

COULD THE JEWS OF HUNGARY HAVE SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST?

New Answers to an Old Question

One in ten victims of the Shoah, that is 550,000 people, were Hungarian Jews or Jews deported from Hungary. Considering the immense number of victims, the question might seem meaningless at first sight: could the Jews of Hungary have survived the Holocaust?

Table I. *The numbers of the victims of the Holocaust - estimates*

Country	Jewish population before the Holocaust	Number of dead	Number of dead in %
1. Finland	2,000	7	0.3
2. Denmark	7,800	60	0.7
3. Italy	44,500	7,680	17.0
4. Bulgaria	62,300 (March 1943)	10,000	17.0
5. France	350,000	77,320	22.0
6. Germany (with Austria)	751,000	191,500	25.0
7. Soviet Union	3,020,000	1,100,000	36.0
8. Belgium	65,000	28,900	44.0
9. Estonia	4,500	2,000	44.0
10. Norway	1,700	762	45.0
11. Romania	609,000 (with Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, in 1941)	287,000	47.0
12. Luxemburg	3,500	1,950	56.0
13. Hungary	825,000	500,000	60.0
14. Czech-Moravian Protectorate	118,310	78,150	66.0
15. The Netherlands	140,000	100,000	71.0
16. Croatia	40,000	30,000	75.0
17. Latvia	91,500	71,500	78.0
18. Slovakia	88,950	71,000	80.0
19. Greece	77,380	67,000	87.0
20. Serbia	16,000	14,500	91.0
21. Poland	3,300,000	3,000,000	91.0
22. Lithuania	220,000	199,000	95.0

The above table contains data from 23 countries. If we examine how many persons were killed by the Nazis and/or their accomplices in each country, and how many Jews were deported from each country, we get interesting numbers and even more interesting percentages. The crucial factor was the "Jewish policy" the Nazis themselves pursued in a particular country. In occupied Poland and Serbia they never asked for nor availed themselves of the assistance of the local authorities or the population, while in inveterately and wildly antisemitic Lithuania, for example, pogroms claiming the lives of tens of thousands of victims were gladly received and encouraged. In France and Denmark, the resistance of most of the political elite, as well as a part of the local authorities and the population resulted in a relatively high number of Holocaust survivors. In Slovakia, Romania, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria, the Nazis also had to take into consideration the international and domestic interests of their allies and reluctant satellites.

Until 1944, the lives of the great majority of Hungarian Jews were not directly in danger. After World War I, Hungary was regarded as a pioneer in the field of anti-Jewish legislation. As "revenge" for the bourgeois-democratic, and then communist revolutions led by "Judeo-bolsheviks," the National Assembly passed the so-called Numerus Clausus act in 1920, which restricted university and college education of people of the Jewish religion. During the premiership of István Bethlen (1921-1931) no antisemitic laws were passed, nor were such decrees issued. Indeed, in 1928, the antisemitic paragraph of the Numerus Clausus act was repealed, and no new antisemitic laws would be passed for over a decade. From 1938 onward, however, in rivalry with the extreme right, and following cautiously the examples of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, Hungary passed a series of anti-Jewish laws in order to deny Jews civic equality of rights, and first a 20%, then from 1939 a 6% Numerus Clausus was introduced for various professions (physicians, lawyers, engineers, journalists). Tens of thousands of Jewish tradesmen, artisans, small merchants, and publicists had their licenses withdrawn, and 200,000 Hungarian Jews (and their family members) were ruined, despoiled, and pauperized.

The majority of society regarded the despoliation, pauperization of Jews as natural and legitimate. Tens of thousands acquired Jewish jobs, property, and real estate during the process of Aryanization. These people knew perfectly well that if the Allied armed forces won, everything they had "legally" acquired from the Jews would have to be returned. In 1941, legislation in Hungary along the lines of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws prohibited marriage between "Aryans" and Jews, penalizing with imprisonment Jewish men who committed *Rassenschande* by having extramarital sexual relationships with non-Jewish women. Jewish reserve officers were often stripped of the ranks they had been given during World War I. In 1941, unarmed military forced labour service was introduced for Jews and other nationalities, such as Romanians, Serbs, and Slovaks, who were considered "unreliable." By 1944 at least 25,000 Hungarian Jews had been killed on the eastern front

serving as humiliated military forced labourers. In July-August 1941, 18-21,000 Jews whose citizenship was regarded as unsettled or who had sought refuge in Hungary as stateless persons were deported through Kőrösmező to German-occupied territories. On August 27-28, 1941 the Nazis and their Ukrainian accomplices murdered 23,000 Jews at Kamenets-Podolski. The victims included approximately 18,000 Hungarian Jews or Jews deported from Hungary. This was the first mass murder in the history of the Holocaust where the number of victims exceeded ten thousand. In January 1942, under the pretext of a raid against partisans, Hungarian soldiers and gendarmes murdered 3,000 people, including 700 Jews, in *Délvidék* (Vojvodina, Serbia), reannexed in 1941.

