

The Politics of GENOCIDE

The Holocaust in Hungary

CONDENSED EDITION

Randolph L. Braham

Published in association with the
UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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Preface

The destruction of Hungarian Jewry constitutes the last phase in the Nazis' war against the Jews. Although subjected to harsh legal and economic measures from 1938 onward, the Jews of Hungary survived the first four and a half years of World War II relatively intact. However, after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, Hungarian Jewry was subjected to the most ruthless and concentrated destruction process of the war. This took place on the eve of Allied victory, when the grisly details of the Final Solution—the Nazi drive for the liquidation of European Jewry—were already known to the leaders of the world, including those of Hungarian and world Jewry. For the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices, time was of the essence. Aware of the impending Axis defeat, they were resolved to win at least the war against the Jews.

While the masses of Hungarian Jewry lived for several years virtually in the shadow of Auschwitz, they had no concrete knowledge about the gas chambers and the assembly-line mass murders committed there and in many other death camps. Those among them who had heard talk about these horrors discounted it as rumor or anti-Nazi propaganda. Having survived most of the war, the Hungarian Jews, highly patriotic and largely assimilated, developed a basically false sense of security. Even though they, too, experienced the consequences of the anti-Jewish drive of the wartime era—they suffered more than sixty thousand casualties before the German occupation—they continued to delude themselves to the very end. What happened in Poland, they argued upon hearing vague accounts of the anti-Jewish excesses there, could not possibly happen in a civilized Hungary, where the destiny of the Jews and Magyars had been intertwined for over a thousand years! By the second half of 1943 Hungarian Jews had become firmly convinced that they would survive the war under the continued protection of the aristocratic-conservative regime of Miklós Kállay.

The conviction of the Jews was founded on the assumption that Hungary, an independent member of the Axis alliance, would continue to remain sovereign under the leadership of the Kállay government. That assumption was shattered in the spring of 1944, when Germany, having become convinced of Hungary's resolve to extricate herself from the Axis, decided to occupy the country. The occupation virtually ended Hungary's existence as a sovereign state and eliminated the governmental and political

leadership on which the Jews depended for their protection. Uninformed about the realities of the Final Solution program and unprepared for any possible emergency measures, the Hungarian Jews became easy prey for the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices. Hungary (with the notable exception of Budapest) became *judenrein* (free of Jews) within fewer than four months.

The aim of this abbreviated edition is to provide a better understanding of the many complex domestic and international factors that led to the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. It attempts to succinctly explain in a rational context the historical, political, communal, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to the unfolding of this tragedy. Finally, it endeavors to summarize the various facets of the Holocaust in Hungary, doing so in the context of Hungarian and world history and international politics.

The volume includes the most important revisions of the second edition, as well as new materials in scholarly works and documentary collections published since 1994. These are listed in the bibliography.

For their help in the preparation and publication of this volume, I would like to express my gratitude to the leaders of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; President Frances D. Horowitz, Dean Alan Gartner, and Professor Egon Mayer of the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York; Gizella and Arie Edrich, Valerie and Frank Furth, Eva and Norman Gati, Irene and Paul Greenwald, Sheba and Jacob Gruber, Ann and Gaby Newmark, Elizabeth and Jack Rosenthal, and Marcel Sand of the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies of CUNY's Graduate Center; and Gábor Várszegi, founder of the J. and O. Winter Fund and benefactor of the endowment that bears his name at the Graduate Center. I also want to express my thanks to Michael Berenbaum, president of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, for his support. For their valuable editorial contributions, I would like to express my gratitude to Benton Arnovitz, Director of Academic Publications at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and my friend Judit Schulmann. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Elizabeth, for her encouragement and editorial assistance.

Randolph L. Braham
February 1998

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***Vádirat*:** *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* (Indictment of Nazism), Ilona Beneschofsky and Elek Karsai, comps. and eds. (Budapest: A Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőlete, 1958–1967), 3 vols., 379, 401, 720 pp.

Glossary

AJDC: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, also known simply as Joint. An American philanthropic organization dedicated to helping distressed Jews the world over.

Arrow Cross Party (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*): The Hungarian ultra-rightist pro-Nazi party headed by Ferenc Szálasi.

Dejewification: A term denoting a policy or activity relating to the physical elimination of Jews from a particular area.

Einsatzgruppen: Mobile formations of the German Security Police and Security Service used after the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, for the liquidation of Jews and other “dangerous” persons, including Communist Party functionaries.

Final Solution: A Nazi euphemism used in correspondence and other forms of communication, denoting the program relating to the physical elimination of the Jews.

Gestapo: State Secret Police (*Geheime Staatspolizei*) of Nazi Germany.

Hehalutz: Hebrew for pioneer; a pioneering youth organization that trained young Jewish men and women for agricultural work in Palestine (Israel).

HIJEF: Society for the Aid of Refugees Abroad (*Hilfsverein für jüdische Flüchtlinge im Ausland*), a rescue and relief organization headed by the Sternbuch brothers in Montreux, Switzerland.

Judenfrei: A term denoting an area from which the Jews had been removed.

Kenyérmező: A basically fictitious geographic name used during the deportation of the Jews of Northern Transylvania as the alleged ultimate destination of the Jews.

KEOKH: The National Central Alien Control Office (*Külföldieket Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság*). With headquarters in Budapest, the office was in charge of, among other things, the Jews with foreign citizenship living in Hungary.

Kripo: Criminal Police (*Kriminalpolizei*) of Nazi Germany.

MIPI: Welfare Bureau of Hungarian Jews (*Magyar Izraeliták Pártfogó Irodája*), a Hungarian Jewish relief and welfare organization.

Nyilas: A member or follower of the pro-Nazi ultra-rightist Arrow Cross Party.

Quisling: Term denoting a pro-Nazi collaborator or traitor.

Reichsführer-SS: Reich leader of the SS, the position held by Heinrich Himmler.

RSHA: Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*). Operating under the *Reichsführer-SS*, it was headed until 1942 by Reinhard Heydrich, and thereafter by Ernst Kaltenbrunner.

SD: Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*), intelligence and counterintelligence agency of the SS.

SIPO: Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*). The name given to the Gestapo and Kripo jointly.

Sonderkommando: Special Commando in charge of implementing the Final Solution program in Hungary; it was headed by Adolf Eichmann.

SS: (*Schutzstaffel*), Elite corps of the Nazi party. Blackshirts.

Vaadah: Relief and Rescue Committee (*Vaadat ha'Ezra ve'ha'Hatzalah*) of Budapest. Established in January 1943, it was officially headed by Ottó Komoly, but in practice by Rudolph (Rezső) Kasztner.

Waldsee: A fictitious geographic name used by the Nazis to pacify the Hungarian Jews awaiting deportation. Deported Jews, many of them just prior to being gassed, were asked to write home messages of well-being from this "locality."

WRB: War Refugee Board, established by order of President Franklin Roosevelt in January 1944.

Yellow Star House: One of a series of buildings in Budapest, identified by a yellow star, in which thousands of Jews were concentrated in 1944.

Yishuv: Hebrew for settlement; usually denoting the Jewish community of Palestine (Israel).

1 HUNGARIAN JEWRY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Historical Background

According to some historians, a number of Jewish settlements existed during the Roman era in the area then called Pannonia; Magyar tribes conquered that territory toward the end of the ninth century. The number of Jews who lived in Hungary up to the end of the seventeenth century cannot be determined on the basis of convincing statistical evidence, but according to the census of 1700, the Jewish population of the country that year was 4,071. The growth of the Jewish population during the eighteenth century was relatively moderate, increasing from 11,621 in 1735 to 80,775 in 1787. By 1805 the number of Jews reached 126,620, constituting 1.8 percent of the total population. From this time on, the number and proportion of Jews increased more rapidly because of a relatively high birth rate and a higher level of immigration, especially from Moravia and Galicia. By 1850, the number of Jews in Hungary reached 339,816 (3.7 percent) and by 1880, 624,826 (4.4 percent). The Jewish population of Greater Hungary reached its peak in 1910, when it numbered 911,227 or 4.3 percent of the total population of 21 million.¹

During the revolution of 1848–49, the Jews sided with the forces of Lajos Kossuth in the struggle against the Habsburgs for Hungarian independence. In recognition of their patriotic stance, the Hungarian Jews were rewarded with full legal equality during the last weeks of Kossuth's revolutionary regime in 1849. The Habsburg repression that followed the crushing of the revolution, with the aid of the Russians, nullified that act. It was only after the Compromise of 1867 that established the Austro-Hungarian Empire that the legal equality of the Jews was formally recognized.²

THE “GOLDEN ERA”

After its emancipation in 1867, Hungary's Jewish community enjoyed an unparalleled level of multilateral development, taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the “liberal” regime that ruled the country during the pre–World War I era. The Hungarian ruling classes—the gentry and the conservative-aristocratic leaders—adopted a tolerant position toward the Jews. They were motivated not only by economic considerations, but also by

the desire to perpetuate their dominant political role in a multinational empire in which the ethnic Hungarians constituted a minority. Because of Hungary's feudal tradition, the ruling classes encouraged the Jews to engage in business and industry, so that in the course of time a friendly, cooperative, and mutually advantageous relationship developed between the conservative-aristocratic leaders and Jewish industrialists, bankers, and financiers. The Jews also took full advantage of their new educational opportunities and within a short time came to play an influential, if not dominant, role in the professions, literature, and the arts.³

As a consequence of the Hungarian policy of tolerance, many of the Jews of Hungary considered themselves an integral part of the Hungarian nation. They eagerly embraced the process of magyarization, opting not only to change their names but also to serve as economic modernizers and cultural magyarizers in the areas of the polyglot Hungarian Kingdom inhabited by other nationalities. Having no territorial ambitions and naturally supporting the group that offered them the greatest protection, the Hungarian Jews were soon looked upon as agents for the preservation of the status quo by the nationalities clamoring for self-determination and independence.

The Jews were well aware of the protection the regime provided against the threat of antisemitism. The prompt and forceful intervention of the government in dealing with anti-Jewish manifestations, however sporadic and local these were at the time, further enhanced the fidelity of the Jews to the Magyar state. Thus, in the course of time the Jews, especially the acculturated and assimilated ones, became ever more assertively pro-Magyar. In many cases their allegiance was due not only to expediency or gratitude for the opportunities and the safety afforded by the aristocratic-gentry regime, but also to fervent patriotism.

THE INTERWAR PERIOD

It was to some extent the political and economic symbiosis between the conservative-aristocratic and Jewish leaderships during the so-called Golden Era that determined the views and attitudes of the two leaderships toward both the Third Reich and the USSR during the interwar and wartime periods. Although the conservative-aristocratic leadership was more inclined to look upon the Third Reich as a vehicle for the possible satisfaction of Hungary's revisionist ambitions, both leaderships shared a fear of German and Russian expansionism and above all of Bolshevism.

Signs that the commonality of interests between the two groups was in fact limited, fragile, and based primarily on expediency clearly were visible even before the end of World War I: despite the eagerness with which Hungarian Jews embraced the Magyar cause and the enthusiasm with

which they became acculturated, with relatively few exceptions they failed to become fully integrated into Hungarian society. Their ultimate assimilationist expectations were frustrated: they were not accepted socially by either the aristocratic gentry, who exploited them politically and economically for the perpetuation of its feudal privileges, or by the disenfranchised and impoverished peasantry, who—as did a large proportion of the industrial workers—often viewed them as instruments of an oppressive regime.

Christian-Jewish relations were further strained by the presence in the country of a considerable number of mostly impoverished Yiddish-speaking Jews who resisted assimilation, let alone acculturation, and, in contrast to the assimilated magyarized Jews, were pejoratively referred to as “Eastern” or “Galician.” Gradually these nonassimilated Jews, almost by definition, began to be considered unworthy of the government’s policy of toleration. During the interwar period they became the target of special abuse, since even “civilized” antisemites regarded them as constituting not only a distinct “biological race” but also an “ideological race” constituting a grave threat to Christian Magyars.⁴

The mutuality of interests that provisionally bound the Hungarian ruling classes and the Jews came to an end with the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the dismemberment of the Hungarian Kingdom in 1918. The short-lived Communist dictatorship that followed soon thereafter had a crucial effect on the evolution of Hungarian domestic and foreign policy during the interwar period. The brief but harsh period of the proletarian dictatorship headed by Béla Kun left a bitter legacy in the nation at large, and had a particularly devastating effect on the Jews of Hungary. The overwhelming majority of Jews had opposed the proletarian dictatorship. Moreover, Jews probably suffered proportionately more than the rest of the population—they were persecuted both as members of the middle class and as followers of an organized religion. These facts notwithstanding, popular opinion tended to attach blame for the abortive dictatorship to the Jews as a whole. In part, this was due to the high visibility of Communists of Jewish origin in the Kun government; primarily, though, it was a consequence of the antisemitic propaganda and activities of the counterrevolutionary clericalist-nationalist forces that came to power in the late summer of 1919.

These forces were driven by the so-called Szeged Idea, a nebulous amalgam of political-propagandistic views including among its central themes the struggle against Bolshevism, the fostering of antisemitism, chauvinistic nationalism, and a revanchist revisionism that sought to undo the territorial consequences of the Trianon treaty. As an ideological pastiche and action plan it antedated both Italian fascism and German Nazism. In its sway, the counterrevolutionaries engulfed the country in a wave of terror that dwarfed in ferocity and magnitude the Red Terror that had preceded

and allegedly warranted it. While their murder squads killed a large number of leftists, including industrial workers and landless peasants as well as opposition intellectuals, their fury was directed primarily against the Jews; their violence claimed thousands of victims.

Radicalized by the national humiliation, social upheavals, and catastrophic consequences of the lost war—Hungary had lost two-thirds of its historic territory, one-third of its Magyar people, and three-fifths of its total population—the counterrevolutionaries organized themselves into a variety of ultrapatriotic associations devoted primarily to the successful resolution of the two major issues that came to obsess Hungary during the interwar period: revisionism and the Jewish question. In the course of time these two issues became interlocked and formed the foundation of not only Hungary's domestic policies but also its relations with the Third Reich.

Following the absorption of historic Hungary's major national minorities into successor states through the transfer of territories, the Jews clearly became the country's most vulnerable minority group—with the transformation of Trianon Hungary into a basically homogeneous state, they lost their importance as statistical recruits to the cause of Magyardom. In the new truncated state they came to be exploited for another purpose: as in Nazi Germany a little later, they were conveniently used as scapegoats for most of the country's misfortunes, including its socioeconomic dislocations.

In this climate it was no surprise that, in the wake of the White Terror, Hungary—the country in which the Jews had enjoyed a “Golden Era” just a few years earlier—emerged as the first country in post–World War I Europe to adopt anti-Jewish legislation. The so-called *Numerus Clausus* Act (1920), which was adopted in violation of the League of Nations' Minorities Protection Treaty, restricted admission of Jews into institutions of higher learning to 6 percent of the total enrollment—the alleged percentage of Jews in the total population. Although this particular legislation was allowed to expire a few years later, it sanctified the fundamental principle that was to guide many of the “civilized” antisemites of the 1930s who were eager to solve the Jewish question in an “orderly and legal” manner. This principle was later formulated by Gyula Gömbös, one of the foremost representatives of the Hungarian radical Right, who stipulated that “the Jews must not be allowed to succeed in any field beyond the level of their ratio in the population.”⁵

The Jewish leadership viewed the anti-Jewish measures of the counterrevolutionaries as merely temporary aberrations caused by the unfortunate outcome of the war, and retained its patriotic stance. The Hungarian Jewish leadership not only embraced the cause of revisionism, but actually protested and rejected all “foreign” interventions on behalf of that community—including those by international Jewish organizations—as

violations of Hungarian sovereign rights. Their optimism was reinforced for some years during the 1920s when Count István Bethlen, a representative of the conservative-aristocratic group of large landholders and financial magnates that had ruled Hungary before World War I, headed the Hungarian government. The Bethlen era was characterized by a domestic policy of consolidation and a foreign policy that aimed to undo the perceived injustices of Trianon with the aid of the Western powers and the League of Nations.

The appointment of Gömbös as prime minister in October 1932, coinciding with the spectacular electoral victories of the Nazi Party in Germany, brought about a significant departure from Bethlen's domestic and foreign policies, however, and from his treatment of the Jewish question. The Jewish issue soon became a national obsession that frequently rivaled revisionism in intensity. Borrowing a page from the Nazis' propaganda book, the Hungarian radicals depicted the Jews as naturally unpatriotic, parasitically sapping the energy of the nation, and prone to internationalist—that is, Bolshevik—tendencies. The propaganda campaign was soon coupled with demands for a definitive solution to the Jewish question. The suggestions offered by the radical Right at the time ranged from legal restrictions on the Jews' professional and economic activities to their orderly "resettlement" out of the country.

Although expediency and temporary tactical considerations induced Gömbös to "revise" his position on the Jewish question, his policies prepared the ground for the disaster that was later to strike Hungary and its Jews. He tied Hungary's destiny almost irrevocably to that of Nazi Germany. He not only abandoned Bethlen's reliance on the Western democracies and the League of Nations as a means to correct "the injustices of Trianon," but also brought Hungary's foreign policy into line with that of Nazi Germany and made possible the subsequent penetration by and direct involvement of the Reich in practically every aspect of the country's life. This was greatly facilitated by the formidable and potentially collaborationist power base Gömbös established during his tenure. He was able to replace the civil and military bureaucracies of the state apparatus with his own protégés, and also—and this was perhaps more crucial—to pack the upper army hierarchy, including the General Staff, with younger, highly nationalistic Germanophile officers. The stage for anti-Jewish excesses to come was further set through the radicalization of the press and the flourishing of ultra-rightist political movements and parties.

The spectacular domestic and foreign policy successes of the Third Reich in the late 1930s, including the *Anschluss* with Austria by which Germany extended its borders to those of Hungary, further encouraged the forces of the antisemitic Right. The Nazi victories also induced the successive Hungarian governments to embrace the Axis ever more tightly.

The Hungarian Rightists became increasingly eager to involve themselves in the establishment of the “New Order” in Europe and to reap the benefits of the Nazi revisionist-revanchist policies as an active member of the Axis Alliance.⁶ The pro-Reich policy was especially supported by the Germanophile General Staff and the right wing of the governing Hungarian Life Party.

This pro-Axis policy yielded considerable dividends, enabling Hungary to fulfill part of its revisionist ambitions. As a result of the so-called First Vienna Award by the Axis powers, Hungary was enabled to acquire the Felvidék (Upper Province) from Czechoslovakia in November 1938. Following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Hungary incorporated the region of Carpatho-Ruthenia. By virtue of the Second Vienna Award of August 30, 1940, it acquired Northern Transylvania from Romania, and, following the defeat of Yugoslavia in April 1941, it annexed the so-called Délvidék (Southern Region) area (see [map 1](#)).⁷

As full-fledged political allies of Nazi Germany, the aristocratic-conservative Hungarian leaders were soon compelled to come to grips with the ever more influential Right radicals at home. While they despised and feared the *Nyilas* radicals almost as much as did the Jews—those Hungarian “Nazis” had advocated not only the need to solve the Jewish question, but also the necessity to bring about a social revolution that would put an end to the inherited privileges of the conservative-aristocratic elements—the governmental leaders felt compelled to appease them as well as the Germans. In fact, these leaders looked upon the Right radicals’ preoccupation with the Jewish question as a blessing, in that it helped draw attention from the grave social-agrarian problems confronting the nation. They were, consequently, ready to adopt a series of anti-Jewish measures. These became more draconian with each territorial acquisition between 1938 and 1941.

The First Anti-Jewish Law (Law No. XV:1938) went into effect on May 29, 1938. It set a 20 percent ceiling on the proportion of Jews in the professions and in financial, commercial, and industrial enterprises employing more than ten persons. Enacted into law on May 4, 1939, the Second Anti-Jewish Law (Law No. IV:1939) went well beyond the scope of the first, restricting to 6 percent the proportion of Jews allowable in such enterprises. It even provided a detailed and complicated religious and “racial” definition of who was a Jew. Both laws were supported with various degrees of enthusiasm by the representatives of the major Christian churches. The Christian church leaders manifested some anxiety over the Third Anti-Jewish Law (Law No. XV:1941), by far the most brazenly racist piece of legislation ever adopted in Hungary, which affected a considerable number of their parishioners. The law, which emulated Nazi Germany’s Nuremberg

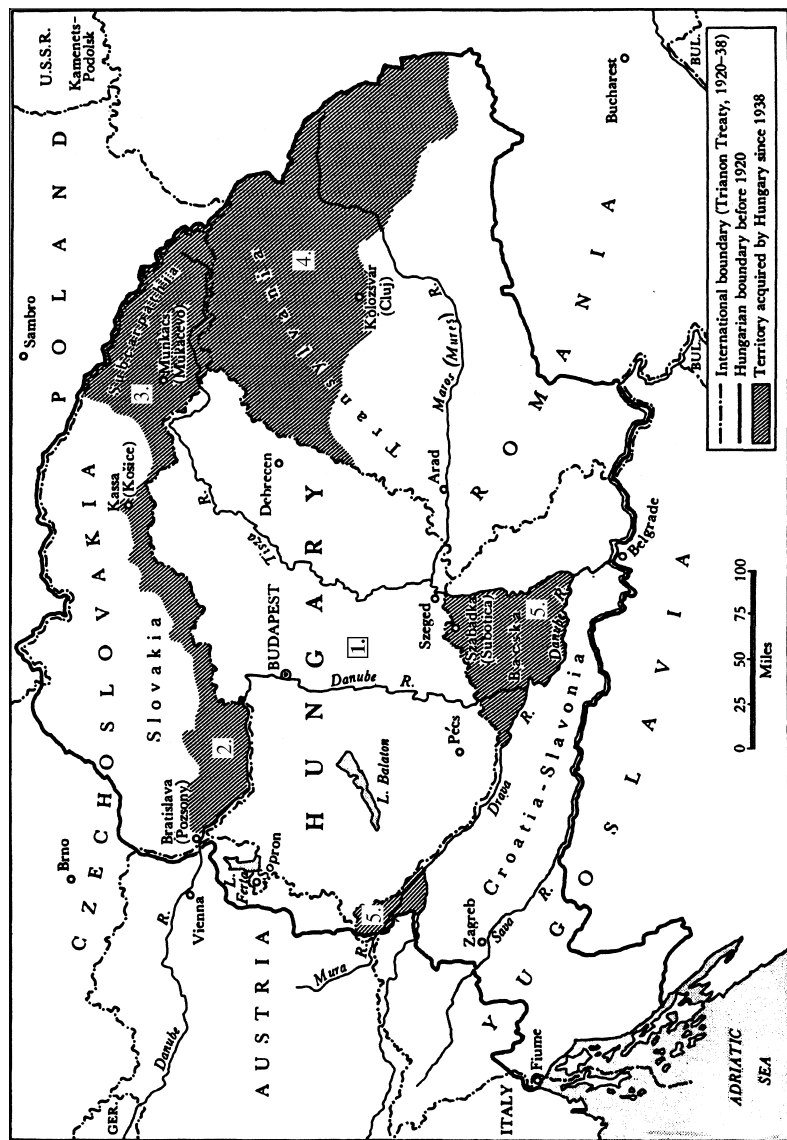
Law of 1935, went into effect on August 2, 1941. Among other things, it prohibited marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews.⁸

The three major anti-Jewish laws were succeeded by a large number of legislative acts and governmental decrees that had a devastating effect on the economic well-being of the Jews, impacting especially hard those in the middle and lower classes. The plight of indigent Jews, both indigenous and foreign, was partially alleviated by the relatively large network of educational-cultural institutions and social welfare organizations⁹ that were maintained individually or collectively by the three major Jewish denominations: the Neolog, Orthodox, and Status Quo.¹⁰

The anti-Jewish measures of the various governments were based on the illusions that guided the ruling elites until the German occupation. They thought that by passing laws that would curtail the Jews' economic power and eliminate their "harmful" cultural influence, they could not only appease the ultra-rightists—who thrived on the social and economic unrest that plagued the country—but also satisfy the Third Reich. The more moderate among them, the "civilized" antisemites, rationalized their stance by arguing that the anti-Jewish measures in fact safeguarded the vital interests of the Jews themselves. This rationalization was part of the larger quixotic assumption that Hungary could satisfy its revisionist ambitions by embracing the Third Reich without having to jeopardize its own freedom of action.

