she feels so passionately'¹²⁸ and accused her of claiming a monopoly. He disliked her implication that officials were 'too busy or too indifferent or inefficient to deal with the practical problems of which she knows very little.'¹²⁹ More disturbing was his belief that she would have a better chance of success if she shed the 'unreal talk of the problem of millions, or hundreds of thousands at the present juncture,' numbers that were, in his view, 'simply not justified by the facts...'¹³⁰ This last statement demonstrates the grave difficulty which the pro-refugee lobby and others faced, for despite the rapid growth of knowledge of the atrocities by early 1943, which they and others worked hard at disseminating, officials like Randall were unwilling to believe the scale of destruction.¹³¹ If he had been less biased, and accepted the veracity of the evidence, he may have measured his words more carefully when he asserted, in February 1943, that 'The Jewish disaster is only part of the vast human problem of Europe under Nazi control.' Certainly there were, as he wrote 'starving children, the deliberate extinction of Polish and Czech intelligenzia (sic), forced labour, the spiritual perversion of youth' to be considered, but the Jews were deliberately being exterminated.¹³² He would also have been less inclined to claim, alluding to Jewish refugees whom he collectively called 'an indiscriminate mass' that 'no doubt there will be a vast refugee problem when the war ends and there will be special refugee problems as the countries of Europe are liberated.'¹³³ For by then, according to Hilberg's figures, over 3.9 million Jews had already been murdered.¹³⁴ First-hand knowledge, combined with the 'icy flow of discouraging

a man of high authority charged with the responsibility, nothing will be done.' See Letter of Bell to EFR, 16 Feb 1943, Bell Papers, 32/24. LPL. Rathbone dismissed Emerson as a candidate. See letter of EFR to Noel-Baker, 12 Feb 1943. NBKR 4/581.CAC.

¹²⁸ Minutes of Randall, 22 Feb 1943. PRO FO 371/36653 W 3321/49/48 (also WO 95/1499).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ A. Bunting, 'Representing Rescue. The National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, the British and the Rescue of Jews from Nazism', *Journal of Holocaust Education*, 9, 1 (2000) 65-84.

¹³² Minutes of Randall, 22 Feb 1943. PRO FO 371/36653 W 3321/49/48 (also WO 95/1499).

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ See R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, vol.3 (revised and definitive edition, New York, 1985) 1120, as cited in Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 321, f.2.

answers'¹³⁵ that Rathbone received from Randall, prompted her to write despairingly to Temple on 2 March 1943:

I don't believe all our efforts have resulted in the rescue of a single Jew – man, woman or child.¹³⁶

VII

It was against this background of governmental intransigence and the increasing awareness of the cost in human life that Rathbone formally established a new non-political, non-sectarian pressure committee, the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror (NCRNT) on 9 March 1943. Amongst the 35 Vice-Presidents were many familiar refugee activists, including Gollancz, Cazalet and Grenfell,¹³⁷ and whilst the committee was under the presidency of the Marquess of Crewe, there is no doubt that Rathbone was the driving force behind the new group.¹³⁸ The most compelling reason for her to disguise her leadership role was to distance the group from the accusation that she was 'tainted with the refugee brush'. However, it is doubtful whether this attempt at adopting a more discrete role made any difference to those in government, who were hostile to the notion of rescue, irrespective of the leadership.

The committee embodied all of Rathbone's cherished principles and ideals, her belief in British humanity, honour and justice, and it was no coincidence that it sought, through its work, to restore what she believed was Britain's reputation for liberalism by rescuing endangered Jews. It had, as its stated aims:

- 1 To act as a medium for co-operation between the various organisations, groups and individuals in the United Kingdom interested in saving victims of Axis persecution of whatever race or religion.
- 2 To consider what practical measures can be taken to this end.

¹³⁵ Letter of EFR to Randall, 27 Feb 1943. FO 371/36653 W3465.

¹³⁶ Letter of EFR to Temple, 2 March 1943, Temple Papers, 54/281, LPL.

¹³⁷ Minutes of meeting, 9 March 1943, Acc 3121/3/536/1. BDBJ. Vice Presidents were the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Moderators of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church Federal Council, the Chief Rabbi, Sir William Beveridge, Professor Brodetsky, Dame Elizabeth Cadbury, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, Victor Cazalet MP, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, Lord Davies, Sir Wyndham Deedes, A.J.Dobbs, D.R.Grenfell MP, Victor Gollancz, Sir Derrick Gunston, Sir Percy Harris MP, Professor A.V.Hill MP, Sir Austin Hudson MP, the Earl of Huntingdon, Miss Anne Loughlin, J.S.Middleton, Rev James Parkes, the Earl of Perth, Lord Queenborough, Wilfred Roberts MP, Lord Rochester, the Marchioness of Reading, Viscount Samuel, Viscount Sankey, H.Willink MP and Reverend Whale.

¹³⁸ Letter of EFR to Graham White, 24 Dec 1942. GW10/3/52. HLRO.

- 3 To establish and maintain relations with non-official organisations and groups in other countries working for the same purpose.

Rathbone's imprint was very evident in the *Twelve Point Programme for immediate rescue measures for Jews of Europe*, which the NCRNT formally presented in early April 1943.¹³⁹ The document crystallised the proposals she had been campaigning for over many months, and she was eager that it be presented at the forthcoming Bermuda Conference, the private and informal UN conference that was due to commence on 19 April 1943, and at which Britain and the US were due to discuss the refugee question.¹⁴⁰ Her entreaties to Eden, who had further delayed the House of Commons debate on refugees until after Bermuda,¹⁴¹ requesting a pre-Bermuda deputation of NCRNT representatives, were rejected.¹⁴² But Rathbone was unapologetic for her persistence, writing:

Meantime, what can we all do but go on making ourselves a nuisance to you and everyone else in authority? We recognize the disadvantages of publicity. But nothing here seems to happen without.¹⁴³

Eden's refusal must have pleased Morrison, who had opposed such a meeting, on the basis that Eden, who was more susceptible to humanitarian pleas, might 'commit the Home Office' to some unspecified scheme.¹⁴⁴ As to the Twelve-point plan, Walker advised Eden that they communicate it to the delegates at Bermuda 'as a sop to Miss Rathbone,'¹⁴⁵ but of course transmission did not guarantee that the plan would receive consideration.

Meanwhile, as the early momentum of public sympathy for the victims of persecution, precipitated by the UN Declaration in December 1942, waned in the face of government inactivity,¹⁴⁶ the need for a revitalised domestic propaganda campaign became more urgent.¹⁴⁷ One strand of this was to call a press conference in advance of Peake's statement on the Bermuda conference, at which journalists were urged to

¹³⁹ 1st draft, 5 Apr 1943. Re-draft 6 April 1943. Acc 3121/3/536/1. BDBJ.

¹⁴⁰ For Rathbone's concern over Bermuda see *Hansard* HC, vol.388, col.588, 7 Apr 1943.

¹⁴¹ The question of a Debate before Easter was put by Mr. Arthur Greenwood, MP. *Hansard* HC, vol.388, col. 813. 8 Apr 1943.

¹⁴² Letter of EFR to Eden, 9 Apr 1943. PRO FO 371/36658 W5673/49/48.

¹⁴³ Letter of EFR to Eden, 10 Apr 1943, PRO FO 371/36658 W5673/49/48.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, minutes, 14 Apr 1943. PRO FO 371/36658 W5673/49/48.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ As noted by Gollancz, NCRNT meeting, 13 Apr 1943. Acc 3121/C3/536/1. BDBJ.

¹⁴⁷ Minutes of General meeting of NCRNT, 7 Apr 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/1. BDBJ.

give the refugee question as much publicity as possible before and after the debate. The distinct lack of journalists present was very discouraging,¹⁴⁸ but enlisting the support of the *Manchester Guardian* was not difficult, for as letters show, Rathbone had a very good working relationship with the editor, William Crozier. She was not afraid to confide in him at this difficult time, and revealed her deep concern, that:

... if the Government hasn't succeeded up till now in finding shipping even to evacuate refugees already in Spain and Portugal and for those from the Balkans to Palestine, what hope is there that they will find it when a second front in Europe has begun.¹⁴⁹

Rathbone's personal contribution to breaking the 'conspiracy of silence' was her pamphlet, '*Rescue the Perishing*,'¹⁵⁰ published under the auspices of the NCRNT in late April 1943, whilst the outcome of the Bermuda conference was still unknown. In an extended version of the Twelve-point plan,¹⁵¹ with its proposals for rescue and relief, Rathbone set out to answer all the well-rehearsed anti-refugee arguments and, with the use of statistics, to show how little the government had really done in respect of rescue.¹⁵² But more than this, she reaffirmed her unswerving loyalty to her country, a loyalty that her determined opponents still considered incompatible with her rescue mission, when she wrote:

I have been accused of belittling the record of my own country, and no English woman likes to do that, even justly.¹⁵³

The unequivocal support which the pamphlet received from Crozier, who described it as 'excellent and, supplementing Gollancz should be very useful,'¹⁵⁴ contrasted vastly with that of Peake, who directed a vindictive attack on her integrity during the only major war-time House of Commons debate on the refugee question on 19 May 1943. Besides this, the War Cabinet had prepared itself to counter an expected onslaught from Rathbone and her fellow activists by asking the whips to line

¹⁴⁸ Letter of Sibthorp to Brodetsky, 14 May 1943. Acc 3121/3/536/1. BDBJ.

¹⁴⁹ Letter of EFR to W. Crozier, 13 May 1943. B/R45/3. *Manchester Guardian* Archive. JRL.

¹⁵⁰ Minutes of Executive Meeting, NCRNT, 29 Apr 1943. The first print run was 10,000 copies, paid for by Rathbone. 25,000 copies had been circularised by June 1943, as well as about 37,000 copies of the Twelve-point plan. Report, 16 June 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/1. BDBJ.

¹⁵¹ It included case studies and a critique of government actions to date.

¹⁵² An updated version of *Rescue the Perishing*, which incorporated the 'Ten-Point Programme for Measures of Rescue from Nazi Terror' was produced in Jan 1944.

¹⁵³ EFR, *Rescue the Perishing*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Letter of Crozier to EFR, 17 May 1943. B/R45/4. *Manchester Guardian* Archive. JRL. Crozier was referring to Gollancz's pamphlet, *Let My People Go*, published in December 1942.

up speakers with 'a more balanced point of view.'¹⁵⁵ The much-delayed, post-Bermuda conference debate gave Rathbone and other activists little or no hope that refugees would be offered a lifeline. In fact they were given almost no information as to what Britain and the US proposed, which, as Rathbone told Peake, was a matter of grave concern:

It is clearly difficult for me to follow my right hon. Friend, because there has been so much that he has not been able to tell us and so much which he hinted it would be dangerous to discuss in public. We feel like the school-boy who was asked to write an essay on snakes in Ireland, and who could only say that there were no snakes in Ireland. There is so much we are debarred from saying, and so much it would be imprudent to say.¹⁵⁶

And in an overt moment of cynicism, she added that the only pleasurable emotion she felt was that the delegates had returned safely 'because all journeys are dangerous nowadays.'¹⁵⁷

VIII

Her assessment of Peake had diminished significantly since the outbreak of war: whereas in 1939 she had described him as 'a particularly nice and humane man, who has always paid my requests great attention.'¹⁵⁸ she now viewed him with animus, not least of all because of his fatalistic attitude towards the rescue of Jews. Speaking in general terms, Peake called upon MP's to 'recognize that these people are for the present mostly beyond the possibility of rescue...' even though, as Rathbone argued, the timing was critical, for the Mediterranean had become relatively safe for shipping, prior to the beginning of the second front movements.¹⁵⁹ Nor was his argument that:

... the rate of extermination is such that no measures of rescue or relief, however large a scale, could be commensurate with the problem¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ PRO CAB 65/34, War Cabinet 67, 10 May 1943, conclusion 5. An example was Colonel Sir A. Lambert Ward, MP for Kingston-upon-Hull, North West. See *Hansard* HC, vol. 389, cols. 1145-6, 19 May 1943.

¹⁵⁶ *Hansard* HC, vol. 389, col. 1132-3, 19 May 1943. St Patrick was supposed to have banished all the snakes from Ireland, although in fact there were never any on the island.

¹⁵⁷ *Hansard* HC, vol. 389, col. 1133, 19 May 1943.

¹⁵⁸ This was in connection with a report about Women Patrols that EFR sent on to Peake. See Letter of EFR to Elfrida, 19 August 1939, RP XIV 2.19 (2).

¹⁵⁹ Letter of Crozier to EFR, 17 May 1943. B/R45/4. *Manchester Guardian* Archive. JRL.

¹⁶⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol. 389, col. 1120, 19 May 1943.

any consolation, for Rathbone had repeatedly proposed small-scale initiatives that could feasibly have saved even a few lives. In response to his claim that 'he could not send visas direct into enemy territory and that it might endanger refugees if he communicated with them,' Rathbone had a sharp riposte:

Does he believe I need telling that? For months past every letter I have written to refugees has reminded them of these two facts. Does the Under-Secretary really mean to deny that refugees do not sometimes have secret ways of communication with their relatives in enemy territory? I do not know how they do it, but they do it through one channel or another, through neutral channels. But whether that is so or not in any particular case, does he tell me that it does not make a difference when a refugee arrives at the border if the authorities of that country have been informed beforehand that a visa is awaiting the refugee? It is common sense that it makes a difference.¹⁶¹

Peake's rhetoric rehearsed the fear of an influx of refugees precipitating an antisemitic backlash, which Rathbone vociferously refuted, stating:

It is an insult to the British people to suppose that even those who 'don't like Jews' would rather leave them to be massacred than find asylum for a few more thousand of them.¹⁶²

In fact a Gallup poll, conducted in late February 1943 following a private meeting which Rathbone had attended,¹⁶³ showed a significant amount of public sympathy towards the admission of threatened Jews: 78 per cent of those questioned supported admission, the total made up of 40 per cent who specified asylum only until another place of refuge could be found, 28 per cent who approved of admission until the end of the war, and 10 per cent for an indefinite time.¹⁶⁴ Inevitably, Peake rehearsed the firmly held government opinion that 'victory... will contribute more to their salvation than any diversion of our war efforts in measures of relief, even if such measures could be put into effect.'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ *Hansard* HC, vol.389, col.1140, 19 May 1943.