Yet, despite all the despoliation, disenfranchisement, deportations, and the two massacres mentioned above, the lives of the overwhelming majority of Hungarian Jews were not in danger before the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. There was still hope for hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews, as well as thousands of Jewish refugees from Poland, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and "independent" Slovakia until March 1944: unlike their co-religionists in Poland, the Baltic states, Serbia, etc., there was still a chance that they might survive the war. The leader of Romania, Marshall Ion Antonescu, following the examples of Mussolini and his generals, Marshall Pétain and, not the least, Miklós Horthy, refused to allow the deportation of Romanian Jews in October 1942. The *Conducator's* decision surprised Berlin. Until October 1942, Romania had been the front-line champion of the struggle for a Jew-free Europe. The estimated number of victims of the Romanian Holocaust is 270-280,000. From the autumn of 1942, however, Romania followed a policy that definitely protected Jews. Perhaps the soldiers in Bucharest were better than those in Budapest. After Stalingrad, the Germans did not have the slightest chance of making Antonescu deport the rest of Romanian Jewry - nor did they attempt to make him. This was especially the case, since they had been unable to persuade the leaders of Italy and Hungary to give up their policy of protecting Jews.

Berlin was dissatisfied with more than the Kállay cabinet's (March 5, 1942-March 22, 1944) policy of protecting Jews. Indeed, the main reason for the occupation of Hungary was that during 1943, and especially after the fall of Mussolini (July 25, 1943), Budapest had consistently rejected the increasing German demands for more Hungarian troops. The occupation was the result of both the cautious feelers for a separate peace and the policy of protecting Jews. In his monumental work *The Politics of Genocide* (1981), Professor Randolph L. Braham wrote that the occupation of the country had been provoked by the dilettante politics of the Kállay government. According to Professor Braham, the Kállay government maintained unfounded illusions concerning the possibilities of a separate peace with the Western Allies, had not cleansed the political and military leadership of pro-Nazi elements, and the Nazi intelligence service knew everything about their "secret" western connections and the talks concerning a separate peace. Braham says that if Hungary "had remained a militarily reluctant but politically reliable

ally...then it is possible that the Hungarian Jewish population would have survived the war unharmed." Miklós Kállay and those close to him knew very well who the friends of the Nazis were within the political and military elite. It was not because of their political dilettantism that they had not removed these persons from positions of power, but because Berlin attentively followed the rise of every Hungarian pro-Nazi to important positions. In the case of a major purge, the Nazis would certainly have occupied Hungary earlier. It was more a case of political idiocy: the old Regent, Miklós Horthy believed that even pro-Nazi generals and politicians would remain loyal to him, whatever orders he might issue. There is more emphasis on the problem of the reluctant military cooperation versus the mouthing of political loyalty. The latter would have been worth anything for the Nazi leadership only if the Hungarians, like the Romanians, had been willing to send as many troops to the Eastern Front as the Germans had asked for.

When Istvan Deak, the Hungarian-born professor at Columbia University, asked whether the Jews of Hungary could have survived the Holocaust, his answer was a resounding yes.¹ He argued that if the Hungarian political leadership had followed the example of the Romanians, and pretended to be enthusiastic followers of the Nazis in words, propaganda, and, especially on the battlefield, then Hungary would not have been occupied by the armed forces of the Third Reich. What Professor Deak called the frightening conclusion is that most of the Jewish population of Hungary could have survived the world war if Hungary had collaborated with the Germans on the battlefield exactly as the Romanians did, and if Regent Horthy had switched to the side of the Red Army as quickly and as nimbly as King Michael of Romania did. Braham regards the Hungarian Holocaust as the failure of Hungarian Jewish assimilation. He is certainly wrong: it was not the religious division of the Hungarian Jews nor the rather forceful assimilation that carried masses of Jews to Auschwitz. Even the very strong Zionist movement in Poland managed to get merely a fraction of its members to Palestine prior to 1941, and the only safer than refuge in those days was the United States, since Europe was swarming with SS and Gestapo units following the advancing Wehrmacht.

Recent literature on the subject, especially by Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach, whose book *The Last Chapter*, has formulated new positions on the aims of the Nazi occupiers.² Namely, that the Nazis had not been planning to deport masses of Hungarian Jews, and were not prepared, in Auschwitz, for example, to "receive" such a multitude of Hungarian Jews. According to the "traditionalist" position, the occupation of Hungary had a threefold purpose, apart from keeping the country from quitting the war:

¹ I. Deak, 'Could the Hungarian Jews Have Been Survived?', *New York Review of Books*, 8 February 1982.

² Ch. Gerlach and G. Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel. Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden. 1944/1945* (Stuttgart and München, 2002).

1) to mobilize the economic resources of the country to support the German war effort; 2) to mobilize and send to the front the human reserves of the country; and 3) "Last but not least the occupation aimed at the final solution of the Jewish question," writes Professor György Ránki.³

László Varga, former academic director of the Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection Public Foundation on Páva Street, Budapest,⁴ put forth his theory in public at the April 2004 International Holocaust Conference in Budapest. He claims that the Nazis did not aim at deporting the Jewish population of Hungary, they would have been content with having 50–100,000 Jewish forced military labourers, and separating the Hungarian Jews from the population in ghettos and/or concentration camps. Nobody questions the fact that the Sztójay cabinet, appointed in the wake of the German occupation, zealously instructed the whole apparatus of the gendarmerie, police and administration to carry out the de-jewification of Hungary. The main point of contention is what purpose, what plans the Nazi occupiers had upon arrival, whether they tried to put pressure on the Hungarian government, or whether nothing of the kind was necessary because the Hungarians themselves wished to get rid of the Jews. The "revisionist" thesis of Varga and his colleagues is shocking at first sight. Since we well know that one of the most important goals of the Nazi leaders was to make Europe free of Jews, why would they have made an exception for wavering Hungary, out of all their allies? Already in October 1942, they demanded in a diplomatic note that the Hungarian Jews be marked with yellow Stars of David, locked up in ghettos, and deported. Regent Miklós Horthy and Premier Miklós Kállay refused to comply with these demands. Horthy and his advisers referred primarily to Mussolini's policy of protecting Jews in justifying their own policy concerning the Jews. As long as the Duce and his generals continued refusing to allow the Jews in Italy or the Italian-occupied French, Yugoslav, and Greek territories to be deported, Horthy, Antonescu, and Tiso had someone to refer to. The Hungarian political leadership was also afraid that beginning to deport Hungarian Jews by the hundred thousand would cause serious social and economic problems. With the military situation steadily deteriorating, the Hungarian political leaders, who erroneously believed that the Western Allies were interested in the Jewish policies of a Nazi ally, did not wish to score black points with London and Washington by deporting the Jews. Regent Horthy and most of the Hungarian political elite were perfectly aware from the early summer of 1942, and not from June 1944 as the apologists of Horthy claim, what exactly the "final solution" of the Jewish question actually meant. Until 1944, Horthy and his advisers, out of moral and humanitarian considerations, among others, would not hand over the Hungarian Jews to the Nazi mass murderers.