The upper strata of Hungarian Jewry, including the official national leadership, shared these illusions, convinced that the Jewish community's long history of loyal service to Magyardom would continue to be recognized and their fundamental interests safeguarded by the country's ruling elite. They accepted, however reluctantly, many of the anti-Jewish measures as reflecting "the spirit of the times" and as necessary tactical moves to "take the sting out of the antisemitic drive" of the ultra-rightists at home and abroad. They also tended to concur with the rationalizations of the governmental leaders that the anti-Jewish laws were "the best guarantee against antisemitism and intolerance."¹¹ In consequence, they were convinced that the safety and well-being of the Jews were firmly linked to the preservation of the basically reactionary conservative-aristocratic regime.

Indeed, as long as this aristocratic elite remained in power, the vital interests of Hungarian Jewry were preserved relatively intact, even during the war. The Hungarian regime continued not only to provide haven to many thousands of refugees from Poland, Slovakia, and other areas, but also consistently to oppose the ever greater pressure by the Germans to bring about the Final Solution of the Jewish question. While the Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe were being systematically annihilated, Hungary continued to protect its 825,000 Jews (including approximately 100,000



Map 1. Hungary, 1919-1945

1. Trianon Hungary; 2. Upper Province (*Felvidék*), 4,630 sq. m., acquired from Czechoslovakia in November 1938; 3. Carpatho-Ruthenia or Subcarpathia, 4,257 sq. m., acquired from Czechoslovakia in March 1939; 4. Northern Transylvania, 43,494 sq. m., acquired from Romania in August 1940; 5. The Bačka (Bácska), the Baranya Triangle, the Prekomurje (*Muravidék*), and the Medjumurje (*Muraköz*), 4,488 sq. m., acquired from Yugoslavia in April 1941.

converts identified as Jews under Hungary's racial law of 1941) until it virtually lost its independence in the wake of the German occupation of March 19, 1944.

Hungary's preoccupation record was not spotless, however. The Jews suffered more than sixty thousand casualties as a result of actions initiated by Hungarians. Most of these casualties were Jews who had been mobilized into the labor service system. The others were victims of the massacres that took place near Kamenets Podolsk in August 1941 and in and around Újvidék (Novi Sad) in January–February 1942.¹² Still, Hungarian Jewry could hardly foresee what was to follow.

2 THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The Jewish Community before the Holocaust

According to the census of 1941, Hungary had a population of 14,683,323, of whom 725,007 or 4.94 percent identified themselves as Jews. Of these, 400,981 lived in Trianon Hungary (184,453 in Budapest) and 324,026 in the territories acquired by Hungary in 1938–41: approximately 68,000 in the Upper Province and 78,000 in Carpatho-Ruthenia, acquired from Czechoslovakia in November 1938 and March 1939, respectively; 146,000 in Northern Transylvania, acquired from Romania in August 1940; and 14,000 in the area of the Bácska, acquired from Yugoslavia in April 1941. In addition, there were approximately 100,000 converts or Christians of Jewish origin who were identified as Jews under the racial laws then in effect. Of these, 89,640 lived in Trianon Hungary (62,350 in Budapest) and 10,360 in the acquired territories.¹

Overwhelmingly urban and patriotic, the Jews continued to play an important role in the modernization and capitalist development of Hungary even after the debacle of World War I. A relatively small percentage of them managed to maintain their leading position in the professions and the major sectors of the economy, including banking, industry, and commerce. However, in the wake of ever harsher antisemitic agitation and governmental policies, the great majority of the Jews could hardly eke out a living. This was especially true during the war years preceding the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. The impoverished Jews were supported by the Jewish congregations, which maintained a well-developed network of religious, educational, health, and welfare organizations.

The level of support varied from community to community, depending on the financial health of the central welfare organizations and of the local congregations. The larger communities had three types of congregations: *Neolog* (also known as Reform or Congressional), which consisted primarily of the assimilationist strata of Hungarian Jewry and which followed the modern ecclesiastical practices spearheaded by the Jewish community of Pest; *Orthodox*, which were composed overwhelmingly of anti-assimilationist Jews who clung to the traditional rituals and practices of Judaism; and *Status Quo*, the smallest, whose members usually followed

an “independent” course. During the interwar period, Hungarian Jewry had 267 major and 465 minor branch congregations. Of these, 104 and 131 respectively were Neolog, 149 and 321 Orthodox, and 12 and 13 Status Quo.² The Neolog congregations were almost always led by lay people. The Orthodox, although as patriotic as the Neolog, were usually led by rabbis. The ultra-Orthodox, including the mostly Yiddish-speaking Hasidim, were concentrated in the northeastern parts of the country, mostly in Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania.

The local congregations operated under the guidance of their particular national organizations. The nature and limits of their authority were determined by the government. The central leadership of Hungarian Jewry was dominated by the Neologs, who also controlled most of the congregations in Trianon Hungary. Consisting of rich, patriotic, and generally conservative elements, this leadership was firmly committed to the values and principles of the traditional conservative-aristocratic system. Firmly identified with the revisionist aspirations of Hungary, it was convinced throughout the pre-occupation era that the basic interests of Jewry were intimately intertwined with those of the Magyars. Like most Hungarian Jews, the leaders proudly identified themselves as “Magyars of the Israelite faith.” As a result, they tended to view the rise of antisemitism and the consequent adoption of anti-Jewish measures as a legal and constitutional issue confronting the entire nation and a reflection of the spirit of the times. They remained convinced that, unlike the Jewish communities in the neighboring countries, the Jews of Hungary would survive the war, enjoying the physical protection of the conservative-aristocratic Hungarian government.

The Era before the German Occupation

The entry of Hungary into World War II in late June 1941 marked a new watershed for the country’s Jewish community. During the first few months of the war, the status of the Hungarian Jews worsened considerably. Already subject to two major anti-Jewish laws restricting their economic and professional activities, the Jews were now subjected to additional restrictions stipulated in an openly “racial” law—the so-called Third Anti-Jewish Law. As we already have seen, under its provisions, many converts and Christians of Jewish ancestry were identified as Jews, and Jews were prohibited from engaging in marital or sexual relations with Christians. Under the impact of the euphoria associated with the early victories against the Soviet forces, the Jews became the object of a vicious propaganda campaign that identified them not only with the evils of Communism, styled “Judeo-Bolshevism,” but also with the economic ills of Hungary. Nationalistic, patriotic, and rightist elements demanded that in addition to the expansion of Hungary’s military

contribution to the war effort, the country also emulate Nazi Germany's Jewish policies, including the "resettlement" of the Jews.

Urged on by a venomous antisemitic press campaign and the government's anti-Jewish domestic policies, public opinion took a sharp swing to the right. The Jews were soon blamed not only for the country's involvement in the war, but also for all of the domestic evils associated with it, including the increasing shortages of goods and the flourishing black market. They were highly vulnerable to these accusations since they played a very important role in business, industry, trade, and finance: although, as in every country at war, hoarding was practiced by practically the entire population, the shortages and the consequent price rises were attributed exclusively to "the machinations of the Jews."

The traditional antisemitism of the Christian middle classes was exacerbated by a commensurate increase in their sympathy with and admiration for the Third Reich, an attitude that was increasingly shared by ever larger numbers of industrial workers and peasants. In this atmosphere of anti-Jewish hysteria, new measures were constantly demanded and adopted against the Jews. Order after order was issued relating to service by Jews in special labor service companies or to the implementation of the various anti-Jewish laws, further aggravating the situation of those Jews in business and the professions. Toward the end of 1941, a draft law was introduced that eventually reduced the status of the Israelite Confession from "received" or accepted to merely "tolerated."³

Harsh as these measures were, however, they did not shake the basic confidence of the Hungarian Jews, and especially of the assimilated ones, that they were in no physical danger. This confidence was partially based on their conviction that the conservative-aristocratic leadership, with which they had many economic and personal connections, would continue to protect them as in the past. Tragically, this confidence on the part of the Hungarian Jewish leaders that the community, though economically ruined and somewhat diminished, would survive the war in a position strong enough to assure its quick rehabilitation was partially also the cause of what befell them after the German occupation of the country on March 19, 1944. The central Jewish leadership failed to take any precautionary contingency measures and neglected to inform the local leaders or the Hungarian Jewish masses about the Final Solution program being implemented in the other parts of Europe—a program whose details and dimensions became increasingly clear to them starting in mid-1942. They remained adamant in their position despite three major events that shocked the community as well as the decent strata of Hungarian society itself long before the German occupation: the roundup and massacre of the "alien" Jews; the massacres in the so-called Délvidék area; and the exacerbation of the labor service system. They were inclined

to view these events merely as aberrations soon to be corrected, rather than as a possible prelude to future violence.

Roundup and Massacre of the “Alien” Jews

Following the annexation of Austria in March 1938, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia between November 1938 and March 1939, and the subsequent German occupation of Poland in September 1939, a large number of people sought refuge in Hungary. Of these, according to various estimates, from 15,000 to 35,000 were Jews, mostly Austrian, German, Polish, and Slovak in origin.⁴ Some of these Jews lived in Hungary as Aryans, having acquired false identification papers; others lived at liberty, having obtained official residence permits; still others enjoyed their freedom as “transients” en route to Palestine, a status they acquired through the efforts of the pro-Zionist Palestine Office of Budapest. A number of the Jewish refugees lived in internment camps, of which the most important facilities were those of Csörgő, Garany, and Ricse. Whatever the basis of their stay in Hungary, all had to register with the National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH), the agency having jurisdiction over foreign nationals living in Hungary.⁵

The functions and responsibilities of the KEOKH increased dramatically in the wake of the outbreak of World War II, when ever larger numbers of refugees began arriving. Following Hungary’s entry into the war against the Soviet Union on June 27, 1941, and the subsequent acquisition of military-administrative jurisdiction over a considerable portion of Ukrainian territory northeast of Hungary, two rabidly antisemitic KEOKH officers—Ödön Martinides and Árkád Kiss—devised a plan for the settlement of the “alien” Jews in the newly “liberated” areas. They justified their plan for the expulsion of the “Polish and Russian Jews” on the premise that these Jews, who had found themselves unemployed in the wake of the anti-Jewish measures in Hungary, could start a new life in Galicia. They first contacted Miklós Kozma, a former minister of the interior in the Gömbös government during the mid-1930s, who was then government commissioner in Carpatho-Ruthenia. Kozma was as enthusiastic about the plan, as were Chief of the General Staff Henrik Werth and Minister of Defense Károly Bartha, the two government officials he mobilized for its implementation. They persuaded Prime Minister László Bárdossy, who, in turn, convinced the Council of Ministers of the viability of the plan. The only member of the Council who reportedly opposed the plan was Minister of the Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer. The Council agreed “to expel from Carpatho-Ruthenia all persons of dubious citizenship and to hand them over to the German authorities in Eastern Galicia.” Overall command for the implementation of the plan, which went beyond the framework of Carpatho-Ruthenia, was

entrusted to Kozma. The “legislative” framework for the expulsion of the “alien” Jews was provided by Nándor Batizfalvy, a KEOKH officer. Based on the resolution of the Council of Ministers, Batizfalvy worked out the “resettlement” details, which were subsequently incorporated in Decree No. 192/1941, issued on July 12, 1941. The decree was supplemented by a secret directive issued by Sándor Siménfalvy, the KEOKH head, emphasizing that the major objective of the plan was the “deportation of the recently infiltrated Polish and Russian Jews in the largest possible number and as fast as possible.” The plan called for the Jews to be taken to the town of Körösmező, near the Polish border, where they would be handed over to the military authorities.

With the formalities completed, the KEOKH authorities began the roundup of the “alien” Jews, many of whom were of Polish birth or background. Among them, however, were also a considerable number of Hungarian Jews who could not prove their Hungarian citizenship simply because their papers were not immediately available. Some Jewish Hungarian citizens were arrested simply because they were in the way of the local authorities. Thus the entire Jewish community of Putnok, consisting almost exclusively of indigenous Jews, was transferred to Körösmező. The “alien” Jews who were rounded up in Budapest were concentrated in the Rumbach Street synagogue and in the Jewish community establishments in Magdolna, Páva, and Szabolcs streets. Most were picked up at night with only a few hours’ notice.

The roundup was especially harsh in Carpatho-Ruthenia, where many a Jewish community was uprooted as a whole. Although the Jews were technically allowed to take along provisions for three days, because of the speed with which they were picked up, most of them could take along only the food they happened to have in the house at the time. The Jews were “assured” by the Hungarian officials that they were being relocated to Poland, where they would take over the homes vacated by the Jews who had retreated with the Soviet forces. The “alien” Jews were crammed into freight cars for the trip to Körösmező, which often lasted from twenty-four to forty-eight hours. From this collection point, the Jews were transferred across the border at the rate of about 1,000 a day. By August 19, 1941, 15,567 Jews had been handed over to the SS. Approximately 3,000 more had been transferred by the end of the month, when the operation was completed. The transferred Jews were first taken by the SS in trucks to the vicinity of Kolomea (Kolomyia). From there they were marched in columns of three to four hundred to temporary homes around Kamenets-Podolsk. En route they often were attacked by armband-wearing Ukrainian militiamen, who robbed them of their possessions. Those who refused to yield their valuables were killed. In the area of Kolomea and Kamenets-Podolsk, which had been

vacated by Soviet troops only a few weeks earlier, there were still a few indigenous Jews left. Most of these, however, were women and children, who could offer little besides shelter to some of the deportees from Hungary.

The Germans were unprepared for the mass arrival of the Jews from Hungary. At first they actually requested that the deportations stop, as they “could not cope with all these Jews,” who constituted “a menace to their lines of communication.” Since the Hungarians refused to take them back, the problem was solved at a conference on August 25, when the participants, mostly Wehrmacht officers, were assured by *SS-Obergruppenführer* Franz Jäckeln, the Higher SS and Police Leader in the area, that he would “complete the liquidation of these Jews by September 1, 1941.”

The extermination of the Jews deported from Hungary was carried out on August 27–28. According to an eyewitness account, the deportees were told that in view of a decision to clear Kamenets-Podolsk of Jews, they would have to be relocated. Surrounded by units of the SS, their Ukrainian hirelings, and reportedly a Hungarian sapper platoon composed of Swabians, they, together with the indigenous Jews of Kamenets-Podolsk, were compelled to march about ten miles to a series of craters caused by bombings. There they were ordered to undress, after which they were machine-gunned. Many of them were buried while gravely wounded but still alive. The number of victims executed at Kamenets-Podolsk cannot be established with any degree of accuracy. In his Operational Report USSR No. 80, dated September 11, 1941, Jäckeln put the total number of those shot at Kamenets-Podolsk at 23,600—the first five-figure massacre in the Nazis’ Final Solution program. Of these, approximately 16,000 were Jews from Hungary. Of the close to 18,000 deportees from Hungary, only about 2,000 survived. Of these, a few managed to escape with the aid of Polish peasants or by bribing Hungarian military personnel. Others presumably tried to survive by crossing into Soviet-ruled territory or hiding. The escapees who returned to Hungary told a harrowing story of suffering and mass murder. The details about the mass executions were brought to the attention of Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, the enlightened minister of the interior, who put an immediate end to the deportations.⁶

The Délvidék Massacres

No sooner had the storm over the Kamenets-Podolsk massacres subsided than a new series of atrocities rocked the liberal stratum of the nation in general and the Jewish community in particular. This time it involved the “military campaign” to clear the Délvidék—as the Hungarian-occupied part of Yugoslavia was called—of the ever-more-active pro-Tito partisans. In

response to the increasingly daring forays of the partisans, the Hungarian authorities decided to “smoke out the nest.”

They first focused their attention on the so-called Sajkás area, the part of the Bácska encompassing the triangle formed by the confluence of the Danube and the Tisza Rivers. On January 4, 1942, units of the local gendarmerie staged a house-to-house search in and around the village of Zsablya, in the course of which six gendarmes were killed. Unable to cope with the situation, the local administrative officials and gendarmerie called upon the government to send in reinforcements. Authorized by the Council of Ministers, Gen. Ferenc Szombathelyi, chief of the General Staff, instructed Gen. Ferenc Feketehalmy-Czeydner, commander of V Army Corps stationed in nearby Szeged, to assist the local gendarmerie and police units. A vocal Germanophile and a rabid antisemite, Feketehalmy-Czeydner decided to teach the local partisans a lesson. He ordered three infantry battalions under the command of Col. László Deák into the area. The combined gendarmerie-military units were reinforced with the “home guards,” consisting almost exclusively of Hungarians and Germans living in the area.

Although order had already been reestablished in Zsablya through the execution of six partisans, the Hungarian officers, staging several pitched battles in the area, decided to teach Zsablya and the neighboring communities, including Boldogasszony, Csurog, Gyurgyevo, Mosorin, Sajkás-györgye, and Titel, a lesson. They had these communities surrounded and many of their people massacred. Since many of the officers involved in these massacres considered the Jews to be their natural enemies and by definition actual or potential partisans, they directed much of their fury against the helpless Jewish population in these communities.

On the basis of Feketehalmy-Czeydner’s official report on the events in the Sajkás area,⁷ the Hungarian authorities decided on January 12 to extend the “combing” operations to Újvidék (Novi Sad) itself. Immediate command at Újvidék was entrusted to Maj. Gen. József Grassy, who entered the city with a body of troops on January 20. He was accompanied by Capt. Márton Zöldi, a rabid antisemite, who led a detachment of gendarmes from Szekszárd. That same day Feketehalmy-Czeydner held a meeting with the police, gendarmerie, and military officers entrusted with the operation, informing them that the city would be taken over for three days in order for it to be “cleaned up,” and warning them “against the danger of using arms too late.”

The raid began the following morning, the city having been divided into eight operational sectors. During the first day about six thousand to seven thousand “suspects” were brought before hastily organized “screening

committees.” Of these, fewer than one hundred were detained, and from fifteen to fifty were shot and thrown into the Danube after the most summary examination. On January 22, however, events took a more ominous turn. The leaders of the raid decided to take hostages from among the “wealthier strata” of the population, which, of course, meant the Jews. The troops, already indoctrinated in antisemitism, were further incited by the possibility of booty, the receipt of extra rations of rum, and “revelations” by Zöldi that his gendarmes had been fired upon. Zöldi in fact staged the “attack” on his troops and submitted the “evidence” by parading some of his “wounded” and bandaged gendarmes before a civilian and military audience.

In reprisal for the “attack,” Feketehalmy-Czeydner ordered the mass execution of the hostages. The operation was extended to several parts of the city, where groups of Jews and Serbs were executed at random. By far the most savage atrocities took place at the Danube beach, the so-called Strand. Force-marched or brought in by truck, the victims were ordered to strip and stand in rows of four to await their execution. Most of these unfortunate people were shot from the diving board into the Danube, whose ice had been broken by cannon fire. According to eyewitness accounts, many of the victims, including children, begged to be killed because the “cold was unbearable.” The thermometer that day read -30°C (-22°F). The execution squad at the Strand was headed by Gusztáv Korompay.

Although the full extent of the massacres was revealed only after the thawing waters of the Danube relinquished their victims in the spring, news of the atrocities reached Budapest almost immediately. Among those who informed Keresztes-Fischer about the horrors perpetrated in Újvidék and other parts of the Bácska was Leó Deák, the Prefect of Bács-Bodrog County. Although the orders for the suspension of the “raids” were issued on January 22, the massacres continued, albeit at a less intensive pace, for another twenty-four hours in Újvidék and for about a week in many other parts of the Délvidék.

The Délvidék “raids” claimed 3,309 victims, including 141 children and 299 elderly men and women. Of these, close to 2,550 were Serbs and about 700 Jews. In Újvidék alone 879 people were killed, including 53 women and children and 90 elderly men. Of the Újvidék victims, 550 were Jews, 292 Serbs, 13 Russians, and 11 Hungarians.⁸ Details about the massacres were revealed only after the lifting of the curfew, when many refugees and visitors from the Délvidék arrived in Budapest in late February 1942. The gruesome accounts of the atrocities perpetrated by Hungarian soldiers and gendarmes under the order of high-ranking officers who were mostly of Swabian-German background enraged most decent Hungarians, and even more so the Jewish strata of the population. Demands for an inquiry into the affair became increasingly vocal and questions about it were raised in

both houses of the Hungarian Parliament. At first, the government accepted the military's version of the events. It was only well after the appointment of Miklós Kállay as prime minister that the affair received the proper attention, and this was due largely to the pressure exerted by Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, the Smallholder deputy.