¹⁶² EFR. Replies to objections. Twelve Point Programme. *Rescue the Perishing*. 3.

¹⁶³ Copy of notes of meeting on 3 Feb 1943. XVII Folder F, Sir Francis Meynell Papers, CUL. The NCRNT sponsored this poll. Those present included EFR, Gollancz, Francis Meynell, Dennis Cohen, Alan Sainsbury, Sydney Bernstein, Tom Driberg, Evelyn Sharp, Alix Kilroy (later Alix Meynell) and Mrs Reginald McKenna. See A. Meynell, *Public Servant, Private Woman* (London, 1988) 201-3.

¹⁶⁴ *News Chronicle*, 26 March 1943.

¹⁶⁵ *Hansard* HC, vol.389, col.1118, 19 May 1943. Amongst Peake's supporters in the Debate included Mr Butcher, MP for Holland with Boston, Colonel Sir A. Lambert-Ward, MP for Kingston-upon-Hull, North-West and Earl Winterton, MP for Horsham and Worthing.

But it was Peake's personal attack on Rathbone that caused the greatest concern, for he accused her of producing a sensationalist pamphlet that was full of 'more inaccuracies' than he could enumerate, and of disseminating rescue suggestions that were 'fantastic.'¹⁶⁶ Only subsequently in a private letter did he qualify this accusation, maintaining that he:

would not think of attributing to you any deliberate mis-statements. What I deplore is not so much inaccuracies of detail as the misleading character of the general picture you present of the situation, and of the action which has been, or might be taken by the Government.¹⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that when Rathbone came to rewrite this pamphlet in January 1944, she commented that she was 'much dissatisfied' with the original, and thought it 'dull, ill-arranged, and quite out-of-date.'¹⁶⁸ It is also worth bearing in mind that her prospective audiences were, in her words:

... only a limited public; mainly the few thousand names on our mailing list of people already in full sympathy... who needed the kind of material that will enable them to meet the doubts and difficulties which they hear raised by others.¹⁶⁹

An overriding concern was that the facts be strictly accurate and that overstatement was avoided.

With the relationship between Rathbone and Peake at an all-time low, her feelings towards Morrison, the Home Secretary, were equally bitter, as she made patently clear in her criticism of him during the debate:

... I must say that in one respect this country excels. There is no other country where public opinion favours a strong and generous policy. Yet when we approach the Home Secretary we are made to feel that pressure from public opinion has not merely helped but has hardened his attitude. It seems that he wants to show that he is a strong man by refusing to make even the smallest concession and that his attitude has been influenced sometimes less by the merits of the case than by his dislike of yielding anything to his critics. He has made some concessions today, and I will say no more about that, but why does he always make us feel in his Parliamentary answers, and even in our approaches to him

¹⁶⁶ *Hansard* HC, vol.389, col.1211, 19 May 1943.

¹⁶⁷ Letter of Peake to Rathbone, 25 May 1943. PRO FO 371/36662.

¹⁶⁸ Letter of EFR to Brodetsky, 27 Jan 1944. Acc 3121/63/536/1. BDBJ.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

privately, as if the whole question of refugees was becoming a bore and an irritation to him and that he was transferring to refugees the dislike which he quite openly feels for ourselves? ¹⁷⁰

It was no wonder that she called for a special Ministry for Refugees to be appointed to deal with the problem, as proposed in her pamphlet, and as discussed with Noel-Baker and others months previously. ¹⁷¹

Neither Peake nor Rathbone would concede defeat and the accusations and counter-accusations continued outside the House, ¹⁷² with Lord Winterton adding his support for Peake and Eden alongside his public denouncement of Rathbone's remedies, in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, as 'either impracticable or beside the point.' ¹⁷³ It was Harold Nicolson who sprang to her defence, arguing that 'some of them may, in truth, not be feasible, but others might at least be attempted.' ¹⁷⁴ Only later did Peake reveal that Rathbone had been 'the bane of his official life as Under-Secretary at the Home Office for nearly five years.' ¹⁷⁵

From the Jewish perspective the outcome of Bermuda was far from encouraging, for as historians have noted, the delegates failed to reach agreement upon immediate relief measures. ¹⁷⁶ And even the rescue scheme proposed by Adler-Rudel, the accredited representative of the Jewish Agency in London, which offered the possibility of a safe haven in Sweden for up to 20,000 Jewish children, and which looked so promising when it was first discussed with Jan Karski in Rathbone's flat in May 1943, prior to the big debate on refugees, failed to materialize. ¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁰ *Hansard* HC, vol.389, col.1141, 19 May 1943.

¹⁷¹ *Hansard* HC, vol.389, col.1137-8, 19 May 1943.

¹⁷² E.Rathbone, Addendum to *Rescue the Perishing*, 20 May 1943. GW10/3/68. HLRO. Letter of Peake to Rathbone, 25 May 1943. PRO FO 371/36662.

¹⁷³ *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1943.

¹⁷⁴ H. Nicolson, 'Marginal Comment', *The Spectator*, 28 May 1943,

¹⁷⁵ M. Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography* (1949) 288.

¹⁷⁶ See Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 180-82.

¹⁷⁷ Notes of discussion at EFR's flat on 5 May 1943. Temple Papers, 55/7-8; Letter of Temple to Eden (and copy to Selborne), 7 May 1943, Temple Papers, 55/9; Reply of Eden to Temple, Temple Papers, 21 May 1943. LPL. When Adler-Rudel was trying to speed up negotiations, it was Rathbone who introduced him to John Winant, the US Ambassador, on 30 July 1943. For this, and the scheme itself see S.Adler-Rudel, 'A Chronicle of Rescue Efforts', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, XI (1966) 213-41. For Sweden's role during the Holocaust see P.Levine, *From Indifference to Activism: Swedish Diplomacy and the Holocaust, 1938-1944* (Uppsala. 1998).

IX

In the wake of Rathbone's debacle with Peake in May 1943, she had become totally dispirited by the apparent stalemate between the government and the pro-rescue lobby, having noted, with a degree of sarcasm, how, on 19 May 1943, Eden had 'reproached them [the NCRNT] for implying that the government cared less about the matter than we did.'¹⁷⁸ She concluded at this time that:

the government has little sense of urgency over the whole matter, very little hope of doing anything for rescue except on a small scale, and a strong desire to avoid pressure.¹⁷⁹

As Crozier observed in a letter to her in August 1943:

... most of the rescue schemes are bound to come to nothing unless the Government, or some enterprising person in it or nominated by it, treats the whole thing as though it were our own people who were concerned. We should have a lot of refugees out by this time!¹⁸⁰

But Rubinstein, in his scathing attack of the NCRNT's plans, has concluded that none of the rescue schemes proposed ever had any chance of success as they were:

every bit as useless and misguided as their American counterparts. Manifestly they centrally conceived of the task of 'rescue' as the reception of refugees rather than the liberation of captives of the Nazis,¹⁸¹

and that their ideas were 'futile.'¹⁸²

The one victory at this time was the successful outcome of Rathbone's campaign to get a large sum of money transferred to Spain through official channels for the relief of refugees,¹⁸³ even though it had involved her being sent on 'a wild goose chase' by Randall and Eden, which she very much resented.¹⁸⁴ Although surviving Rathbone letters relating to this matter are scant, this plan was, as Louise London describes, part of a much bigger scheme that the British government, and

¹⁷⁸ Confidential note of EFR, 28 June 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/1. BDBJ.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Letter of Crozier to EFR, 1 Aug 1943. B/R45/5, *Manchester Guardian* Archive, JRL.

¹⁸¹ Rubinstein, *Myth of Rescue*, 135.

¹⁸² For Rubinstein's discussion of the NCRNT see Rubinstein, *Myth of Rescue*, 132-41.

¹⁸³ Letter of Bell to Finance Officer, FO. 30 July 1943. Bell Papers, 32/76. LPL.

¹⁸⁴ Letters of EFR to Bell, 2 & 11 June 1943. Bell Papers, 32/68. LPL.

the Ministry of Economic Warfare in particular, had been involved with since early 1943.¹⁸⁵ What her correspondence does do is highlight, again, the extent of her contacts, in this case her regular communication with Sir Samuel Hoare, the Ambassador to Spain, and R.A.B.Mynors, of the Treasury Department.¹⁸⁶ On a less happy note, in 1943 she had to deal with the temporary loss of support of Victor Gollancz, who had suffered a nervous breakdown,¹⁸⁷ and more grievously, the coincidental deaths of two staunch allies, Victor Cazalet, who was killed in an air crash off the coast of Gibraltar,¹⁸⁸ and Josiah Wedgwood.

X

Neither Rathbone nor the NCRNT had high expectations of the revived Inter-governmental Committee on Refugees (IGC), first established in July 1938 following the Evian Conference. The appointment of Lord Winterton as chairman did not bode well, for he had already made his feelings quite clear about Rathbone's rescue plans. Besides this, as Kushner has pointed out, he was known for his social antipathy towards Jews and anti-Zionism.¹⁸⁹ There was also the Committee's post-Evian record to consider, but the NCRNT nevertheless gave it some support, on the basis that every door to rescue ought to be kept open.¹⁹⁰ Rathbone would have been more optimistic had she been appointed as a 'kind of assessor' on the committee, a suggestion that was first mooted, informally, to Randall in early June 1943, by Lord Perth, a member of the NCRNT.¹⁹¹ Violet Bonham-Carter was amongst those who also championed Rathbone, commending her to her friend Eden as:

... she has fought the battle for refugees with such splendid courage and, as you know, no one has more detailed knowledge and experience of the problems involved...¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ See London, *Whitehall and the Jews*.

¹⁸⁶ Letter of EFR to Bell, 2 June 1943, Bell Papers, 32/68, LPL.

¹⁸⁷ Dudley-Edwards, *Victor Gollancz*, 378-83.

¹⁸⁸ Cazalet and General Sikorski, head of the Polish government in exile were killed on 3 July 1943.

¹⁸⁹ As Kushner notes, Winterton was rejected as Lord Moyne's replacement in Cairo in 1944 because, in the words of Churchill's advisor, he was 'chairman of the Antisemitic (sic) League.' See Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 199.

¹⁹⁰ Letter of Perth to Randall, 15 June 1943. PRO FO 371/36726 W8828/6731/48

¹⁹¹ Minutes, Randall, 9 June 1943. PRO FO 317/366662 W8192/49/48.

¹⁹² Letter of Lady Bonham-Carter to Eden, 21 July 1943. Eden to Churchill (in which he put forward her suggestion), 2 Aug 1943. PRO FO 371/36727 W11245/6731/48. See also Letter of Irene Ward (Woman Power Committee) to Law, July 1943, and reply of Law to Ward, 26 July 1943. PRO FO 371/36727 W10921/6731/48.

Perth's argument for Rathbone's inclusion was presented in such a way as to make it appear that the government would be the main beneficiaries. He put it that, as an insider, she would gain confidence in, and become less suspicious of the IGC's activities, and this would, in turn:

blunt all the intense criticism of HMG (and) if she were on the inside
I do not think that she would raise difficulties unnecessarily.¹⁹³

There was the added 'unanswerable value' that might ensue from the vital sources of information that she had access to, through her contact with various societies and individuals.¹⁹⁴ Another supporter, but from a different viewpoint, was Lady Cheetham, who saw the appointment as a way of controlling Rathbone's activities:

Collaboration from the 'Terror' committee and realization that we feel the sufferings of the persecuted and are trying to help them just as much as they, would be very welcome. At present their antagonistic attitude is disheartening. I agree with Lord Perth that it would be useful to appoint Miss Rathbone to some official post on the IGC where her sympathy with the refugees might find practical expression and she would come up against some of the main difficulties of the problem and realize that a block of visas is no magic comfort which will automatically carry away the persecuted from Nazi Europe.¹⁹⁵

Cheetham's colleague, Walker, who admitted to having no knowledge of the assessor system, was of the same mind and thought it '... a good idea to draw the dragons teeth by taking it into our confidence.'¹⁹⁶

Officials continued to vacillate over the advisability of Rathbone's appointment, and at one point Eden seemed sorely tempted by the notion.¹⁹⁷ But Sir Herbert Emerson, director of the IGC, was adamantly against this and would only consider consultation with appointed representatives of voluntary organisations.¹⁹⁸ This was not an option that Rathbone would accept, for it would have left her and the NCRNT ignorant of the subjects discussed or decisions reached.¹⁹⁹ Of course

¹⁹³ Letter of Perth to Randall, 15 June 1943. PRO FO 371/36726 W8828/6731/48.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Minutes of Cheetham, 17 June 1943. PRO FO 371/36726 W8828/6731/48.

¹⁹⁶ Note added to minutes of Cheetham, 17 June 1943. PRO FO 371/36726 W8828/6731/48.

¹⁹⁷ Prime Minister's personal minute, serial no. M53713, 29 July 1943 and Eden to Churchill, 2 Aug 1943. PRO FO 371/36727/W11245.

¹⁹⁸ Draft memo by Emerson, 9 Aug 1943, PRO FO 371/36727/W11589.

¹⁹⁹ Confidential meeting of NCRNT, 1 Sep 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/1. BDBJ.

the two were inextricably linked, but Walker's remarks on possible collaboration between Rathbone, the NCRNT and the IGC highlight the extent to which Rathbone and the committee were seen as synonymous, and the degree of hostility which existed between Rathbone, Emerson and Lord Winterton:

If by collaboration is meant collaboration with Miss Rathbone there is the personal factor, which may be termed lack of esteem between Sir Herbert Emerson and Miss Rathbone on the one hand and Lord Winterton and Miss Rathbone on the other which is not conducive to the smooth conduct of affairs.²⁰⁰

Emerson wasted no time in dismissing the notion of Rathbone as an assessor,²⁰¹ and any chance of her representing the interest of refugees on the IGC was destroyed in a contemptuous Foreign Office memo of 3 September 1943:

... I'm convinced that we can't use Miss Rathbone or any of her kidney as 'assessors'. Assessors are concerned with facts. Miss Rathbone is interested in policies, (and) would just sit there trying to force her particular views down the throats of the others. Anyway, the Americans won't have her.²⁰²

The resentment towards Rathbone was more than evident here, and was particularly insulting, for since her earliest days of social work in Liverpool she had always been exceptionally concerned with establishing facts. And it was these facts, gleaned from her wide variety of sources, which drove the need for rescue policies.

