

SCHOLARS AT RISK

N E T W O R K

A brief history of aid to displaced scholars in the World War II era¹

The SCHOLARS AT RISK NETWORK is a new initiative of the Human Rights Program at The University of Chicago. Rooted in the principle of academic freedom--the freedom to pursue scholarship and research without discrimination, censorship, intimidation, or violence--SCHOLARS AT RISK aims to bring scholars facing severe human rights abuses in their home region to positions at North American universities, colleges and research centers.

This is not a new idea. In the 15th century, Greek scholars fled the Ottoman's conquest of Constantinople, arriving in Italy and the West in the dawn of the Renaissance. In 17th century, French Protestants arrived in England and other lands after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In the early 20th century, more than 600 scholars and students were forced to flee the Bolsheviks in Russia. But these attacks reached an unprecedented level in the World War II era, when the racist and nationalist policies of European dictatorships--Nazi Germany principally but Italy, Spain, and Russia as well--drove thousands of scholars and intellectuals into exile.

They fled from Germany, Austria, Armenia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Russia, and Czechoslovakia. They fled first to the Eastern European states, then progressively into Western Europe and Scandinavia, and ultimately North America, South America, and the Middle East. During that era numerous committees and associations formed to address the urgent needs of displaced scholars and to assist in securing positions which would allow them to continue their work. The largest of these were the Academic Assistance Council in London and the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars in New York. Certain institutions also committed themselves to assisting large numbers of displaced scholars. Most notable was the New School for Social Research in New York, which pioneered the concept of the "University in Exile" by establishing an entire faculty drawn from displaced scholars.

Founded in 1933, the **Academic Assistance Council** was comprised of prominent English scholars and administrators who organized to address what was originally perceived as a short-term problem. With the realization in 1936 that Nazism and the flood of refugees would not subside quickly, the AAC transformed itself into a permanent body that continues to operate today as the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) (known in the intervening years

¹This brief history focuses on the efforts of the American Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars. SCHOLARS AT RISK is developing an extended record of the history of the World War II era and the many other groups and institutions that participated in efforts to aid displaced scholars. Those readers with interest in learning more or in contributing information are urged to contact Robert Quinn, Director, SCHOLARS AT RISK, c/o Human Rights Program, The University of Chicago, 5828 South University Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637; telephone 773-834-4408; fax 773-702-9286; e-mail rquinn@uchicago.edu.

as the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, and herein collectively as “CARA”). CARA maintained a fund for grants for salaries of displaced scholars and researchers. It used an Allocation Committee to make recommendations to an Executive Committee for final decision on all grants. An Executive Appeal Committee solicited funds through direct appeals to the wealthy individuals, civic groups, university faculties and the public generally. Appeals often included lectures or talks at colleges and universities. CARA also solicited colleges and universities to create positions for particular scholars. From 1933-58 CARA assisted more than 2600 scholars, of which 624 were in the USA and 612 in the United Kingdom.

The American counterpart to CARA was the **American Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars**. Founded in May 1933, it began with a letter to the presidents of colleges and universities explaining the objective and methodology proposed, and soliciting comments. The basics of the plan were:

1. Action was needed to address the urgent need of displaced scholars;
2. University funds should not be relied upon;
3. Universities should do the selecting, then seek funds from the Committee, although the Committee would provide a list of candidates if requested;
4. Scholars assisted would be advanced in their fields, although arrangements to assist younger scholars overseas might be possible;
5. Any positions or chairs should be honorary, so as to avoid resentment within existing faculty hierarchies;
6. Salaries, while ideally equal, would out of necessity of the emergency situation be lower;
7. Commitments of both the Committee and the host university would be specific and limited, probably to three years.²

After favorable response the organizers sent a letter in June 1933 to distinguished scholars and university presidents asking them to join a General Committee “whose standing in the world of scholarship and university affiliations will help to make the activity appear to the public to be one worthy of approval.” The letter emphasized that no obligations other than those in the original letter would be imposed without their prior approval, and that the General Committee would not be expected to meet or to operate the program; that work would be done by an Executive Committee. Ultimately twenty-three persons joined the General Committee, including Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago.