Following a new and more detailed investigation of the massacres, the fifteen leading officers in charge of the "raids" were brought to trial on December 14, 1943. This was at a time when Hungary, following the crushing defeat of the Second Hungarian Army earlier in the year and Italy's extrication from the war, was actively pursuing an honorable way out of the Axis alliance. Although the defendants contended that they had acted on direct orders from their superiors, they were found guilty and sentenced to long years of imprisonment. The four leading defendants, however, including Feketehalmy-Czeydner and Márton Zöldi, escaped to the Reich on January 15, 1944, violating the military honor code of their country. They returned to Hungary with the German occupation forces a few months later and took an active part in the implementation of the Final Solution program. They and most of the other officers involved in the Délvidék massacres were arrested after the war and received their due punishment at the hands of the Yugoslavs.⁹

The Labor Service System

BACKGROUND

The military-related labor service system operated by Hungary during World War II was unique. No other member of the Axis alliance had as comprehensive and multifaceted a forced labor system as did Hungary. This system encompassed hundreds of thousands of Jewish men of military age classified as "unreliable" and thus deemed unfit to bear arms. Organized into military formations under the command and supervision of Hungarian officers and guards, these men were supplied with tools and were employed primarily in road building, mining, rail line construction and maintenance, and fortification work for the military within Hungary and in many Hungarian and German-occupied parts of the Ukraine and Yugoslavia. Along the front lines, especially in Galicia and the Ukraine, they were also used for road maintenance, snow removal, clearing minefields, and carrying munitions. Although the system was originally envisioned for all "unreliable elements," including Communists, Romanians, Serbs, and Slovaks, it was used primarily as a vehicle for the "solution" of the Jewish question in the country.

The system of labor service for those deemed politically unreliable for regular military service was first introduced late in 1919 by officers associated with the counterrevolutionary forces that came to power a year later.

The first labor detachments, composed of “interned political prisoners,” were set up in December 1919. Since the counterrevolutionary forces considered the Jews to be leftist-oriented, a considerable percentage of these labor detachments was composed of Jews. Placed under the leadership of “suitable and energetic officers,” the labor detachments were theoretically employed on public projects of urgent national interest. Many of the proposals for these units advanced in 1919, including the wearing of civilian clothes instead of uniforms and of special armbands to distinguish the labor servicemen from other recruits, were introduced only during World War II.

The labor service system was established and evolved on the basis of a provision incorporated in the comprehensive law relating to national defense. Adopted as Law No. II in 1939, the legislation regulated all facets of the national defense system. Although it was obviously not directed against the Jews, some of the law’s provisions were subsequently used as the legal basis for the introduction of the compulsory labor service system. After the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, some provisions of the law were also cited as judicial justification for the implementation of the Final Solution program. Among the more important provisions in this respect were those included in Article 141, which gave the government extraordinary emergency powers in times of war or threat of war, and in Articles 87–94, which stipulated that all persons between the ages of fourteen and seventy were liable to work for the defense of the nation to the limit of their physical and mental capacities.

The legal basis for the labor service system was provided by Article 230. According to its first paragraph, all Hungarian citizens twenty-one years of age who were classified as permanently unsuitable for military service could be compelled to engage in “public labor service” in special labor camps for a period not exceeding three months at a time. The original intent and scope of the labor service system could not be immediately discerned. On the surface, they were not exclusively or even necessarily discriminatory in nature, for those conscripted into this service were envisioned to receive the same pay, clothing, and rations as those in the armed forces. As it turned out, however, they reflected the practices of the counterrevolutionary era, when “unreliables” had been systematically excluded from the military. The system was also used for the gradual elimination of the Jews from the country’s cultural and socioeconomic life. The strictly military goals of the labor service system were basically of only secondary importance.

The details of the implementation of Article 230 were left to be worked out by the Ministry of Defense. The Ministry officials entrusted with this task adopted on March 31, 1939, the definition of “Jew” incorporated in the draft legislation then before the Hungarian Parliament and subsequently

adopted as Law No. IV in 1939.¹⁰ They could not, however, agree on the substance of the issue before them, as they represented different ideological positions of the Right.

One of the participating officers proposed that the Jews be grouped in separate companies and assigned to the fighting troops under strict supervision and command. Another officer suggested that the Jews be placed into special units and deployed in front of the Christian detachments. The minister of defense argued that the Jews should be placed into special labor service companies.

Another set of arguments was advanced during the April 4, 1939, meeting of the Presidential Section of the Ministry. The major proposal emanating from this meeting was that no Jews were to be admitted into the officers' training schools, but that Jewish recruits were to be allowed to bear arms, for otherwise, "Jewish blood would be saved at the expense of the Christians." These Jewish soldiers were to be intermixed with the Christian units, because if they were to be placed into segregated units, "they would surrender more easily, escape to the enemy, or commit treason."

On April 12, 1939, the Presidential Section adopted a series of guidelines for the implementation of the anti-Jewish laws within the armed forces, which were three days later adopted with minor changes by the Leadership Conference of the Ministry. Accordingly, commissioned officers and their spouses were required to prove that all four of their grandparents had been Christian, while noncommissioned officers had only to prove that their parents were Christian. Jewish retired officers were allowed to retain their rank, but could not receive combat assignments when recalled to service or in times of mobilization.¹¹

ORGANIZATION OF THE LABOR SERVICE SYSTEM

The general principles underlying the objectives of the labor service system as well as the provisions relating to its organization, structure, and administration were incorporated in Decree No. 5070/1939.M.E. of the Council of Ministers, signed into effect on May 12, 1939. The decree stipulated that the primary objectives of the labor service system were to:

- Train or retrain the young men recruited for labor service in accordance with their aptitudes.
- Employ those in the service to satisfy the needs of the armed forces and to meet the requirements of defense work.
- Utilize them for any other work of public interest with the approval of the Ministry.

Under the decree, the recruitment agencies had the responsibility of determining whether the recruits were fit for armed service, labor service, or neither. Those selected for labor service were to serve for a period not exceeding three months at a time in special labor camps that were identified as “militarily organized worker units.” The number, character, and internal organization and supply of the camps were to be determined by the minister of defense, who (through the particular army corps command) also had jurisdiction over matters of command, discipline, training, and specific organizational details. He exercised supreme command over the labor camps through the National Superintendent of the Public Labor Service System (KMOF). The latter was appointed by the head of state from among the generals of the armed forces upon the recommendation of the minister.¹²

The labor service system went into effect on July 1, 1939. Among the first to be called up for labor service were those born in 1916 who had previously been classified as unfit to bear arms. During the first phase of its operation, the call-up and induction were not very different from those in effect in the armed forces as a whole. The labor servicemen were required, like all other recruits, to report to their local recruitment centers. Following the usual medical checkup and classification, they were assigned to companies formed within the framework of public labor service battalions that operated under the jurisdiction of the eight army corps commands in existence at the time.¹³

The size of the companies varied from 200 to 250 labor servicemen, who were subdivided within each company into platoons. In many cases the platoons were further subdivided into squads. Instead of rifles, the labor servicemen were supplied with shovels or pickaxes. They had to address their officers in the traditional fashion, using titles of rank. Although the labor servicemen were clearly identified as “unreliable” on racial and political grounds, their treatment during the system’s first year at least was basically the same as that accorded to the Christian recruits in the armed forces. They had the same pay, received the same rations, and were subjected to the same rigorous discipline. They were also on a par in terms of family assistance and welfare benefits for the disabled. The only difference in uniform was that those assigned to labor service had an *M* (*Munkaszolgálat*; labor service) made of green fabric sewn on their lapel.

In 1940, the labor service companies were put to work in a series of projects of interest primarily to the military. Many of them were sent to clear the woods—especially along the frontier with Romania. Others worked on road construction, the dredging and clearing of rivers, the unloading of freight at train yards, and the building and maintenance of airfields. Labor servicemen were occasionally also allocated for work on large estates. The

conditions of labor were still quite tolerable, and a considerable number of labor servicemen enjoyed certain privileges that were quite remarkable given the general antisemitic climate at the time. For example, Jews working in labor companies stationed near their homes or those of friends and relatives were permitted to eat and sleep away from the company. Many of the richer Jews, moreover, managed to either “buy” their way out of the service or, if recruited, to free themselves of “dirty work” by paying poorer comrades.

During the first two years of the system’s operation, the labor servicemen were still given standard military uniforms, although without any insignia or signs of rank. Their military documents were identical to the ones provided for the Christian servicemen, and they were required to carry standard documents and identification on their persons at all times, including the pay-book and the dog tag. The Ministry of Defense and its subordinate units used the same forms for both arms-bearing and labor servicemen for all service-related administrative processes including call-up, discharge, and furlough.

RADICALIZATION OF THE SYSTEM

The status of the labor servicemen changed for the worse shortly after the annexation of Northern Transylvania in September 1940. At this time the domestic and foreign policies of Pál Teleki’s government took a sharp turn to the right in response to internal political pressure and the general realization that the country’s further revisionist ambitions could be achieved only in closer cooperation with the Third Reich. The point of no return was reached with Hungary’s involvement in the war against Yugoslavia in April 1941, when the status of the labor service system was also radically changed.

The initiative for the further regulation of the labor service system was taken by the Ministry of Defense, relying on Article 141 of Law No. II of 1939 as the “legal” justification for its actions. Having received the approval of the Ministry of Justice, it was translated into Decree No. 2870/1941.M.E., which was issued by the Council of Ministers over the signature of László Bárdossy, the new prime minister, on April 16, 1941. The Jewish leaders and their friends immediately recognized the ominous implications of the decree and gave vent to their feelings in a lengthy memorandum addressed to the government on April 23. The indirect response came the following day, when Bárdossy outlined in the Hungarian Parliament his government’s plans for a new and more radical anti-Jewish program. The forebodings of the Jewish leaders about the implications of the decree were fully substantiated on August 19, when the Ministry of Defense issued Order No. 27 300. eln.8.-1941 for its implementation.

The new order regulated all aspects of the new “auxiliary service” system (a term frequently used to denote the labor service system), affecting all Jews of military age. From that time on, all recruits assigned to auxiliary service were obliged to serve for two years. The Jewish officers were deprived of their rank and those among them who were still liable for service were compelled to fulfill their obligation as ordinary auxiliary labor servicemen. Their “officer’s discharge certificates” were recalled and replaced with new ones that no longer identified their ranks. These new certificates, like the corresponding sections of the military registers in which they were entered, were stamped, in clear emulation of the Nazi practice, with the letters “Zs” (*Zsidó*; Jew).

At the time the ministerial order was issued, Hungary had already been at war with the Soviet Union for almost two months. During the anti-Soviet crusade, the condition and status of the labor servicemen changed from bad to worse. This was reflected not only by the more aggressive antisemitic attitude of many of the commissioned and noncommissioned officers and guards attached to the field companies, but also by the increasingly blatant discriminatory treatment of the Jews as servicemen. They were, among other things, gradually deprived of their uniform. According to an order issued by the Minister of Defense on March 17, 1942, the “uniform” of the Jews in the field units was to consist of civilian clothes, an armband, and an insignia-free cap—a uniform that identified the Jewish labor servicemen as open targets for abuse.

The plight of the labor servicemen came to the fore in the fall of 1942, when many of them, and especially those stationed in the Ukraine, found themselves inadequately prepared for the Russian winter. Their civilian clothes, good as some may have been, were worn out or destroyed by the long marches and heavy physical labor to which the men had been subjected. Moreover, many of the labor service companies were under the command of especially sadistic officers and guards who subjected the Jews to so-called calisthenics (leapfrog, somersaults, crawling, and so on) after their heavy work.

The order requiring the wearing of a distinguishing armband was not generally enforced until the spring of 1942. Until that time, practices varied according to the attitudes of the company commanders. The Jews were required to wear a yellow armband; the converts and the Christians still identified as Jews under the racial laws were to wear a white one. The latter served in separate “Christian Labor Service Companies.” Although the lot of the converts was somewhat better, depending upon the attitudes of the officers and guards, they, like the yellow-armband-wearers, were easily identified as targets for abuse. This was especially so along the Ukrainian fronts and in and around Bor, Yugoslavia.

THE LABOR SERVICEMEN IN THE UKRAINE

Shortly after the government approved the deployment of the Second Hungarian Army in the battle against the Soviets, the number of labor servicemen assigned to serve along the front lines increased dramatically. Most of the tens of thousands of Jews recruited for service were called on an individual basis rather than by age group. They were issued emergency call-up notices that required them to report to duty within a week or less. By this practice, the Hungarian antisemitic authorities apparently aimed not only to satisfy the labor requirements of the military, but also to achieve certain “racial”-ideological objectives, including the partial “solution” of the Jewish question.

As a result, many of the Jews who were called up on an individual basis were those who had played a prominent role in their communities. Special attention was devoted to calling up the rich, the prominent professionals, the leading industrialists and businessmen, the well-known Zionist and community leaders, and above all those who had been denounced by the local Christians as “objectionable” elements. Many of these denunciations were made by greedy and morally bankrupt individuals who were eager to take over the businesses or professional practices of the Jews they denounced. Other denouncers were the local Baross Association, an antisemitic business organization; the counterintelligence services; and chapters of various professional organizations. Partially in response to pressures by groups such as these, the Ministry of Defense in fact issued a secret decree on April 22, 1942, ordering the KMOF and the commanders of the nine army corps to see to it that 10 to 15 percent of the field labor service companies was composed of Jews “well-known by their wealth and reputation.” The decree also authorized the recruitment of Jews in these categories even if they were above forty-two years of age, the limit specified by law for frontline service.¹⁴ Many of the Jews recruited on the basis of these directives were totally unfit for labor or any other service. A number of them were quite old or suffered from serious physical or mental illnesses.

Another group singled out for special punitive labor service consisted of individuals—both Jews and non-Jews—deemed “risky” on national security grounds. These included a considerable number of Communists and other leftists—many of whom were also of Jewish background—who at the time were in special internment camps for political detainees. Most of these were subsequently placed in “special”—that is, punitive—companies that were dispatched to the front lines. There they were clearly identified by yellow armbands with large black dots denoting their “criminal past.”

The Second Hungarian Army, consisting of about 250,000 men under the command of Gen. Gusztáv Jány, left the country early in April 1942.

It was accompanied by approximately 50,000 labor servicemen, grouped in various types of companies. In the Hungarian-occupied parts of the Ukraine and especially along the front lines, the labor servicemen were employed on a variety of projects of interest to the Hungarian and German military authorities. Among their tasks were the construction, clearing, and maintenance of roads and railroads (including snow removal); the loading and unloading of munitions, provisions, and other materials; and the performance of war-related technical tasks such as the building of trenches, tank traps, bunkers, and gun emplacements, and the removal of mines from the fields.

The various types of fortification work were extraordinarily demanding in the winter, when the soil was frozen and the shovels and pickaxes wielded by the emaciated and poorly clothed labor servicemen could hardly penetrate it. The clearing of the minefields, which sometimes involved marching over them, exacted large numbers of casualties. Often the men were made to assist in propelling the horse-drawn supply trains, especially along the passes and the rain-soaked mud roads, and on many occasions they were actually compelled to replace horses that had collapsed or died of exhaustion. Some especially sadistic company commanders made them pull the heavily laden wagons “to save the energy of the animals.” The conditions under which the labor servicemen lived and worked in the Ukraine were especially bad, primarily because of the viciously antisemitic attitude of many of the company commanders and guards—not to speak of the SS and German military police units that were rampaging in the area. The behavior of these officers and guards reflected not only their own virulently antisemitic attitudes, but also the instructions of their immediate superiors back home or at the front lines that went counter to the official governmental guidelines. Thus, for example, Lt. Col. Lipót Muray, the notorious “hangman of Nagykáta,” allegedly instructed his company commanders to make sure the labor servicemen did not come back home alive, since they were the enemies of the state. Indeed, many of the company commanders and guards acted on this premise, subjecting the labor servicemen to unimaginable cruelties.

The sacrificial attrition of the labor service companies, like that of the Second Hungarian Army as a whole, began in the wake of the Soviet breakthrough near Voronezh early in January 1943. The losses among the Hungarians, both Jews and non-Jews, were staggering.

In the chaos that followed the Voronezh debacle, many of the labor service companies simply disintegrated. The commanders and guards of many of these companies deserted their posts, leaving the Jews either under the control of a handful of subordinates or to their own fate. The straggling labor servicemen, bundled in their lice-infested rags and blankets, were subjected to unbelievable humiliation and torture during the long and tortuous retreat. With the logistics in disarray, they were deprived of even

the meager food rations they had received while their companies were still relatively intact. Occasionally, when they were driven out of their shelters by intruding German or Hungarian soldiers, they felt compelled to walk throughout the night to avoid freezing to death. Emaciated by hunger and the numbing cold and infested with lice, many of the labor servicemen who survived the debacle and escaped or avoided capture by the Red Army, having lost their resistance, succumbed to a variety of diseases of which typhoid fever was the most prevalent. In the absence of hospital facilities or medication, many of these died by the wayside.

Particularly cruel was the fate that befell the many labor servicemen, both ill and healthy, who were quarantined at Doroshich, a kolkhoz village located between Zhitomir and Korosten. The quarantine area was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. In their desire to attack the disease in a decisive fashion, the authorities decided on April 30, 1943, to set one of the barns, containing about eight hundred labor servicemen, afire. The living torches who leaped out of the flaming barn were machine-gunned by waiting guards.¹⁵ A report that was subsequently filed in response to a request by Gen. Vilmos Nagy, the benevolent minister of defense, claimed that the “fire had been inadvertently set by smoking Jews.”

THE ERA OF VILMOS NAGY

Ironically, some of the most intense suffering among the labor servicemen stationed in the Ukraine took place during the tenure of Gen. Vilmos Nagy, who did everything in his power to ameliorate their plight. Nagy replaced the Germanophile Károly Bartha on September 24, 1942, and served until June 12, 1943. Aware of the notoriously antisemitic atmosphere that prevailed in many sections of his Ministry, Nagy was soon to learn about the inhumane treatment of labor servicemen in the Ukraine. While paying a visit to Hitler’s headquarters near Vinnitsa shortly after his appointment as minister, Nagy went out of his way to talk with labor servicemen, showing their officers and guards that he regarded these men as “soldiers and human beings.” Upon his return, he reported his findings to the Council of Ministers as well as to the Parliament, recommending specific measures for improving their lot. In his endeavor to ameliorate the plight of the labor servicemen, Nagy issued a series of instructions stipulating that:

- The labor servicemen were no longer to be treated as POWs.
- Ill and unsuitable servicemen were to be discharged.
- The food rations were to be improved to enable the men to work.
- Corporal punishment and other forms of maltreatment were to be discontinued.

- Individuals responsible for the brutal treatment and blackmailing of labor servicemen were to be punished.¹⁶

The minister of defense's instructions had, for a considerable time at least, a generally positive effect upon the status of the labor servicemen stationed within Hungary. However, the officers and guards of most field units stationed along the front lines failed to heed either the instructions or the warnings of their superiors back home. There were, of course, many notable exceptions in which commissioned and noncommissioned officers and rank-and-file guards did everything in their power to protect and care for the labor servicemen placed in their charge. Some of them succeeded in returning their companies relatively intact. Others failed, but for reasons beyond their control.¹⁷

Ironically, it was Nagy's responsibility to issue a decree relating to the implementation of Law No. XIV of July 31, 1942.¹⁸ Enthusiastically supported by the rightist elements in both houses of the Hungarian Parliament, the law incorporated the provisions of the major decrees relating to the labor service system then in effect, using the openly racial Third Anti-Jewish Law as a basis for the definition of "Jew." The decree contained detailed provisions relating to the responsibilities of all Jews of military age, irrespective of their former ranks, and to the procedures for the determination of exemptions and disqualification from labor service. It also provided for the recall of all military-related documents issued to Jews and their replacement by new auxiliary-service identity cards with the letters "Zs" marked prominently on the front page.

Nagy claims that while he inherited the responsibility for issuing the decree from his predecessor, he did everything in his power to ameliorate some of its provisions.¹⁹ Presumably influenced by his observations at the front, where he met many Jews over the age of forty-two doing hard physical labor, Nagy issued a secret decree on November 6, 1942, providing for the call-up of Jews between twenty-four and thirty-three years of age and for the gradual replacement and eventual demobilization of those over forty-two. This decree dovetailed with Prime Minister Kállay's response to the ever-growing pressure by the Third Reich for a radical "solution" to the Jewish question in Hungary. Kállay issued an instruction stipulating that "all Jews of military age, whether suitable for military service or not," be directed into labor camps. However, this general call-up of the Jews was coupled to a resolution to bring about the gradual replacement and eventual demobilization of those over forty-two years of age doing hard physical labor, especially on the front lines.

The Germans lost no opportunity to manifest their displeasure over Nagy's humanitarian policies. They were particularly upset over his adamant

opposition to their request that Jewish labor servicemen be allocated for the exploitation of the copper mines at Bor, Yugoslavia. Yielding to pressure, Miklós Horthy, Hungary's head of state, had Nagy replaced by Gen. Lajos Csataj on June 12, 1943. A staunch opponent of Communism, Csataj was more sympathetic to Germany than his predecessor had been, but he was basically a professional soldier loyal to Horthy and to the conservative-aristocratic system he represented.

THE ORDEAL OF LABOR SERVICEMEN IN OCCUPIED SERBIA

Under Csataj, the Ministry of Defense reorganized the labor service system by consolidating the three major units under which the Jews and non-Jews had served, placing them under the central command of the newly established Labor Organization for National Defense. With General Nagy gone, the agreement for the deployment of Jewish labor servicemen at Bor, Serbia, was signed on July 2, 1943.²⁰ The labor servicemen scheduled for deployment in the copper mines were given a short furlough to enable them to acquire the necessary clothing and equipment. They were required to return to duty two days before their scheduled departure. The Hungarian authorities assumed the financial costs of the assigned labor service companies until they reached the border point at Prahovo, Serbia. From that point on, these burdens were assumed by the Todt Organization, the German agency in charge of the mining operations. As stipulated in the German-Hungarian agreement, the number of labor servicemen assigned to Bor increased steadily. By the time the Germans were compelled to evacuate the Balkans in September 1944, their number had reached close to 6,200.

Immediate command over the labor service companies was entrusted to Lt. Col. András Balogh, a brutish officer, who was later succeeded by Col. Ede Marányi, an even more ruthless sadist. Although under Hungarian military control and discipline, the labor servicemen worked under the immediate supervision of German technicians and foremen. They labored under grueling conditions for around eleven hours a day, receiving seven dinars and half a pound of bread and a portion of watery soup per day in compensation. Some of the labor servicemen were used to build the Bor-Zagubica railway line; others were engaged in road repair work. The majority, however, worked in the mines. Especially harsh was the lot of those building the access tunnel, which was five kilometers long and several hundred meters deep. These labor servicemen had to work in knee-deep water, breathing air filled with suffocating dust and explosive gas.