By November 1943 Rathbone and Lord Perth had decided not to press Emerson any further for the appointment of assessors.²⁰³ Describing the IGC as 'a most unwieldy and unsuitable committee', Rathbone became increasingly frustrated by the slow pace at which it operated.²⁰⁴ The Treasury did not complete the financial arrangements to enable the IGC to begin functioning until December 1943,²⁰⁵ although they were not quite as inactive as Rathbone insinuated, for Emerson was

²⁰⁰ Note of Walker, 12 Aug 1943. PRO FO 371/371/36665/W11961.

²⁰¹ Draft memo by Emerson, 9 Aug 1943. PRO FO 371/36727/W11589.

²⁰² Memo on the refugee situation, 3 Sep 1943. PRO FO 371/3666 W12842/49/48.

²⁰³ Notes of General meeting of NCRNT, 4 Nov 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/2. BDBJ.

²⁰⁴ See letter of EFR to Crozier, 13 Aug 1943. B/R45/6, JRL.

²⁰⁵ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 233.

doing his best to persuade more countries to join the committee.²⁰⁶ Behind the scenes the Refugee Department resented her persistent questioning in the House,²⁰⁷ which was interpreted variously as a deliberate 'indirect criticism of the Committee',²⁰⁸ a deterrent to potential new members, or a ploy to lead the Government into supplying information that it was not up to them to disclose.²⁰⁹ They all expected Rathbone to continue asking questions and were ready with a draft reply that was intended:

at once to conciliate her and to foil her attempt to fasten on us responsibility for answering Questions about the IGC which the Committee should deal with.²¹⁰

Rathbone was equally perturbed by the negative discussions she was having with Foreign Office officials,²¹¹ exacerbated by Law, Hall and Randall's rejection of her calls for a Debate on the Address:

We felt perplexed and uneasy... But fears to ignore the subject in the Debate on the Address - the biggest annual opportunity for the discussion of important issues - gives the impression that the UK government and Parliament has lost interest in the subject and were influenced by growing anti-Semitism (sic) as Goebbels has implied.²¹²

Whilst her remarks were loaded with cynicism, her impression of official indifference was not altogether wrong, for unbeknown to her, the WCC, which had only been set up in early 1943, had not met since late June 1943.²¹³ Nor had Randall seen the need to respond to the US government's call for a joint statement of action taken since Bermuda, on the grounds that 'there is not much straw for this particular piece of brick-making.'²¹⁴

²⁰⁶ The plenary session of the IGC began on 15 Aug 1944, and Mary Sibthorp, the secretary of the NCRNT attended as an observer. Letter of EFR and D. Grenfell for the NCRNT to Ambassadors, (8) Aug 1944, MSS 157/3/SE/1/28. Gollancz Papers. MRC.

²⁰⁷ For PQs see Letter of EFR to Hall, 11 Oct 1943 (re: her PQ for 13 Oct 1943), PRO FO 371/36729 W14460/6731/48 and *Hansard* HC, vol.393, cols.638-9, 3 Nov 1943.

²⁰⁸ Note of Randall, 29 Oct 1943, PRO FO 371/36729 W15384/6731/48.

²⁰⁹ Walker, Minutes, 26 Oct 1943, PRO FO 371/36729 W15384/6731/48.

²¹⁰ Note of Randall, 29 Oct 1943, PRO FO 371/36729 W15384/6731/48.

²¹¹ In Dec 1943 Rathbone got Eden's agreement for him to meet a small deputation in Jan 1944. This was to be the first such meeting since early 1943. See letters of EFR to Eden, 28 Dec 28 Dec 1943 & 7 Jan 1944. PRO FO 371/42751 W544/83/48. For report on deputation see Report, 27 Jan 1944. FO 371/42751.

²¹² Draft letter of EFR to Hall, 24 Nov 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/2. BDBJ.

²¹³ The next meeting took place on 14 March 1944. JR (44) 1st meeting, 14 March 1944. PRO CAB 95/15.

²¹⁴ Note by Randall, 29 Nov 1943. PRO FO 371/36669 W16144. Note by the Minister of State, 3 Dec 1943. PRO CAB 95/15 JR (43) 26.

XI

The lack of an official lead, combined with the diminution of press coverage, had certainly dented public interest in the subject of refugees and rescue,²¹⁵ and encouraged the NCRNT to organize another large-scale domestic propaganda campaign. But now the emphasis was not limited to trying to reinforce evidence of the extent of the atrocities against Jews, facts that the general public found increasingly difficult to assimilate,²¹⁶ but included countering antisemitism at home, in the hope that it would promote renewed pressure on government *vis-à-vis* rescue.²¹⁷

Rathbone herself set about producing a number of pamphlets, including one entitled *Continuing Terror: How to Rescue Hitler's Victims and Falsehoods and Facts about the Jews*. The latter differed markedly from *Continuing Terror* for it was compiled as a Jewish defence document to counter domestic antisemitism, which, according to government officials, was a valid reason for not allowing more Jewish refugees into the country. Whereas government officials had been the harshest critics of *Rescue the Perishing*, Rathbone now faced the fury of her friend and colleague, Victor Gollancz,²¹⁸ who by now was addressing her as 'My dear Eleanor.' Whether this implied a less formal relationship or was Gollancz being a touch patronising, is uncertain. He maintained, not unreasonably, that antisemitism defied logic or reason, so that to attempt an approach that owed everything to logical arguments was flawed. Gollancz did not question Rathbone's basic liberalism and universalism but he feared that her pamphlet would give the wrong impression:

You will forgive me for saying that if I had not known you I should have said 'Here is a terrifically humanitarian woman who loathes any form of persecution and has an extremely strong sense of decency and justice: but it's perfectly clear that in her heart of hearts she really dislikes the Jews, and finds them objectionable.'²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Letter of Crewe to Churchill, 10 Nov 1943. Acc 3121/C/2/2/5. BDBJ.

²¹⁶ See Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 186-7 for an examination of the reasons for this disbelief.

²¹⁷ Minutes of Executive meeting, NCRNT, 9 Nov 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/2. Notes on proposed campaign, 23 Nov 1943. Acc 3121/E3/536/1. BDBJ.

²¹⁸ Besides Gollancz's censure, there were other critics whose opinion Rathbone valued, including the Reverend W.W. Simpson, of the Council of Christians and Jews, and the Reverend James Parkes who pointed out that titles purporting to state the truth while identifying the others as liars always create 'a suspicion of objectivity of the author.' See Simpson to members of the publications sub-committee, 1 Jan 1944; Parkes, 'Some comments on Miss Rathbone's proposed pamphlet', Jan 1944; Simpson to Parkes, 13 June 1944. Parkes Papers. USL.

²¹⁹ Letter of Gollancz to EFR, 22 August 1944. Author File. The Orion Archive.

Presenting a Gentile readership with well-rehearsed antisemitic stereotypes of Jews upset him the most. Thus he asked:

I would put it to you: apart from what you have heard, how many Jews have you actually come across to whom any of these things apply? It is the same with the legend of the 'noisiness' and 'loudness' of Jews... The trouble, as a matter of fact, with the majority of well-established Jews in England is that they tend to reproduce somewhat to excess the British reserve...²²⁰

The irony of this was that Gollancz personally exhibited many of the very characteristic stereotypes he so derided. For, as Ruth Dudley Edwards has described, he was noisy, and prone to public displays of ostentation. Ironically, the 'clannishness' – Jewish family loyalty – that he claimed to despise, was the very thing that had supported him, and provided the starting capital for his business. And as a well-established Jew himself, he was far from reserved. On the contrary, he had a reputation amongst some British Jews for being extrovert to the point of embarrassment.²²¹ At worst, Rathbone made an error of judgment in the apologist tone of the pamphlet, but equally, as has been argued, Gollancz's criticism of it was ill conceived. There is also Pedersen's assessment of *Falsehoods and Facts* to be considered. She has deduced that Rathbone's responses to questions involving Jews, specifically those in this pamphlet, were all informed (or inflected, as she writes) by her own identification with Jews, and 'not simply humanitarian universalism.'²²² It is true that Rathbone came to identify with Jews in many ways, and confessed how much she admired their enterprise, tenacity, culture and values. But to claim, as Pedersen does, that as 'the daughter of a provincial merchant dynasty' Rathbone would have seen nothing wrong in being accused of being 'clannish' or 'tightfisted', is misguided, for it demonstrates a lack of understanding of the prevailing nature of antisemitism in Britain. Antisemites used these terms in a derogatory fashion, intending to demean and malign Jews, a discourse which Rathbone would never have engaged in. She was undoubtedly a proponent of family loyalty, but not in the way that Pedersen, or Gollancz, understood it. Besides this, Pedersen has ignored a far more significant aspect of the pamphlet, namely Rathbone's implicit references to the calumnies of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Here she countered claims, albeit

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Dudley-Edwards, *Victor Gollancz*, 391.

²²² Pedersen, *Politics of Conscience*, 358.

briefly, that 'the Jews control the Press' and 'the Jews control the Banks and the Stock Exchange.'²²³ As to the success of the pamphlet, the only tangible form of evidence is the sales figures, which indicate that about 30,000 copies were printed, an insignificant quantity in comparison with Gollancz's pamphlet, *Let my People Go*.²²⁴ It therefore seems likely that Rathbone's pamphlet did not reach the wide audience she may have anticipated.

Gollancz was not the only person to castigate Rathbone, and given the antagonism in government circles towards her campaigning activities, it was not entirely surprising that her pamphlets were censured by the usual coterie of officials. Cheetham was scathing in her attack on *Continuing Terror*, claiming that 'there was nothing new in this pamphlet' and that the sub-title was:

very misleading since it implies that schemes are set out by which Jews could be rescued: it is furthermore implied ... that if there were a front rank statesman with energy and conviction these schemes could be carried out. Miss Rathbone must know we have no means of getting unfortunate Jews in Hitler's clutches out of them and it is dishonest to say that energy and conviction could bring such measures about.²²⁵

Randall was equally critical, dismissing her call for a special official as 'the same old central fallacy', and accusing her of raising false hopes.²²⁶ His advice was that it be pointed out to her 'with perfect frankness' that:

A combination of Gladstone and Nansen in the middle of a desperate war, could avail little so long as Germany will not allow even Jewish children to leave, and to suggest the contrary is a cruel policy towards refugees who have succeeded in getting to safety.²²⁷

As for Walker, his blatant dislike of Rathbone was undisguised. In minutes that referred to the pressure that she and the Americans were putting upon government to secure extra accommodation for refugees, he dubbed her 'the "perishing" Miss

²²³ EFR, *Falsehoods and Facts*, v-vi.

²²⁴ Dudley-Edwards, *Victor Gollancz*, 391.

²²⁵ Cheetham, Minutes, 25 Feb 1944. PRO FO 371/42751 W2859/83/48.

²²⁶ Randall, minutes, 25 Feb 1944. PRO FO 371/42751 W2859/83/48.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

Rathbone,' and was quite prepared to make gestures in this direction, even though these would only be 'eye-wash'.²²⁸

All the remarks made by Walker, Randall and Cheetham, as well as so many made by Peake and Morrison, are significant for they are characteristic of the obstacles that Rathbone was up against: her campaigning was regarded in official circles with increasing disdain, her persistence was an irritant, responses to her proposals were often tailored to placate her and she was only tolerated because of her political status.²²⁹ Nor was there ever any question of her or her parliamentary colleagues, male or female, being involved in decision making.

Apart from Rathbone and Gollancz's contributions, the regular cyclostyled bulletin, *News From Hitler's Europe*, which was produced by the NCRNT from October 1943 until late 1945, proved to be a much more important initiative of the renewed publicity campaign. Whilst Eva Hubback played down the value of the publication, describing it as a 'small and unpretentious bulletin,'²³⁰ it contained immensely detailed information about the progress of the war, gleaned from a wide variety of sources as diverse as underground representatives and foreign newspapers.²³¹ In this respect it exonerated Rathbone from the charge made by Cheetham, Walker and other officials, and latterly Rubinstein,²³² that she lacked real knowledge about the refugee situation in Europe. On the contrary, both she and the NCRNT probably had a far more realistic understanding of the enormity and gravity of the crisis than the government.

XII

Rathbone's reputation for having up-to-date knowledge of refugee-related matters was quite evident when, in late January 1944, Crozier wrote to her asking for information about the newly established American War Refugee Board (WRB).²³³

²²⁸ See Minute of Walker, 29 Feb 1944. PRO FO 371/42727 W2971/16/48.

²²⁹ Cheetham was equally obstructive towards the BDBJ, and on one occasion in 1944 wrote in an internal memo, 'Mr Brotman had been told that the memo of the Board of Deputies would be given due consideration. Perhaps it is not necessary to inform him that time was not available for it to be considered by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers.' See PRO FO 371/42751.

²³⁰ *News From Hitler's Europe*, Issue 2, 22 Oct 1943. Sibthorp Papers MS96/30/1 IWM.

²³¹ For some examples see Bunting, *Representing Rescue*, 81-2.

²³² Rubinstein, *Myth of Rescue*, 136.

²³³ Crozier of the *Manchester Guardian* wrote to EFR in Jan 1944 asking her for information about 'this new War Refugee Board' which the *Zionist Review* had recently written about. See letter of Crozier to EFR, 31 Jan 1944, B/R45/12. *Manchester Guardian* Archive. JRL.

