

**Kirsner, D.** (2007). Saving Psychoanalysts: Ernest Jones and the Isakowers. *Psychoanal. Hist.*, 9:83-91

## **Saving Psychoanalysts: Ernest Jones and the Isakowers**

*Douglas Kirsner, Ph.D.* 

In this article I want to focus upon Ernest Jones's role in saving psychoanalysts, and on the case of Drs Otto and Salomea Isakower. During the 1930s when refugee analysts left Germany and Austria, which coincided with the time of the Great Depression, psychoanalysts in New York and London were ambivalent about receiving more competitors from Europe. Although this has been noted as having been an issue in the US (see Kirsner **2000**, pp. 16-21), it is of interest to know the attitudes of Ernest Jones as well as those of members of the British Psychoanalytical Society. Pearl **King (1989)** has described the wartime activities of the British psychoanalysts (see also **King & Steiner 1991**).

The major emigration of psychoanalysts from Nazism in the 1930s transferred the epicentre of psychoanalysis from Europe to the United States as well as providing significant immigration of psychoanalysts to Britain. This was in the context of the fact that, though estimates vary, at least 56,000 refugees from Germany and Austria became residents of Britain before war broke out (Holmes **1990**, p. 26; see also Brinson **1998**, p. 205).

During the 1930s Ernest Jones was president of the International Psychoanalytical Association and, in the crucial year of 1938, also president of the British Psychoanalytical Society. He directed much of the emigration of European psychoanalysts to the far corners of the world. Much of this is documented in the invaluable work of Ricardo Steiner (**1989, 2000**) and Pearl **King (1989)**. In particular, **Steiner (2000)** helpfully and interestingly documented many letters between Anna Freud and Ernest Jones during the 1930s concerning the politics of psychoanalysis in Germany and Austria, and discussed issues about the role Jones played in these psychoanalytic politics in trying to 'save' psychoanalysis in Europe (see also **Cocks 1997; Goggin & Goggin 2001**;

- 83 -

**Frosh 2005**). It is clear from early 1933 that, as Steiner put it in relation to Jones, 'As president of the International Psychoanalytical Association he understood it as

his duty to assume overall responsibility for the safeguarding of the general well-being of his colleagues'. Steiner found not one letter that Jones wrote from 1933 throughout the 1930s where Jones's care on this issue was not in evidence (Steiner 1989, p. 47).

Some letters from and to Jones over this period, which are held at the Archives of the British Psychoanalytical Society and in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, provide direct evidence about Jones's generosity and concern about immigrants, and of the crucial role he played in saving psychoanalysts (Papers of Otto and Salomea Isakower, The Sigmund Freud Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress). I am grateful to these archives for their invaluable help with this research.

One such immigrant was Dr Otto Isakower (1899-1972) who, although relatively unknown outside the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, became a major leader there during the 1940s and 1950s where he chaired the all-powerful Educational Committee, and he taught there until just before he died in 1972. He had developed the concept of the 'Isakower phenomenon' (Isakower 1938) and the 'analyzing instrument' (Grossman 1992). He was a Training and Control Analyst at the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society (Bibring 1938, p. 282) but became a refugee after the 1938 *Anschluss* when he left for Britain. Otto and his new wife Salomea were unique in settling as psychoanalysts in Liverpool—still fewer than even today lived outside London (see List of Members of the International Psycho-Analytical Association, 1939, p. 504. For details on Isakower see Kirsner 2000, pp. 30-6; Kronold 1973; Wyman & Rittenberg 1994). In 1940 Isakower left to live in New York where he remained for the rest of his life.

In a letter to Ernest Jones on 9 May 1938 concerning Viennese psychoanalysts who wanted to emigrate, Anna Freud mentioned the Isakowers who had just married: 'And therefore two problems had now become one. She is very quiet and withdrawn, but one of the most brilliant and critical analytic minds,' Anna Freud wrote, and mentioned that Salomea was a doctor. 'If you can send them to the provinces, the situation will not become worse but better,' and asked Jones if he had a city in mind, perhaps Liverpool (Steiner 2000, pp. 104-5, Steiner's translation).

From Vienna on 12 May 1938 Isakower asked Jones to help process his application with the Home Office for a permit to practise medicine in England. Hitler's *Anschluss* of Austria took place on 12 March, just two months earlier. Jones responded on 17 May that he was not definite about arrangements as yet because of three factors:

1. The finding of a suitable opening with reasonable prospects. We are exploring every avenue as best we can and gradually acquire more and more information.