³ Gy. Ránki, 'A német megszálláshoz vezető út,' *Kortárs* (1984), no. 11, pp. 1757–8.

⁴ He resigned from his post last summer, i.e. 2005.

What Hitler was afraid of, and with good reason, was that the Hungarian leaders, at least Miklós Horthy and most of the members of the Kállay government, were only waiting for an opportunity to quit the war. They also believed that Hungarian Jews, who they considered agents of the Allied powers, were behind the cautious exploratory moves for a separate peace. Hitler "knew" that the Jews supported the bolshevization of Europe. One finds it difficult to believe that the Nazis would have been content having nearly one million "Judeo-Bolsheviks" merely "isolated," locked up in camps within the borders of Hungary.

A number of contemporary diplomatic reports also indicate that the Nazi leadership was continuously dissatisfied with the Jewish policy of the Hungarians. In April 1943, at Klessheim, Hitler and Ribbentrop demanded that Horthy dismiss the Kállay cabinet not only on account of the moves for a separate peace, but also because of the policy of protecting Jews.

Soon after Horthy's visit to Klessheim in April 1943, SS *Standartenführer* Edmund Veesenmayer, expert of the Nazi Foreign Ministry on East European affairs, attributed Hungary's weakness and defeatism to the immense influence of the Jews. Veesenmayer made another prolonged "study tour" in Hungary in October 1943. He submitted his comprehensive report and concrete proposals to Ribbentrop on December 10. László Varga does not mention what Veesenmayer wrote about the Jewish question in Hungary, and what proposals he put forward. Veesenmayer called the Hungarian Jewish population, whose number he erroneously assessed to be 1.1 million, "enemy number one." He thought that 1.1 million Jews "mean at least the same number of saboteurs, and the number of those Hungarians who, as henchmen of Jews, assist them in carrying out their large-scale plans aimed at sabotage and espionage, helping and covering for them in carrying out their large-scale plans aimed at sabotage is the same if not twice as many."⁵ These are hard words especially if we remember how spies and saboteurs are to be treated in times of war. If 1.1 million Jewish spies and saboteurs were "eliminated" from Hungary, this would simultaneously rid the country of the main supporters of 1-2 million Jewish hirelings, too, Edmund Veesenmayer suggests in his memorandum to the Nazi decision-makers. Sztójay, as he would never tire of repeating during his people's court trial in the spring of 1946, reported many times during 1942-1943 how dissatisfied the Germans were with the Hungarian policy concerning the Jews. In December 1943, Sztójay warned his government again, that "since the events in Italy," that is, the "treason" of the Badoglio government, "they would respond, if necessary, without any hesitation with the most ruthless determination against anybody." Sztójay especially emphasized that "it is well-known that the Jewish question as such has given

⁵ Report of E. Veesenmayer, 10 December 1943. Cf. *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról 1933-1944*, ed. Gy. Ránki, E. Pamlényi, L. Tilkovszky and Gy. Juhász (Budapest, 1968), p. 745.

cause for major and perhaps fundamental differences of opinion, but it would be going too far if I repeated all the mutual complaints, which Your Excellency is already aware of."⁶ Before the people's court Sztójay declared that when he returned to Budapest for Christmas in 1943, he informed Premier Miklós Kállay and Foreign Minister Jenő Ghyczy personally and in detail that unless Hungary modified its policy concerning the Jews, the occupation of the country would be unavoidable.

Varga knows all of this, but he emphasizes, sharing the view of Aly and Gerlach, that the German leadership abandoned the deportation of Jews in every country where they came up against resistance. This was the case in Romania, in Bulgaria, and even in Slovakia. This is true, but in 1944 the occupiers' first move in Hungary was to remove the pro-Jewish Kállay government, while the Nazis never considered removing Marshal Antonescu, King Boris, or Prime Minister Tiso during 1942-1944.

The main reason for the occupation was not that the Kállay government was protecting the Jews, but that the government was offering reluctant, indeed sham military cooperation.

The Hungarian politicians, who wanted to avoid occupation at all costs, found support in the events in Italy. The fact that the German army, after Italy had quit the war, was strong enough to occupy Italy, disarm the Italian army, deport and intern 650,000 Italian soldiers, and then to open a new front made a deep impression in Budapest. By the end of 1943 it had to be accepted that the western Allies were not going to land in the Balkans, thus there remained a distant hope that an army would appear near the borders of Hungary to which the Hungarians could surrender.