Her response to the WRB was, in fact, a mixture of disappointment and relief.²³⁴ The frustration she felt emanated from the way in which officials of her own government had repeatedly rejected her demands for the establishment of a British equivalent of the WRB. Randall was infuriated by the rumour, which he claimed Rathbone was disseminating, that the WRB was:

going really to rescue Jews from Europe by secret means and that HMG should be urged to do likewise. Any public mention of this would be extremely unfortunate.²³⁵

and he dismissed her views and aims on the question of rescue as:

quite unreal (and) based on ignorance of the true situation and what is worst of all may do real harm to such efforts as are being made to assist refugees.²³⁶

Officially, Eden welcomed the establishment of the WRB, emphasising the willingness of his government to work with the organisation, within 'unavoidable limitations.'²³⁷ But he still did not consider it necessary to set up a specific government group to handle the refugee question, maintaining that Britain already had her own equivalent of the WRB, in the form of the hitherto secret War Cabinet Committee (WCC) which had been set up in 1943.²³⁸ Neither Rathbone nor Mr Lipson, the Jewish Independent Conservative MP, were satisfied with this, pointing out the advantage that the WRB had because of its direct access to the President and an executive director. Eden's response to this was that 'the WCC has a responsibility to the Foreign Office. We think that, on the whole, that is the best way.'²³⁹ This was by no means the same thing, as Law and Emerson were to concede in private. They realized that, in reality, the American Board did differ greatly from the WCC, in its specific commitment, governmental support and financial foundation, as well as the speed of its actions.²⁴⁰ And there was another dimension that Rathbone was unaware of: the WCC had been inactive for the six months prior to the establishment of the WRB and was only reactivated because of the new situation. But the most

²³⁴ Speech of EFR, 29 Feb 1944. Sibthorp Papers 96/30/1. Mss 2/1. IWM. Also Note of Sibthorp (for the NCRNT) to Eden, 14 June 1944, PRO FO 371/42730 W9635/16/48.

²³⁵ Minutes of Law to Randall, 22 Feb 1944. PRO FO 371/42727 W3201/16/48. Letter of NCRNT, *The Times*, 10 Apr 1944.

²³⁶ Minutes of Law to Randall, 22 Feb 1944. PRO FO 371/42727 W3201/16/48.

²³⁷ Eden note on the WRB, JR 44 (1) in PRO CAB 95/15.

²³⁸ *Hansard* HC, vol.396, col.1741-2, 9 Feb 1944; vol.397, col.1471, 1 March 1944.

²³⁹ *Hansard* HC, vol.396, cols.1742, 9 Feb 1944.

²⁴⁰ Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 196.

fundamental difference was in its philosophy on rescue, for the WRB's first loyalty was to the Jews of Europe, and not to either 'Anglo-American cooperation or to the British conception of a financial blockade.'²⁴¹ Ultimately, Eden's intransigence over the matter of a British equivalent of the WRB enabled the government to contain their rescue policies within established and limited parameters.

From Rathbone's perspective, it must have been a source of deep dismay to her, and her national pride, that it was the Americans, and not the British, who had responded so readily to this humanitarian crisis. For what was at stake here were not only rescuing human lives, but also rescuing the liberal identity of Britain, and her sense of honour and justice. Conversely, she must have been relieved to know, that, at last, there was an organisation in place, albeit in the US, whose philosophy on the rescue of Jews mirrored her own. Nor did the similarity end there, for Roosevelt's Executive order of 22 January 1944 that established the WRB had much in common with the NCRNT programme, to the extent that it could be argued that, indirectly, the committee acted as a model for the American Board.²⁴² In any event, the very existence of the WRB was problematic for it served to reinforce the ideological gulf between the two nations.²⁴³ Rathbone was undeterred by this and eager to move on with aiding the rescue of refugees, and thus established a personal rapport with the American organisation. Interestingly, neither Mary Stocks nor Susan Pedersen have made any reference to Rathbone's liaison with the WRB, and it must be assumed that neither was aware of this significant connection. It is also important to reflect upon Rathbone's position as an Independent MP, for whilst Pamela Shatzkes has suggested that her lack of support of party machinery was a disadvantage,²⁴⁴ the fact that she had no party line to tow, and was not answerable to a party leader, was a distinct advantage. Any party affiliation would surely have militated against her pursuing her own goals and may have prevented her making direct contact with the WRB.

Rathbone's first letter to John Pehle, the 33 year old Gentile executive director of the WRB, was sent in early March 1944.²⁴⁵ She had been directed to him by

²⁴¹ As cited in Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 196.

²⁴² *Ibid.* 191.

²⁴³ For reports on co-operation with Britain in early 1944 see D. Wyman (ed) *America and the Holocaust. War Refugee Board 'Weekly Reports'*, II. 13,21-2,38,45 (New York, 1989)

²⁴⁴ Shatzkes, *Holocaust and Rescue*, 227-8.

²⁴⁵ Letter of EFR (for NCRNT) to Pehle, 10 March 1944. NCRNT file, WRB Archive, Box 17.

Norman Angell, the prominent liberal humanitarian,²⁴⁶ making contact through Lauren Casady, the American Treasury Representative in London. Casady was subsequently empowered by Pehle to meet Rathbone and 'discuss more fully the Board's activities' with her. Besides including a copy of the NCRNT's Ten-Point Programme, she set out some additional questions that were causing her the greatest anxiety at the time. She suggested that the US President and the Prime Minister send authoritative statements warning Germany and its satellites of British and world attitudes towards the persecution of Jews, the punishment of war criminals and the post-war situation, rather than the current warnings given by nameless voices. She also made a plea for more financial aid for refugees in occupied countries:

We gather that many more might escape, especially from France into Spain or Switzerland, more doubtfully from Poland and elsewhere, if funds could be conveyed to them to pay for their maintenance in hiding or guides when escaping...²⁴⁷

a reminder of her contacts with innumerable underground sources and escaped refugees. As to funding, the WRB had in fact licensed \$100,000 to the International Red Cross to spend on goods for Jews in enemy territory, an action that provoked an open display of hostility by Randall, not only towards the WRB, but also to the principle of rescue itself.²⁴⁸

Rathbone's other concern was the matter of Turkey, and the limit imposed by the government on the number of transit visas they were issuing, for 'the Turkish authorities seem very unfriendly on this point.'²⁴⁹ Besides raising this issue with Pehle, she also pressed Randall²⁵⁰ and Eden over the apparent lack of co-operation of the Turkish government, only to receive a very unconvincing reassurance from Eden about their good intentions.²⁵¹ Coincidental to this, Rathbone also met Nahum Goldmann, the Chairman of the World Jewish Congress, on his official visit to London in March 1944 to promote the American WRB, and to try and persuade the British government and the governments-in-exile to set up their own WRB's.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Telegram of Angell to EFR, n.d. but probably post 8 March 1944. Also Letter of Angell to Rathbone, 8 March 1944. Angell Collection. Ball State University Archives & Special Collections.

²⁴⁷ Letter of EFR (for NCRNT) to Pehle, 10 March 1944. NCRNT file, WRB Archive, Box 17.

²⁴⁸ London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, 231.

²⁴⁹ Letter of EFR (for NCRNT) to Pehle, 10 March 1944. NCRNT file, WRB Archive, Box 17.

²⁵⁰ See Letter of EFR to Randall, 1 Apr 1944. PRO FO 371/42723 W5134/15/48.

²⁵¹ Hansard HC, vol.398, col.1411, 29 March 1944.

²⁵² Memo of Goldmann, 23 March 1944. World Jewish Congress file, WRB Archive, Box 29.

Whilst the British government's lack of enthusiasm was implicit in Goldmann's memo, his impression of Rathbone and the committee was unequivocally favourable:

Wide sections of Parliament, especially the committee to save the victims of the Nazi terror, of which Miss Eleanor Rathbone, MP, is the leading member, were ready to renew their campaign in order to get the British Government to adopt policies similar to those of the War Refugee Board.²⁵³

The contrast in her dealings with Pehle and British officials could not have been more marked, for instead of her proposals being dismissed with a raft of well-rehearsed excuses, she found herself in the unique position of being encouraged to send 'any further comments or suggestions' that she might have to the WRB.²⁵⁴ It was a novelty for her to be told that one particular suggestion of hers, whereby:

uniformed trained staff be attached to Supreme headquarters with the specific task of organizing the relief and rescue of European Jews, and that these staff would enter large metropolitan areas such as Paris before the American troops...²⁵⁵

was considered a very valuable idea that warranted immediate effect. Rathbone had great faith in the ability of the WRB to rescue thousands of Jews from Nazi Europe, but the extent of their success remains uncertain, and has been the subject of academic scrutiny. For whilst David Wyman has assessed that the organisation helped save approximately 200,000 Jews, Rubinstein has challenged this, not only reducing the figure to around 20,000, but also suggesting that the WRB may not have actually saved a single life.²⁵⁶ This is an extreme view that should be treated with caution, especially as it is not founded on any original critical research.

XIII

Juxtaposed against Rathbone's dealings with the WRB in mid 1944 was her involvement with yet another refugee crisis. It should be borne in mind that she was now nearly 70 years old and in poor health,²⁵⁷ but she nevertheless approached the desperate plight of Hungary's Jews, the last major group of victims of Nazi

²⁵³ Memo of Goldmann, 23 March 1944. World Jewish Congress file, WRB Archive, Box 29.

²⁵⁴ Letter of Pehle to EFR, 8 Apr 1944. NCRNT file, WRB Archive, Box 17.

²⁵⁵ Letter of Casady to Pehle, 30 June 1944, NCRNT File, WRB Archive, Box 17.

²⁵⁶ Rubinstein, *Myth of Rescue*, 182-97.

²⁵⁷ See letter of EFR to Graham White, 7 June 1944. GW 10/3/92. HLRO.

annihilation, with tenacity and compassion. When the Nazis invaded Hungary in spring 1944, the Jewish population numbered around 750,000. Ghettoisation was followed, with extraordinary speed, by deportations to Auschwitz and the gas chambers, organised with ruthless efficiency by Adolf Eichmann.²⁵⁸

Her initial approaches to Eden and Randall, calling for threats to be made by Stalin to the Hungarian government unless they stopped the massacres of Jews, were well received,²⁵⁹ but in the aftermath of the last large NCRNT deputation to meet government officials, in July 1944, both Rathbone and the committee became increasingly disheartened.²⁶⁰ Complex international discussions were in progress in connection with Admiral Horthy, the Hungarian Regent, and his offer to let certain categories of Hungarian Jews go.²⁶¹ The major point of the deputation was Rathbone's call for Britain to enter into urgent negotiations with Horthy to accept and, if possible, extend the offer to all Hungarian Jews. She was in no doubt that time was of the essence, and her frustration at the lack of action was evident in a letter to Eden on 31 July 1944:

All this is very perturbing. It means that although Horthy's offer was published in the press some two and a half weeks ago, no one in Hungary has yet been told of our Government's determination to find transport and accommodation for all who could get out...²⁶²

A central aspect of the delay was the communications with the Americans concerning Britain's request for an agreement of collaboration. Exactly who was responsible for the delay is unclear, for the WRB noted in May-June 1944:

While assurances of 'warmest support and sympathy' have not been lacking, we have received little active cooperation to date from the British in connection with refugee rescues and relief...²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Cesarani, *Eichmann*.

²⁵⁹ Letter of EFR to Eden, 6 July 1944 & Reply of Eden to EFR 7 July 1944. PRO FO 371/42808 WR 129/3/48. Record of meeting between Randall and EFR, 18 July 1944. PRO FO 371/42808 WR 363/3/48. Letter of EFR to Hall, 31 July 1944. PRO FO 371/42812 WR 521/3/48.

²⁶⁰ Record of NCRNT meeting on 26 July 1944. PRO FO 371/42814.

²⁶¹ See, for example, Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, vol.2 (New York, 1981).

²⁶² Letter of EFR to Eden, 31 July 1944, PRO FO 371/42814.

²⁶³ As cited in Kushner & Knox, *Age of Genocide*. 202.

As far as Rathbone was concerned, she could not see why it was really necessary to await US co-operation and, in an attempt at impressing upon him the urgency of the situation, reminded Eden that:

... A promising opportunity a year ago, in Sweden, was lost because of their delays; but this is a far greater opportunity.²⁶⁴

Rathbone's concern was heightened by information, passed to her by Hall, that Horthy had moved the goalpost and had added the condition that Germany must give its consent to the release of 8000 Jews to Palestine before they could leave Hungary. Now her fear was that:

Horthy may have yielded to Gestapo or internal anti-semitic (sic) pressure partly because no definite assurance has yet been sent to him (so Hall admitted) of the desire of our government to take full advantage of the offer and facilitate it in every possible way.²⁶⁵

She concluded by begging that 'action be speeded up. It may be already too late.'²⁶⁶ And despite Eden's confidential reply to her, on 16 August 1944, which included his assurance that 'we have taken action as rapidly as possible...'²⁶⁷ Rathbone's remarks proved prophetic. It was indeed too late, for only days before the two governments finally declared their intention to help Hungary's Jews, the deportations to certain death had recommenced.²⁶⁸ More disturbing was what Rathbone did not know, that there had never been any question of these refugees being admitted to Britain, for Morrison had already made it clear to the WRB that, in respect of Hungarian Jews, it was 'essential that we do nothing at all which involves the risk that the further reception of refugees here might be the ultimate outcome.'²⁶⁹ As in the case of the French children denied admittance in 1942, Morrison once again displayed his true colours, and his overt hostility towards Jewish refugees. A total of between 500,000-

²⁶⁴ Letter of EFR to Eden, 31 July 1944. PRO FO 371/42814 and Acc 3121/E3/536/2, BDBJ. On Sweden, EFR was referring to the Adler Rudel scheme, first discussed in her flat, 5 May 1943. See Temple Papers, 55/7-8. LPL.

²⁶⁵ Letter of EFR to Eden, 9 Aug 1944. PRO FO 371/42815 WR 752/3/48.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Letter of Eden to Rathbone, 16 Aug 1944. PRO FO 371/42815 WR 752/3/48.

²⁶⁸ See Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, 791-7.

²⁶⁹ Morrison, 1 July 1944, PRO FO 371/42807 WR 170, as quoted in Bauer, *Jews For Sale?* 188.