During their leisure time, including Sundays, they were often ordered out for "household" chores—cutting wood for the kitchen or doing repair work on the buildings. Some of the company commanders and guards

were especially cruel. On the slightest excuse they would hang the “culprits” by their hands, which were tied behind their backs, or subject them to a variety of other sadistic punishments. Harsh as their life was in and around Bor, however, worse was yet to come. Their life and death struggle began with their evacuation in mid-September 1944, when the Germans, fearing encirclement by the Soviet and Yugoslav partisan forces, decided to abandon the area.

The first contingent of Jewish labor servicemen, numbering about 3,600, was evacuated from Bor on September 17 under the escort of 1st Lt. Sándor Pataki, 2nd Lt. Pál Juhász, and about one hundred Hungarian guards. A few of the labor servicemen escaped or were rescued by the Yugoslav partisans. A few hundred of them were killed by the Germans and local Swabians. The survivors were first marched, under the most inhumane conditions, to near Belgrade. From there they were driven on through Újvidék to Cserevka, where they arrived on October 6. Close to 800 of the labor servicemen were marched on toward Zombor under the escort of Swabian SS-men and Bosnian Ustashi, the Croatian Nazis; those remaining in Cserevka were taken over by an SS unit and quartered in the local brickyard. The labor servicemen were immediately gripped by a foreboding that something terrible was about to happen. The day of October 7 was spent in terror, since the SS, in preparation for what was to come, had decided first to destroy the Jews’ spirit. The labor servicemen were tortured and, to exhaust their remaining energies, made to run from place to place all day. Shortly before midnight, the SS made them surrender all of their remaining valuables, including wedding bands, and then took them in groups of twenty to thirty to a huge pit nearby. The shooting ended around 4:00 a.m. on October 8, by which time from seven hundred to one thousand Jews had been massacred.²¹ The survivors were marched on by the SS toward Baja in Hungary, with many continuing atrocities during the journey. A few managed to escape along the way, but most of the labor servicemen who marched on ended up in German concentration camps, including Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Flossenbürg, Sachsenhausen, and Oranienburg.

The second contingent of around two thousand labor servicemen evacuated from Bor on September 29 was much luckier. Although the evacuation route was the same as that taken by the first group, they survived the war almost intact. When the column reached Zagubica, Serbian peasants who helped both columns along the way alerted the partisans. Careful not to hit the Jewish labor servicemen, the partisans attacked the soldiers, causing many casualties. The surviving guards surrendered without firing a shot. With the aid of one of the labor servicemen who spoke Serbo-Croatian, the partisans interrogated the Hungarian officers and guards, and executed about one hundred of them.²²

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION ERA

Ironically, after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, the labor service system turned out to be a source of rescue for many thousands of Jewish men threatened by deportation. While the Jewish labor servicemen in the Ukraine, Galicia, and Bor continued to suffer from the harsh and often cruel treatment of their superiors, those called up or actually volunteering for duty in the labor service companies stationed within Hungary fared comparatively well, at least until the *Nyilas* coup of October 15, 1944.

It is one of the ironies of history that the Ministry of Defense, which had been viewed as one of the chief causes of suffering among Jews during the previous years, suddenly emerged in 1944 as a major governmental institution actively involved in the saving of Jewish lives. The motivations behind the Ministry's actions are not absolutely clear. It is safe to assume that many national political, governmental, and military leaders, as well as many local commanders, aware of the realities of the ghettoization and deportation program and motivated by humanitarian instincts, did everything in their power to rescue as many Jews as possible. One of the most praiseworthy of these military figures was Col. Imre Reviczky, the commander of Labor Battalion No. X of Nagybánya. Under his direction, the Jewish men who appeared for service at his headquarters were immediately inducted and provided with food and shelter, irrespective of their age or state of health. His merit was recognized by Yad Vashem after the war when it honored him as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations."

Many Hungarian officials also changed their position in view of the manpower shortage from which the country was suffering at the time. To meet this crisis and in order to assure the continued production of the industrial and agricultural goods required by the military, the German and Hungarian authorities agreed to exempt about 150,000 able-bodied Jews from the "evacuation" measures associated with the Final Solution program. In opposition to the pressures exerted by the German and Hungarian elements in charge of the Final Solution program,²³ Minister of Defense Csatay proceeded with the implementation of this agreement, issuing instructions for Jewish males aged eighteen to forty-eight to report to their recruiting stations. By that time, however, many of the Jews already had been placed into ghettos and many others had in fact already been deported. The Ministry and the various labor battalion headquarters issued an unusually large number of emergency call-up notices that were hand-delivered in the ghettos.

On June 7, 1944, the Ministry of Defense issued a secret decree under which the labor servicemen were to be treated like POWs. On the surface, the decree was punitive in character (and it was so implemented in many companies), but in fact it was most probably designed to protect the

Jews from the danger of arrest by the SS and their Hungarian hirelings.²⁴ With the shortage of labor becoming progressively more acute, the government resorted increasingly to the recruitment of women into the labor service system. In 1943, the women served under the central administration of the National Superintendent of Labor Service for Women. Following the reorganization of the labor service system in 1944, they were placed, like all other labor service personnel, under the jurisdiction of the Labor Organization for National Defense. During the recruitment drive of 1944, priority was given to the call-up of women between eighteen and thirty who had been employed in Jewish enterprises.

The situation of the Jews still remaining in Hungary—that is, of those in labor service companies and in the capital—continued to improve during August and September 1944, following the replacement of Prime Minister Döme Sztójay's government by the one headed by Gen. Géza Lakatos, the former commander of the First Hungarian Army. This was, however, short-lived, for in the wake of Horthy's mismanaged attempt to extricate Hungary from the hopeless alliance with the Third Reich, the country was placed under the rule of the *Nyilas* on October 15, 1944.

THE NYILAS ERA

During this period the lot of the labor servicemen, like that of the surviving Jews of Budapest, turned from bad to worse.²⁵ In the new government of Ferenc Szálasi, the position of minister of defense was held by Lt. Col. Károly Beregfy, a notorious antisemite, who did everything in his power to exacerbate the position of the Jews. Less than a week after the seizure of power, he ordered the call-up "for national defense service" within two days of all Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and sixty and of all Jewish women between the ages of fourteen and sixty. On October 26, Beregfy authorized the transfer of a large number of labor service companies to the Germans, allegedly to build fortifications along the Hungarian-Reich borders for the defense of Vienna.²⁶

Jewish women were the subject of two additional call-up decrees issued on November 2 and 3. The first related to the call-up of women between sixteen and fifty years of age who knew how to sew; the other was a repeat of the order of October 26 and involved the call-up of women in the sixteen to forty age range for "national-defense-related labor service."

Shortly after their "recruitment," usually in the brickyards of Óbuda, thousands of these Jewish women were marched, together with regular labor servicemen, along what became known as a highway of death that led toward Hegyeshalom, near the Austrian border of the Reich.²⁷

With the inexorable advance of the Red Army, this area of Transdanubia was the place to which the *Nyilas* government concentrated most of the surviving labor service companies, including several of those stationed in Budapest. The latter, which included a few “protected” ones—i.e., those who enjoyed the protection of neutral countries, especially Sweden and Switzerland—were entrained at the Józsefvárosi Railway Station under conditions reminiscent of the deportations from the provinces. The number of Jewish labor servicemen handed over to the Germans is estimated at approximately fifty thousand.

The lot of these servicemen was not very different from that of the Jews in most notorious concentration camps. Particularly tragic was the situation of those stationed in and around Balf, Fertőrákos, Hidegség, Ilkajmajor, Kőszeg, Mosonszentmiklós, Nagycenk, and Sopron-Bánfalva, where hundreds upon hundreds were massacred. These massacres were but the culmination of the atrocities to which the labor servicemen had been subjected during and shortly before the *Nyilas* acquisition of power. On October 11, 194 members of Labor Service Company No. 101/322 were killed at the Kiskunhalas Railway Station by the SS and their *Nyilas* accomplices for having dared to share their rations with refugees on another train. Five days later, at Pusztavám, two companies from Jolsva numbering a total of close to 300 men—mostly physicians and pharmacists—were subjected to particularly cruel treatment. The SS and their Hungarian henchmen machine-gunned 216 of them (47 had escaped the day before) after they had, as ordered, first undressed themselves.

The surviving labor servicemen in the area were herded toward the Reich, where most of them ended up in the Mauthausen and Günskirchen concentration camps. The lot of the labor servicemen left in Budapest was just a shade better than that of those in western Hungary. A noteworthy exception was the fate of Company No. 101/359, the so-called Clothes-Collecting Company, which was under the command of László Ócskay, a very decent and humane officer. All servicemen under his command survived the war.

HUNGARIAN JEWS IN SOVIET POW CAMPS

Estimates of the number of Hungarian Jews in Soviet captivity vary from twenty thousand to thirty thousand. There were basically two types of labor servicemen in Soviet POW camps: those who escaped from their units in search of liberation from their terrible oppression and those (and these were the overwhelming majority) who were captured by the Red Army following the offensive around Voronezh in January 1943. In addition to the labor

servicemen, the Soviet POW camps also included a considerable number of civilian Jews who were captured (together with non-Jews) by Red Army units *after* the end of hostilities in Hungary. Tragically, some of these were survivors of concentration camps who had just returned after their long ordeal in Poland, Germany, and elsewhere. Their treatment in the POW camps was generally similar to that of other non-Jewish POWs, including German and Hungarian soldiers, although many with “good credentials,” that is, pro-Communist elements, were given preferential status. In most cases, the labor servicemen were kept in camps that also included captured German and Hungarian officers and soldiers; often they shared their captivity with their own former officers and guards. In some cases the labor servicemen were actually treated worse than were the Hungarian officers, since the camp commanders normally accorded officers the special treatment that was due to those with military ranks. The attitude of the Soviet officers and officials directly involved in the capture and subsequent placement of the labor servicemen into POW camps varied. There were many among them who were antisemitically inclined and who tried to admit absolutely no differentiation between other POWs and the labor servicemen, who, in their view, had been engaged in operations of great use to the enemy. On the other hand, there were also a considerable number of understanding officers and officials, who were aware of the Nazis’ Final Solution program and of the nature of the Hungarian labor service system. Many among these were Jewish, and some of them even spoke Yiddish. It was through their generosity that many a captured labor serviceman was enabled to “escape” from the temporary frontline camps and avoid being transferred to the POW camps in the Soviet Union. Many of the captured labor servicemen were emaciated and disease-ridden. Some of the luckier among these came to the attention of the Hungarian Communist leaders in exile in the Soviet Union, who took them under their care. The surviving labor servicemen were repatriated only after the conclusion of the peace treaties with Hungary and Romania in February 1947.²⁸

3 THE ROAD TO DESTRUCTION

Antecedents of the German Occupation

The German decision to occupy Hungary resulted from a series of political-military factors; the “unsolved” Jewish question, though important, was not the determining consideration. By the spring of 1944, the military pressures on Germany had become continual and frequently overpowering. The leaders of the Third Reich became extremely anxious to assure the absolute loyalty and subservience of their allies in East Central Europe. They were particularly concerned with the political developments in Hungary after the Voronezh debacle of January 1943, and even more so after Italy’s desertion from the Axis later that year. In his attempt to emulate Italy, Prime Minister Miklós Kállay adopted a series of measures that clearly irritated the Germans. He allowed a partial relaxation of censorship, resulting in open demands by the opposition press and politicians for withdrawal from the war; he recognized the Badoglio government of Italy; he attempted to purge the foreign service of the openly pro-Nazi elements; he ordered a new investigation into the Délvidék massacres and brought the leading officers responsible for them to trial; he continued to physically protect the Jews, though he called for a radical solution “after the war”; and, last but not least, he decided to order the repatriation of the Hungarian fighting forces “for the defense of the Carpathians.”

Although eager to extricate Hungary from the war, Kállay and his conservative-aristocratic government consistently refused the Allies’ advice to turn against the Germans even as moderately as declaring their readiness to defend their borders against a possible German occupation. Their dealings with the representatives of the Western Allies aimed not only to pull Hungary out of the war, but also—and above all—to prevent a Soviet occupation of the country: concerned with the preservation of the traditional socioeconomic order and national political values, they were mortally afraid of the rising specter of Bolshevik occupation. The military reverses notwithstanding, they were ready to continue the war on the side of the Third Reich rather than surrender unconditionally to the Soviets.

Kállay’s policies and intentions were revealed to Hitler through many channels, the most determinant of which was a report by Edmund

Veesenmayer, who later became Hitler's personal plenipotentiary in Hungary. Dated December 14, 1943, the report not only called for the replacement of Regent Horthy's advisers, but also identified the Jews of Hungary as "enemy no. 1" and as "Bolshevik vanguards." Veesenmayer's analysis was used by the Führer as justification for the occupation. In his order of March 12, 1944, Hitler stated:

For some time it has been known to me and to the Reich government that the Hungarian Kállay government has prepared Hungary's betrayal of the united European nations. The Jews, who control everything in Hungary, and individual reactionary or partly Jewish and corrupt elements of the Hungarian aristocracy have brought the Hungarian people, who were well disposed toward us, into this situation.¹

Although the German troop concentrations along the Hungarian border, which began in earnest during the first months of 1944, were brought to the attention of Kállay, he dismissed the "rumors" of an imminent occupation. He had been convinced that Germany would not risk losing its Hungarian lines of communication, which the Allies had tacitly agreed not to bomb as long as Hungary remained independent. He dismissed the intelligence reports about German intentions, calling them "tactical threats" aimed at inducing his government's resignation—a view that was clearly shared by the other members of the conservative-aristocratic elite. Consequently, contrary to the advice advanced by staunch anti-Nazi figures such as Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and Gen. János Kiss, who advocated "resolute counteraction and the arming of the workers," no attempt was ever made to alert the armed forces—and the nation—to any possible resistance. The fear of a possible Soviet occupation, which seemed more menacing in the long run than the immediate threat of a German occupation, paralyzed the Hungarian leaders' will.

The immediate issue that triggered the chain of events leading to the occupation was the Hungarian government's demand to withdraw its forces from the Ukraine, ostensibly to enable themselves to defend the Carpathians.²

Hitler's original plan to punish Hungary through the use of Croatian, Romanian, and Slovak forces was jettisoned at the recommendation of *SS-Sturmabführer* Wilhelm Höttl (Walter Hagen), then head of the Intelligence Service of the Security Police in Vienna. In a lengthy memorandum, which was forwarded to Hitler in a somewhat revised form by Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the chief of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), Höttl did far more than merely provide the rationale for the exclusion of the satellite troops. He also identified the basic approaches to be followed for persuading Horthy to remain head of state while inducing him to consent—as

the price for a “restricted occupation”—to the appointment of a pro-Reich, Right-oriented government and to the implementation of an “unconditional program” relating to the elimination of political undesirables and Jews.

In accordance with the provisions of the memorandum, Hitler signed and issued the order for Operation Margarethe I—the code name for the occupation—on March 12. In addition to the regular army and air force troops under the general command of Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, the order also provided for the inclusion in the occupation forces of special SS units to be provided by Heinrich Himmler. These were to be placed under the immediate control of Kaltenbrunner and to be used for the possible implementation of the Final Solution program. These special SS detachments were to consist of five hundred to six hundred Gestapo and Security Service (SD) men under the immediate command of *SS-Standartenführer* Hans Geschke and a two-hundred- to three-hundred-man Special Commando under the leadership of *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann, chief of Bureau IVB4 of the RSHA.

With the preparations for the occupation completed, Hitler invited Horthy to Schloss Klessheim, near Salzburg, ostensibly to discuss “the military situation in general and the question of the withdrawal of Hungarian troops” in particular.

THE SCHLOSS KLESSHEIM CONFERENCE

Although some of Hungary’s top leaders were at first inclined not to accept the invitation, they were persuaded by Gen. Ferenc Szombathelyi to attend. A delegation headed by Horthy³ arrived at Schloss Klessheim in the evening of March 17, 1944. During the following day parallel negotiations were conducted between Horthy and Hitler, between Ghyczy and Joachim von Ribbentrop, and between Csatay and Szombathelyi and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel. These were to a large extent one-sided, for the Germans had already decided on the occupation of Hungary. In his attempt to rationalize the fait accompli Hitler invoked his responsibility to the German people to prevent Hungary from emulating Italy’s “treachery.”

The Hungarian negotiators were prevented from returning until the occupation was well under way. They left with no written agreement, except for Hitler’s “assurances” that no satellite troops would be involved in the occupation—a promise the Hungarians accepted with a sigh of relief—and an assurance that the German troops (but not the SS units) would be withdrawn as soon as an “acceptable” government was formed. They were confronted with the reality of the occupation when their special train arrived on Hungarian soil on the morning of March 19. While still on the train, Horthy was introduced to two of the top Nazis who were to guide the destiny

of Hungary during the crucial months to come: Edmund Veessenmayer, who had just been appointed as the Führer's personal plenipotentiary, and Ernst Kaltenbrunner.

Many, though apparently not all, of the details of the fateful Schloss Klessheim Conference were revealed during the emergency Crown Council Meeting that was held almost immediately after the delegation's return to Budapest. Horthy informed the members of the government about his encounter with Hitler and his desperate though fruitless attempt to dissuade the Germans from occupying the country. He emphasized that Hitler had already made up his mind to prevent the "treacherous" activities of the Kállay regime, citing certain specific examples as evidence.⁴ Horthy's account was corroborated by the other members of his delegation.

At the same meeting, Kállay submitted the resignation of his government. Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, the benevolent minister of the interior and a major German target, reported on the police measures the SS had already implemented. The Council members approved Horthy's decision to stay on as head of state, presumably convinced that by his very presence Horthy would not only help protect the sovereignty of the country but also prevent the absorption of the Hungarian army by the Germans. After the war, Horthy offered still another rationalization for his decision to remain at the helm. In his *Memoirs*, Horthy claimed that while he was in charge, the Germans "could not attempt putting the Arrow Cross Party into office to do their deadly work of murdering Hungarian patriots, of exterminating the 800,000 Hungarian Jews and the tens of thousands of refugees who sought sanctuary in Hungary."⁵ In light of the fateful concessions he had made on the delivery of Jewish "workers" (discussed in the following), one must wonder about his expressed concern over the safety of the Jews.

Horthy's decision to continue in his position as head of state has emerged as one of the most controversial topics of postwar historiography. There is, however, considerable agreement on the conclusion that by his resolve to stay on and cooperate in the formation of the Sztójay government, Horthy accomplished several things:

- He legitimized the occupation and contributed to the placement of the entire Hungarian state apparatus at the service of the Germans; without this they could not possibly have established or maintained an orderly occupation.
- He pacified the Hungarian masses and thereby assured the maintenance of law and order that the Germans desired, guaranteed the uninterrupted continuation of war production, and caused the development of a quiescent spirit in the country.
- He contributed at least indirectly to the commission of the very mass crimes he feared the Arrow Cross Party would perpetrate in his absence.

Horthy's decision to stay on but at the same time to withdraw himself from active leadership and give his newly appointed Sztójay government a free hand in the management of state affairs proved harmful to the country. It was particularly disastrous for the Jews.

Horthy's Consent to the Delivery of "Jewish Workers"

In his report to the Crown Council, Horthy made no reference to the concessions he had clearly made for the delivery of a sizeable number of Jewish "workers" to Germany. He merely observed that Hitler had complained that "Hungary did nothing in the matter of the Jewish problem, and was not prepared to settle accounts with the large Jewish population in Hungary." Apparently either Horthy deliberately failed to inform the Crown Council about the "agreement" to supply Germany with Jewish "workers" or the Council decided not to record this obviously controversial item in the minutes.⁶ The evidence, however, reveals that Horthy in fact did agree—perhaps reluctantly and unwillingly—to the delivery of a considerable number of "Jewish workers for German war production purposes." Horthy's concurrence was important to the Germans, who were eager to maintain the facade of Hungarian sovereignty; to assure the cooperation of the new, pro-Nazi Hungarian government; and to provide legitimacy for the anti-Jewish operation.

At Schloss Klessheim Hitler had no difficulty in demonstrating Germany's desperate need for manpower. To compensate for their losses suffered at the hands of the British and American air forces, the Germans had decided to build a number of underground aircraft plants in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, with the aid of Jewish workers from Hungary.⁷ The Germans proceeded with the implementation of their grandiose plans in late 1943 and early 1944. In a letter dated March 9, 1944, Himmler assured Hermann Göring that plans were already being implemented for the allocation of about one hundred thousand workers for that purpose.

BACKGROUND OF THE "JEWISH WORKERS" POOL

The one hundred thousand Jewish workers Himmler had promised to place at Göring's disposal for the aircraft production project were part of an offer that a few Hungarian ultra-rightists had submitted to the Germans early in 1942—an offer that presumably neither Horthy nor Kállay had been aware of.

The "resettlement" of sixteen thousand to eighteen thousand "alien" Jews from Hungary to Galicia, where most of them were massacred near Kamenets-Podolsk during the summer of 1941,⁸ and the successes of the anti-Jewish drive in neighboring Slovakia emboldened a few high-ranking

military officers and ultra-rightist political figures to approach the Germans early in 1942 with a plan for the possible resettlement of additional “alien” Jews.⁹ While at first they spoke only about the possible return to Russia of twelve thousand Jews who had gone to Hungary from Galicia during the war, the offer was soon augmented to involve the possible “resettlement” of all of the Jews in Hungary in several phases, with the first installment designed to include one hundred thousand “alien” Jews.

During the latter half of September 1942, the issue was brought to the attention of Eichmann, who was not particularly enthusiastic about this plan, which called for only a partial “solution” of the Jewish question. In a letter dated September 25, 1942, Eichmann, citing technical reasons, rejected the idea of mobilizing the entire deportation apparatus merely for the deportation of the “Jewish refugees.” He contended that it would be better to delay the operation until Hungary was ready to effect the Final Solution. Nevertheless, the scheme to effectuate the “resettlement” of the first installment of one hundred thousand gradually gathered momentum among both Hungarian and German officials.