Varga stresses the fact that no agreement was concluded at the Klessheim talks between Hitler and Horthy on March 18, 1944; nothing was signed, the Jewish question in Hungary was practically not even mentioned, and we do not really know exactly what the two heads of state talked about. It is true that the original minutes of the talks, if they were taken at all, have never been recovered. On the other hand, Horthy summoned the Crown Council on March 19, where he gave a detailed account of the subjects and the tone of the talks he had had with the *Führer*. The minutes of that Crown Council are extant. Horthy said that "Hitler also protested to me about Hungary not taking the necessary steps against the Jews. Our crime is, therefore, that I have not fulfilled Hitler's wish, and have not allowed the Jews to be massacred."⁷ Varga and Aly-Gerlach also emphasize that Horthy consented to nothing, least of all to the occupation, or to the deportation of Jews, and signed nothing, either.

László Varga places great emphasis on the fact that, in the papers preparing the occupation, neither the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*), nor the OKW (the Supreme Staff of the Wehrmacht) mention the words "Jew"

⁶ Magyar Országos Levéltár-K63-21/7-Sztójay XU/pol.-főn.-1943. (December 23.)
⁷ *Demokrácia*, 5 August 1945, pp. 1-2.

or "Jewish question." Most of the papers of the RSHA were destroyed by the Nazis at the end of the war. The OKW had nothing to do with the settlement of the Jewish question in Hungary because that belonged to the competence of the SS, the Gestapo, and, last but not least, the Nazi Foreign Ministry, because after all the country concerned was still formally independent. By remaining in place, Horthy gave his *de facto* consent to the occupation. He accepted the occupying forces as legal, so much so that he started lengthy negotiations with Edmund Veesenmayer, the new representative of the occupying power. The first and most important subject of these talks was the person of the new Prime Minister. The first candidate of the Germans for the position was former Prime Minister (1938-1939) Béla Imrédy, while Horthy, perhaps in order to demonstrate to the world that he was not acting of his own free will, charged his former ambassador to Berlin, the out and out racist and antisemitic Döme Sztójay, to form a government.

SS *Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann, head of Department IV (Gestapo)-B-4 (Jewish affairs) of the RSHA, also arrived in Hungary along with the occupying forces. Varga mentions this fact, but he omits to mention that he arrived accompanied by a staff of 15-20 select specialists, much experienced by that time in the de-jewification of other occupied countries. Dieter Wisliceny, Alois Krumei, Theodor Dannecker, and their colleagues had organized the deportation of tens of thousands of Poles, Jews, and Gypsies all over Europe from France to Greece since 1940. It is not without reason that Raul Hilberg calls them "the top deportation specialists of the RSHA."⁸ It does not seem very likely that the "Master" of deportations and so many select specialists traveled to Budapest merely for the sake of a few tens of thousands of Jewish forced military labourers. Organizing the transport of 50,000 Jewish forced military labourers to Germany would have meant a few days' "work" for a Wisliceny or a Krumei. In addition, Varga mentions that demanding the 50-100,000 forced labourers was merely a pretext for the Germans. As soon as the Nazis had learnt that the Hungarians were ready to hand over a few tens of thousands of *Arbeitsjuden*, they started to protest, and then abandoned the whole idea of the *Arbeitsjuden*.

This was the first time in the history of the Holocaust that Adolf Eichmann directed on the spot the de-jewification of a country. He was determined to break the "record" set during the large deportation operation in Warsaw in 1942. On that occasion, 275,000 people were deported from the Warsaw ghetto between July 22 and September 12, 1942, most of them to the death camp at Treblinka some 80 kilometers away (approximately 100 kilometers by railway). Now Eichmann was set upon organizing an operation that would involve the marking with yellow stars, the ghettoization, the collecting into camps, the despoliation, and, finally, the deportation of an approximately 800,000 strong Jewish population, including converts,

living dispersed in a country with a territory of 200,000 square kilometers, in a situation much less favorable for the Nazis militarily, politically, and logistically.

Varga relates who had sent Eichmann to Budapest and with what purpose. We know that days before the occupation he had summoned his chief specialists of de-jewification to the concentration camp at Mauthausen from various parts of Nazi-occupied Europe and from all over the Reich. According to Gideon Hausner, Chief Prosecuting Attorney of the trial at Jerusalem, it was Himmler who ordered "to send the Master himself to Hungary."⁹ Eichmann's *Sondereinsatzkommando* was organized at Mauthausen. As he recollected, Heinrich Müller, Chief of the Gestapo instructed him around March 10 to go to Hungary, where "sweeping the area from the east to the west, innumerable Jews will have to be evacuated from Hungary for reasons of strategy." There were times when he remembered receiving the order from SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler to "sweep the country from the east to the west, and deport every Jew to Auschwitz, and as soon as possible." Varga brushes aside Eichmann's recollections on the ground that he separately named both Heinrich Müller and Heinrich Himmler as the issuer of the fatal order. However, the fact that fifteen years later Eichmann did not remember exactly who had given him the order does not refute the fact that he had received orders before the German occupation of Hungary to organize the de-jewification of that country.