2. The attitude of the British authorities—my influence with these has, of course, definite limits as I want to use it with the best advantage, not to squander it at this early stage.
3. The attitude of my British colleagues, which is naturally somewhat ambivalent towards a further flood of immigration. They have shown great sympathy and helpfulness, but on the other side they tend to criticize me for over-activity in encouraging immigration. In these complicated circumstances one can only proceed gradually, step by step, as the path in front of one clears. One can see one's way one decision at a time and has to keep a number of other ones in suspense, in spite of the anxiety this causes. (Jones to Otto Isakower, 17 May 1938, Library of Congress)

Jones was clearly dedicated to working hard on such matters. He was obviously politically adept but wary—wary of the authorities but perhaps still more of some of his psychoanalytic colleagues, and wished to seize any opportunities that would arise in terms of employment and help for the refugee psychoanalysts. Another relevant issue in terms of immigration of Viennese psychoanalysts to Britain was the cool reception they would get from Melanie Klein and her followers, the results of which became clear in ‘The Controversial Discussions’ (King & Steiner 1991). These were rapids to be navigated carefully, protecting the British Psychoanalytical Society both economically and ideologically while at the same time helping European colleagues in desperate need. This involved not only ideological considerations (fitting in harmoniously with the British Psychoanalytical Society) but fitting in with English ways of life. The British, especially outside London, were less used to foreigners than were the Americans, and limited work possibilities were to be found in the provincial cities also. No doubt natural personal likes and dislikes that Jones felt for particular psychoanalysts who wished to immigrate played their part in decisions of whether they were to be accepted in Britain or instead suggested for the US or other countries. Jones and some of his colleagues undertook detailed investigations to find the fit of who should go to which work opportunity (see Steiner 2000, pp. 135-44).

In just such a case Jones found an opportunity in Liverpool for both the Isakowers to practise as psychoanalysts. ‘DrLipman, an English Jew, who is just finishing a training analysis with Dr Gross in Manchester, tells me that, in his opinion, there is room in Liverpool for two analysts, especially if they can do consulting work in psychiatry as well.’ He hoped to be able to arrange for the Balints to work in nearby Manchester, which would create ‘quite an Arbeitsgemeinschaft (working group) in that neighbourhood’ (Jones to Otto Isakower, 17 May 1938, Isakower Papers, Library of Congress). DrLipman, who

specialized in psychoanalysis, was on the staff of the Liverpool Psychiatric Clinic from 1934 until his death in 1956 (Green 2000).

- 85 -

Jones told Isakower that this was all based on the assumption that Jones was able to obtain a permit from the Home Office for the Isakowers to practise psychoanalysis and to acquire British medical qualifications. Otto Isakower obtained his Austrian MD in 1923 and Salomea from Cracow, Poland, in 1914. Both had practised in Vienna as physicians. Jones thought it was more likely that the Home Office would approve them to practise psychoanalysis than to be granted a permit to practise medicine. He was also working to help the Bibrings and Kris's who were already in Britain.

Jones was sorry he could not be more definite but wanted to 'ASSURE' Isakower (original emphasis) that he was doing his best in the 'difficult circumstances'. Jones added that he was 'personally very welcome' and congratulated Isakower on his marriage to Salomea that year. Jones clearly took such projects very seriously and demonstrated the appropriate human warmth and empathy for psychoanalysts in such a plight.

In a letter to Anna Freud on 25 April 1938 marked 'very important', Ernest Jones documented the way that refugee psychoanalysts needed to proceed with immigration into Britain. It was necessary that the psychoanalyst gave Jones 'some days' previous notice (if possible, also the port of entry). 'I then let the Home Office know of the date and they notify the Immigration Authorities to pass our friends through without further question'. It was important that as complete a list as possible of those wishing to come would be compiled, as a selection would need to be made.

Jones warned, 'Coming to England is not the same as coming to London. For two or three years it has been extremely difficult to get a permit for a new analyst to come to London. There are also good reasons for this on our side, since the amount of practice does not support the analysts here already.' Jones believed a maximum of eight psychoanalysts could settle in London and told Anna, 'They will, of course, be your father and yourself, Dorothy [Burlingham], Hitschmann, the two Kris', and either the Bibrings or the Hoffers at their choice. Five provincial towns come into consideration, though we are not yet sure of more than three. They are Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Bristol, Oxford and Cambridge.' Jones had arranged permits for Freud's personal physician, Max Schur, and Josefina Stross to practise medicine in England after they passed the requisite examination. Schur was Freud's personal physician and Stross was Anna Freud's friend and a paediatrician who acted temporarily as Freud's physician when Schur could not accompany the Freuds to London because he required an

emergency appendectomy. Jones continued, 'Naturally, they will stay in London. I also have permits for Kris, Bibring, Hoffer and Hitschmann to practise psychoanalysis in England.'