During his West European tour of August–September 1942, György Ottlik, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament, paid a visit to Döme Sztójay, then Hungarian minister in Berlin. As revealed by the lengthy memorandum Ottlik submitted to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 10, 1942, Sztójay was not only aware of the German decision to “solve” the Jewish question “radically” in the course of the war, but was also anxious to solve the “grave” problem the Jews represented in Hungary as expeditiously as possible. Sztójay, according to Ottlik, thought that

it would be appropriate if Hungary did not wait until [the Germans] raised the issue sharply, but would expedite the tempo of the changing of the guards and resettle a sizable portion of our Jewish population in occupied Russia. Our minister first spoke of about 300,000 but then bargained himself down to 100,000. On my interjected remark he did not keep it a secret that “resettlement” meant execution.¹⁰

The issue was also kept alive in Hungary. Early in October 1942, SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Dieter Wisliceny, then attached to Bratislava and in charge of the deportations of the Slovak Jews, visited Budapest. In his October 8 report to Hanns Elard Ludin, the German minister in Bratislava, Wisliceny summarized a conversation he had had two days earlier with a certain Fáy, whom he identified as Kállay’s personal secretary. Fáy reportedly inquired about the solution of the Jewish question in Slovakia and solicited Wisliceny’s views on the Jewish question in Hungary. According to Wisliceny,

Fáy suddenly asked if Hungary would also be considered in a resettlement program. It was a matter of about 100,000 Jews in Carpatho-Ukraine and the territories acquired from Romania, whom Hungary would like to resettle. As a second stage, one would have to handle [the Jews in the Hungarian Plains], and finally [those in] the capital city of Budapest.¹¹

Contrary to Wisliceny's claim, there is no evidence that Fáy had advanced his questions and proposals "on higher orders." Nevertheless, it was in this light that the issue was brought to the attention of both Ribbentrop and Himmler later that month. In a letter dated November 30, Himmler brought Ribbentrop up to date about the background of the Hungarian offer, emphasizing that the Final Solution was envisioned to be carried out in several phases, with the first phase to involve the "evacuation" of one hundred thousand Jews from the eastern parts of the country. He further stressed—echoing Eichmann's earlier stated position—that although at first he had been against a partial solution of the Jewish question in Hungary, he was now ready to assign Wisliceny to the German Legation in Budapest, where he could act as a "scientific adviser."

Although the expectations of the RSHA and of the few elements of the Hungarian extreme Right in the government remained unfulfilled during Kállay's tenure, it was their groundwork that laid the basis for the Hitler-Horthy agreement under which one hundred thousand to three hundred thousand Hungarian Jews were made available to the Reich "for war production purposes."¹²

Apparently Horthy was convinced that by giving his consent he would not only satisfy Germany's "legitimate" needs, but also contribute to the struggle against Bolshevism and at the same time rid the country of the "Galician Jews," whom he—like the other "civilized" antisemites of his conservative-aristocratic class—openly detested. It was this agreement that the Eichmann Special Commando and its Hungarian accomplices exploited after the occupation for the speedy implementation of the Final Solution, claiming that "the Jews would be more productive in Germany if they had *all* members of their families with them."

THE EVIDENCE ON HORTHY'S CONSENT

Shortly after the occupation began, the Sztójay government, assisted by the SD, proceeded with the roundup of the one hundred thousand able-bodied Jewish "workers" who were needed for the aircraft project in the Protectorate. In his communication to Ribbentrop, Veessenmayer stressed that he had not only the cooperation of the Hungarian armed forces and the Ministry of the Interior, but also the concurrence of Horthy.¹³ Veessenmayer's assertion

was amply corroborated by evidence revealed after the war, especially at the various war crimes trials.

According to Ribbentrop, the regent agreed that “a considerable number of Jewish workers” were to be made available for German war production.¹⁴ Otto Winkelmann, the Higher SS and Police Leader and Himmler’s immediate representative in Hungary in 1944, stated in the Ministries Trial that there was a “legal agreement” with the Hungarian government “for the deportation of what was initially 100,000 Jews.”¹⁵ This was also corroborated by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Ernst Kienast, Winkelmann’s assistant in Budapest, who testified that according to his superior, “the necessity for a solution of the Jewish question in Hungary was unequivocally established by Hitler at Klessheim and urgently pushed through,” although “no agreement was reached on the form which the solution should take, nor on the extent of the program.”¹⁶ In his testimony during his own trial in 1948, Veessenmayer stated:

Horthy himself told me that he was interested only in protecting those who were prosperous, the economically valuable Jews in Budapest, those who were well off. However, as to the remaining Jewry—and he used a very ugly term there—he had no interest in them and was quite prepared to have them go to the Reich or elsewhere for labor. He approved that; and he did not approve it after a demand made by me but he approved it after agreements and discussions with his premier and his ministries. The fact has been proved that he later—at first he moderated the deportations, and then later stopped them. Somebody who forbids something later on, must have given permission for it earlier.¹⁷

Several other German sources testified in a similar vein. Horthy’s complicity was corroborated by a considerable number of Hungarian rightist officials as well. László Baky, one of Horthy’s trusted officers of the counter-revolutionary era (and as under secretary of state—that is, head of the political section of the Ministry of the Interior in the Sztójay government—one of the officials chiefly responsible for the speedy and ruthless implementation of the Final Solution) gave one of the most damning accounts. In a statement written while in prison, Baky claimed that he had issued the decree of April 7, 1944, which called for the ghettoization of the Jews, because László Endre, the other under secretary of state chiefly responsible for the Holocaust in Hungary as head of the administrative section in the Ministry of the Interior, had requested it on the basis that “the Regent had agreed to the delivery of the Jews to the Germans for purposes of labor.”¹⁸ He believed this, he claimed, because during his own previous audience with the regent, Horthy had told him:

Baky, you are one of my old Szeged officers. The Germans have cheated me. Now they want to deport the Jews. I don't mind. I hate the Galician Jews and the Communists. Out with them, out of the country! But you must see, Baky, that there are some Jews who are as good Hungarians as you and I. For example, here are little Chorin and Vida—aren't they good Hungarians? I can't allow these to be taken away. But they can take the rest.¹⁹

Endre spoke in the same vein, claiming that “the Regent raised no objection to the deportations, saying that the sooner the operation was concluded, the sooner the Germans would leave the country.”²⁰

Perhaps the most convincing evidence about Horthy's consent was given by Bishop László Ravasz. The head of the Reformed Church stated that Zsigmond Perényi, president of the Upper House, had informed him about the atrocities committed during the ghettoization of the Jews in Carpatho-Ruthenia and in northeastern Hungary. The cleric said that he himself then contacted Horthy to express his misgivings. At a meeting on April 28, 1944, he continued, Horthy told him that “a large number of labor draftees were requested of Hungary. . . . A few hundred thousand Jews will leave the country's frontier in this manner, but not a single hair of their heads will be touched, just as is the case with the many hundreds of thousands of Hungarian workers who have been working in Germany since the beginning of the war.”²¹ Bishop Ravasz repeated this account during his testimony in the postwar war crimes trials in Budapest. According to his testimony, Horthy also mentioned that the families of the laborers were to be sent along with them so that they could be together and that they should not have to be “supported by the nation when they [the laborers] are making a living out there.”²²

That there was an agreement relating to the transfer of Jews to Germany was also confirmed during the war. In his June 26, 1944, memorandum cabled to the Hungarian diplomatic representatives abroad, aiming to “explain” the deportations that were then taking place, Sztójay stated:

In view of the position of the labor market in Hungary as well as of the full share this country takes in the war, the Hungarian Government has not been able to raise the contingent of Hungarian workers for Germany but has wished to comply with the requests of the Germans by placing Jews at their disposal. It was on the grounds of this agreement that Jews were sent to Germany for work. Experience having proved that in foreign countries the Jews' willingness to work diminishes when they are separated from their families, the members of their families were sent along with them.²³

This telegram by Sztójay is the only official Hungarian confirmation that the Jews were delivered to the Germans on the basis of “an agreement.”

C. A. Macartney, who cannot be accused of being unsympathetic to Hungary or Horthy, reached the following conclusion on the treatment of the Jewish question at Klessheim: "It seems established only that Horthy agreed to one specific step in this field: that a considerable number of Hungarian Jews should be sent to Germany for work in the German munitions factories."²⁴

The evidence is thus overwhelming that Horthy did indeed agree to the delivery of "Jewish workers" for the German war industry. This agreement was subsequently exploited by the German and Hungarian de-jewification squads to bring about the Final Solution. Toward this end, they received not only the cooperation of the Hungarian instruments of state power, but also that of the German occupation forces and authorities.

The German Occupation Forces and Authorities

While the scenario was being played out at Schloss Klessheim, the German forces were poised to launch Operation Margarethe, which was scheduled for the early morning hours of March 19, 1944.

THE *WEHRMACHT*

The invading forces were spearheaded by a special parachute regiment headed by Major General Alexander von Pfohlstein, which was dropped in the vicinity of Budapest and entrusted with the occupation of all key positions. The paratroopers were followed by the main occupation forces, consisting of eleven divisions under the overall command of Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs. Except for a few isolated shots, the occupation was carried out without any interference or resistance by the Hungarian army or population. With the main objective of the occupation achieved shortly after the invasion, the bulk of the *Wehrmacht* troops were assigned to front duties within a month. Field Marshal von Weichs himself returned to his headquarters on the Soviet front, and command over the remaining units was assigned to Gen. Hans Greiffenberg, the former German military attaché in Budapest. The *Wehrmacht* reportedly was not permitted to "mix into the Jewish question."²⁵ That was to remain the prerogative of the other German entities in the country, including the German Legation.

THE GERMAN LEGATION

Concurrently with the occupation, the leadership of the German Legation in Budapest was entrusted to Edmund Veesenmayer, whom Hitler had appointed as his personal representative. The author of two ominous reports on Hungary based upon his on-the-spot investigations in 1943, the new plenipo-

tentiary arrived in Hungary in Horthy's special train. Under Hitler's special authorization, Veesenmayer was entrusted with or made responsible for:²⁶

- Overseeing the political development of Hungary and the formation of a new national government.
- Ascertaining that the country was administered so that all of Hungary's resources, especially in the economic field, were used for the common war effort.
- Guiding the activities of all German civilian agencies operating in Hungary and providing political directives to the Higher SS and Police Leader to be appointed to his staff for performing "tasks of the SS and police to be carried out by German agencies in Hungary, and especially police duties in connection with the Jewish question."

To assist him, Veesenmayer was provided with a formidable and zealous staff, including Gerhardt Feine, Veesenmayer's second in command; Adolf Hezinger, an expert on the treatment of Jews of foreign citizenship, who was replaced toward the end of May 1944 by Theodor Horst Grell; Franz von Adamovic-Waagstaetten, who served as an expert on anti-Jewish legislation; and *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Ballensiefen, an expert on anti-Jewish propaganda who helped organize the Hungarian Institute for the Researching of the Jewish Question headed by Zoltán Bosnyák, one of the leading antisemitic agitators in Hungary.²⁷

Veesebmayer played a very important, if not decisive, role in what would happen to Hungarian Jewry. In 1943 he had written two reports on Hungary that were considered in Hitler's occupation decision, and he was one of the major architects of the Jewish deportations in 1944. He constantly used the weight of his position and office to induce the quiescent Hungarian government to take ever harsher measures against the Jews—measures that he regularly reported to his superiors in Germany.²⁸ In reporting about his activities in Hungary, Veesebmayer normally corresponded with the Foreign Office through Karl Ritter, Ambassador for Special Assignments, and occasionally, on more important matters, directly with Ribbentrop. He also maintained constant and close contact with agencies of the RSHA, especially in cases involving Jews and other "enemies of the Reich."

Within the Foreign Office, the agency immediately concerned with the treatment of the Jewish question was *Abteilung Inland II*, headed by Horst Wagner and his associate Eberhard von Thadden. In particular, *Inland II* was entrusted with handling liaison with the RSHA.²⁹

AGENCIES OF THE RSHA

The entry of the SS and Gestapo units into Hungary was spearheaded by *SS-Obergruppenführer* Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the chief of the RSHA. He returned

to Germany three days after the occupation, having played an influential role in the formation of the new Hungarian government and launched the operation of the SS and Gestapo units in Hungary. After his departure, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Otto Winkelmann, in his capacity as the Higher SS and Police Leader, became the representative of Himmler and the RSHA.³⁰

Winkelmann's jurisdiction extended to all the police, *Waffen-SS*, and SS representatives of the *Reichsführer-SS* in Hungary, including the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*. His staff included Ernst Kienast, a political adviser, and Wilhelm Höttl, his second in command and an expert on counterespionage and political security matters. Driven by ideological conviction and ambition, Kienast and Höttl played leading roles in the formulation of German policy relating to the establishment of the postoccupation Hungarian government.

The *Einsatzgruppe* that entered Hungary along with the regular *Wehrmacht* troops consisted of five hundred to six hundred Gestapo and Security Service (SD) men under the immediate command of *SS-Standartenführer* Hans Geschke. Geschke's chief lieutenant and head of the Security Police (SIPO) in Budapest was *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Alfred Trenker. It was under Trenker's command that the German police units arrested the major opposition and anti-German Hungarian leaders, took a large number of Jewish hostages, and rounded up the Jews in and around the railway stations immediately after the occupation.

THE EICHMANN-SONDERKOMMANDO

For the Final Solution in Hungary, a Special Commando of around 150 to 200 men was organized under the immediate command of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann's office in the RSHA—Section IV.B.4.—was alerted in advance of the impending occupation and was instructed to make the necessary preparations. In light of his decision of 1942 rejecting the request for the mobilization of his deportation apparatus for the “resettlement” of a limited number of “alien” Jews from Hungary, Eichmann must have felt both vindicated and gratified. He now had the chance for the *total* “solution” of the Jewish question.³¹

Eichmann and his chief lieutenants met in Mauthausen from March 10 to 12, 1944, to work out a blueprint for the ghettoization, deportation, and extermination program. Among Eichmann's closest collaborators, with years of experience in the implementation of the Final Solution in Europe, were Hermann Alois Krumei, Otto Hunsche, Dieter Wisliceny, Theodor Dannecker, Franz Novak, Franz Abromeit, and Siegfried Seidl. They arrived in Budapest early in the morning of March 19, together with the advance guard of the German troops. (According to most reports, Eichmann himself

did not arrive until March 21.) They first established their headquarters at the Astoria Hotel in the heart of Pest, and later settled in the Majestic Hotel, one of several resort hostels that the SS took over in the Svábhegy section of Buda.

Although technically and administratively Eichmann was subordinated to Winkelmann, he had “plenipotentiary powers” in his own field of competence—the “resettlement” of Jews; on these matters he most often dealt directly with the RSHA in Berlin. He was successful in the performance of his tasks despite the fact that his Special Commando was relatively small. This was due primarily to the support he received from the newly established Sztójay government. The new puppet regime demonstrated its eagerness to solve the Jewish question by swiftly providing a legal basis for it, and by placing the instruments of state power at the disposal of the German and Hungarian dejewification units.

The Sztójay Government and Its Agencies

The formation of a government that was acceptable to both the Germans and Horthy took some wrangling. The Germans themselves were at odds over its composition: Himmler and the RSHA, expressing their wishes through Kaltenbrunner, insisted on the formation of a purely Nazi-type government composed of the leadership of the Hungarian National Socialist Party; the German Foreign Office and Veessenmayer were more inclined toward a coalition government dominated by Béla Imrédy’s pro-Reich Party of Hungarian Renewal; Horthy, although eager to bring about the formation of a new Hungarian government acceptable to the Germans “in order to end his country’s military occupation,” objected to Imrédy, whom he despised and constantly referred to as “the Jew.” The compromise that was hammered out on March 22 reflected the triumph of Veessenmayer’s position, although both Horthy and the RSHA also had something to cheer about.

THE QUISLING GOVERNMENT

The compromise provided for the appointment of Döme Sztójay, the former military attaché (1925–33) and Hungarian minister (1935–44) in Berlin, to serve concurrently as prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. The other members of this quisling government were: Jenő Rátz, deputy prime minister; Lajos Reményi-Schneller, minister of finance; Lajos Csataj, minister of defense; Antal Kunder, minister of trade and transportation; Andor Jaross, minister of the interior; Lajos Szász, minister of industry; István Antal, minister of justice; and Béla Jurcsek, minister of agriculture.³²

On the surface the composition of the new government was not radically pro-Nazi. Four of the members—Antal, Jurcsek, Reményi-Schneller,

and Szász—belonged to the right wing of the traditional Government Party and actually had served in the Kállay government; three of them—Jaross, Kunder, and Rátz—belonged to Imrédy's party; and two were professional soldiers. Csatay was basically Horthy's man, appointed to ensure the integrity of the Hungarian armed forces; Sztójay, who had the rank of lieutenant general in the Hungarian army, was practically co-opted into the Government Party.

While the interests of the RSHA were safeguarded, the fate of the Hungarian Jews was essentially sealed with the subsequent appointment of two notorious antisemites—László Endre and László Baky—as secretaries of state in the Ministry of the Interior. In charge of the Ministry's administrative and political sections respectively, they were particularly concerned with the swiftest possible "solution" of the Jewish question.

Endre, one of the leading figures of Hungarian Nazism since 1931, emerged as the prime mover of the anti-Jewish measures during the German occupation. Before his rise to power he had served as the chief constable of Gödöllő and then as deputy prefect of Pest County. He was tapped for the administrative leadership of the Ministry of the Interior by Jaross on March 28, 1944, for his recognized expertise on Jewish affairs. Eichmann, with whom he struck up a close personal friendship, claimed that Endre "wanted to eat the Jews with paprika." Indeed, when Jaross inquired whether he would be willing to undertake the "special handling of the Jewish question" in the Ministry, Endre reportedly took a thick file out of his desk drawer, saying: "All the necessary draft laws can be found in this file; I have prepared everything."³³

Baky, who ranks with Endre as one of those most clearly responsible for the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry, was one of the most outspokenly antisemitic members of the Hungarian officer corps. As the organizer and leader of several Nazi parties and a member of Parliament, Baky, too, emerged as a leading spokesman for Nazism and antisemitism in the country. He was also secretly in the service of the Gestapo and the SS, whose leaders he regularly informed about political developments in Hungary.

Baky was formally appointed to his position on March 24. Endre's appointment was not formally announced until April 9, although the Hungarian press had hailed his forthcoming appointment on March 31. Two days earlier, on March 29, he had made the following ominous declaration: "For the time being I cannot say anything about my functions. The important thing is that I do my work without any announcement or hullabaloo, as quickly as possible. The time will come when the public will know why I was appointed secretary of state in the Ministry of the Interior." That same day, Baky was more specific, declaring: "I make my job dependent on the final and total liquidation of left-wing and Jewish mischief in this country. I am sure that

the government will be able to accomplish this overwhelming task which is of enormous historical importance.”³⁴ According to Jaross, Horthy gave his approval for the appointment of both Baky and Endre, remembering them as his former officers of the counterrevolutionary era. He changed his mind about them late in June, but by that time it was already too late for the Jews in the provinces.

The communiqué issued shortly after the Sztójay government was sworn in on March 23 emphasized, among other things, that the German troops had entered Hungary as the result of a mutual agreement, “in order to assist Hungary in the common war waged . . . against the common enemy.” In addition to the explanation provided by the communiqué, the Hungarians were given additional details about the “necessity” of the occupation. They were told that “the German Reich considered the unrestricted presence of some 1 million Jews and another 1 million Socialist and other refugees on Hungarian soil as a concrete threat to the safety of German arms in the Balkan Peninsula.”³⁵ As a compromise appointee, Sztójay was warned by Veessenmayer that his government was on trial and that it had to prove its sincerity, in particular by solving the Jewish question and supplying Germany with desperately needed goods.³⁶

Almost concurrently with the establishment of the new government, the instruments of state power were placed under the leadership of “reliable” elements who were ready and eager to proceed with the implementation of the new order. By far the most important ones in regard to the “solution” of the Jewish question were the police and the gendarmerie. Without their collaboration, the Germans could not possibly have carried out their designs in Hungary.

THE POLICE

As is the case in most countries with a centralized system of government, the police in Hungary operated within the framework of the Ministry of the Interior. Ultimate authority over the police was vested in the minister of the interior, who exercised it through his deputy, the national chief captain of the police.

Even before the German occupation, several of the police-related departments in the Ministry were concerned with Jewish questions. Among these, a crucial role was played by Department VII—the Public Safety Department—which was led by Ámon Pásztory. It had three subdepartments: VIIa. Public Safety, VIIb. Organizations, and VIIc. National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH). Of these, the Organizations section played a determining role in the planning and implementation of the ghettoization and deportation program. KEOKH, the nemesis of the Jewish refugees in

Hungary, was instrumental in the roundup and forced resettlement of sixteen thousand to eighteen thousand “alien” Jews, most of whom were slaughtered near Kamenets-Podolsk in August 1941.³⁷

During the preoccupation era, the Jewish question was also the concern of the Political Police Department, which was led by a number of relatively moderate individuals including József Sombor-Schweinitzer. One of the primary tasks of this unit was the protection of the aristocratic-gentry ruled proto-Fascist regime from both the extreme Right and the extreme Left.

After the occupation, the functions of these units underwent a radical change: they were reoriented toward the Final Solution of the Jewish question. A prominent role in this respect was assumed by Section VIIb, which acquired jurisdiction over the Central Jewish Council and as such over all Jews in Hungary. Previously under the leadership of János Páskándy, the section was headed after the occupation by Lajos Blaskovich, a personal friend and ideological-political associate of Endre. Among his closest collaborators in the so-called Jewish Department of this unit were István Vassányi and the notorious Jew-baiter Zoltán Bosnyák. This unit worked closely with Lajos Argalás, a ministerial counselor in charge of preparing the anti-Jewish laws and decrees, and with departments XX and XXI of the Ministry of the Interior, which were established after the occupation.

After the arrest of Sombor-Schweinitzer, the Political Department was reorganized under the leadership of Péter Hain. A detective inspector-general, Hain had already served in the Political Department as the head of a subdepartment in charge of the safety of state leaders, including Horthy—a position he had held since 1937. From 1938 on, he was also in close contact with General Hubert of the Vienna Gestapo, “whom he . . . regularly informed of political events in Hungary.”³⁸ Presumably it was as a reward for his long and faithful services to the Gestapo that the Germans concurred with his appointment.

In accordance with the plan worked out by Hain, the Political Department was removed from the jurisdiction of Police Headquarters and placed under the immediate control of Secretary of State Baky. Its name was changed to State Security Police (i.e., the Hungarian counterpart of the Gestapo), and its headquarters moved to the Svábhegy in Buda, in the immediate vicinity of the Gestapo and the Eichmann Special Commando. Of the four sections of the newly organized State Security Police, one was placed under the leadership of László Koltay and entrusted with “the implementation of the legal measures relating to persons considered as Jews.”³⁹ Like the Eichmann Special Commando, this section also bore the number IV/4 and had its headquarters in the Majestic Hotel, one flight above Eichmann’s.