600,000 Hungarian Jews perished during the war, most of them in the period May – September 1944.²⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, as soon as Rathbone and the NCRNT got wind of press reports that the satellite countries were taking soundings as to the terms the Allies would agree to to end hostilities, they wasted no time in communicating with Eden again. If the reports were true they urged to him to call for the persecution of the Jews to end, and for all antisemitic legislation and discrimination to be abrogated.²⁷¹ It was not until towards the end of September 1944 that Rathbone noted the latest information from Sweden, which reported that the deportations had finally been halted.²⁷²

XIV

From the tone of Rathbone's remarks in letters and speeches it is evident that she felt utterly despondent by what she perceived as her failure to save more Jews from extermination. And it was not only her political and moral conscience that was troubled, for she felt personally responsible for the British nation's conscience. New ways of assuaging her self-imposed guilt included her active campaigning on behalf of Poles facing deportation,²⁷³ which brought her into contact with Ignacy Schwarzbart of the Polish Government-in-exile, whom, it seems, she had met some months previously.²⁷⁴ The details of this campaign are beyond the scope of this thesis, for as Rathbone remarked, the deportations were not due to Nazi persecution, and were thus beyond the remit of the NCRNT. However, Schwarzbart's remarks about Rathbone serve as a reminder of the universality of her compassion, for he

²⁷⁰ Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, & D.Cesarani (ed.) *Genocide and Rescue in Hungary, 1944* (Oxford, 1997) as cited in Kushner & Knox, *Age of Genocide*, 201.

²⁷¹ Letter of NCRNT (signed by EFR, Temple, Grenfell, Perth and Roberts) to Eden, 19 Aug 1944. Temple Papers, 55/199. LPL. For this and Eden's reply, dated 31 Aug 1944, that 'careful note taken of suggestions' see PRO FO 371/42815 WR 811/3/48.

²⁷² Report of EFR on meeting with Emerson, James Mann (special representative WRB) and Mr Mason (he replaced Randall at the FO) 25 Sep 1944. Acc 3121/E3/536/2.

²⁷³ The papers relating to the deportation of Poles into USSR are to be found in RP XIV 2.18 (1-40). . Included are some papers concerning antisemitism in the Polish Army. See also Letter to the Editor, 'Return of the Poles', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 July 1945, which refers to her speech in the House of Commons, 15 Dec 1944. For her private correspondence with the *Manchester Guardian* on the subject see B/R45/15-18, *Manchester Guardian* Archive. JRL.

²⁷⁴ Notes of meeting with Rathbone, 5 Feb 1945 in Schwartzbart Diaries, Yad Vashem Institute Archives. I am grateful to Tony Kushner for alerting me to this document. There is some confusion as to when the two first met, but Schwartzbart said he had last seen Rathbone 9 or 10 months previously. However, an earlier diary says he met her on 29 Jan 1945. For questions concerning antisemitism in the Polish army see *Hansard* HC, vol.398, col.2012, 5 Apr 1944 and cols.2273-5, 6 Apr 1944. Schwartzbart was certainly present at an NCRNT meeting on 20 July 1943. See MS 60/15/57/t2. USL.

commended this 'good hearted old woman... for looking after anyone in need.'²⁷⁵ Schwarzbart, a strong Zionist,²⁷⁶ was nevertheless eager to discuss two crucial Jewish issues with her, one concerning the current situation of Jews still in concentration camps in Poland, the other concerning funds which were urgently needed to save 300 Jews in Bergen-Belsen.²⁷⁷ His suspicion, that she no longer had much political power anymore is noteworthy, for it suggests that he, at least, believed that her persistent campaigning for refugees had influenced government in the past.²⁷⁸ In reality the British government were never going to accede to any rescue proposals which conflicted with their objectives, for they stuck to the universalist belief that winning the war would solve the Jewish question, and that any relaxation in immigration policies would increase antisemitism and not be in the best national interest. Rathbone's real power was vested in her ability to apply pressure and act as the moral and humanitarian conscience of the nation, a crucial role that few were willing to undertake, and that none pursued with her degree of passion and tenacity.

The work of the NCRNT continued to absorb Rathbone during 1945,²⁷⁹ and included her communications with the International Committee of the Red Cross on humanitarian issues,²⁸⁰ and the compilation of a lengthy document summarizing 'Facts about Refugees', concluded in March 1945.²⁸¹ Included was evidence that the British government was far more interested in finding ways of removing as many

²⁷⁵ This included her involvement, with Gollancz and other humanitarian activists, in the "Save Europe Now" campaign, which aimed to both publicise and mobilize support for the freeing of British resources to aid famine relief in Europe. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 321. Besides this, she became the first President of the organisation known as German Educational Reconstruction in 1943, a group of people with widely differing political and religious convictions who worked to assist German refugee educationalists prepare for their eventual return to their own country. J. Anderson 'GER: A Voluntary Anglo-German Contribution' in A. Hearden (ed) *The British in Germany. Educational Reconstruction after 1945* (London, 1978).

²⁷⁶ As noted on a letter of EFR to Wilfrid Roberts, 1 May 1944. This note is not in Rathbone's handwriting. RP XIV 2.18 (7).

²⁷⁷ Notes of meeting with Rathbone, 5 Feb 1945 in Schwarzbart Diaries, Yad Vashem Institute Archives. I am grateful to Tony Kushner for alerting me to this entry. For an overview of her concern over the Polish question see Stocks, *Rathbone*, 304-07, and EFR, Speech notes, 28 Feb 1944. RP XIV 3 (77).

²⁷⁸ In an earlier entry he said 'Unfortunately her influence is only a moral one, which in political life is tantamount to no influence.' 29 Jan 1945, Schwarzbart Diaries, Yad Vashem Institute Archives.

²⁷⁹ Circular letter, 22 Feb 1945. Acc 3121/E3/5361/2. BDBJ.

²⁸⁰ Reply of ICRC to EFR's letter of 20 Jan 1945 and NCRNT telegram of 18 Jan 1945, 6 March 1945. G 59/4. Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva.

²⁸¹ NCRNT, 30 March 1945.96/30/1 Sibthorp Papers. MSS 2/1. IWM.

domestic refugees post-war than they were with offering help to European victims of Nazism.²⁸²

XIV

A disturbing repercussion of the publication of the atrocities committed in the camps was the way in which the British public mixed up Jewish refugees with German Nationals, towards whom a genocidal attitude had developed. This prompted the Association of Jewish Refugees in Britain to write to Rathbone in April 1945, reasserting:

the suffering undergone by Jews in concentration camps between 1933 and the outbreak of war. This Association has always made it clear that no bonds are left between Jewish refugees and Germany, but it seems necessary to show once again that the Jews were Hitler's first victims in the concentration camps as they were anywhere else.²⁸³

And it is worth noting that even in 1945, a major Jewish refugee organisation was still euphemistically referring to concentration camps, when in fact many of the camps were used for exterminatory purposes.

Gollancz's response to the atrocities committed in Buchenwald, revealed after the Americans liberated the camp in April 1945, was a propaganda pamphlet *What Buchenwald Really Means*, intended to counter the growing anti-German hate campaign at home, which was so badly affecting German Jews. Rathbone added her own thoughts in a 'letter to the Editor' of the *Manchester Guardian* in May 1945, in which she explored, publicly, the notions of collective guilt and personal responsibility:

I believe that the greater burden of guilt must rest on the nation which from 1933 –45 failed to overthrow its government and in which the great majority during the war fought or laboured as they were bidden. But I ask myself, as Gollancz does, what would I have done if I had been an Anti-Nazi during those years?

²⁸² See PRO HO 213/1009 as cited in Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*, 200. Also 'Facts About Refugees', NCRNT, 30 March 1945, which refers to an article in the *Daily Express*, 21 Mar 1945, in which it was reported that the government intended to allow only one third of the refugees already in Britain to stay. Sibthorp Papers 96/30/1. MSS 2/1. IWM.

²⁸³ Letter of Association to EFR, 30 April 1945. RP XIV 2.17 (65). This included a 20-page bulletin issued by the Joint Rescue Committee of Jewish Agency for Palestine, detailing information on the situation of the Jews in Europe. Feb 1945. RP XIV 2.17 (64).

Significantly, in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, she reasserted her pride in the British people's finest tradition:

... their love of justice, their sense of fair play even for hated enemies. It would be a disaster if we forsook this tradition in our hour of victory, when the future of the world may depend on whether justice and stern punishment can be meted out to the guilty, without encouraging a spirit of hatred and revenge which may not only destroy many innocent people but may so embitter future relations as to sow the seeds of another war.²⁸⁴

National and humanitarian responsibility were at the core of an impassioned speech which she gave during the course of the debate on European conditions on 20 August 1945, several months after the liberation of the extermination camps in Western Europe. Now she pleaded for the 'poor surviving remnant of European Jewry' whom she was sure would perish if they 'had to endure the rigor (sic) of a European winter under their present conditions.'²⁸⁵ She had already unburdened her soul to Norman Bentwich, in respect of Jewish immigration into Palestine:

I feel so strongly at the way the liberated Jews etc. are being treated... I think myself that the situation is too bad to observe excessive caution about it,²⁸⁶

and subsequently reiterated her concern in a private letter to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, when she wrote:

the position of the Jews on the Continent (and as to that I have made a pretty close study) is really desperately bad.²⁸⁷

If her unequivocal support for a Jewish homeland, in which refugees who had survived the Nazi terror could make a new life, lost her some supporters within government, she was unconcerned. What her loyalty did do was strengthen her connections with, and increase the admiration that the Jewish community in Britain had of her. The net result was that she was inundated with invitations to speak and

²⁸⁴ EFR, Letter to the Editor, 'The Significance of Buchenwald,' *Manchester Guardian*, 22 May 1945, 4.

²⁸⁵ *Hansard HC*, vol.413, col.364. 20 Aug 1945.

²⁸⁶ Letter of EFR to Bentwich, 15 Aug 1945. A255/617. CZA.

²⁸⁷ Letter of EFR to the Editor, 26 Sept 1945. B/R45/19. *Manchester Guardian* Archive. JRL

write on the Jewish question.²⁸⁸ Amongst these the Board of Deputies asked her to lead a proposed deputation to the Prime Minister,²⁸⁹ and she became involved with fighting the Hampstead anti-alien petition in October 1945,²⁹⁰ at which she gave a powerful and successful speech.²⁹¹ Her long experience with refugee issues and her deeply held interest in Palestine as a homeland for the displaced Jews of Europe²⁹² persuaded her to put her name forward as a member of the proposed Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry into the Palestine question.²⁹³ This was an almost unprecedented action for someone who had largely eschewed official positions during her sixteen years as a politician. The Palestine issue was not going to go away and she persisted in asking parliamentary questions,²⁹⁴ but her anger at being denied a debate on Palestine in December 1945 was obvious in a memo sent to 'Members believed to be sympathetic to the Jewish side of the Palestinian problem.' She wrote of how 'the subject is to be smothered as much as possible...' and, as an alternative strategy 'that it would be worth putting in questions for reply on the first appropriate day after we reassemble on January 22nd (1946).'²⁹⁵

Rathbone never got this opportunity, for she died suddenly, at her home in Highgate, on 2 January 1946.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the way in which Rathbone's activities on behalf of refugees moved on from the context of internment issues in Britain, to a resolute determination to aid the rescue of people, mostly Jews threatened with extermination, from Nazi Europe. Against this background, and as with the

²⁸⁸ Notes of talk between EFR and Samuel Landman, 27 Aug 1945, RP 2002 Accession (being catalogued).

²⁸⁹ Letter of BDBJ to EFR, 27 Sept 1945. RP 2002 Accession (being catalogued).

²⁹⁰ For a study of this petition see G.Macklin " 'A quite natural and moderate defensive action?' The 1945 Hampstead 'anti-alien' petition", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 37, 3 (2003) 277-300. One of the organizers of the petition, Margaret Crabtree, had written to Rathbone the year before, complaining about the German Jews in Hampstead, and of Rathbone's support for them. See letter of M.Crabtree to EFR, 25 Jan 1944, RP XIV 2.17 (62).

²⁹¹ EFR, Notes of speech, 22 Oct 1945. RP XIV 3 (80).

²⁹² Letter of EFR to Bevin, 22 Nov 1945, RP 2002 Accession (being catalogued).

²⁹³ Hansard HC, vol.415, cols.1928-34. 13 Nov 1945.

²⁹⁴ *Hansard HC*, vol.415, cols.322-3, 30 Oct 1945; vol.415, cols. 1927-34, 13 Nov 1945; vol.417, col.634, 13 Dec 1945.

²⁹⁵ Memo of EFR to MPs, 10 Dec 1945. RP 2002 Accession (being catalogued).

previous chapter, it has also attempted to show the nature, extent and value of her campaigning activities during this period.

By 1940, as a result of her devotion to the cause of interned aliens, Rathbone's name had become synonymous with the refugee question, ultimately earning her the soubriquet 'MP for refugees.' But the nature of her humanitarian activities altered dramatically in late 1941, for it was then that she became totally committed to the saving of lives. There are a number of interrelated factors that help explain why she shifted the nature of her work at this time. Foremost was the urgency of action in the light of the change in Nazi policy from forced emigration to programmes of mass extermination. As these policies were being implemented, so news was trickling through from occupied Europe of the Nazi atrocities. Even though the extant evidence is fragmented, there are many reasons to believe that Rathbone was being fed with information about this human tragedy from August 1942, and that her informants included William Temple, Jan Karski, Victor Gollancz and Arthur Koestler. And given her innumerable contacts with refugees in Britain, it is reasonable to assume that she also received news from a variety of underground sources, as well as from members of the Anglo-Jewish community. Importantly, from the outset she never doubted the veracity of these reports, and was compelled by the anticipation of impending catastrophe, and her own conscience, to wholeheartedly embrace the cause.

It was a constant source of anguish to her that the British government did not consider the plight of the Jews in the same way as she did: she saw rescuing people as an integral part of the war effort, and not a detached aspect of it which conflicted with the national goal, and which would ultimately be resolved through winning the war. She was as prescient here as on many other occasions, realizing that victory would come too late to save the majority of Europe's Jews. She repeatedly reaffirmed her loyalty to Britain and the national interest, that of defending the country and defeating the enemy, but unlike the many government officials with whom she battled, she saw saving the lives of refugees, especially Jews, as a national and personal responsibility that should, and could, be undertaken simultaneously to defeating the enemy.

By mid 1942, and coincidental to events in Nazi-occupied Europe, precipitated

by Pierre Laval's cooperation with the Hitler regime to cleanse France of its Jews,²⁹⁶ changes were occurring within the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees. The volume of casework being dealt with was diminishing as large numbers of internees were released, even though the cases that remained were the most complex. And it is evident from extant documents that Rathbone allowed her office staff, especially Mary Sibthorp, to deal with many of these herself, and she involved herself when advice was necessary. This freed her to concentrate on more urgent refugee matters. But having said this, there is little doubt that Rathbone would have seen the saving of lives as a priority, even if the internment crisis had not diminished.