To the end of his life, Eichmann was proud that he succeeded in breaking the Warsaw deportation-record in Hungary. His small but elect team, which, including the drivers, secretaries, and radio operators, cannot have been more than 150-200 strong, would of course have been unable to perform that feat. From May 15 to July 9, when Regent Horthy had the deportations stopped, he "managed" to deport over 437,000 Jews on 147 trains from the country. Gathering and transporting this immense mass of people would not have been possible without the disciplined, sometimes definitely enthusiastic cooperation of the Sztójay government and its officials, gendarmes, policemen, soldiers, doctors, engineers, altogether some 200,000 people. The question arises whether Horthy's resignation as a protest against the occupation would have slowed down the pace of the process of de-jewification. Had that happened, the Germans would have perhaps set up Béla Imrédy as Prime Minister, and it is impossible to imagine him as having the deportations stopped at any time. Had Horthy resigned, Hungary would have been left with no political force capable of stopping the deportations. Imrédy would, of course, never have been regarded as a legitimate head of government if Horthy had not appointed him *pro forma*, as, giving in to blackmail, he did with Szálasi on October 15, 1944. Many Jews continued hoping that as long as Horthy remained in place, His Excellency would not allow the worst to happen, and they would not be

⁸ R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York, 1985), p. 823.

⁹ G. Hausner, *Ítélet Jeruzsálemben. Az Eichmann-per története* (Budapest, 1984), p. 198.

deported. Eventually, the Jews of Budapest were not disappointed of this expectation. Horthy claims in his memoirs that he refused to resign lest the worst, i.e. an Arrow-Cross take-over, should happen, which would endanger the lives of 800,000 Hungarian Jews. However, with Horthy remaining in place, appointing the Sztójay government and then, at least formally, withdrawing into the background concerning the Jewish question, the Jews found themselves in a more deadly and dangerous position than they would after the Arrow-Cross *coup* on October 15, 1944.

Regent Horthy even gave up his right, not incorporated in law or constitution, to have the decrees concerning the Jews presented to him before they were issued. The question is what the members of Sztójay's cabinet had a free hand to do. Gerlach and Varga claim that it was not the Nazis, but the Hungarians, who proposed the deportation of the 800,000 Hungarian Jews. The nearly exclusive responsibility then should be laid to the doorstep of the Sztójay cabinet, especially the new friend of Eichmann, László Endre, the antisemitic former deputy prefect of Pest county, Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior. According to Varga, Endre and Eichmann elaborated the whole deportation plan sometime in early April. What the Nazis originally expected of the Sztójay government, as claimed by Andor Jaross, Minister of the Interior in that cabinet, in his written statement as prisoner of the Political Police in October 6, 1945, was no more than the "separation" of the Jews.¹⁰

If Varga accepts the testimony of a major war criminal as "conclusive," then everything that the other members of the same cabinet said before the people's court should be taken equally seriously. László Varga claims, for example, that the minutes of the cabinet meetings do not support the view that the Germans were putting pressure on Sztójay to have the Jewish question "settled." He does not mention, on the other hand, that the original minutes of the first cabinet meeting after the occupation, which was held on March 22, and lasted, according to certain reports in the press, for three hours, have not survived. According to Jenő Rátz, Deputy Prime Minister of the Sztójay cabinet, "at the first meeting of the cabinet Prime Minister Sztójay determined the duty-list of the ministry [i.e. the government], and placed the solution of the Jewish question to the first place on the agenda."¹¹ Lajos Szász, Minister of Industry of the same government claimed before the people's court that "certain regulations and decrees were issued because they had to be issued under a very strong pressure, and they had to be issued because the Germans had promised that if the Jewish question was solved, Hungary would be freed of German occupation, and the Gestapo would leave."¹² Antal Kunder, Minister of Commerce and Transport in the Sztójay government added that "the Germans were urging

¹⁰ Quoted in *A magyar Quisling-kormány. Sztójay Döme és társai a népbíróság előtt*, ed. L. Karsai and J. Molnár (Budapest, 2004), p. 73, footnote no. 345.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹² *Ibid.*

us to issue the decrees. They even prescribed the day when the Jews would have to start wearing the Jewish star."¹³ If that is true, then Sztójay was able to convey the exact demands of the Germans at the very first meeting of the council of ministers. At the following meeting, on March 29, they discussed, and two days later published, the decree that made the wearing of the canary-yellow, six pointed star compulsory as of April 5.

We have a number of testimonies claiming that not only Eichmann and the members of his "dejewifying" team arrived in Budapest along with or directly after the occupiers. According to Varga, we do not have "reliable sources" to prove that Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the Chief of the RSHA himself came to Budapest around March 19-22. Curiously, Sztójay, Veessenmayer, and other war criminals testified in the various trials that the leader of the RSHA did come to Budapest in those days.

Döme Sztójay appeared as a witness during the preparation of the trial of Edmund Veessenmayer on May 16, 1946. He said that at their very first talk at the German Embassy Veessenmayer had introduced Kaltenbrunner to him (who was, as Sztójay incidentally revealed, "an old acquaintance" of his from Berlin). Sztójay said the following: "After a brief introduction, Kaltenbrunner explained that Berlin wanted the Hungarian government to issue a decree that would compel the Jews to wear a distinguishing sign, to segregate the Jews from the rest of the population, and, in general, implement measures against the Jews according to the *German model*."¹⁴ Thus, the Hungarians also had to solve the Jewish question according to the "*German model*." Sztójay, an old acquaintance of Göring, Himmler, Kaltenbrunner, and their associates, from his Berlin days, knew very well what that meant: disenfranchisement, Aryanization, yellow star, ghettos, *collecting camps*, and then *deportation to the death camps*. According to certain sources, Eichmann and his men gathered in the *Kisludas* restaurant on the evening of March 20. Here Kaltenbrunner made a speech, wished Eichmann and his staff success with the deportation of the Jews, and instructed the SS officers present to extend all possible assistance to them. A day or two later, perhaps on March 22, Eichmann already met László Endre. We know that by that time Kaltenbrunner had talked to Sztójay. The Chief of the RSHA, as Yaacov Lozowick, Director of Yad Vashem Archives has said, gave instructions to the Hungarian Prime Minister, and Eichmann gave advice the [future] Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁵

According to Varga, the Germans would have been content to have the Hungarian Jews separated from the population in ghettos and concentration camps. As he writes, "this segregation had worked for years in Poland."¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

¹⁴ Budapest Főváros Levéltára-A Szálasi-per iratai-19.618/1949. Vol. 11. p. 81.