The Committee decided early on to focus only on scholars, and did not service professionals including physicians, lawyers and civil servants. It did, however, cooperate with several related groups serving these constituencies. The Committee also endeavored to maintain an atmosphere in which the refugee scholar could feel “accepted as an academician in an

²Stephen Duggan & Betty Drury, The Rescue of Science and Learning: The Story of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars at 173-75 (MacMillan 1948).

academic setting.” It provided no relief services, but would direct refugees to service agencies. Neither did it provide grants to individuals. The Committee’s assistance came in the form of grants to institutions in the United States who had identified a scholar they would employ, although the Committee did maintain a list of scholars seeking positions. Grants were generally not awarded to scholars under 30 or over 60 years of age and were limited to eminent scholars, so as not to compete with young American scholars at a time when American institutions were still struggling to overcome the Great Depression. Grants were generally limited to one year, approximately \$2000, with possibility of renewal for second year. Preference was given to universities that promised to absorb the displaced scholar into the regular staff in short time. When the Committee disbanded on June 1, 1945, its records included the names of more than 6,000 professionals who sought its help, of whom 613 (582 men, 31 women) were scholars. The records show that 459 found opportunities to teach or carry on research at more than 145 US colleges or universities.

As noted earlier, the **New School for Social Research** in New York far exceeded any other American institution in the numbers of scholars assisted. In 1933 Alvin Johnson, the President of the New School founded a “University in Exile.” The name came from a recognition of Hitler’s attempt to exile “the German university as the world knew it.” As such, it was at once “a response to the challenge in Nazi Germany to academic liberty, and an attempt to set up in America a university faculty which should carry forward the best traditions of German University life.” They began with 20 scholars. In Johnson’s words, where the American Committee “looked to the assimilation of the individual scholar . . . the New School looked to the assimilation of a Faculty as a whole.”³ Funding was provided by the Rockefeller Foundation and philanthropist Hiram J. Halle. In 1935, the University in Exile changed its name to the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science.

Before the war ended, a total of 167 refugee scholars passed through the New School, including Max Wertheimer (founder of Gestalt school of psychology) and economists Karl Brandt and Gerhard Colm. Many of these scholars were rescued when France fell—a moment when time was of the essence and the American Committee’s approach of relying on the universities to identify and invite scholars was too slow. The New School sought and received emergency funding for 100 two-year grants for French and Belgian scholars. One group of 30 at the New School formed the **Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes**, the only functioning free French university at that time. In 1947 it became an independent institution and later a permanent part of the State University of New York.

Other institutions followed the New School’s lead in hosting groups of scholars. The **Institute for Advanced Study** in Princeton received scores of displaced scholars, perhaps most notably Einstein in 1933. The Iranian Institute founded its School for Asiatic Studies with a core of scholars in exile. By 1948, it had grown to a full-time faculty of 14 and had 165 students.

³Duggan & Drury at 80 (quoting Alvin Johnson).

Overseas, displaced scholars formed or greatly expanded institutions in Mexico, Turkey and the Middle East. In Mexico City, the “College of Mexico” was founded as a home for scores of exiled academics from Spain. It remains a permanent institution. In 1933 in Turkey, Hungarian-born German Professor Philip Schwartz assembled fifty scholars--most committed to a 5 year term and a promise to learn the Turkish language—to found the “Istanbul Universitesi.” In the following years, more than 50 more scholars and a total of 250 professionals found refuge in Turkey, these including doctors, artists, architects, and musicians. In the Middle East, the American Committee and CARA assisted more than 30 scholars and scientists find homes at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and placed others at the Technicum or Polytechnic Institute in Haifa and the Daniel Sieff Research Institute for Chemistry at Rehovot (later part of the Weizmann Institute for Science).

Another significant organization was the **Notgemeinschaft Deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland** (Emergency Society of German Scholars Abroad), founded in March 1933 in Zurich by Philip Schwartz with aid from the Rockefeller Foundation. The society later moved to the offices of CARA in London. By 1936, the Notgemeinschaft compiled and published a list of 1500 displaced German scholars. By 1947, it had assisted 2000 scholars at institutions around the world including the newly formed universities in Tehran and Istanbul.