But the British psychoanalysts did not have an open door policy. Jones wrote, 'We have held a General Meeting, a Council Meeting and two committee meetings on the subject of immigration.' A number of criteria emerged. They favoured younger people who would be more likely to adapt.

- 86 -

'There is naturally a preference for members who we think can work harmoniously with our Society and would have some prospect of assimilating themselves to the English ways of life. I am sure some people would be better suited to England than to America and vice versa.' Hans Lampl, in particular, and his wife, Jeanne Lampl-de-Groot, were unwelcome on personal grounds but, since she was Dutch, they could settle in Holland and need not displace other colleagues who could not settle in other countries. Moreover, they would 'be of great use' there. 'I cannot see how I can ask for a permit for them in the face of the united disapproval of the Society' (Jones to Anna Freud, No date noted but was 25 April 1938, British Psychoanalytical Society Archives). On 19 May 1938, he told Anna Freud that Jeanne Lampl was still trying to get a Dutch permit, but failing that the British Society would recommend they go to Dundee.

Jones's account to Anna Freud of 28 April 1938 reported that there was still stronger sentiment in the Society than about the Lampls that Robert and Jenny Waelder 'would neither work harmoniously with our Society or be able to adapt themselves to England. They would therefore receive little support and would find it hard to get work'. Interestingly, Jones had crossed out the word 'no' before 'support' in his typed draft and substituted 'little' in pen. In any case, Jones wrote, there were other possibilities for them in Geneva, Boston and Belgium. 'If all else fails, and they insist on coming to England in the face of this, then one would try to get them into Manchester or Glasgow', Jones wrote Anna Freud. (The Waelders ended up emigrating to Philadelphia.) Richard Sterba and Otto Isakower were 'mentioned favourably' in these meetings.

On 19 May 1938 Jones told Anna Freud that he very much hoped 'to be able to place the Balints, Stengels and Isakowers, but there are a number of difficulties to be overcome first'. Discussing another request, Jones commented that 'There is strong resistance here against the admission of doctors', which meant that it was harder to immigrate as a doctor than as a psychoanalyst. Steiner (2000, pp. 12-13) described the resistance of the British Medical Association to numbers of refugee doctors arriving, and cites a figure of just 100 Jewish medically qualified refugees who were admitted to practise in Britain between 1933 and 1939.

On the same day, 19 May 1938, Jones informed Isakower that the Council of the Society had allocated some of its refugee fund (£200) as a loan for medical studies and examination for British medical registration, for which Isakower was understandably most grateful (Isakower to Jones, 29 May 1938). On 24 May 1938 Jones informed Isakower that he had requested the permit and thought the Home Office would send it to the British Consul in Vienna so that Isakower could then apply for the requisite Austrian and transit permits for immigration. On 25 May, Anna Freud informed Jones that Stengel and Isakower were 'sehr glücklich' ('very lucky') with the decisions Jones made (British Psychoanalytical Society Archives).

- 87 -

Jones wrote to Isakower on 5 September 1938, when the Isakowers were already in Liverpool, enclosing a letter from the Home Office confirming the British permit. Isakower was concerned about his parents who were still in Austria. His father had been arrested but released, and Jones suggested Isakower write to a specific person in the Home Office, requesting permission for them to come to Britain on the basis of their destitution in Vienna and the fact that Isakower was in a position to support them in Britain. Jones explained that Grete Bibring had successfully achieved this for her parents. Jones concluded his letter:

*I was very glad indeed that you feel happy in Liverpool and hope you are adapting yourself successfully to the strange English ways of life. I should very much like to have a report from you in the next few weeks about the details of your life and prospects, for you may be sure that my interest in your success is a permanent one. (Jones to Isakower, 5 September 1938, British Psychoanalytical Society Archive)*