Trying to piece together the reasons why Rathbone was so determined to fight for the lives of the Jews of Europe is complex. She was certainly motivated by her admiration for, and identification with the cultural and ideological characteristics of Jews.²⁹⁷ These same traits placed them in the 'deserving of help' category. That she perceived them as 'European' may also have influenced her, even though she may not have consciously been aware of this. Being European was, in her eyes, synonymous with a certain superiority, and was a reflection of the strong Victorian and Edwardian imperialist culture in which she was nurtured. Just as she had been concerned, in 1933, about 'debasement Jewish women to the level of Arab women,' in connection with the women's franchise in Palestine,²⁹⁸ so in 1945 she favoured Europe's Jews over the Arabs when immigration into Palestine was a major issue: the Arabs became the contemporary equivalent of the Victorian 'undeserving poor' whilst the Jews were 'deserving' on account of their gifts to civilisation – from providing the basis of Christianity, their contributions to medicine, literature and philosophy through to their invaluable support for the Allied cause – all contributions which were of incalculable value.²⁹⁹ This was a case of saving lives for the betterment of the world as a whole, rather than helping an individual group of Indian, Arab or even British women improve their status in life, as she had done prior to 1933.

Another element was her boundless compassion, allied to her sense of right and wrong, which manifested itself in selfless acts of support for those who were

²⁹⁶ Statement of Laval, quoted in A.Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators 1922-45* (London, 1973) 316.

²⁹⁷ E.Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (London, 1993)

²⁹⁸ Letter of Rathbone to Cunliffe-Lister, 28 Feb 1933. RP XIV 2.5 (11).

²⁹⁹ *Hansard HC*, vol.413, cols.364-5. 20 Aug 1945.

suffering and who needed, and deserved, an advocate. At that time, Rathbone knew of nobody in greater need than the Jews who were threatened with annihilation. She had spent a lifetime championing on behalf of unpopular causes, and to stress a point again, it was her lack of attachment to a party line that allowed her to pursue these, unfettered by party opinion. Nor did she care whether others approved of her actions. She was answerable to no one but herself and her conscience, which impelled her to do what she could to help others, living by the family maxim 'What can be done, ought to be done.' Her financial independence was an added factor that cannot be overlooked, for besides having the physical stamina, and the backing of a committed band of fellow activists, she also had the resources to support her activities. Alongside all of these factors was her innate belief that her actions would make a difference, and were worth any amount of effort.

But doing what she could for Jewish refugees was fraught with difficulties, not least of all because of the opposition that she faced from within government circles, which should not be underestimated. Publicly, she withstood the barrage of attacks from the likes of Randall, Peake and Morrison, but their cynicism, rhetoric, anti-alienism and antisemitism struck her very deeply, for it revealed an unpalatable view of Britain and her government that was at odds with her idealized belief of a liberal and tolerant society and culture. Her opponents, who, besides the ministers mentioned, included Walker and Cheetham of the Refugee Department, found her presence within the political arena a serious irritant, for her constant challenges deflected them from their favoured path, that of avoiding involvement in the refugee debate wherever possible. Similarly, her penetrating questions chipped away at the official façade of generosity towards refugees. Her rescue campaigning on behalf of desperate refugees was never perceived by the British government as a priority, and officials went to extreme lengths to outwit her. Whilst there were undoubtedly occasions where it was not expedient for officials to reveal certain information, it is clear that in many instances they were prepared to deceive her and feed her with misleading information and spurious answers, in an effort to placate her and resist her demands. Such devious behaviour was tragic, for human lives were at stake, compounded by the fact that, on occasions, small concessions could have been made that might conceivably have saved a few lives.

On a more positive note Rathbone was able to rely upon the unswerving support of her network of fellow activists. Amongst these were Cazalet, Graham White, Victor Gollancz and Noel-Baker, all of whom admired and respected her. She also had a vast network of supporters within the established church, amongst sections of the Anglo-Jewish community and the British Establishment, a fact that even Rubinstein acknowledges was a positive and advantageous aspect of Rathbone's campaigning.³⁰⁰ Conversely, Pamela Shatzkes, in her work, *Holocaust and Rescue*, has asserted that Rathbone, along with Wedgwood, the Reverend James Parkes, and Dr George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, belonged to 'marginal and uninfluential sectors of society.'³⁰¹ This assessment sits uneasily against her more positive description of Rathbone as 'prominent' amongst activists, as indeed she was, and as one of 'several outstanding individuals.'³⁰²

True, Rathbone did not belong to the aristocracy, nor was she a member of one of the main political parties, and as a female politician she was in a minority in a male dominated arena. According to Shatzkes, these factors all mitigated against a successful outcome for Rathbone's activism on behalf of refugees. But as has been argued throughout this thesis, these were not the real impediments to success. The obstacles went much deeper, for they were embedded in governmental policies and actions that gave primacy to winning the war, and in which moral and ethical concerns and humanitarianism were of secondary significance. As to Rathbone's character, she can perhaps best be described as unconventional, for she defied the norms of conventional society by supporting the unpopular cause of Jewish refugees. And even though her actions may have been viewed as non-conformist, this did not diminish her ability to influence people from all walks of life to back her campaigning activities. As to her wider circle of support, she had countless contacts amongst the refugee community in Britain, who, in turn, had their own links both at home and abroad, often through underground movements and channels. One has the sense that Rathbone was able to keep tabs on all of these, summoning assistance and information as and when she needed it.

It was her utter frustration at government inaction that precipitated the

³⁰⁰ Rubinstein, *Myth of Rescue*, 129.

³⁰¹ Shatzkes, *Holocaust and Rescue*, 27.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

establishment of the NCRNT, the non-political organisation that she instigated to force the issue of saving lives into the public arena in early 1943. She had recognized very early on in the war the need for a group that would exert pressure on behalf of refugees, and the NCRNT was central to her rescue mission, becoming the conduit for propaganda, deputations, public meetings, parliamentary questions, articles and letters. This was another example of Rathbone's prescience, for it was another year before the American President set up the War Refugee Board (WRB). And the fact that many of the aims and proposals of the WRB mirrored those put forward by the NCRNT suggests a greater level of impact than Rathbone appears to have acknowledged. Whilst a detailed examination of the committee's activities is beyond the scope of this thesis, some of the criticism laid at Rathbone's door in respect of the NCRNT needs to be addressed. Rubinstein, in his *Myth of Rescue*, is unequivocal in his denunciation of the committee's activities, asserting that their proposals were 'every bit as useless and misguided as their American counterparts.'³⁰³ No less acerbic is his assessment of Rathbone and Gollancz's efforts at rescue, claiming how incompletely they, and the other members of the committee understood 'the diabolical evil they were attempting to ameliorate.'³⁰⁴ It is hard, in the light of evidence presented in this thesis, to agree with Rubinstein's conclusion, for Rathbone and Gollancz were probably better informed than, or at least as well informed as many others at the time, and unlike innumerable people, never doubted the veracity of the dreadful news that was passed on to them. Given the enormity of the tragedy, which was barely comprehensible even after the Nuremberg trials, it is reasonable to assume that their understanding of the so-called 'evil' was at least on a par with others, if not greater.

Ironically, Rathbone would probably have agreed with Rubinstein's assertion that 'the National Committee was grasping at straws' for she only ever envisaged small rescue schemes being successful, and was prepared to grasp any possible opportunity for rescue. But what Rubinstein and Shatkes overlook is the importance of the committee as an agent of agitation, and as the group that succeeded, certainly at the outset, in getting the plight of the Jews of Europe onto the public and political agenda. That the organisation dropped its overt publicity and propaganda campaign in late 1943 was a tragedy, compounded by Gollancz's absence due to illness, and the

³⁰³ Rubinstein, *Myth of Rescue*, 135.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 136

deaths of Cazalet and Wedgwood. By the time the NCRNT decided, in 1944, to reverse this decision, the task of reviving public sympathy and interest had become almost insurmountable. Rathbone's pamphlet, *Continuing Terror*, had little impact, the organisation was desperately short of funds, the response to appeals was weak, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to get speakers.³⁰⁵

. Whether lives were saved as a direct result of her actions remains speculative, but ultimately what was important was that she cared enough to speak out and to act. Rathbone sought to awaken the consciences of her fellow citizens, and to restore Britain's reputation as a generous and humane society through her campaigning. For that, she is owed a very great debt.

³⁰⁵ For *Continuing Terror* see NCRNT report, 10 May 1944. Acc 3121 C11/7/3d/5; Minutes of Exec. Committee meeting, 10 May 1944. Acc 3121E1/74. BDA. LMA

PART FOUR

Conclusion and Postscript

CONCLUSION

‘With gratitude to the memory of Eleanor Rathbone, Member of Parliament 1929-1946 ... who strove for tolerance, understanding and open doors.’¹

To Eleanor Rathbone who knew, cared and acted.²

Eleanor Rathbone’s commitment to the cause of Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Nazi occupied Europe before and during the Second World War came towards the end of her long career as a humanitarian activist. She devoted the whole of her working life to compassionate acts, championing the cause of the needy, the impoverished and the underrepresented in British society, her imperial colonies as well as Europe. This humanitarianism remained consistent throughout her career, but, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, its direction changed according to need.³ She never planned to undertake a particular activity, but rather dealt with each ‘unsuspected obligation’ as and when it aroused a reaction in her. This is not to say that she did not prioritise her work, for she always gave great thought and careful consideration to competing claims before deciding which was the most important of them. Thus, during the 1930s onwards, the welfare and rescue of Jewish refugees became her priority, to the exclusion of all other demands.

As a responsible citizen, nurtured within a family whose credo was ‘what ought to be done, could be done’, she was unable to ignore the needs of others. Her sense of personal accountability, which impelled her to dedicate her time and energy to the needs of others, emanated from a combination of upbringing, religious nonconformity and heritage. Of special significance was the ideology of Oxford philosophers, Caird and Green, whose teachings introduced her to ethical idealism, with its thesis of personal service and citizenship, whereby the actions of the individual rather than abstract institutions would create a better society. But over and above all of these influences was her personal decision to follow a humanitarian path, and nowhere was this better demonstrated than in her devotion to the plight of threatened Jews.

¹ Dedication in Mosse, *Second Chance*.

² Dedication in Kushner, *Liberal Imagination*..

³ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*. 117.

Devoting her time, energy and often personal finances to humanitarian acts was Rathbone's purpose in life, and whether it was seeking solutions to, for example, the injustice of the casual dock labour system, fighting for women's suffrage and the family allowance for mothers, pursuing a policy of collective security, challenging the practice of child marriage in India and Africa, or becoming the 'MP for refugees', she undertook each with fervour and tenacity. This reaching out to strangers, whether they were British, Indian, African, Arab or Jewish, required crossing huge social, cultural and psychological barriers, and it was here that Rathbone's weaknesses came to light. For even though she had the mindset to help all these souls, her dealings with Indians and Arabs in particular were fraught with difficulties. The cultural divide was often too great for her to cross, so that she was prone to deal tactlessly with issues connected with local customs and practices. Nor was she able to come to terms with the class differences within these cultures. For whilst she was able to cultivate a rapport with cultured people, especially ladies, in these communities, she was often disdainful of the less well educated amongst them. At times she was patronising and officious, and her 'mother knows best' attitude threatened her position and credibility. But despite these human frailties, her intentions were always honourable and not informed by any eugenic or racial determinism. Rather, she had a progressive attitude, which found expression in her strongly held belief that people could better themselves with the help of activists like her.

However, when it came to Jews, all these negative characteristics disappeared, and she had no difficulty traversing the same boundaries that had, to some extent, impeded her work in other spheres. Explaining how she was able to make this leap is complex, and can, in part, be explained by her upbringing and education. And it is possible that Rathbone became more sensitive as she matured, and learnt from her earlier mistakes, becoming a more tactful and intuitive person. But more influential than all of these influences was the fact that she saw Jews as human beings like herself, people with whom she could identify, empathise and sympathise with, even though she had relatively little personal contact with them. This was especially so where endangered Hungarian, Czech and Polish Jews were concerned, for she fought for their lives from the safety of her homeland. Moreover, she confessed as early as 1934, well before Jewish refugees became the burning issue, that, had she been given

the opportunity, she would have chosen to be born a Jew.⁴ In her eyes, the Jews, unlike the Indians, Arabs and Africans, and even the poor in Britain whose causes she championed, were a civilized race with whom she had an affinity. She admired them for their culture, ethics and values, and Zionism, to which she became increasingly attracted, was in her view, the 'first day's progress of a new civilization.'⁵ Had she not been nurtured within a somewhat unconventional Victorian tradition that encouraged freedom of expression and diversity of religious thought it is doubtful that she would have articulated her views so freely. And although her loyalty to early twentieth century feminism was indisputable, it was her conscience and awareness of the needs of people outside of her own privileged circle which informed all her work, rather than a commitment to a particular movement or female issue.

The rise of Fascism and its insidious threat to the lives and freedom of individuals was more than she could bear, and her dedication to alleviating their plight became her main concern and ultimately eclipsed all others. Her high principles of integrity and her belief in responsible citizenship were tested to the limit, as she championed the cause of refugees, especially Jews, trying to escape from Nazi-occupied Europe. The refugee issue caused Rathbone more grief and heartache than any other that she pursued during her lifetime, for it challenged her deeply rooted sense of patriotism, and her faith in Britain's tradition of democracy, liberty, asylum and generosity, all ideals which she cherished. Her strong sense of decency, and of right and wrong were challenged by the Munich Agreement and the policy of appeasement, which both represented the antithesis of these ideals, and made her ashamed to be British. It led her to accuse British politicians of being 'short-sighted, selfish and ungenerous,'⁶ charges that gave an insight into her relationship with government officials. This was frequently acrimonious, and the discourses in which she was engaged revealed the underlying prejudice of many of them towards Jews. Even when their intransigence in respect of the impending human disaster is considered in its historical context, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that some were antisemitic. Nowhere was this better exemplified than in the case of the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, who was barely able to disguise his antipathy towards

⁴ RP XIV 2.5 (45).