¹⁵ Y. Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats. The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil* (London and New York, 2002), p. 245.

¹⁶ Lecture of L. Varga at the International Holocaust Conference, Budapest, 16 April 2004 (unpublished manuscript, p. 7).

This is true, but we must not forget that two years had passed since then. The segregation had "worked" in Poland between 1939 and 1942, and then the mass murder of the Jews of Poland began, refined to industrialized perfection in the death camps. In 1944, tens of thousands were crowded into ghettos and collecting camps, in horrible conditions. People were allowed to take food for a maximum of 14 days, and nobody thought of organizing these camps and ghettos after the example of the "working" ghetto of Łódź, for example. There is no trace in extant official documents and decrees of anyone suggesting that the Jews should be made to work in Hungary, and not deported. It is illogical and unimaginable to "separate" hundreds of thousands of people without providing them with the possibility of performing useful work, even forced labour, and with the all burden of their sustenance laid on the shoulders of the Hungarian authorities. The Germans, on the other hand, justified their demands for increased food transports to the Reich by their having to feed hundreds of thousand Hungarian Jews deported to Germany.

Varga ignores the fact that Otto Winkelmann was only formally a subordinate of Veessenmayer. Eichmann reported directly to the commander of the SS and Police forces in Hungary, and Winkelmann to Kaltenbrunner and Himmler. However, because the papers of the RSHA have been destroyed by the mass-murderers for perfectly understandable reasons, all we can do is guess what the relevant persons of the SS, the SD, and the Gestapo were doing, knew, or were preparing to do in late March and early April 1944 with regard to the Jewish question in Hungary. That Veessenmayer was far from being an all-powerful factor concerning the Jewish question is shown by the story of how the property of Manfréd Weiss passed into German hands. Kurt Becher, Himmler's personal representative, started to negotiate about the "purchase" of the Manfréd Weiss Works, one of the largest war factories in Europe, from its Jewish and converted owners; these negotiations took place behind the backs of Veessenmayer and the Hungarian government. The transaction was concluded with the assistance of, among others, the pro-Nazi Minister of Finance, Lajos Reményi-Schneller, and the members of the Weiss-Chorin family, some 60 persons, who received some cash and air tickets to Portugal. When Veessenmayer heard of the case, which caused a great scandal in Hungarian domestic politics, he began a frantic correspondence with his superiors in the Foreign Ministry, but to no avail. The SS did not respect the views of the Foreign Ministry in this case either, allowing no interference in the Jewish question. Veessenmayer did not know about the talks of Zionist leader Rezső Kasztner, either, nor was he informed that the latter had managed to rescue 1,684 Jews from Hungary.

Due to the geographical, geopolitical situation of Hungary, the only realistic escape route in the spring and summer of 1944, during the great deportations, led through southern Transylvania. And this meant a real chance to escape only for those fortunate and, no less importantly, rich enough to be able to bribe the Romanian border guards. The leaders of the

northern neighbor of Hungary, Slovakia, "independent" since the spring of 1939, also had stopped deporting their Jewish citizens in the autumn of 1942. The western neighbor was the Nazi Reich, and in the east the Red Army was approaching rather too slowly for the Hungarian Jews. The leaders of the United States and Great Britain, like those of the Soviet Union, were of the opinion that the most efficient way to help the Jews was to win the war as soon as possible. The proposal of SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, conveyed to the leaders of the western Allied Powers by Eichmann through Hungarian Zionist leaders, can be regarded as nothing but a bluff: he offered the lives of one million Hungarian Jews for ten thousand trucks, even promising that the vehicles would be used against the Russians only. The proposal was not taken seriously either in London or in Washington, where political leaders, such as British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden and President Roosevelt were involved in gesture-politicking only. They protested too late, at the end of June, threatening Regent Horthy because of the deportations. Pope Pius XII also waited until the liberation of Rome on June 6, and then three weeks later he sent a telegram of protest to Horthy. These messages certainly influenced the Regent, fortifying his slowly mounting determination to put an end to the deportations.

However, this was all that the Allied political and military leaders did for the Hungarian Jews. Early in May, decision-makers in the Office of Strategic Services even turned down the idea of dropping thousands of leaflets from airplanes over Hungary to warn the organizers of the deportations that they would be taken to task after the war. The first argument of the OSS might even be called reasonable: those who were at that time, i.e. in May 1944, in a position to make decisions in Hungary surely believed in the final victory of the Germans, and, therefore, were not likely to be moved by such threats. There was, however, another argument: even if such a leaflet-campaign were successful and 800,000 Hungarian Jews were saved, would that shorten the war in any way? Since the answer to that question was obviously no, not a single airplane was risked to drop those leaflets, which were never printed.