In a letter to Max Eitingon on 17 November (no year but it must be 1940), Jones reported that 'more than half the analysts, specially the English ones, are stationed out of London. Mrs Klein is in Scotland'. Jones made no mention of internment of psychoanalysts. Although many 'enemy aliens' were interned after War began, few psychoanalysts were. Even Jewish refugees from Nazism, whom the British authorities should have realized at the time posed no threat whatever since they were designated victims of Nazism, were mostly interned. Perhaps Jones was able to circumvent these internments through his contacts in the Home Office or perhaps it was because those admitted to practise psychoanalysis or medicine could be exempted because of their specialized contribution to the war effort. But not invariably. Jones told Eitingon, 'Staub was interned, but managed to escape to America. Kris, Hitschmann, Isakower, Eidenberg, Witt and others have gone to America; the Bibrings are going soon but the Hoffers prefer to stay here.' Hugo Staub was a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society but was unusual as he was a lawyer and criminologist who worked on the forensic applications of psychoanalysis. He also enlisted in the French Army at the

outbreak of World War II and, when France collapsed, he managed to get to the US where he remained (see **Alexander 1943**). Although it is not entirely clear whether the internment Jones wrote of was in France or the UK, I suspect that Staub left France, was interned in England from whence he emigrated to the US. The British authorities encouraged internees to emigrate to the US. This strategy was not effective as the US Government did not want to take them (Holmes **1990**, pp. 27-8). In any case, it is clear from the context that all the other psychoanalysts Jones mentions, including Isakower, were not interned but chose to go to the US. But all those designated 'enemy aliens' (those who were from Germany and Austria who had not become British citizens) were under

- 88 -

threat of internment at the time. The Government established three categories of 'enemy aliens' according to perceived security risk, and established tribunals to implement them: Category A were interned, Category B were under restrictions while Category C were exempt from restrictions. But in May 1940 the authorities rounded up everybody in Category B and those in Category C in June 1941. Nor was the atmosphere supportive to the refugees (Holmes **1990**, p. 27). Ernest Jones wrote to Max Eitingon on 7 July 1940:

*We are now fighting to prevent our German analyst friends from being interned. Martin Freud and his son have been interned. It is possible that German women may also be interned. I have made strong representations at the Home Office about the Freud family, which I hope will be successful. Anna is in good spirits and a tower of strength to all her friends. She has refused three offers to go to America including two University Professorships of Psycho-Analysis. The old people are also very brave, though of course their life is very empty since Professor's death. It is evident that he did not miss much by dying when he did.  
(British Psychoanalytical Society Archives)*

In these circumstances, it must have been a very attractive proposition to migrate to the US if that could be arranged (given the medical requirements of the American Psychoanalytic Association, more possible if the analysts were physicians as the Isakowers were). Jones reported to Eitingon: 'Eidelberg, Isakower and Witt have gone to America and also a young DrGeleerd, a Dutch candidate of Anna's. Kris is also going this week, but on a temporary secret mission' (British Psychoanalytical Society Archives).

Jones's idea about an Arbeitsgemeinschaft in Manchester and Liverpool in fact came to be realized. A study group consisting of the Isakowers from Liverpool together with Michael Balint and Alfred Gross from Manchester was formed on 10 December 1938 and was scheduled to meet alternately in

Manchester and Liverpool ‘always on the Sunday preceding the full moon’ (Michael Balint to Sylvia Payne, 14 December 1939, British Psychoanalytical Society). They had two previous informal meetings that year but the first official meeting of the group was a lecture by Michael Balint on ‘Ego Strength and Ego Pedagogy’. W.R.D. Fairbairn had promised to come to some meetings from Edinburgh but, given that it was a rather small group, Balint asked Payne on behalf of the group:

*We would be very pleased if you could give us addresses of analysts, or half analysts, or even of persons interested in psycho-analysis, who could be approached to take part in some of the activities of our group.*  
(Michael Balint to Sylvia Payne, 14 December 1939, British Psychoanalytical Society Archive)

Balint had previously approached the British Psychoanalytical Society to recognize a training group in north England but to no avail. However, in March 1940 the British Society's Training Committee recognized the ‘North of England’ training group with Balint, Gross and the Isakowers in

- 89 -

Liverpool, 35 miles from Manchester (Willoughby 2004, p. 180). Unfortunately for the group, the Isakowers left for the US the next month. On 22 April 1940 Otto Isakower wrote to Sylvia Payne:

*It is with regret that I have to inform you that my wife and myself are not in a position to take part in the formation of the new Study Group here in the North of England, as we have decided to leave Liverpool for USA. The situation here has been very difficult even for me who was determined to do pioneer work, and has become almost hopeless since the outbreak of the war. We intend to settle down in New York, if possible.*  
(British Psychoanalytical Society Archives)

They arrived in New York on 4 May 1940 and became members of the New York Psychoanalytic Society the following year (Brill Archive).