The operations of Koltay’s office were synchronized with those

of Eichmann's. The cooperation between the two offices in the arrest of Jews and "politically unreliable" Hungarians was so close that often not even the members of the Sztójay government knew for certain which had effectuated a particular arrest or where the arrested individuals were. During the period immediately after the occupation, Koltay's office participated in the drive against "anti-Nazi elements," and following the adoption of the anti-Jewish decrees it became particularly busy in implementing them. It took an especially active part in the expropriation of Jewish property and in satisfying the Germans' unceasing demands. It was Koltay's office that, on its own initiative and in response to thousands of denunciations,⁴⁰ prepared the many lists of Jewish journalists, lawyers, and other professionals who were subsequently arrested and mostly deported.

DEPARTMENTS XX AND XXI

These two departments of the Ministry of the Interior played a crucial role in the "solution" of the Jewish question during the occupation era. Department XX was headed by László Baky, who in this capacity acquired control over both the police and the gendarmerie. One of his closest associates in this department was Col. Gyula Balázs-Piri, the primary contact of Lt. Col. László Ferenczy, the gendarmerie officer entrusted with the implementation of the ghettoization and deportation program. Ferenczy's reports addressed to Balázs-Piri dating from May 3 through July 9, 1941 are among the most important documents relating to the Holocaust in Hungary.

Department XXI was concerned more directly with the roundup, internment, concentration, and deportation of the Jews. Since the ghettoization of the Jews was camouflaged as "housing and relocation," the department was identified as the "Housing Department." Jewish affairs were the concern of Subsection b., a "Special Service Unit" on Refugee Matters, whose functions were "the settlement of questions arising in connection with the evacuation and internment of the Jews in camps which do not fall under the jurisdiction of other departments, on the direct instructions of Secretary of State Dr. László Endre." This special department was first under the leadership of Zsigmond Székely-Molnár, a ministerial assistant secretary and Endre's close collaborator. He was replaced on May 30, 1944, by Gábor Ajtay, a ministerial department counselor, who, in turn, was replaced on June 24, 1944, by Albert Takács, the district chief constable who doubled as Endre's secretary.

THE GENDARMERIE

As the agency entrusted with the preservation of law and order in the countryside, the gendarmerie emerged as the major instrument through which

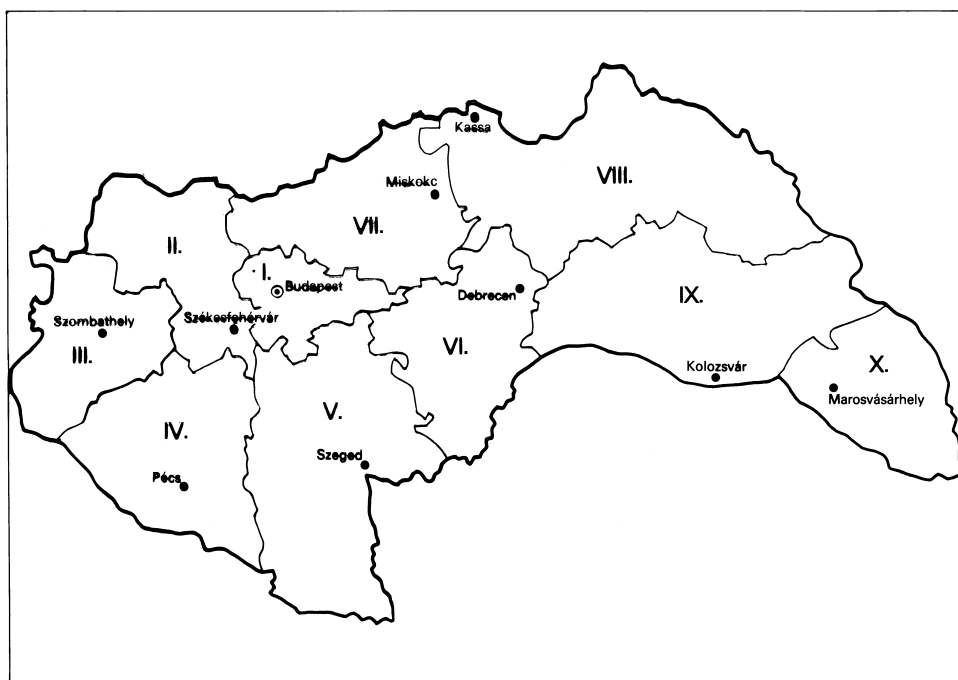
the ghettoization and deportation program was implemented in Hungary. Although the gendarmerie operated under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, it was also subordinated to the Ministry of Defense. While the Ministry of the Interior was primarily concerned with the public safety and the pay and pension system of the gendarmes, the Ministry of Defense exercised jurisdiction in matters of training and discipline. The gendarmerie operated under the command of the superintendent of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, a position that was held during the occupation era by Lt. Gen. Gábor Faragho.

The gendarmerie, like the armed forces, operated on a territorial basis, with Hungary divided into ten gendarmerie district commands (see [map 2](#)). Each command was under the leadership of a colonel of the gendarmerie, who played a pivotal role in the planning and implementation of the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews in the territory under his jurisdiction.⁴¹

The deportations that began on May 15, 1944, were planned and carried out on the basis of these territorial units. The number of gendarmes used for this purpose ranged from three thousand to five thousand. Many of the gendarmes involved in the anti-Jewish drive were of Swabian background and particularly ferocious and pro-Nazi in sentiment. The testimonies of virtually all survivors of the Holocaust in Hungary emphasize the cruel and barbarous behavior of the gendarmes in the ghettos and during the entrainment.

To assure the effectiveness of the anti-Jewish operations, the de-jewification high command provided for the rotation of the gendarme units involved. The ghettoization, concentration, entrainment, and deportation of the Jews of a particular county were normally carried out with the participation of a unit from another part of the country, so as to prevent corruption or leniency based on personal contacts with the local Jews. Thus, for example, in Dés, the anti-Jewish drive was implemented with a special unit of forty gendarmes from Zilah; in Beszterce there were twenty-five gendarmes from Nagydémeter; in Szászrégen there were forty gendarmes from Szeged; and in Máramarossziget fifty gendarmes came from Miskolc.

The gendarmes involved in the anti-Jewish drive were under the overall command of László Ferenczy. Nominally, he was the liaison officer in charge of coordinating the operations of the gendarmerie with those of the German Security Service and especially the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*. His headquarters were on the second floor of the Lomnic Hotel, immediately adjacent to Eichmann's headquarters. The effectiveness of the gendarmerie in the implementation of the anti-Jewish drive was to a large extent due to the support it received from the civil servants.



Map 2. Gendarmerie Districts and Their Headquarters, 1944

THE CIVIL SERVICE

The German occupation authorities were aware that their effectiveness in Hungary was dependent not only on the support of the police and gendarmerie but also on the collaboration of the central and local administrative and executive organs of the Hungarian state. It was not an accident, therefore, that the Germans insisted that the secretaries of state in charge of the administration of the various ministries, as well as the heads of the major divisions and sections, be pro-German elements. The purging of the central and local administrative and executive organs of actual and potential anti-Nazi elements was completed within a relatively short period following the establishment of the Sztójay government.

Following the “purification” of the national and local governmental units, it was the turn of the *Gleichschaltung* (political realignment) of all social organizations, associations, and institutions. To further assure the loyalty of the working class, the trade unions, which were already restricted

in their operation, were placed under the leadership of Béla Marton, a pro-Nazi stooge.

A few decent county and municipality leaders and even police officers resigned rather than be involved in the drive against the Jews. However, the overwhelming majority of the local, district, and county officials, including the civil servants and law enforcement officers, collaborated fully, and many quite enthusiastically. Most of the county and city officials proved overzealous in implementing both the written instructions and the oral communications given by Endre and his associates at the various conferences relating to the implementation of the Final Solution.⁴² These conferences were attended by the top civilian, police, and gendarmerie officers of the appropriate regions, including the mayors and police chiefs of the municipalities and larger cities, the gendarmerie commanders, and the deputy prefects of the various counties.

Following their return from these conferences, the city and county representatives coordinated their plans for the implementation of the anti-Jewish drive. At the headquarters of their city or county seat, they jointly decided on the location of the local ghetto and on details relating to the roundup of the Jews. In fact, the so-called commissions or squads for the roundup operations consisted almost entirely of representatives of the police, gendarmerie, and civil service. The latter frequently included members of the local teaching and administrative personnel. Occasionally, these squads were joined by volunteers from all walks of life, and above all by members of the paramilitary *Levente* youth organization and of the Arrow Cross Party.

The master plan for the liquidation of the Jewish community called not only for the subordination of the major instrument of state power, but also for the creation of Jewish Councils that were envisioned to become, like those in all other Nazi-dominated countries, pliable tools for the smoothest possible implementation of the Final Solution.

4 THE JEWISH COUNCIL AND THE AWARENESS OF THE FINAL SOLUTION

The Jewish Councils: The Nazi Design

To implement their plan for the extermination of the Jews, the SS and their Hungarian accomplices had to take into account the specifics of the time and place. Such factors included the rapid advance of the Red Army in the east, the limited German forces available for the operation, and the need to lull the large Jewish community into a false sense of security in order to minimize the risk of resistance. These considerations required that the Final Solution program be implemented at lightning speed. Toward this end, the establishment and subordination of a Central Jewish Council in Budapest acquired top priority. After the establishment of the Council within the first few days of the occupation, local Jewish Councils were established throughout Hungary. Their structure and functions were generally those established by Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), on September 21, 1939, for the ghettos in Poland.¹ The Councils were trapped into outright though unwitting collaboration, although they did everything possible to gain time and to ease the suffering of their coreligionists.

The Germans embarked upon the Final Solution with the assumption that there was a Hungarian-German agreement to this effect and that the Jewish question—and its solution—were the exclusive responsibility of the SS. This assumption was fully corroborated not only after the war, but also by the attitude of the Hungarian authorities during the first few months of the occupation.

The Central Jewish Council of Budapest was of primary concern for the Nazis because, in view of the swift ghettoization and deportation of the provincial Jews, the provincial Jewish Councils were short-lived. These Councils were normally composed of the traditional community leaders whom the Jewish masses trusted and followed. The various provincial Councils and the ghettos over which they exercised nominal jurisdiction had little if any contact with one another and acted “independently” in response to the orders and directives they received from the central and local Hungarian and German authorities and those issued by the Central Jewish Council of Budapest. The isolation that was imposed upon them was practically

total, since the Jews were deprived of every means of communication and transportation soon after the occupation.

The Central Jewish Council of Budapest

ORGANIZATION OF THE COUNCIL

Within a few hours of the occupation of the capital and the western parts of Hungary on March 19, 1944, two leading figures of the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*—Hermann Alois Krumei and Dieter Wisliceny—established contact with the Jewish Community of Pest, the country's largest Neolog congregation.² They instructed László Bánóczy, the only official they found at the community headquarters at 12 Sip Street, to have the Jewish leaders convene for an urgent meeting the following morning.

Alarmed by this ominous invitation, Hugó Csergő, the community's chief registrar, called an urgent meeting of some of the influential Jewish leaders for later that day.³ The participants decided that since they represented Hungarian citizens of the Jewish faith, they should consult the appropriate Hungarian authorities before establishing any contact with the Germans.

They contacted the minister of religious affairs and education, the authority having direct jurisdiction over the religious communities, to inquire whether they should negotiate with the Germans. The terse response came from the police commissioner of Budapest the following day: "The demands of the Germans must be obeyed!"

That same morning, March 20, the leaders of the Jewish community gathered under the chairmanship of Sámuel (Samu) Stern, the head of the Jewish Community of Pest. The Germans were awaited by János Gábor, one of the most able lawyers of the community, who, because of his impeccable German, was to emerge as the major liaison between the Jewish Council and the *Sonderkommando*. Noticing the anxiety of the participants—some of them, expecting the worst, brought along their wives and packed suitcases—Krumei reassured everyone that there would be no arrests. To keep them off guard and enhance their collaborative mood, Krumei, using a well-tested Nazi technique, further assured them that while there would be certain restrictions dictated by the war conditions, there would be no violation of personal and property rights and there would be no deportations. He further asserted that no one would be harmed simply because he or she was Jewish. All were to continue their work and the community would be permitted to perform its functions, including the religious ones. The Jewish leaders did not immediately grasp the ominous implications of the directives then issued by Krumei. The SS officers informed the Jewish leaders that:

- The Germans would from then on exercise exclusive control over all matters affecting the Jews.
- The Jewish community of Budapest would come under the immediate jurisdiction of *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Alfred Trenker, the head of the Security Police (SIPO) in Budapest.
- By noon of the following day the Jewish leaders were to establish a Jewish Council, which would exercise jurisdiction over all the Jews.
- They [the leaders] would be issued special immunity certificates that would exempt them from the anti-Jewish measures to enable them to carry out their functions properly.
- No Jew would be permitted to leave his dwelling place and all Jewish publications, including the official journal of the community—*A Magyar Zsidók Lapja* (Journal of Hungarian Jews)—would be subjected to censorship by the Gestapo.
- They [the leaders] were to calm the Jewish masses and prevent panic by informing them through the press or their rabbis about the reassurances received.

Shortly after the meeting, Stern completed his plans for the composition of the Council. He devised a coalition of the representatives of the major Jewish community organizations designed to share the burdens of, and the responsibility for, all actions imposed upon the Council.⁴

The composition of the Jewish Council was approved by the Germans at a March 21 meeting that was attended by about two hundred Jewish leaders, including some heads of the provincial Jewish communities. The SS once again assured the Jewish leaders that, aside from certain restrictions imposed by the requirements of the war, the Jewish community would continue its life as before.

The scenario of this meeting was replayed on March 28 for the benefit of the leaders of the provincial Jewish communities. The invitation, extended to them on March 24 over the signature of Stern, already incorporated one of the basic objectives of the Germans: the lulling of the Jewish masses into submission. Stern warned that the German authorities had “placed great emphasis on the fact that the country’s Jewish population should calmly and in a panic-free atmosphere continue not only its private life, but also its religious, social, and cultural activities.”

The meeting of March 28 was the last national meeting of the historic Jewish community of Hungary. The SS representative repeated his earlier assurances about the intentions of the Germans. The attitude and mood of the Jewish leaders present at this meeting varied. One of the most optimistic during this early phase of the occupation was Fülöp Freudiger, the Orthodox leader, who believed that the Jews, while subjected to many

sorrows and deprivations, would not suffer the fate of the Polish Jews. Nison Kahán, the Zionist representative in the Council, struck a more somber and prophetic note: “Our fate is not only material ruin, and not even only a chain of physical and mental tortures and the beating down of the last fibers of our human dignity, but rather *certain physical annihilation*” (emphasis added).⁵

The opinion of most of those present at the March 28 meeting was that since the Hungarian authorities had refused to be of any assistance, the Jewish leaders should try to come to terms with the local SS commandos wherever they were stationed. A few of the delegates were skeptical about the idea but only the one from Munkács was definitely opposed to it. He reportedly suggested that the Jews engage in passive resistance, but this was decisively overruled.

Three days later a delegation of the Central Jewish Council was received by Eichmann in his headquarters at the Svábhegy section of Buda. By this time a series of drastic anti-Jewish decrees had already been issued and thousands of Jews had already been arrested and imprisoned. The meeting was an occasion not only for the Jewish leaders to catalog their grievances and advance a series of requests incorporated in a special memorandum, but also for Eichmann to “clarify” some of the anti-Jewish measures. He stated, among other things:

All these things would last as long as the war lasted. After the war, the Jews would be free to do whatever they wanted. Everything taking place on the Jewish question was in fact only for the wartime period, and with the end of the war the Germans would again become good-natured (*gemütlich*) and permit everything, as in the past.⁶

The gullibility with which the Jewish leaders accepted the explanations and reassurances of Eichmann and of the other SS officers was as surprising as it was tragic, for many of them were well aware by that time of the Nazis’ techniques.

PERCEPTIONS AND POLICIES OF THE COUNCIL

The ineffectiveness of the Council was due primarily to two factors: the speed and single-mindedness with which the SS and their Hungarian accomplices implemented the Final Solution in Hungary, and the wholehearted collaboration of the Sztójay government. However, it was also due to the Hungarian Jewish leaders’ distorted perception of the domestic and international situation early in 1944. Influenced by the fact that the large Hungarian Jewish community had continued to survive and, relatively speaking, even prosper in the midst of the bloodshed that engulfed the

Jewish communities in Nazi-occupied Europe, they deluded themselves into believing that—with Allied victory clearly on the horizon—the community would somehow manage to survive the war. Even during the first days of the German occupation of Hungary, they tended to believe that the Germans would not apply the same draconic measures to solve the Jewish question in Hungary that they had elsewhere in Europe. This distorted perception, which persisted—for a short while at least—was based on:

- The promises and declarations made by the SS officers during their first meetings.
- The fact that Miklós Horthy, who shared Miklós Kállay's Jewish policies, had decided to continue as head of state.
- The realization that the military situation of the Germans at the time of the occupation was extremely precarious.
- The expectation that the Germans, aware of the unpopular character of the occupation, would want to pacify, rather than antagonize, the population.
- The belief that the radical solution of the Jewish question would undermine the Hungarian economy, which was to a large extent geared to trade with Germany.
- The expectation that proposals for a radical solution would bring forth vocal opposition in Parliament.
- The realization that the Red Army was fast approaching the Carpathians.

Perhaps it was because of this distorted perception that the national leaders of Hungarian Jewry failed to take any precautionary contingency measures or to keep the Jewish masses fully informed. Although most of these leaders, like the national leaders of Hungary, were aware of the Nazis' Final Solution,⁷ they failed to keep the Jewish masses fully and accurately informed.

The Jewish leaders' perceptions of the policies and objectives of the Nazis were probably also influenced by the personal favors the SS extended to them and their families. This was a standard SS approach in all the countries under Nazi occupation, not only toward the Jewish leaders but also toward local officials. In this way the Nazis acquired their confidence and cooperation. In the case of the Jews, these favors consisted primarily of exempting the leaders and their immediate families from many of the anti-Jewish measures. However, these favors were normally ephemeral: with the termination of the ghettoization and deportation program in a particular area, the leaders themselves would be picked up and subjected to the same treatment as the rest. This is what happened to practically all of the Jewish Council members in the provinces. The members of the Central Jewish Council of Budapest were saved, along with the Jews of Budapest, by Horthy's decision to suspend the deportations on July 7, 1944.

The privileges enjoyed by the Council members soon awoke the envy and jealousy of others vying for the same privileges. The issue that caused the greatest animosity and became the subject of a heated debate both during and after the war revolved around the distribution of “immunity certificates,” which enabled the recipients to move about freely without being bound by many of the restrictions imposed upon the rest of the community. The certificates undoubtedly made the lives of those possessing them a little more tolerable; more to the point, though, they were absolutely essential for the leaders who acted on behalf of the community and had to be on the streets, as they were often going from one German or Hungarian office to another.

FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

Because of their limited forces and eagerness to avoid antagonizing the local population unnecessarily, in Hungary as elsewhere in the German sphere of influence the Nazis relied on the local governmental authorities and the Jewish Council to bring about the implementation of the anti-Jewish measures. The local government was to provide the instruments of state power for the physical implementation of the drive, and the Jewish Council was to be maneuvered into lulling the Jewish masses into submission by giving them a false sense of security.⁸ The Council’s appeals for the Jewish masses to remain calm and disciplined and work to the limit of their abilities were published in the Nazi-censured Jewish newspaper that was distributed to all Jewish communities.⁹

STRUCTURE OF THE CENTRAL JEWISH COUNCIL

The many onerous and burdensome functions of the Council were reflected by its complex administrative-bureaucratic structure. The grandiose design for the establishment of a new national organization of Hungarian Jewry was worked out by Ernő Munkácsi, the executive secretary. Assigning a central leadership role to the Jewish Council, the design, reflecting the naïvete of the Jewish leaders, called for the setting up of two advisory Councils: a “Great Council of Budapest” to consist of twenty-five to twenty-seven members, and a “National Great Council” to include ten additional members—all presidents of various congregations. The country was to be divided into ten community districts, with the heads of the various communities at each district seat being responsible for the implementation of the Central Jewish Council’s instructions.

In addition to the national structural plan for the administration of the communities, Munkácsi also completed a detailed administrative design for the Central Council. It called for the establishment of nine departments,

each having distinct functions and responsibilities. Though these departments underwent some changes in response to the shifting requirements imposed upon them, most of them continued to operate relatively unchanged until shortly after the Arrow Cross coup of October 15, 1944. However, the two Great Councils, which symbolized a “unification” of the Hungarian Jews—a goal that they never reached—were destined to remain mere paper organizations. The swift ghettoization and deportation of the provincial Jews made these Councils superfluous.

The departments played an important and useful role for both the oppressed and the oppressors. They represented the major vehicle through which the Council tried, to the limit of its abilities, to help the victims and through which the Germans and the Hungarians communicated their orders and exacted their demands. By far the most important department was the “Presidential” one, which was entrusted with responsibility for the implementation of the instructions issued to and by the Council.¹⁰

The affairs of the Christian Jews, including persons who had been born Christian but were identified as Jews under the racial laws in effect at the time, were at first handled by the Department for Converts. After the representatives of the Christian churches complained about the resolution of the Germans to treat converts as Jews, the converts were placed under the jurisdiction of a new organization of their own: the Association of the Christian Jews of Hungary.

The workload of the various departments increased tremendously as time went on. The Council headquarters were constantly besieged by large numbers of Jews in search of individual favors. In response to these pressures, the number of officials and clerical employees increased dramatically. Many of these were volunteers who hoped to ease their own lot by being associated with, and thereby enjoying the “protection” of, the Council. Some of these worked tirelessly and devotedly on behalf of their persecuted brethren; others continued in the bureaucratic tradition of the prewar period. There were also a few who acted in a dictatorial fashion, boasting about their direct contacts with the German and Hungarian authorities. All of them, including the leaders of the Council, had to act circumspectly because of the suspected presence of informers.

After the jurisdiction of the Jewish Council of Budapest was extended to cover the entire Jewish community of Hungary, it assumed the name of Central Council of Hungarian Jews. Like its successor organizations, the Central Council only rarely held formal meetings. Most of its decisions were made on an emergency basis as events unfolded by a “presidential council” that included Stern and his two most intimate coworkers, Pető and Wilhelm. The three leaders, however, held frequent discussions with many other officials of the Council on problems that confronted them. The close

cooperation between the three—Neolog, assimilationist, and traditional—leaders of Hungarian Jewry throughout their tenure on the Council was based as much on their mutual trust and long-standing personal friendship as on their collective mistrust of some of the other members of the Council. It was further strengthened by the dictates of the constantly arising emergencies requiring speedy decisions that a larger deliberative body would have made more difficult.