⁵ Stated in Lecture of EFR, 8 Oct 1934. See *Palestine Post*, 9 Oct 1934, 5.

⁶ Stocks, *Rathbone*, 340.

Jews.⁷ But she also had to contend with opposition from within the broader population, for there were many who saw Jews, and Jewish refugees as 'foreigners', people who they could not 'take to', who came from a world that was totally alien to them, and who might, in some way, pose a threat to the fabric of their society. Besides this, their understanding of the grave situation that they faced was limited, not least of all because Britain was in conflict with Germany, and the war was not being fought on behalf of the Jews. This was a popular argument often rehearsed by government officials who resisted implementing rescue measures, maintaining that they were incompatible with the war effort. But it was an argument that Rathbone never agreed with, for in her view the reverse was true. As far as she was concerned rescue and a successful outcome to the conflict were entirely compatible, and if jointly pursued, would have huge benefits for Britain. For not only would she be setting an example to other countries, but it would provide the chance for her to restore what Rathbone saw as her country's tarnished reputation as a humanitarian, liberal state. It was these factors that made her persistent campaigning on behalf of refugees all the more remarkable, even amongst other activists.

It is difficult to evaluate the success of Rathbone's activities on behalf of Jewish refugees in quantitative terms, for whilst her actions may have been instrumental in facilitating the saving of lives, there is no evidence that she was actively involved in a rescue mission. Regardless of this, in humanitarian terms her contribution was enormous. Her presence in the political arena as the first female MP to denounce Hitler in 1933 and warn of the consequences of his rise to power, helped initiate the debate over the Jewish question and to keep it on the agenda, both politically and publicly, right up until her death in 1946. Her Independent status was a positive advantage here, for she had no party line to tow, and nor was she answerable to a party leader. The extent of her connections in political, official, establishment and Anglo-Jewish circles were legion, and ensured that she could maximise support as and when she needed it, even if this meant, as it often did, her almost dragooning people to help her.

⁷ Donoghue, in his official biography of Morrison, paid a minimum attention to Morrison's dealings with Jewish refugees. In fact his limited reference to Morrison's involvement with refugees, paints a picture of a benevolent Home Secretary, who generously released interned aliens in Nov 1940. This is a distorted picture, which lacks any reference to National Archive documents. See Donoghue, *Morrison*, 302-3, 306.

Without Rathbone's devotion to and support of the refugee cause it is doubtful whether either the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees or the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror would have come into existence. This would have been a tragedy, for each organisation fulfilled a very important role in its own way, the PCR in its commitment to issues related to domestic and deported interned aliens, and the NCRNT as the central plank of Rathbone's rescue mission. It acted as an agent of agitation and was the conduit for propaganda, deputations, public meetings, parliamentary questions, articles and letters, all intended to keep the plight of the Jews of Europe in the public and political eye. That it lost momentum in mid-1944 as a result of circumstances beyond her control was very unfortunate. Nor can she be blamed for the fact that none of the potentially viable small-scale rescue schemes that she proposed were actually pursued. This responsibility rested with the British government who lacked the foresight and humanity to support them

Ultimately, Rathbone's motives were genuine and her compassion boundless. Nowhere was this better expressed than in the tribute that her friend and co-activist, Victor Gollancz, wrote after her death:

No one who did not have the privilege of working daily with Eleanor Rathbone can have any conception of what she did for refugees in general and Jewish refugees in particular. It wasn't merely that she gave every single case the most careful consideration: it was that she never ceased to *think* 'How can I best help these people? How can I carry on the work a stage further? What is the next thing to do?' She once told me that she did her best thinking in the small hours of the morning... to that nightly thinking some Jews owe their lives: many more owe to it a little hope and a little faith in human goodness. Eleanor Rathbone was truly humble, and would have quite genuinely desired no epitaph: but if she had been told that she must have one, I believe that she would have desired that it should be 'If a few people are a little happier because of me, my life has not wholly (sic) failed.'⁸

Despite Gollancz's words, it should be borne in mind that Rathbone was not a saint, for she had many negative qualities that did not endear her to everyone. But she was nevertheless an exceptional human being who defies categorising sociologically or historically. The path she chose, to help refugees fleeing Nazi persecution was brave, remarkable and unique, for no other refugee activist in the non-Christian world

⁸ V.Gollancz, 'Eleanor Rathbone', *AJR Information* (Feb 1946) 13.

succeeded in crossing the boundaries, and no one, not even the Reverend James Parkes,⁹ who was widely acclaimed for his devotion to persecuted Jewry, committed themselves so wholeheartedly to the cause.

⁹ Parkes died in 1981. J.Parkes, *Voyages of Discovery* (1969) and for an overview of Parkes' campaigning see T. Kushner, 'James Parkes and the Holocaust', in John Roth *et al* (eds.) *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide* (Basingstoke, 2001) 575-85.

POSTSCRIPT

Rathbone's generosity towards refugees was exemplified at a very personal level, when, in 1945, she gave shelter to a young married Jewish couple, refugees from Nazi Germany. The Lustig's found themselves unexpectedly homeless just before Mrs. Lustig gave birth to her first child, and Rathbone offered the family a home in the house she shared with Elizabeth Macadam in Highgate.¹

Her enduring legacy took the form of a bequest in her will, in which she requested that £ 7500 be used by her trustees to establish a charitable trust known as the Refugee Fund:

for the benefit of refugees from any country (chiefly but not necessarily exclusively political refugees from the Country Protectorate or area prior to One thousand nine hundred and thirty nine known as Czechoslovakia and from Spain).

The Jewish community celebrated Rathbone's work for refugees both at home and abroad. In Israel, Children and Youth Aliyah collected £10,000 for a memorial:

To take the form of a building for cultural activities in Magdiel, near Tel Aviv... in honour of the great British humanitarian and staunch advocate of the rights of children, who spent the last years of her life in helping victims of Nazi persecution.²

The inscription on the plaque that fellow refugee activist, MP David Grenfell, read when he attended the opening ceremony in October 1949 was:

In memory of Eleanor Rathbone, champion of justice and lover of children.³

In London, the Otto Schiff Housing Association, which provided accommodation for Jewish refugees who came to Britain after the Second World War, named their home in Highgate 'Eleanor Rathbone House.'⁴

¹ Telephone interview with Mrs Harriet Hagan, *nee* Lustig, 22 July 2001. Mrs Harriet Hagan was the child born to this couple, and her birth certificate gives her address as 26 Hampstead Lane. Stocks refers to this event, but does not mention that the couple were German Jewish refugees. See Stocks, *Rathbone*, 312-3.

² Copy of newspaper cutting, unidentified, 3 Sept 1948, MSS SPSL, 120/2. Folio 210.

³ 'Rathbone School near Tel-Aviv', 19 Oct 1949, MSS SPSL, 120/2. Folio 211.

⁴ Eleanor Rathbone House was set up after the Second World War. It was eventually closed, and sold at auction in July 2003. My thanks to Cyril Brown for this information.

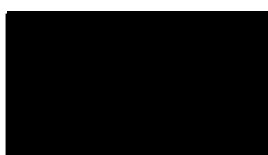
APPENDIX ONE**DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I, Susan Cohen, declare that the thesis entitled

ELEANOR RATHBONE AND HER WORK FOR REFUGEES

and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University:
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification:
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed:
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work:
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help:
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.



18 January 2005.

PART FIVE

Appendices and Bibliography

APPENDIX TWO

Interned Aliens Case Studies

CASE ONE

Alfred Richard Weyl

PRO HO 382 W1234

Weyl was born in Berlin in 1897, and arrived in Britain from Holland in September 1934, having been granted permission to stay for one month. He was eventually granted leave to remain, and established a light aircraft business. He applied for naturalisation in July 1939. His representations to Sir John Anderson, the Home Secretary, to get his case expedited 'as his services might be deemed useful in the case of an emergency' came to nothing, and by March 1940 his factory had been closed down and he was banned from working due to Air Ministry regulations. Internment followed in May 1940, and he was still interned in December 1940, when he wrote to Rathbone for her help. For, despite the intervention of the Royal Aeronautical Society, the eight applications that he had submitted to officials over the past six months had gone unanswered. Vera Craig, the PCR secretary, handled much of the correspondence and wrote to Mr Drinkwater in the Aliens Dept. of the Home Office in January 1941, complaining that:

this is one of the cases in which there has been a most unreasonable delay in dealing with application for release.

Drinkwater was not at all happy about the underlined paragraph, describing it as 'an improper remark, I think'¹ Suggestions were made that Weyl was politically 'unreliable', and the security services kept blocking his release, despite the assertion of the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees (PCR) that he was 'strongly anti-Nazi and pro-Allied.'² Rathbone received numerous letters of support for Weyl from eminent aeronautical associates,³ but the Home Office had to weigh up this against

¹ Letter of V.Craig to Drinkwater, 21 Dec 1940. PRO HO 382 W1234/7.

² Letter of V.Craig to Prestige, 8 Sept 1941. PRO HO 382 W1234.

³ See letter of Prof Eissner to EFR, 12 Dec 1941 and Letter of F.David to EFR, 1 June 1942. PRO HO 382 W1234/9.

the impressions of others, including Otto Schiff, founder and chairman of the Jewish Refugees Committee, who had previously described Weyl as 'not the type of person I would recommend (for naturalisation) in any event.'⁴ Craig pursued the case throughout 1941 and 1942, but neither she nor the PCR got any thanks for their help. In April 1943 Weyl wrote of his 'disappointment with this committee, accusing them of 'repeatedly dissuading all sorts of people from doing steps in my favour...' singling out Craig as the least helpful.⁵ Weyl was eventually released from internment on 18 Nov 1943, but as late as March 1946, was still barred from working in his area of aeronautical research.⁶

⁴ Letter of Denniston to Prestige, 3 Sept 1941. PRO HO 382 W1234/9.

⁵ Letter of Weyl to Captain Pritchard, Royal Aeronautical Society. 10 Apr 1943. PRO HO 382 W1234/9

⁶ Letter of Denniston to Paterson, 24 July 1943 and Letter of C.F.Ryder, 5 Mar 1946 PRO HO 382 W1234/9.

CASE TWO

Gerasimos Stephanotos (Stefantos)**PRO HO 405 S39505**

Rathbone took up the case of Stephanotos, a Greek national, in October 1940, and used it to illustrate to Osbert Peake, Parliamentary under secretary at the Home Office:

the 'hardship of chivying aliens around from one area to another as they become successively protected without – as far as I or they know – giving them any assistance towards the cost of removal; further, the question of whether holding Communist views is a legitimate reason for expulsion.'⁷

Stephanotos, a self-confessed strong anti-Fascist, had lived in Britain since 1916, and was ordered out of a protected area near Plymouth in May 1940 because he held Communist views. As the protected area was extended so he was moved on, finally being ordered out of Devon and Cornwall in August. He had inevitably lost his job as waiter. In her subsequent correspondence with Mr Tuckett in the Legal Department of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) Rathbone referred to the 'preposterous workup of the protected areas regulation' and informed him, as she had Peake, of her intention to put down a Parliamentary Question.⁸ Her pessimism about the Greek waiter's case was such that she personally sent him a small sum of money to ease his financial distress.⁹ She also expressed the hope that 'now that "gallant little Greece" is so much in the public eye, being Greek might even help him get back to Plymouth,'¹⁰ a sentiment which Stefanotos shared and intended to use in a reapplication.¹¹ The NCCL were very grateful for Rathbone's interest in the whole matter of Protected Areas regulations, and told her that a memo being sent to the Minister of Home Security referred to the 'most dangerous nature of these regulations.' The Stefanotos case generated a huge Home Office file, dating back to

⁷ Letter of EFR to Peake, 28 Oct 1940. PRO HO 405 S39505/5

⁸ *Hansard* HC, vol. cols.1037-8. 12 Dec 1940 and Oral answer, vol.367, cols.1086-7, 17 Dec 1940.

⁹ Letter of D.Hardman (secretary at PCR) to Tuckett, 29 Nov 1940. DCL/3/3.

¹⁰ Letter of EFR to Tuckett, 7 Nov 1940. DCL/3/30.

¹¹ Letter of Tuckett to EFR, 5 Dec 1940. DCL/3/3.

1917 when he first got into trouble with the police, but ending in late 1940, before any final decision had been made. The final outcome is uncertain, but given that the police were 'satisfied that the alien was a potential danger and might be a ready tool for persons doing subversive work,' and was suspected of 'tampering with the loyalty of members of His Majesty's Forces' it seems unlikely that his appeal to return to Plymouth was unsuccessful.¹²

¹² PRO HO 405 S39505/2.

CASE THREE**Feiwel Willner****PRO HO 382 W2234**

This was a complex case, dating back to 1942, which Rathbone became involved with in 1944. Willner, who arrived in Britain in 1935, was convicted for several fraudulent offences in 1941, imprisoned, and whilst still in Brixton prison in late 1942, was served with a deportation order. He persistently claimed that he had been wrongly accused, a case that was not weakened by the fact that his accuser was later convicted of an £800 fraud.¹³ Whilst awaiting his removal from Britain he was interned in Camp X on the Isle of Man, from where he embarked upon a lengthy campaign to get his case for repatriation reconsidered. Rathbone was one of three MPs whom he inundated with begging letters, and in November 1945 he approached her in the most fawning manner, describing her as 'the best Samaritan of the country... a person gifted with a high sense of proportion, full understanding and the adequate interpretation of human rights and justice...'¹⁴ Rathbone subsequently wrote a number of letters to G.H.Oliver, Parliamentary under secretary at the Home Office, remarking:

... Here is another case, one of three sent you today of a man who wants me to intervene in his repatriation... I know nothing of the case, but in view of the fact that 1) he is a Jew and 2) all his relatives were murdered in Poland, it would seem a peculiarly cruel form of repatriation.¹⁵

As the details of the case emerged Rathbone had to concede that the man was 'a bad lot', but nevertheless she stuck by her view that 'even criminals have their rights.' These 'rights' related to his assertion that he was not a Pole, having been born in Austria in 1909, and therefore could not be deported to Poland.¹⁶ If he was in fact stateless, which Rathbone thought was 'pretty clear'¹⁷ then, according to Dr Kullmann, Sir Herbert Emerson's deputy, the Home Office had no right to forcibly

¹³ Letter of David Tait, MP, for the PCR to Miss Jennie Lee. No date but *circa* Oct 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/2.