The **Geneva-based Comite International Pour le Placement des Intellectuals Refugies** made significant contributions placing doctors, lawyers, architects, and writers. By 1942, the Comite had sent 300 scholars to other parts of Europe, South America, Palestine, Belgian Congo and Australia. By 1946, it helped another 200 settle in North and South America. From 1944-48 it operated the Chateau of Frentenex outside Geneva: part internment camp and part college, over 100 scholars and scientists found refuge and academic outlets there. Similarly in 1949, the Italian section of the Comite founded an institutional home for 50 scientists and writers in Fiesole. By 1950, the Comite (renamed after the war the International Committee for Aid to Intellectuals) had aided over 2000 scholars.

Other committees or assistance organizations involved in the effort included the Christian Committee for Refugees (USA), the Catholic Committee for Refugees (USA), the Association Universelle pour les Exiles Allemands (France), the Comite Francais pour l'accueil et l'Organisation du Travail des Savants Etranger, the Institute of International Education (USA) (promoted educational exchanges from the post World War I period), the Russian Student Fund (USA) (secured places for English-speaking Russian professors and scholarships for more than 600 Russian students), the Refugee Economic Committee (assisted in placing scholars in Venezuela and the Philippines), the International Refugee Organization, the Federation of University Women (UK), the International Student Service, and the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe (USA). Committees and organizations established to assist professionals generally included the Emergency Committee for Displaced German Physicians, the Committee for the Re-education of Refugee Lawyers, the Committee for the Guidance of Professional Personnel, the Committee for the Re-Education of Refugee Lawyers (USA), the German Refugees Assistance Fund (Academic & Professional) (UK), and the Jewish Professional Committee (UK) (aiding doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers).

Of course the threats to academic freedom did not end with World War II. They carried through into the Cold War. Beginning in 1946, scores of Czech, Pole and other Eastern European scholars were in need. By the end of that year, CARA also assisted 17 Greek and 4 Portuguese professors dismissed on political grounds. In 1947, scholars and student members of the Democratic League were forced to flee China, many of whom were assisted by the World Students Relief Organization (which after the war became the **World University Service** and continues to be active in the area of academic freedom). In 1948, non-communists scientists and scholars fled in waves from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia while many Communist states, including the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and China required affirmations of party loyalty from academics, the latter still using them through at least 1997. Similarly, in the 1950s in the United States ideological litmus tests spread as Congress investigated the presence of alleged “communist sympathizers” on campuses, and states like California and New York required teachers to take oaths of national loyalty. And in later decades, Mao’s Cultural Revolution and Pol Pot’s devastating leadership in Kampuchea revived the anti-intellectualism of earlier eras resulting in devastating violations of the human rights of academics.

The Academic Freedom Project at Human Rights Watch works today to publicize threats to academic freedom. From 1997 through 1999, the project has reported violations of the academic freedom and human rights of intellectuals and students in dozens of states. These include Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, South Korea, Uzbekistan and Zambia. These violations include reprisals against dissenting academics (including arbitrary dismissal or expulsion, harassment, exile, arrest on false charges, torture, trial and imprisonment), ideological pressure and censorship (including imposition of approved national ideology, book burning and ideological revisionism), closing of schools and universities, suppression of student protests, restrictions on travel and exchange of information, and discriminatory restrictions on academic resources (including discrimination against women, indigenous peoples, and cultural or ethnic minorities).⁴

Reports from HRW’s Academic Freedom Project note that academics have been slow to develop solidarity with their colleagues abroad. SCHOLARS AT RISK aims to address that shortcoming, and in so doing, to help universities, colleges and their faculties to fulfill an important part of their mission as educators.

⁴Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch World Report 1999 at 449 (Dec. 1998); World University Service, Ximena Erazo, Mike Kirkwood, & Frederiek de Vlaming, Academic Freedom 4: Education and Human Rights at 16 (Zed Books, 1996).

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