The secrecy of the three leaders' deliberations, however, chagrined several of their colleagues on the Council, especially after it was reorganized late in April. Several among the newcomers not only mistrusted their leaders' judgment but also resented the fact that all other Council members had to bear collective responsibility for decisions without having a part in making them.

THE "LEGALIZATION" AND REORGANIZATION OF THE COUNCIL

Once the policies of the German and Hungarian authorities involved in the Jewish question were synchronized, the Jewish Council was given a legal basis for its operations. The government decree relating to the functions and structure of the Council was adopted on April 19 and went into effect three days later.¹¹ This remedied the "illegal" character of the Council, which the Germans had established by fiat on March 21. The decree provided for the establishment of a nine-member Jewish Council to be known as the Association of the Jews of Hungary. Its jurisdiction extended to all the Jews compelled to wear the yellow star. The Council operated under the direction of the Ministry of the Interior, with immediate jurisdiction being exercised by Section VII/b, "Organizations," then headed by Lajos Blaskovich, one of László Endre's closest friends.

Under the decree, the association (i.e., the Council) was entrusted with:

- Guarding the behavior of the Jews under its jurisdiction and issuing instructions binding on them.
- Representing the communal interests of the Jews under its jurisdiction.
- Advancing the social, educational, and cultural interests of the Jews.
- Executing all tasks entrusted to it under law and by the authorities.

The Council was expected to fulfill these functions within an organizational framework specified under bylaws, not yet drafted, that would go into effect with the concurrence of the Ministry of the Interior. In order to set up these bylaws and carry out the functions of the Council on an interim basis, the decree called for the establishment of a nine-man "provisional executive committee." The members of this committee were appointed on May 8 under a decree signed by Endre.¹² The Provisional Executive

Committee of the Association of the Jews of Hungary, as the new Jewish Council was officially called, convened to organize itself on May 15, the very day the mass deportations began in Carpatho-Ruthenia. The composition of the new Council differed from that of the original one and, since the new members had no previous association with the central leadership of Hungarian Jewry, it was more tension-ridden.

The basis for the appointment of the new members to the Council became known only after the war. József Nagy, a physician associated with the Jewish Hospital of Budapest, was appointed on the recommendation of one of his patients, István Vassányi, who worked under Endre as secretary of Section VIIb. of the Ministry of the Interior. Sándor Török, a noted writer who was then under arrest, was appointed to represent the Christian Jews on the recommendation of Zoltán Bosnyák, a rabid antisemite, following an intervention by someone acting for Mrs. Török. János Gábor's appointment was suggested by the Germans in order to assure the continuity of their contact with the Jewish leaders. By far the most controversial appointment was that of Béla Berend, the chief rabbi of the small town of Szigetvár, in the southwestern part of Hungary. Like Török, he was recommended by Bosnyák, to whom he reportedly had been introduced as "a clearheaded nationalist Jewish clergyman" by Count Domonkos Festetics, the noted antisemitic landowner and ultra-right-oriented politician who represented his town in the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament. Berend's appointment to the Council was received by the traditional leaders of Hungarian Jewry with surprise and alarm. They were astonished to find in their midst a young rabbi from a small provincial community with no known record of prior service in any national communal or Zionist organization. Their surprise was soon replaced by apprehension and anxiety as they were apprised about Berend's connections with Bosnyák. Under the extraordinarily perilous conditions of the time, the rumor that he had close connections with other rightists as well, including possibly Endre, soon gained credence.¹³

Though the reorganized Council was appointed by Endre, reflecting in a way the formal reestablishment of Hungarian jurisdiction over Jewish affairs, its functions were almost identical to those of its predecessor, which had been primarily under SS control. The beginning of its operations coincided with the launching of the mass deportations. Nevertheless, it continued along in its predecessor's footsteps, lulling the Jewish masses into submission.

Almost completely oblivious of the inferno around it, the Council continued to pursue in bureaucratic fashion certain legalistic-technical details that unfortunately were of little relevance to the burning problems at hand. It devoted considerable attention to the adoption of the bylaws stipulated in the decree relating to its establishment. As the trains with their quota of about twelve thousand Jews per day continued to roll from

the northeastern parts of the country toward the death camps, the Council remained at work on the bylaws, finally agreeing on a draft on May 22. Although it was promptly submitted to the Ministry of the Interior, it was never formally approved.

The composition and structure of the Council remained unchanged until shortly after Horthy halted the deportations on July 7, 1944. By that time, however, Hungary, with the exception of Budapest, was already *judenrein*. The two major changes that followed Horthy's decision were necessitated by the pressures exerted on behalf of the converts and the subsequent resignation of some of the Council members.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CONVERTS

Christians of Jewish origin were allowed to form their separate organization on July 14, 1944. This came about largely as a result of the Christian churches' vigorous interventions against the inclusion of converts in the anti-Jewish measures and of effective lobbying on the part of the leaders of the two major associations of converts: the Holy Cross Society, the association of converts of the Roman Catholic faith; and the Good Shepherd Mission, the association of converts of the various Protestant denominations.¹⁴

The establishment of a separate organization for the Christians of Jewish origin was also advanced by those who recognized the growing tension between the converts and the "100 percent" Jews, as well as between their respective leaders. The leadership and bureaucracy of the Jewish Council were thought to be more concerned and preoccupied with the problems confronting the Jews who continued to cling to their religion than with those of the converts, who had many more protectors among the Christians. The tension that divided the two persecuted groups was fast becoming unbearable, despite the tremendous efforts of Török, who went out of his way to secure help for both groups.

A delegation of the converted Jews was received by Albert Takács, Endre's confidant and secretary, on July 6. The following day, a committee prepared a draft of the bylaws for the establishment of a separate Association of the Christian Jews of Hungary. The draft, consisting of twenty-eight articles, was promptly submitted to Takács together with a cover letter from Török and his colleagues. The letter noted that the converted Jews would no longer belong to the Provisional Executive Committee of the National Association of the Jews of Hungary. Accordingly it requested that they be exempted, in accordance with the wishes of the churches, from wearing the yellow Star of David. Thanks to energetic interventions by the leaders of the Christian churches, the governmental hurdle was overcome on July 12, when Andor Jaross, the minister of the interior, recommended to the cabinet

that the decree relating to the Jewish Council be amended so as to make possible the establishment of a separate organization for the converts.

The decree establishing the new organization was issued on July 14, concurrently with Jaross's appointment of the members of its Provisional Executive Committee, headed by Török.¹⁵

With the establishment of the new association, a number of organizations of converts requested that their members be admitted into it and removed from the jurisdiction of the Jewish Council. Among the most important of these organizations were the Christian Fraternal Congregations of Hungary and the Christ-Believing Jews.

The Association of the Christian Jews of Hungary continued to expand its operation until shortly after the *Nyilas* coup. At that time it ceased to exist for all practical intents and purposes, and the defense of the interests of the converts reverted back to the Jewish Council.

REORGANIZATION OF THE PROVISIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The vacancies created by the resignation of Török and Kahán-Frankl, who decided to go into hiding, were filled on July 22 by the return of Bóda and the appointment of Lajos Stöckler, a lace manufacturer.¹⁶ Stöckler soon emerged as a gadfly on the Council, challenging the secrecy with which the top leaders—Stern, Pető, and Wilhelm—conducted their deliberations and reached decisions for which the entire Council was normally made responsible.¹⁷

Stöckler emerged as the champion of the interests of the poorer strata of Jewry. In his defense of the "little, unprotected" Jews, he went so far as to oppose the establishment of so-called protective houses for Jews who had obtained Swedish protective papers because that, he feared, would involve the relocation of the unprotected Jews already in the affected buildings. Stöckler (and his family) also deviated from the other members of the Council by refusing to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the regent's exemption policies and continued to wear the yellow star in solidarity with the Jewish masses.

Although the interim between Horthy's halting of the deportations and the *Nyilas* coup was relatively quiet, it was not totally panic-free for the Jews of Budapest or for individual Council members. The periodic rumors about the various plans allegedly devised by the dejewification squads for the resettlement of the Jews of Budapest were particularly upsetting. Some dealt with the "imminent" deportation of the surviving Jews to Poland; others revolved around their possible resettlement within the country. These were exacerbated by the news that some of the members and leading associates of the Council had decided to go into hiding or escape from the country.¹⁸

The greatest furor, both during and after the war, revolved around the escape of Fülöp Freudiger together with his family and friends. The Freudiger group succeeded in getting to Romania on August 9, 1944, with the aid of Dieter Wisliceny.¹⁹ In view of the fact that Freudiger, because of his close contacts with Jewish leaders abroad and with Wisliceny, was widely believed to be one of the best-informed members of the Jewish Council, his sudden departure was construed as a harbinger of imminent deportation. Aside from the panic that it created among the uninformed masses, Freudiger's escape also resulted in the arrest of some leaders of the Council. Gábor was arrested by the Gestapo almost immediately; Pető, Stern, and Wilhelm were arrested on August 18. The latter two were freed the following day after the resolute intervention of the regent, but Pető was mistreated and kept in custody until August 21.

The Jewish Council underwent a last reorganization in the wake of the Arrow Cross coup of October 15. Although the new Council, headed by Stern, was never formally appointed, it acted as such until the end of the occupation of Budapest.²⁰ Shortly after his reappointment, however, Stern decided to follow the example of Pető and Wilhelm and went into hiding. His functions were taken over by Stöckler, who in this capacity also came to head the ghetto of Budapest, where he worked indefatigably.²¹

During the months leading up to the liberation of Budapest on January 17, 1945, the members of the Council did their best to care for the emaciated and disease-ridden Jews of the ghetto, still the largest concentration of Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe. They were witnessing the last phase of the process that led to the annihilation of close to five hundred thousand Hungarian Jews—a process that had begun a mere ten months earlier with the establishment of the first Council. Few if any of them had been willing to believe that the first anti-Jewish measures, including those designed to intimidate and isolate the Jews, were but a prelude to their ghettoization and deportation. According to the currently available evidence, they persisted in their ostrichlike behavior in spite of the fact that, as will be shown, they were fully and accurately informed about the Nazis' Final Solution before the German occupation of Hungary. Their pattern of behavior after the occupation reflected the positions and perceptions to which they had been conditioned during the period of relative normalcy prior to occupation.

The Jewish Leadership: An Evaluation

The top leadership of Hungarian Jewry, both Neolog and Orthodox, was firmly committed to the values and principles of the traditional conservative-aristocratic system of the country. Convinced that Jewish interests were intimately intertwined with those of the Magyars, they never contemplated

the use of independent political techniques for the advancement of Jewish interests *per se*. Most of them proudly considered themselves “Magyars of the Jewish faith.” Consisting of rich, patriotic, anti-Zionist, and generally conservative elements, this leadership aimed at contributing to the maintenance of the established order by faithfully obeying governmental directives and fully associating itself with the values, beliefs, and interests of Hungarian society in general. At the same time, this leadership did everything in its power to protect the basic interests of the community, from which in return it expected not only acclaim, but, above all, voluntary subservience.

The operational techniques of the national leaders tended to be highly formal and legalistic, in emulation of the behavior of their gentry counterparts. Unlike many of the Polish and Romanian national Jewish leaders, for example, they shunned using the political arena for the protection and advancement of Jewish interests as such, opposing with equal vehemence both the Zionists and the proponents of a Hungarian Jewish Party. Consequently, their response to the ever exacerbating anti-Jewish measures during the interwar period was apologetic in nature and isolated from the general struggle of European Jewry. Their loyalty to the Hungarian nation—as shown, among other things, by their vigorous irredentist struggle for the rectification of the “injustices of Trianon”—and their attachment to the gentry-aristocratic establishment remained unshaken. Perhaps considering the great strides Hungarian Jewry had made during the so-called Golden Era,²² these leaders strove to safeguard those rights that the Jews still enjoyed in the wake of the major anti-Jewish laws of the late 1930s and to restore, if possible, the commonality of interests that characterized Jewish-Magyar relations during the pre-World War I era. They tended to pursue these objectives, however, without abandoning the traditional operational techniques that were proving increasingly ineffective, if not clearly counterproductive. Having no experience in militant political struggles for exclusively Jewish causes, lacking direct contact with the masses of Hungarian Jewry, whose intimate problems and spiritual world they did not adequately represent or understand, and voluntarily isolated from the concerns of world Jewry, these leaders emerged during the German occupation as singularly inept at providing the kind of leadership that the extraordinarily perilous times demanded.

Although most Hungarian Jewish leaders were well informed about the Nazis’ Final Solution, they failed to act any differently than their counterparts elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe who did not have the benefit of this knowledge. Helpless and deprived of their traditional governmental and political supporters, they decided that they had no alternative but to cooperate with the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices, constantly rationalizing their actions as “advantageous” to the community under the given circumstances. This posture was reinforced by the realization that they

could not count on the postoccupation Hungarian government for protection and that the only thing they could do was to try to win “the race with time” in a war the Axis powers soon were bound to lose.

Consequently, though motivated by good intentions, they unwillingly became involved in the effectuation of a number of measures in which the perpetrators were interested. Thus, they were the ones who, among other things, lulled the masses into a false sense of security; distributed internment summonses that cost the lives of hundreds of professionals; effectuated the sequestration of the Budapest Jews in special star-marked buildings; requisitioned apartments; and surrendered large amounts of money and valuables. As elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe, they became—against their will and intentions—helpless instruments with which the dejewifiers implemented many of their designs.²³

Could the Jewish leaders have acted differently? What would have happened had they resigned from the Council? The traditional leaders of Hungarian Jewry calculated that, by staying at the helm instead of escaping or resigning in a cowardly fashion, they could at least mitigate, if not totally avoid, their losses. Had they resigned en masse there is no doubt that the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices would easily have found another, or even a third, set of Jewish leaders to replace them. Had they not implemented the orders relating to internments and the requisitioning of apartments, chances are good that the German and Hungarian units would have found a way to carry out these internments and requisitions more cruelly.

On the other hand, while the resignation of Stern and his colleagues would certainly have incurred their immediate arrest and possible execution, the Jewish masses might thus have learned early of the realities of the German occupation. Also, they would perhaps not have followed the instructions of Jewish nonentities as obediently as they did those of the traditional leaders, whom they trusted. It was exactly for this reason that the Germans insisted on retaining the old, traditional, and trusted leaders of the Jewish communities on the Jewish Councils.

Conversely, it is safe to assume that had Stern and his associates refused to undertake the onerous tasks assigned to them by the Germans, and by some miracle still survived the ordeal while hundreds of thousands of Jews were massacred, they would certainly have been condemned by other survivors for having held positions of power only while there was prestige and honor associated with doing so, and for having abandoned the community in its darkest hour, as some of the central and local leaders—including Zionists and rabbis—had done. In spite of the obvious risks involved, the leaders of the Council decided to accept the burdens of leadership in the hope of mitigating, if not averting, the catastrophe looming over Hungarian Jewry. They hoped to achieve this by dilatory tactics calculated to win “the

race with time.” Like Jewish leaders throughout the Diaspora and others throughout Nazi-dominated Europe, they appear to have tried to come to terms with the oppressors in order to try to stymie their objectives, and to save as many Jewish lives as possible under the extraordinarily perilous circumstances.

The Hungarian Jewish leaders were indeed shortsighted in their naive optimism; they were obviously remiss in failing to prepare for a possible catastrophe; they were certainly devoid of any meaningful national Jewish consciousness; they were almost oblivious to the suffering of Jews elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe; and they were woefully inadequate in their leadership after the occupation. The currently available evidence, however, does not lend itself to the conclusion that the Jewish Council, as a whole, acted in willful violation of the best interests of Hungarian Jewry under the extraordinary conditions of Nazi rule. In retrospect, their major mistake appears to have been their failure to keep the Jewish masses informed about the Nazis’ drive against the Jews in German-dominated Europe. The perpetuation of this posture after the German occupation of Hungary proved fatal. This silence constitutes perhaps the most controversial chapter of the Holocaust in Hungary.

Awareness of the Final Solution

THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Probably no other aspect of the Holocaust has evoked more searching questions or elicited more agonizing debates than the wartime attitudes of the Jewish and governmental leaders of the free world and of the doomed Jewish communities. The attitude of the Hungarian Jewish leadership has come under special scrutiny because the community managed to survive until the second quarter of 1944, by which time many of the secrets of Auschwitz had already surfaced and the downfall of the Third Reich generally was considered inevitable. The question of what the Hungarian Jewish leaders knew about the realities of the Nazis’ extermination program before the German occupation and especially by the time the mass deportations began on May 15, 1944, thus acquires a special significance if one is to assess their attitudes and reactions.

What exactly did the national Hungarian Jewish leaders know about the extermination of the Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe, and when did they learn of it? If they did know exactly how the Nazis intended to solve the Jewish question, why did they fail to alert the leaders of the provincial Jewish communities and the Jewish masses in general? Why did they fail to inform their Hungarian friends—the anti-German and anti-Nazi politicians and trade union leaders—and through them the Hungarian masses?

Currently available evidence indicates that many of the national leaders of Hungarian Jewry, like the Jewish and governmental leaders of the free world, were fully aware of the realities of the Final Solution before the German occupation. While their information about the mass extermination of the Jews in the areas dominated by the Nazis was perhaps not totally substantiated during the first two years of the war, hard evidence was definitely at hand weeks before the beginning of the mass deportations from Hungary.

THE FIRST REPORTS

Although the mass exterminations in the death camps of Poland began only after the Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942,²⁴ hundreds of thousands of Polish, Soviet, and other Jews already had been massacred by that time by the *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile killing units that operated in the areas of the Soviet Union conquered by the Germans.²⁵ Among these were the sixteen thousand to eighteen thousand “alien” Jews who had been deported from Hungary in August 1941. Their liquidation near Kamenets-Podolsk, in fact, marked the first Holocaust-period massacre of such dimensions.²⁶

Despite the stringent security measures taken by the SS, the killings were on too massive a scale to be completely concealed. Some of these mass executions were witnessed by members of armed forces allied with the Germans, including the Hungarians. Many of these Hungarians, in particular, were appalled by the machine-gunning of innocent men, women, and children. They expressed their shock in letters to their families and gave detailed reports on what they had seen when home on furlough. The harsh anti-Jewish laws notwithstanding, the Hungarian armed forces in the Ukraine included a limited number of Jewish soldiers—armed and in uniform because of their expertise as drivers, mechanics, engineers, or doctors—who also witnessed the horrors committed by the *Einsatzgruppen*. Their accounts, like those of the Christian soldiers and officers, were brought to the attention of the communal and Zionist leaders of the country. Reports based on these accounts were even published in the American press.²⁷ The accounts of the Hungarian military were fully corroborated by deportees who managed to escape and return to Hungary.

By the late summer of 1941, Hungarian Jewish leaders had solid information not only about the extermination of the Jews deported from Hungary, but also about the mass executions carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* and their local henchmen—Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, Romanians, and Ukrainians—in the Baltic States, the Ukraine, and Bessarabia and Bukovina, as well as about the first experimental use of gassing trucks.²⁸

ACCOUNTS BY JEWISH REFUGEES

Among the major sources of this information were the thousands of Jewish refugees who had escaped into Hungary from Poland and Slovakia in the wake of the draconic anti-Jewish measures adopted in those countries. Some of them were smuggled into Hungary with the assistance of the Budapest-based Relief and Rescue Committee (Vaadah). One of the major functions of this organization was to collect and transmit the personal accounts of the escapees, along with its own reports about the realities of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, to its Jewish Agency contacts in Istanbul and Switzerland. The Budapest Vaadah set up a regular underground intelligence unit, where the escapees were closely questioned and the details about the ghettoization, deportation, and extermination program in Poland, Slovakia, and elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe were carefully scrutinized and counterchecked. Hundreds of such accounts were thus authenticated in Budapest and forwarded to the representatives of the major Jewish international organizations, including those in Palestine, Switzerland, and Turkey.²⁹ These contained details about the “mass murders in the East,” as well as specific information about gassings and the operation of the crematoria.³⁰

REVELATIONS BY THE SLOVAK JEWISH LEADERS

The organization primarily concerned with rescue and relief activities in Slovakia was the Working Group of the Bratislava Jewish Council. Consisting of some of the most activist members of the Council, including Gisi Fleischmann and Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, the Working Group shared many of the responsibilities of the Budapest Vaadah. In addition to its concern for the safety of the Slovak Jewish community, the group was one of the primary sources of information relating to the Nazis’ Final Solution program. Its members felt that one of its most important functions was to inform the Jewish leaders outside the Nazi sphere of domination about the realities of the anti-Jewish drive in Poland and Slovakia. Its periodic reports were sent to the representatives of the international Jewish organizations in Switzerland, the Jewish Agency delegates in Istanbul, and the Hungarian Jewish leaders. Using a secret code system, which incidentally was used by the leaders of all the wartime Jewish agencies involved in relief and rescue work, the group’s reports contained detailed and authenticated information about the extermination of the Jews.

Gisi Fleischmann kept in touch primarily with the Zionist-related groups, while Rabbi Weissmandel was in almost constant communication with the Orthodox community leaders. In Hungary, Rabbi Weissmandel’s primary contact was Fülöp Freudiger. On March 24, 1943, for example,

Fleischmann identified the three major centers where Jews were still in existence as Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Lublin, emphasizing that the only Jews still alive were those who had been deemed physically still able to work. In her May 9, 1943, report on mass murders in Poland, she provided clarification relating to the survivors. She informed the Jewish leaders of the free world that, after a while, even those selected for labor were murdered. A day later, she forwarded an important report that was marked “Top Secret: Destroy Immediately.” The report, a copy of which has survived in spite of her instructions, contained not only further details about the mass murders in Poland, but also specific provisions of a quixotic possible deal with the SS for the saving of European Jewry outside Poland.³¹

Though bitterly complaining about the callousness and insensitivity of the Hungarian Jewish leaders, Fleischmann continued to forward further details about the annihilation of the European Jews in Poland. Her report of September 5, 1943, was quite specific: “We know today that Sobibor, Malkyne-Treblinka, Belzec, and Auschwitz are annihilation camps. In the camps themselves small work parties are being maintained to create the impression that they are ordinary camps.”³²

During the first months of 1944, many of the reports emanating from Bratislava dealt with the impending doom of Hungarian Jewry. The Working Group alerted the Jewish leaders of the free world about ominous developments in Hungary immediately before and after the occupation. The American Jewish leaders, for example, received news from Geneva on April 4, 1944, that the Germans intended to exterminate Hungarian Jewry within six months. That was almost two weeks before the beginning of the ghettoization in Carpatho-Ruthenia, but the Allies reportedly refused to heed the Jewish leaders’ appeals.³³ During the ghettoization and deportation of the Hungarian Jews, Weissmandel—in heartbreaking letters and desperate calls for help—implored the leaders of the free world to help put an end to the bloodletting.