In such a geographical, military, and geopolitical situation the view that if the Hungarian Jews had been "enlightened" in time as to the fate awaiting them once they got on the deportation trains, hundreds of thousands might have been saved does not seem to be well-founded. Those voicing such views blame either the leaders of the Central Jewish Council organized after the occupation, or Zionist leader Rezső Kasztner for not making public in time what they already knew too well, namely, that Auschwitz was a death camp. Most of the Hungarian Jews, even if they had been ready to believe this piece of information, would not have been able to escape. The men of military age, serving as military forced labourers far from their families, would not have been able to help. On the other hand, most of the Jews simply would not believe what fate the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices held in store for them. It was not the information that was wanting, but the ability, the will for people to understand the news about the

Holocaust continuously arriving since 1941. Foreign radio stations reported, if sporadically, the massacres of Jews in Poland, the Baltics, and the Soviet Union. Military labourers on leave, gendarmes and soldiers serving behind the front also brought home news. According to some estimates, some 15,000 Jews from Austria, Poland, and Slovakia had escaped to Hungary by 1944. They were able to testify, as eyewitnesses, that the ghettos, the concentration and death camps were facts. However, they were not and would not be believed. Even if people believed what they heard from these refugees, they tried to find comfort in the belief that it was impossible that this could also happen in Hungary.

Another question is why the leaders of the Central Jewish Council, or of the various Zionist movements, which were very weak in Hungary anyway, did not even try to "enlighten" the multitudes of Hungarian Jews. Rezső Kasztner and his comrades tried to save primarily (but not exclusively!) their own relatives and comrades, which is perfectly understandable from a human and even political perspective. Any kind of propaganda campaign would have only jeopardized their rescue efforts, and would not have had any serious results, either. Last but not least, one must remember the very limited possibilities, room for maneuver of Jewish, Zionist, and "assimilationist" leaders in Hungary. The press, the radio were under military censorship. Professor Istvan Deak's idea that the collective suicide of the members of the Central Jewish Council would have shaken up the masses of Jews is interesting, but it would have been unlikely to bring any results.¹⁷ The news of such a collective suicide would not perhaps have reached the peripheries of Hungary, not even the major towns or villages of post-Trianon Hungary; and even if it had, it is unlikely that it would have moved tens of thousands of Jews to escape in panic just because half a dozen Jewish leaders had committed suicide together in Budapest.

During the deportation of the Jews in the provinces, very few people had the courage and even fewer managed to rescue Jews. Villages, towns, cities in the country were methodically combed by gendarmes, policemen, and officials of the administration. Most of the Jews did not dare, and would not have been able, to run away. Resistance was out of the question, the majority of the population, infected by decades of antisemitic propaganda, at best watched indifferently what was happening to the people with the yellow stars. At the same time, tens of thousands, driven by lust of prey, zealously supported the authorities, reported the Jews and their Christian helpers who tried to hide their valuables or attempted to escape or hide. In many cases sealed Jewish businesses and homes were looted, evacuated ghettos were rushed, and the property of the deported Jews carried off.

We still do not know exactly what made Horthy finally decide on July 6 to have the deportations stopped. It is difficult to assess the effect of the increasing international indignation and the foreign and domestic pressures

on him. He had to take the military situation into consideration, too. The western Allies had managed to break out from the coastline of Normandy, and the great summer offensive of the Red Army was also under way. On July 2, the capital was severely bombed, and maybe Horthy also gave credit to the rumour, spread by, among others, the leaders of the Jewish Council, that if the Jews who were crowded in the more than 2,000 safe houses marked with yellow stars were deported, Budapest would be carpet-bombed in retaliation. He certainly believed for a few days the rumour that Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior László Baký had concentrated 3,000 gendarmes around Budapest not to organize the deportation of the Jews in the capital, but to overthrow him. He was also affected by the international press campaign, originating in Switzerland, in which the "Auschwitz Protocols," written by two escaped prisoners and detailing the operation of the Auschwitz death-factory, was published. It was not from the Protocols that Horthy learned that most of the deported Hungarian Jews were being murdered, but the press campaign deeply affected him and the members of his government. Anyway, whatever his reasons, Horthy decided to stop the deportations, and the persecuted Jews and all those who were trying to help them gained some time.

Aly-Gerlach and, quoting them, László Varga put great emphasis on the fact that the Germans started large-scale preparations at the destination of the deportations, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, in early May only, which would seem to prove, they contend, that they had not planned in advance, seen in advance, or even hoped that hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews would be arriving at that death camp within a few weeks. Commandant Rudolf Hoess was indeed reposted in Auschwitz early in May. The Nazi annihilation machinery was anything but an organization working in strict hierarchical order, with the preciseness of a clockwork. It is easy to see that precisely in March-April 1944 it may have taken Eichmann, indeed, Himmler and Kaltenbrunner long days, weeks to warn the death-factory, which had been running at idle speed for months, and its personnel, and to have the necessary changes and construction works started. If we remember that on March 21, 1944, the Nazis did not even know who the Prime Minister would be who would issue the orders for the deportation of Hungarian Jews, then the preparation in Auschwitz will appear in a different light.

As we have seen, it was on March 21-22 that it became clear in Berlin that Regent Miklós Horthy was going to invite Döme Sztójay to form a new government. László Endre and Adolf Eichmann elaborated the plan of the deportation of the Hungarian Jews within a few weeks in late March and early April. During these weeks, the attention of the Nazi leadership was almost totally focused on the Atlantic coast. It is easy to understand that the decision in such a less important issue as to where such a multitude of Jews could be transported, where they could be efficiently selected, murdered, and cremated was made slowly, erratically, and with difficulties.