¹⁴ Letter of F. Willner to EFR, 25 Nov 1944. PRO HO 405 W2234.

¹⁵ Letter of EFR to G. Oliver, 21 Oct 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/4.

¹⁶ Letter of F. Willner to EFR, Nov 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/2.

¹⁷ Letter of EFR to Oliver, 14 Dec 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/4.

remove him.¹⁸ Rathbone proceeded to ask the Home Secretary 'to define what he does claim as his rights of deportation', adding 'and (I) may try for a supplementary about the particular case.'¹⁹ Oliver took a very dim view of Willner, whom he described in minutes as:

a horrible fellow who seems to be a flagellation pervert in addition to a swindler, preying on refugees, should be got rid of at the earliest possible moment.²⁰

The Home Office was equally displeased by Rathbone's pursuance of the case. Minutes noted that as she had put down a question 'it hardly seems desirable to send her any detailed reply to the letter (of 12 December).' Their attitude towards her persistence was even more overtly demonstrated in this note:

It is not for the Secretary of State to embrace (with the uncritical enthusiasm displayed by Miss Rathbone for any protest however ill-founded which will frustrate the administration of the Aliens Order) an eleventh hour plea that he (Willner) has lost Polish nationality unless some evidence is produced.²¹

Nor could they see any reason to receive the deputation Rathbone had proposed, adding:

as Miss Rathbone will be told in reply to her Question, no alien can be deported except to a territory whose government recognize him or is willing to admit him.'²²

However, in late December 1945, James Chuter Ede, the home secretary in Clement Attlee's new Labour administration, did agree to meet a deputation in the New Year, mainly to discuss the general question of deportation and forced repatriation.²³ The meeting never took place due to Rathbone's death, in January 1946, but others, including Professor Harold Laski, took up the case.²⁴ Willner was released from detention in May 1946 and finally deported in November 1946. Home Office officials

¹⁸ Letters of EFR to Oliver, 12 and 14 Dec 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/4.

¹⁹ Letter of EFR to Oliver, 14 Dec 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/4.

²⁰ Draft for Mr Oliver to EFR, Nov 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/2.

²¹ Under Secretary of State case. Minutes, 14 Dec 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/4.

²² Under Secretary of State case. Minutes, 14 Dec 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/4.

²³ Letters EFR to Oliver, 12, 14 & 21 Dec 1945. PRO HO 405 W2234/4.

²⁴ 24 Apr 1946. PRO HO 405 W2234/9.

could barely conceal their delight, with Hill responding to Chapman's news that '...you may like to know that this man has at last left these shores' with the note 'Excellent. Perseverance is rewarded.'²⁵

As far as Rathbone's involvement with this case was concerned, she approached it through the prism of humanitarianism, which prevented her from taking a more objective view of it. On the one hand it was noble of her to campaign for Willner, but since she acknowledged his reputation as 'a bad lot,' she was rather naïve to believe his stories. But this did not alter the fact that she perceived the principle of human rights being of paramount importance, and was correct in maintaining that deportation would cause great hardship.

²⁵ Letter of Chapman to Hill, 15 Jan 1947. Reply of Hill to Chapman 16 Jan 1947. PRO HO 405 W2234/10.

CASE FOUR**Minna Specht****PRO HO 382 S4370.**

Rathbone met Dr Minna Specht, a lecturer in moral philosophy, on her first visit to Rushen, Isle of Man, in March 1941.²⁶ By the time she took up the case, Specht had already written to Peake, applying for release from internment, to no avail.²⁷ Rathbone's own correspondence to Peake, in May 1941, reasserted the release request, but also enquired whether Specht would be able to continue her work as Head of School in the Camp as a salaried employee after her (anticipated) release.²⁸ The dilemma which Home Office officials faced was a chicken and egg one – should they grapple with the release issue before the continued employment question, or *vice-versa*?²⁹ Rathbone's interference does seem to have expedited matters, for Peake soon wrote to her confirming that Specht's case had been reconsidered, and her release from internment authorised. However, the question of her continuing work raised 'a number of (unspecified) difficulties' which needed careful consideration.³⁰ The case file ends here.

²⁶ Memo by EFR, 'Black Spots on the Refugee Situation', Mar 1941. GW 13/4/15/6-7. HLRO.

²⁷ Letter of Specht to Peake, 1 Nov 1940. PRO HO 382 S4370.

²⁸ Letter of EFR to Peake (copied to Prestige and Sir John Moylan), 14 May 1941. PRO HO 382 S4370/2.

²⁹ Letter of Edmunds to Prestige, 30 May 1941. PRO HO 382 S4370/2.

³⁰ Letter of Peake to EFR, 7 June 1941. PRO HO 382 S4370/2.

APPENDIX THREE

Biographical notes

APPENDIX THREE

Biographical Notes

Except where footnoted, these have been taken from:

L. London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948* (Cambridge, 2000) 285 ff
(London has not cited her original sources)

Abbreviations used:

Con	Conservative
Ld	Lord
Pres	President
Sec	secretary
US	under secretary
PPS	parliamentary private secretary (backbench Member of Parliament working for a minister without pay)
Parl US	parliamentary under secretary (junior minister)
Parl Sec	parliamentary secretary (junior minister)
PUS	permanent under secretary (civil servant at head of government department)

ANDERSON, SIR JOHN, 1st Viscount Waverley (1952)
(1882-1958): PUS Home Office, 1922-32. Governor of Bengal 1932-7, Ind Nat MP 1938-50, Lord Privy Seal 1938-9. Home Sec and Min of Home Security 1939-40, Lord Pres of Council 1940-3, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1943-5.

ATTLEE, CLEMENT RICHARD 1st Earl Attlee (1955)
(1883-1947): Lab MP 1922-50. Leader of Labour Party 1935-55. Lord Privy Seal 1940-2.. Sec for Dominions 1942-3. Lord Pres of Council 1943-5. Deputy Prime Minister 1942-5. Prime Minister 1945-51.

BALDWIN, STANLEY
(1867-1947) Prime Minister 1923-4, 1924-29, 1935-37; Lord President of the Council 1931-35; Lord Privy Seal 1932-34. Cr. Earl 1937.

BENN, W. WEDGWOOD
(1877-1960) Viscount Stansgate, 1941.
MP (Lib.) 1906-1927; MP (Lab.) 1928-31, 1937-42; Sec of State for India 1929-31; Sec. of State for Air 1945-46.

BROCKWAY, ARCHIBALD FENNER
(1888-1988), later Baron Brockway.
He was a conscientious objector during the First World War, Labour Party member for Leyton East 1929-31 and left the Labour Party when it disaffiliated from the ILP in 1931, During the 1930s he was General Secretary and editor of the ILP newspaper, *The New Leader*. He resigned from the ILP in 1946 and rejoined the Labour Party. He was a supporter of Indian independence and a founder of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. (My thanks to Clive Fleay for this information).

BUNBURY, SIR HENRY NOEL (1876-1968): Did administrative work for the German Jewish Aid Committee, 1938-9. Director Czech Refugee Trust Fund 1939.

BUTLER, RICHARD AUSTEN, LORD BUTLER (1965)
 (1902-1982): Con MP 1929-65, Parl US India Office 1932-7. Parl sec Min of Labour 1937-8. Parl US Foreign Office Feb.1938-41.

CHAMBERLAIN, ARTHUR NEVILLE (1869-1940): Con MP 1929-40. Chancellor of the Exchequer 1931-7. Prime Minister 1937-40. Leader of Con Party 1937-40. Lord President of Council 1940.

CHURCHILL, WINSTON LEONARD SPENCER (1874-1965)
 Lib MP 1904-22. Home Sec 1910-11. Con MP 1924-64. First Ld of Admiralty and member of War Cabinet 1939-40. Prime Minister and Min. of Defence 1940-5. Leader of Conservative Party 1940-55, KG 1953.

COOPER, ERNEST NAPIER, OBE (1883-1948)
 Home Office: Factory Inspectorate, Inspector Class II 1910. 1918-20 lent to another department. Superintending Inspector (Western and Northern Division), Aliens Branch 1925-31. Seconded for duty as Principal in Aliens Department 1930-1 (move permanent by 1932). Acting Asst Sec by 1939. Chairman CID Sub-Committee on Control of Aliens in Wartime 1939. Asst Sec by 1940. Ret 1943. Working for Central Office for Refugees 1944.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, ROBERT ARTHUR JAMES GASCOYNE-CECIL (1893-1972) PPS to Eden 1934-35; Parl US Foreign Office 1935-38, resigned with Eden Feb 1938. Paymaster-General May 1940, Sec For Dominions Oct.1940 –1, Entered House of Lords Jan 1941, Sec For Colonies 1942, Lord Privy Seal 1942-3, Sec for Dominions Oct. 1943-5.

EDEN, ANTHONY (SIR) 1st Earl of Avon (1957).
 (1897-1977): Con MP 1923-57. Lord Privy Seal 1933-1935; Minister for League of Nations Affairs June 1935; Foreign Sec Dec 1935-Feb 1938 (resigned) Sec for Dominions 1939-1940, Sec for War May-Dec 1940, Foreign Sec 1940-1945.

EMERSON, SIR HERBERT WILLIAM (1881-1962): Governor of Punjab 1933-8. High Commissioner for Refugees under the Protection of the League of Nations, 1939. Director Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees 1939. Director Central Council for Refugees 1940. Chairman Advisory Council on Aliens 1940.

HOARE, SIR SAMUEL JOHN GURNEY
 1st Viscount Templewood, Con MP 1910-44, Sec for India 1931-5, Foreign Sec 1935, First Lord of the Admiralty 1936-7. Home Sec May 1937-Sep. 1939, Ld Privy Seal and member of War Cabinet 1939-40, Sec for Air 1940, Amb to Spain 1940-44.

MACDONALD, JAMES RAMSAY (1866-1937)
 Lab MP 1906-18, 1922-31. National Labour MP 1931-5, 1936-7. Prime Minister 1924, 1929-31, 1931-5. Ld President of Council 1935.

MAXWELL (SIR) ALEXANDER (1880-1963): Home Office, Asst US 1924, Deputy US 1932. KBE 1936. PUS Home Office, 1938-48.

MORRISON, HERBERT STANLEY, Baron Morrison (1959)
(1891-1965) Lab MP 1923-4, 1929-31, 1935-59. Leader London County Council 1934-40. Min of Supply 1940. Home Sec and Min of Home Security Oct 1940–May 1945. Member of War Cabinet 1942-5. Dep PM 1945-51. Ld Pres of Council and Leader Commons, 1945-51.

PEAKE, OSBERT, 1st Viscount Ingleby (1955)
(1897-1966): Con MP 1929-55, Parl US, Home Office 1939-44.

RANDALL, ALEC WALTER GEORGE
(1892-1977) Foreign Office. Sec to Legation to Holy See 1925. Bucharest 1930. 1st Sec (Far Eastern Dept) 1933-5. Copenhagen 1935-8. Acting Counsellor in Foreign Office Oct. 1938. Adviser on League of Nations Affairs 1939. Seconded to Ministry of Information Dec. 1939. Resumed duty in Foreign Office June 1940. Counsellor Oct. 1940. Head, Refugee Department 1942-4. Br Min Copenhagen June 1945. KCMG 1947.

SIMON, SIR JOHN ALLESBROOK
1st Viscount Simon (1940) (1873-1954): Foreign Sec 1931-5. Home Sec 1935-7. Chancellor of Exchequer 1937-40. Ld Chancellor 1940-5.

SIMPSON, SIR JOHN HOPE
(1868-1961): Authority on refugee problems. Indian Civil Service 1889-1916. Lib MP 1922-4. Vice-President League of Nations Refugee Settlement Commission, Athens 1926-30. Chosen to report on administration of Palestine 1930. Director, National Flood Relief Commission, China, 1931-4. Administration of Newfoundland 1934-6. KBE 1937. Author of studies of refugee problem 1938-9.

SINCLAIR, SIR ARCHIBALD, Viscount Thurso (1952).
Sec. of State for Scotland 1931-32, Ldr Liberal Party 1935-45. Sec. of State for Air in the War Cabinet 1940-45.

TURNOUR, EDWARD, 6TH EARL WINTERTON
(1883-1962): Irish Peer (became Member of the House of Lords when created an English Peer in 1952). Con MP 1904-51. Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1937-9. March 1938 entered Cabinet as Deputy Sec for Air. Paymaster-General Jan-Nov 1939 (No longer in Cabinet). Displaced 1940-5. Represented UK at Evian Conference July 1938. Chairman Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees 1938.

WALKER, EDWARD ALAN
(b.1894); Foreign Office. 1st Sec 1932. Athens 1934-6. Transferred to Foreign Office July 1936. Stockholm 1938. Angora (Ankara) May 1939. London May 1941. In Refugee Department 1941-4.

LORD WINTERTON, 6TH EARL See Turnour, Edward.

WOOD, EDWARD FREDERICK LINDLEY, Baron Urwin (1881-1959): succeeded his father as Viscount Halifax 1934. Created Earl 1944. Sec for War 1935, Ld Privy Seal and Leader of House of Lords 1935-7, Ld President of Council 1937, Foreign Sec Feb 1938-40, British Ambassador to USA 1940-6.

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(a) *National Archives and other Public Collections*

Ball State University Archives & Special Collections, Indiana. US

Norman Angell Collection

BBC Written Archives

Margery Fry file

Eleanor Rathbone file

British Library. Oriental and India Office

Cornelia Sorabji papers

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John Simon papers

British Library

Cecil of Chelwood papers

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Walter Layton papers

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Churchill papers

A.V. Hill papers

Philip Noel-Baker papers

Viscount Thurso papers

Contemporary Medical Archives, Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine

Eugenics Society papers

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, New York State, USA
US War Refugee Board papers

House of Lords Record Office, The Parliamentary Archive

Lloyd George papers
Parliamentary Committee on Refugees papers
Viscount Samuel papers
H.Graham White papers

Imperial War Museum

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R.Stent papers

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