It is clear from the documents that Ernest Jones, in particular, spent an enormous amount of time and energy on helping colleagues get out of Germany and Austria as well as interceding with psychoanalysts in trouble with the Nazis, such as Edith Jacobson who was arrested by the Gestapo. As the president of the International Psychoanalytical Association and of the British Society, Jones had particular responsibilities in these areas that he performed with obvious care, commitment, passion in a generally politically savvy way. Psychoanalytic politics by itself is challenging enough without major political crises where effective actions and connections with the outside world became matters of life and death. Of course, Jones did not act alone. There were constant communications with

Anna Freud and others. Eva Rosenfeld compiled and kept an up-to-date list of psychoanalysts who wanted to emigrate from Germany and Austria with comments on their wishes and progress (British Psychoanalytical Society Archives). The American Psychoanalytic Association had an active Emergency Committee on Immigration in the late 1930s (Jeffrey 1989). But without Jones's activities there can be no doubt that many lives would have been lost.

Undoubtedly, Jones went well beyond the call of duty in his endeavours on behalf of these psychoanalysts. But he also wanted to save psychoanalysis in Europe, particularly in Germany. Although he did not succeed in saving psychoanalysis in Europe, he played a crucial role in saving psychoanalysts. And, by aiding the migration of so many refugee psychoanalysts, he helped to spread the standing and influence of psychoanalysis in many other countries and world-wide.

## References

- Alexander, F. (1943) Hugo Staub 1886-1942. *Psychoanal. Q.* 12: 100-105. [→]
- Bibring, E. (1938) Report of the International Training Commission. *Bulletin of the International Psychoanalytic Association* 19: 271-89. [→]
- Brinson, C. (1998) A woman's place ...?: German-speaking women in exile in Britain, 1933-1945. *German Life and Letters* 51, 2: 204-34, April.
- Cocks, G. (1997) *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich: The Göring Institute*. Second edition. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

- 90 -

- Frosh, S. (2005) *Hate and the 'Jewish Science': Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goggin, J. & Goggin, E. (2001) *Death of a 'Jewish Science': Psychoanalysis in the Third Reich*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Green, B. (2000) A history of Liverpool psychiatry, <http://www.priory.com/homol/livpsy/20th.htm>. Retrieved from the World Wide Web, 5 February 2006.
- Grossman, W. (1992) Comments on the concept of the 'Analyzing Instrument'. *Journal of Clinical Psychoanalysis* 2: 261-71. [→]
- Holmes, C. (1990) Enemy aliens. *History Today* 40, 9: 25-32, September.
- Isakower, O. (1938) A contribution to the patho-psychology of phenomena associated with falling asleep. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 19: 331-45. [→]
- Jeffrey, W. (1989) After the Anschluss: the Emergency Committee on Relief and Immigration of the American Psychoanalytic Association. *The American Psychoanalyst* 23, 2-3: 19-20.
- King, P.H. (1989) Activities of British psychoanalysts during the Second World War and the influence of their interdisciplinary collaboration on the

- development of psychoanalysis in Great Britain. *Int. Rev. Psycho-Anal.* 16: 15-32. [→]
- King, P. & Steiner, C. (1991) *The Freud/Klein Controversies 1941-1945*. London: Tavistock. [→]
- Kirsner, D. (2000) *Unfree Associations: Inside Psychoanalytic Institutes*. London: Process Press.
- Kronold, E. (1973) Otto Isakower 1899-1972. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 54: 369. [→]
- List of Members of the International Psycho-Analytical Association (1939) *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 20: 498-515. [→]
- Steiner, R. (1989) 'It is a new kind of Diaspora ...'. *Int. Rev. Psycho-Anal.* 16: 35-72. [→]
- Steiner, R. (2000) 'It is a New Kind of Diaspora ...'. *Explorations in the Sociopolitical and Cultural Context of Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac Books.
- Willoughby, R. (2004) Between the basic fault and second skin. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 85: 179-95. [→]
- Wyman, H. & Rittenberg, S. (1994) Otto Isakower. *Journal of Clinical Psychoanalysis* 3: 166-7.

## **Abstract**

This article examines the role played by Ernest Jones in saving psychoanalysts from Germany and Austria during the 1930s, and, in particular, in the case of Drs Otto and Salomea Isakower from Vienna. Archives from the Library of Congress and the British Psychoanalytical Society are used to document how Jones navigated the considerable difficulties presented in both Europe and London as well as by colleagues and was able to help the Isakowers emigrate to Liverpool where they worked and began the 'North of England' training group with others and emigrated to the USA in 1940. As President of the International Psychoanalytical Association and of the British Psychoanalytical Society, Jones had responsibilities with psychoanalyst refugees, which he performed with care, commitment and political competence. Although Jones did not succeed in saving psychoanalysis in Europe, he played a crucial role in saving psychoanalysts. He helped to spread the world-wide standing and influence of psychoanalysis.