Actually, this was not at all unprecedented in the history of the Holocaust. Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the RSHA, convened the Wannsee

¹⁷ Deak, 'Could the Hungarian Jews Have Been Survived?', p. 7.

conference for January 20, 1942. The organization of the death camps in Poland started a few months after that. During the first half of 1942, the conditions in the death camp at Treblinka were chaotic, its first commander, SS *Untersturmführer* Dr. Irmfried Eberl was unable to cope with the immense job of annihilating the deportees. The diesel engines from Soviet tanks, used in the gas chambers, often broke down. Trains were often held up for days on the railway lines to Treblinka, causing serious jams in railway traffic. In 1944, talks lasting for several days were necessary with German and the Slovak railway officials to determine the train routes to Auschwitz. It is not at all surprising that the German officials in charge, especially Edmund Veessenmayer himself, were pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm of the Sztójay government in lining up the administrative and police apparatus for the dejewification of the country. On April 23, Veessenmayer reported to Berlin that beginning on May 15, 3,000 people [i.e. a trainload of deportees] per day would be transported from Hungary. The orders that Hoess issued in Auschwitz on May 8 and 9 would have been sufficient for the "reception" of that number of Jews. When it turned out that, in accordance with Eichmann's plans, not one, but 4-5 trains a day were sent by the Hungarian authorities, which meant 12-15,000 people every day, Hoess went to Budapest and managed to have the number of trains alternate from day to day: one day two, the following day three trains were sent. It is obvious that Eichmann had no idea, or did not care, how many people the death-factory of Auschwitz-Birkenau was able to "process" in a single day. He had one goal only: to have as many Jews as possible deported from Hungary during the shortest possible time. These examples will have made it quite clear that Auschwitz prepared slowly for the largest and most quickly performed mass-murder operation in the history of the Holocaust, behind schedule, but eventually with appropriate efficiency.

After all this, the question asked in the title can be clearly answered again. Istvan Deak's "frightening conclusion" is still true today. The Hungarian Jews could have survived the Holocaust if the Hungarian government had acted as the Romanian government did. Unhesitatingly, displaying enthusiasm, it should have put as many troops, as much raw material and food at the disposal of the German military as was demanded, and then, at the appropriate moment, depending on the military situation, switched to the side of the Soviets. The cautious attempts at a separate peace, and especially the fact that the Hungarian government refused to send additional, significant military units to the eastern front during 1943, directly and indirectly sealed the fate of Hungarian Jews, because these actions provoked the Germans to occupy Hungary. The responsibility of Regent Miklós Horthy or the Sztójay government will not be diminished, but a subtler assessment of their role will be possible if we remember that the Germans arrived in Hungary with the purpose of deporting the greatest possible number of Jews from this country.

"TWIN BROTHERS": EUROPEAN ANTISEMITISM AND ANTI-AMERICANISM¹

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who deals even marginally with anti-Americanism has to be struck by its closeness to the prominent topic of antisemitism. I have always viewed the two as close relatives or (to put the point even more figuratively) as first cousins. But my research has convinced me that the relationship between these two phenomena is even closer than is the case among cousins. Andre Glucksmann's characterization of the two as "twin brothers" seems more apt. Glucksmann, like myself, sees contemporary antisemitism as, among other things, a consequence of as well as a necessary corollary to anti-Americanism and both as essential ingredients of a Europe-wide hatred with a pedigreed history.² He writes about the current situation in France and Europe: "One plus two plus three: From the extreme Left to the extreme Right, everyone in French politics - simple activists, members of parliament, trade unionists, cabinet ministers, and the head of state in unison - is raving against the intervention in Iraq: 'Bush equals Sharon equals

1 Although the term "antisemitism," just like "America," ought to be unmistakably clear to all concerned, the former requires a brief explanatory footnote, since there are always people who, for whatever reason, attempt to relativize and alter the concept. Ever since Wilhelm Marr (in his 1879 anti-Jewish pamphlet 'The Victory of Jewry over Germanism') introduced the expression "antisemitism" into the public sphere and common usage of every European country as a negative attitude toward the collectivity of "Jews" and everything Jewish, this is precisely what this generic term has meant: a general negative prejudice against Jews that can coagulate into an ideological explanation of the world attributing all kinds of social phenomena to the impact of Jews. In the course of the Jewish-Arab conflict during the 20th century, Arabs and (later) Europeans developed the stubborn ideology that their attitude toward Jews could not possibly be antisemitic, since Arabs themselves are "Semites." Quite apart from the fact that Arabs can also be anti-Arabic - and, according to this logic, also "anti-Semitic" (since prejudices are spiritual, intellectual, and emotional constructs not tied to the birthplace or "peopleness" of anyone holding them) - this argument only serves as an exculpation and disguise of modern Arab hatred of Jews. In discussing the phenomenon that is generally characterized as antisemitism, it ought to be clear that this has nothing to do with any kind of "Semitic" linguistic regions or "ethnic groups," but with modern hostility to Jews. Some authors - in order to evade this pseudo-problem - have gone over to using the term "anti-Judaism" (in place of "antisemitism"). I find this superfluous and politically unacceptable. For a precise definition of terms like antisemitism, the German *Judenfeindschaft* (hostility or animosity toward Jews) and Judaeophobia in current social science discussions, and for more on the debate about new symbolic forms of these phenomena, cf. L. Rensmann, *Demokratie und Judenbild. Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden, 2004), pp. 71-95.

2 Glucksmann develops this link in his impressive analysis of the existence of hatred. See A. Glucksmann, *Le Discours de la haine* (Paris, 2004).