The Hungarian Jewish leaders also received periodic communications from Bratislava about the many ominous signals that foreshadowed their possible doom. Thus, weeks before the beginning of the deportations, the Slovak Jewish leaders informed them that a railway agreement had been signed by Hungary and Slovakia and that the SS were in the process of improving and renovating the gas chambers and crematoria in Auschwitz in anticipation of the arrival of Jews from Hungary. One of the reports even quoted the words of a *Scharführer* to the effect that the SS “will soon eat fine Hungarian salami.”³⁴

The Hungarian Jewish leaders, and especially those associated with the Vaadah, were also kept up to date about the Nazis’ extermination program by the Jewish Agency office in Istanbul. They were warned, among other

things, about the dangers of cooperating with the Germans in case of an occupation. In letters dated September 25 and October 23, 1943, when speculation was rampant about an imminent German occupation of Hungary, Menachem Bader, a leading member of the Istanbul office, instructed his colleagues in Budapest to desist from cooperating even passively with the Germans. He warned that carrying out such activities as taking a census, submitting to concentration, or wearing the yellow star were “preparation for destruction.”³⁵

REVELATIONS BY ESCAPEES FROM AUSCHWITZ

The most dramatic evidence relating to the Hungarian Jewish leaders’ awareness of the Nazis’ Final Solution program prior to its full implementation in Hungary was provided by two escapees from Auschwitz: Rudolf Vrba (Walter Rosenberg) and Alfred Wetzler (Josef Lanik).³⁶ Both Vrba and Wetzler had held camp positions that enabled them to move comparatively freely throughout Auschwitz and collect detailed information about the incoming transports and the selection and extermination of the victims: Vrba was a clerk in the quarantine block, while Wetzler held the same position in the main camp of Birkenau.

After a dramatic escape on April 7 and an adventurous journey of ten days, they reached relative safety on Slovakian soil on April 21. Four days later, they were telling their story at the Zilina headquarters of the Jewish Council to the Slovak Jewish leaders. The escapees were closely scrutinized, their stories carefully counterchecked and verified.

The Vrba-Wetzler Report contained a detailed description of the camp facilities, including the barracks in which the prisoners were quartered; the kitchens; the hospitals; and the processing of the incoming deportees, including the techniques used in their “selection,” tattooing, gassing, and cremation. It also described the administrative structure in the camp and gave highly accurate data on the number and origin of the Jews gassed at Birkenau between April 1942 and April 1944. The report included sketches of the building plans prepared by a professional architect. In his introduction to the report, Oskar Krasznayansky, one of the Slovak Jewish leaders, included biographical notes on the escapees and vouched for the accuracy and authenticity of their account.³⁷ He also added a supplement in which he urged the Allies to destroy the crematoria and the railroad lines leading to Auschwitz.³⁸

The shocking but factual accounts of Vrba and Wetzler were fully corroborated a few weeks later by two other escapees from Auschwitz—Arnost Rosin of Snina, Slovakia, and Czesław Mordowicz of Mława, Poland—who had escaped on April 27. Their account was recorded by

Krasznyansky during the first half of June 1944, in Liptovsky Mikulas (Liptószentmiklós). It provided new and important data on the deportation and extermination of European Jews up to the time of their flight.³⁹

The record is ambiguous as to the exact date when the Vrba-Wetzler Report was forwarded to the Jewish leaders in Hungary and Switzerland and to the representatives of the Christian churches. The evidence is clear that members of the Working Group, acting collectively and individually, forwarded copies of the report to parties deemed essential for their propagation, including the Jewish Agency representatives in Istanbul; Nathan Schwalb of the *Hehalutz* in Geneva; Giuseppe Burzio, the papal nuncio in Bratislava (who was expected to deliver it to the Vatican); and Rudolph (Rezső) Kasztner (who reportedly was to share it with the Jewish and non-Jewish leaders in Hungary, including Miklós Horthy, the Hungarian head of state, and Jusztinián Cardinal Serédi).⁴⁰ Vrba is quite specific in establishing the date. He claims that he had been assured by Krasznyansky and others on April 26 that the report had already been sent to the Hungarians. Oscar Neumann, the Slovak Jewish leader, is vague about the dates and claims that the report was forwarded “shortly after” it was typed. Krasznyansky, on the other hand, claims that Kasztner, who visited Bratislava during those days, had read the original German text right then and there and had him translate the report into Hungarian as well. He recalls that the Hungarian translation was forwarded to Budapest within two weeks.⁴¹

AWARENESS BY HUNGARIAN JEWISH LEADERS

Several Hungarian Jewish leaders openly acknowledged their awareness of the Nazis’ Final Solution prior to the occupation. Among these was Samu Stern. Describing the circumstances under which he emerged as the head of the Jewish Council of Budapest, he wrote:

I—nor others I suppose—was not taken in by the faked good will, hypocrisy, and treachery of the Gestapo’s debut. *I knew what they had done in all German-occupied states of Europe.* I knew their activities to be a long, long sequence of murders and robberies. . . . I knew the Nazis’ habits, deeds, and terrifying reputation, and yet I accepted the chairmanship of the Council. *And the others knew as much as I did when they joined the Council as members.* (emphasis added)⁴²

Kasztner’s admissions after the war matched Stern’s acknowledgment. As a Zionist, Kasztner perhaps was in an even better position than Stern to keep abreast of the anti-Jewish measures in Europe, since he was in constant contact with the representatives of the Jewish organizations abroad by a variety of underground channels. Shortly after liberation, Kasztner brought

out a detailed though arguably self-serving report on the wartime activities of the Vaadah. In it he provides both direct and indirect evidence that he and his colleagues were fully aware of the measures that had been adopted against the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. He is basically silent about the leaders' failure to inform Hungarian Jewry, but all the more pugnacious and bitter over the passivity and complacency of the Jewish and non-Jewish leaders of the free world. In his endeavor to undercut the position adopted by many Allied leaders both during and after the war that they had been unaware of the "apocalyptic extent of Hitler's anti-Jewish measures," he emphatically declared that there was no dearth of such information. From Budapest alone, he argued, innumerable reports had been sent out by underground channels since the middle of 1942 about what was going on in Poland. Keeping track of the anti-Jewish measures in Nazi-occupied Europe and informing the Jewish and non-Jewish leaders of the free world had, as indicated before, been among the major functions of the Vaadah.⁴³ Among those who provided undercover courier services for the Vaadah were Josef Winninger (Josi) and Dr. Schmidt of Admiral Canaris's *Abwehr* (Intelligence) unit in Budapest, and Rudolf Sedlacek of the SS.

After the war, Kasztner also testified in two major trials that he had been aware of the destruction of European Jewry before the German occupation of Hungary. Appearing as a witness for the prosecution in the Veessenmayer trial on March 19, 1948, Kasztner responded as follows when asked whether he was "in a position to gain a clear picture of the situation in Hungary":

I was the President of the Zionist Organization of Hungary, and after the arrival of the first Jewish refugees from Slovakia I had a mandate to build up a committee to provide rescue and help for these refugees. In this capacity I was, I think, one of the best informed in Hungary about the situation of the Jews at that time. . . . In addition, I have learned from talking to these refugees that some of them managed to escape from Auschwitz. *We had, as early as 1942, a complete picture of what had happened in the East to the Jews deported to Auschwitz and the other extermination camps.* (emphasis added)⁴⁴

However, when he was cross-examined by Veessenmayer's defense counsel as to why he or his organization had failed to inform Horthy about what they had known about the extermination camps since 1942, Kasztner hedged and gave a decidedly evasive reply:

We certainly should have tried this. We ought to have tried it, and we did, but you must visualize the situation in Hungary at the time immediately after the German occupation. It was a state of terror. Many of the friends

and acquaintances through whom we could have informed Regent Horthy were already gone. Others were afraid to get in touch with us. It took quite some time before we found the men and the opportunity to inform Horthy about it.⁴⁵

While Kasztner was partially correct in depicting the situation *after* the German occupation, his answer fails to shed light on the national Hungarian Jewish leaders' failure, *before* the occupation, to inform Horthy and the other Hungarian governmental and political leaders, as well as the provincial Jewish community leaders, if not the Jewish masses, about what they had known since 1942. This is particularly important in light of the power demonstrated by Horthy in July 1944 to halt the deportations.⁴⁶ One can only speculate, of course, whether Horthy would have acted earlier had he been officially informed about the realities of the Final Solution before or at least immediately after the German occupation. It must be added that the evidence indicates that Horthy and some of the top Hungarian leaders were in fact made aware of the Final Solution through other sources, as will be shown.

Kasztner also admitted, during the trial in 1954–55 of his libel suit in Israel against Malkiel Grunwald, to knowledge about the extermination of the Jews in Poland. When questioned by Grunwald's defense lawyer on his dealings with the SS, Kasztner stated:

Toward the end of April 1944, the German military agents informed me that they had finally decided on the total deportation of Hungarian Jews. . . . An agreement was made between Hungary and Slovakia for the transfer of deportation trains from Hungary to Auschwitz.

I also received information from Auschwitz that they were preparing there to receive the Hungarian Jews. . . . I was allowed by . . . Krumei to go to Kluj [Cluj; Kolozsvár] and contact . . . Wisliceny. This was approximately the third of May, 1944. . . . A few days later I visited Wisliceny at his home in Budapest. He told me that it had finally been decided—total deportation.⁴⁷

Kasztner's visit to Kolozsvár during the ghettoization of the North Transylvanian Jews early in May 1944 has emerged as the source of one of the greatest controversies concerning the attitude of the Jewish leaders during the Holocaust. Although Kasztner was already fully and accurately informed about the Final Solution, he reportedly failed to inform the local Jewish Council or his Vaadah colleagues about the impending disaster.⁴⁸ Kasztner's closest friends, including Hillel Danzig and Dezső (David) Hermann, who had played a prominent role in the Zionist movement, denied having been told anything about Auschwitz.

In response to a question by Judge Benjamin Halevi, Kasztner admitted that he had given József Fischer, his father-in-law, who at the time was the head of the Jewish Council of Kolozsvár, certain hints, adding that Fischer “had to know that there was deportation and that extermination would follow.” When asked why the Jews of Kolozsvár had not been informed, he acknowledged that his colleagues in Kolozsvár, including his father-in-law, “did not do all in their power—did not do all that could have been done—all that they had to do.”⁴⁹ In fact, if Kasztner is correct then his colleagues must have known a lot, because at the time of his visit to Kolozsvár on May 3, Kasztner was already in possession of the Vrba-Wetzler Report as well.⁵⁰

While the German and Hungarian Nazis were pressing on with their Final Solution, the Jewish leaders handled the report “confidentially,” in order “not to create panic.”⁵¹ Others, in auxiliary positions, wasted valuable time on translating the report.⁵² It was only during the second half of June that the Hungarian Jewish leaders began to distribute copies of the Vrba-Wetzler Report among the influential governmental and church leaders of Hungary and among their friends abroad. A copy was given by Pető to Miklós Horthy Jr. for transmission to his father. Miklós (Moshe) Krausz forwarded an abbreviated English version of the report, together with a memorandum on the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews in the various parts of Hungary, to Switzerland on June 19, 1944.⁵³ The material was taken to Switzerland by Florian Manoliu, a member of the Romanian Legation in Bern, who had close, and reputedly lucrative, relations with George (Mandel) Mantello, a Jewish businessman originally from Beszterce, Transylvania, who was then serving as the first secretary of the general consulate of El Salvador in Geneva.⁵⁴ It was through Mantello that the report was distributed in Switzerland to the media and the representatives of Jewish and non-Jewish agencies. Shortly after it was brought to public attention by the Swiss press—the first major coverage of the Holocaust in the free world—a number of world leaders, including President Roosevelt, the king of Sweden, and Pope Pius XII, interceded with Horthy on behalf of the Jews of Hungary.⁵⁵ By that time, however, almost all of Hungary, with the notable exception of Budapest, was already *judenrein*.⁵⁶

THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS’ AWARENESS OF THE FINAL SOLUTION

Although the Jewish leaders apparently brought the Vrba-Wetzler Report to the attention of Hungarian governmental and church leaders only during the second half of June 1944, there is ample evidence indicating that these leaders had been acquainted with the Nazis’ war against the Jews even

before the occupation. They had the same sources of information as the Jews about what the *Einsatzgruppen* had done in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union. They were also fully acquainted with the fate that befell the sixteen thousand to eighteen thousand “alien” Jews of Hungary who had been deported to Galicia during the summer of 1941. Moreover, they must have been kept abreast by the Hungarian diplomatic representatives stationed in the affected areas and, above all, in the neutral countries. Last but not least, one can safely presume that they—or at least those in charge of intelligence gathering—also followed the radio broadcasts emanating from “enemy” territory—broadcasts that occasionally also detailed the systematic destruction of Jews in the areas controlled by the Nazis.

There is ample evidence that the Hungarian leaders were personally acquainted with “the great secret.” For example, at his first Schloss Klessheim meeting in April 1943, Horthy was advised by the Führer that Hungary should follow the example of Poland, where “the Jews who did not want to work were simply shot.” This advice was amplified by Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister, who suggested that the Jews “should either be killed or sent to concentration camps.”⁵⁷ Upon his return to Hungary, Horthy decided to defend himself against the Führer, who had reproached him for his alleged “mild treatment of the Jews in Hungary.” In the original draft of his letter of May 7, 1943, addressed to Hitler, Horthy attempted to defend himself and the Kállay government against the Führer’s reproach by denying that Hungary had “failed to take as far-reaching an action *in the extirpation of the Jews* as Germany had taken or as would appear desirable in other countries” (emphasis added). Although this sentence was replaced by one referring to Horthy’s well-substantiated claim that he was the first in Europe to raise his voice “against the destructive attitude of the Jews,” it clearly reveals that Horthy and the officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who prepared the draft had been informed about what was happening to the Jews of Germany.⁵⁸

Döme Sztójay apparently knew about the Nazi design to “solve the Jewish question in a radical manner during the war” as early as 1942, when he was still Hungary’s minister to Berlin. He revealed his knowledge to György Ottlik, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament. Ottlik, who had visited Germany in the course of his West European tour of August–September 1942, transmitted this information to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 10. According to Wisliceny, “both Endre and Baky have been accurately informed as to what the deportations meant.”⁵⁹ In his report of May 29, 1944, László Ferenczy, the Hungarian gendarmerie officer in charge of the ghettoization and deportation program, openly referred to Auschwitz as a place where the deported Jews were subjected to a process of “selection.”⁶⁰

The currently available evidence indicates that not only the pro-German and ultra-rightist elements, but also some of the anti-Nazi leaders in Hungary were acquainted with the Nazi extermination program. Kasztner claims, although without providing sufficient evidence, that the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, including Anna Kéthly, Anton Bán, Illés Mónus, József Büchler, Miklós Kertész, and Manó Buchinger, had been kept informed about the destruction of the European Jews and about the Nazis' methods.⁶¹ Angelo Rotta, the papal nuncio in Budapest, was also familiar with the realities of the deportations. In his letter of May 15, 1944, protesting the measures that the Hungarian government had taken or planned to take against the Jews, Rotta stated that "the whole world knows what the deportation means in practice."⁶²

At the time Rotta warned the Sztójay government, the leaders of the Hungarian state and the heads of the Christian churches were as familiar as he and other Jewish leaders were with the details of the Final Solution revealed by the Vrba-Wetzler Report. According to an in-depth interview study with four non-Jewish wartime personalities prepared by the respected Hungarian journalist Sándor Szenes, the Hungarian governmental and church leaders had copies of the report in Hungarian translation at their disposal shortly before the mass deportations began on May 15, 1944.⁶³ It appears that one of the copies of the original German version of the report was handed to Géza Soós, a counselor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a former confidant of Pál Teleki, late in April 1944. Soós, who later that year became the head of a relatively small resistance group called the Hungarian Independence Movement, handed his copy for translation and duplication to Rev. József Éliás, the head of the Good Shepherd Mission, during the first few days of May. The report was translated into Hungarian in six copies and distributed to the top leaders of the Christian churches and the Hungarian state.⁶⁴ They were distributed by Éliás as per Soós's instructions to Jusztinián Cardinal Serédi; Bishop László Ravasz, the head of the Reformed Church; Bishop Sándor Raffay, the head of the Evangelical Church; Ottó Komoly; and Mrs. István Horthy, the regent's daughter-in-law. The sixth copy was forwarded to Soós together with the original.⁶⁵

Although the top governmental and Christian church leaders, like the anti-Nazi forces in general, were acquainted with the meaning of Auschwitz and were aware of the measures enacted against the Jews in Hungary, in fact witnessing the ghettoization and deportation process, they failed to come to the assistance of their fellow citizens of the Jewish faith who had so faithfully supported the cause of Magyardom in the past. The anti-Nazi forces, including the various though generally weak resistance organizations, failed to engage in any rescue activities designed to help Jews qua Jews.

The leading Hungarian pro-Nazi forces, on the other hand, were actually emboldened by their awareness of the “great secret”: they were eager to implement the Final Solution with their SS partners while Hungary was still in the grip of the Axis. Time was of the essence, for the Red Army was fast approaching the Carpathians. For this reason, the German and Hungarian dejewifiers lost no time in synchronizing their plans for the implementation of the Final Solution in Hungary. These plans called for the dejewification of the country in three distinct phases. The first phase was to be preparatory, laying the ground for the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews; the second related to their ghettoization and concentration in entrainment centers; and the third pertained to their deportation to Auschwitz.

5 THE FINAL SOLUTION: PHASE I

The first phase of the Final Solution in Hungary included the adoption of a series of measures that were designed to prepare the ground for the effective elimination of the Jews from the country. These involved the initiation of mass arrests, the intimidation and pauperization of the community, and the isolation and expropriation of the Jews.

Arrests and Intimidations

The SS and Gestapo units that entered Hungary with the *Wehrmacht* forces in the early morning hours of March 19, 1944, began their operations concurrently with the occupation. One of their first major concerns was to arrest the prominent Hungarian anti-Nazi figures, together with their Jewish “friends,” on the basis of lists provided by the Budapest branch of the Nazi political security and counterespionage office, headed by Wilhelm Höttl. The lists of persons slated for imprisonment identified Hungary’s leading political and economic figures, including the aristocratic-conservative elite on which Hungarian Jewry largely depended for its safety, and the Jewish or Jewish-Christian leaders of business and finance. The lists also included a number of leading artists, journalists, and governmental officials—including some of the most prominent members of the police, diplomatic, and counterintelligence services—who were deemed actual or potential enemies of the Third Reich. The order of the arrests reflected the interests of the Reich as determined by the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA).¹

These arrests took place without any protest on the part of the government or the regent and without any resistance on the part of those affected.² Only one member of the Lower House, József Közi-Horváth of Győr, dared to raise the issue of the arrests and of the violation of the constitutional system when the Hungarian Parliament met on March 22. However, he was ruled out of order and shouted down by his colleagues.

Concurrent with the arrests carried out on the basis of the lists the Nazis brought with them, the SS and their Hungarian accomplices also arrested a large number of Jews who happened to be in or around the railway stations and boat terminals, especially in Budapest. In addition, following an inquiry by Heinrich Himmler, Otto Winkelmann ordered the arrest of

two hundred physicians and lawyers; these professionals were picked out at random from the telephone book on the basis of their Jewish-sounding names. The campaign against individual Jews, the so-called individual actions, continued unabated until the beginning of the mass ghettoization of the Jews. By March 31, the number of Jews arrested had reached 3,364, and by April 2, 3,451. By April 16, when the systematic concentration of the Jews began in Carpatho-Ruthenia, the number of Jews arrested in individual actions had risen to 7,289.³

Most of the Jews arrested in Budapest were temporarily interned in the facilities of the National Rabbinical Institute. Formally transformed into an “auxiliary house of detention,” the institute in fact served as a Gestapo prison under the overall command of Dieter Wisliceny and his Hungarian counterpart, Pál Ubrizsi. From this and other similar detention sites, the Jews usually were taken to the internment camps at Kistarcsa, Topolya, or Csepel, where they were among the first to be deported to Auschwitz in late April.

The arrests during the first few weeks after the occupation served many purposes. The Germans wished to eliminate the actual and potential leaders of the anti-German Hungarian opposition, including the political and aristocratic-gentry friends of the Jews; to demonstrate their own power in Hungary; to intimidate the Jews; and to capture hostages in order to blackmail the Jewish community or acquire control over various industries.

Demands and Requisitions

Simultaneously with the mass arrests carried out against the Jews and other opponents of the Third Reich, the SS began the expropriation of the Jewish community. Almost immediately after the occupation began, the various German units began to set up quarters for themselves in Budapest and the other large cities. The first German demand addressed to the Jewish leadership of Budapest (on March 21) was for the delivery of three hundred mattresses, six hundred blankets, cleaning utensils, and thirty printing presses. (The presses were needed for the operation of the printing shop of the Social Democratic Party, which was transformed into a Nazi propaganda center.) That same day the Germans took over the headquarters of the Orthodox Jewish community at 31 Dob Street, along with the adjacent synagogue and school, and transformed them into barracks and workshops.

In addition to ordinary bedding and household goods, the SS soon began to ask for luxury items of various kinds, including paintings and other art objects, musical instruments, toiletries, perfumes, silverware, automobiles, and lingerie. The successful campaign by the SS induced other German personnel, as well as their Hungarian counterparts, to advance similar demands on the Jews. To protect the special interests of the *Sonderkommando*,

Hermann Alois Krumei—acting in cooperation with the Jewish leaders—prohibited the entry of unauthorized personnel into the headquarters of the Jewish Council.

Costly and upsetting as these demands were, they were soon overshadowed by the more drastic and demoralizing orders for the mass evacuation of apartments. The Allied air attacks of April 3 and 4, 1944, which were directed against industrial and railway centers in Budapest, were fully exploited to fan anti-Jewish hysteria. Demands were made for the execution of one hundred Jews for each Christian killed in the “Jewish-directed” bombings, and for restitution to Christians in the form of Jewish-owned apartments. While suggestions for the reprisal execution of Jews were abandoned—the dejewifiers were already at work on the orderly “resettlement” of all the Jews—the Jews of Budapest were required to provide five hundred apartments within twenty-four hours after the raid of April 3. While the Housing Department of the Jewish Council, acting under the energetic leadership of Rezső Müller, was busy requisitioning these apartments, the authorities ordered the Council to provide an additional one thousand apartments as “reparations” for the bombing of April 4. Using all the resources of the Council and of the Jewish community and acting in conjunction with the local authorities, Müller deposited the fifteen hundred keys within the time specified by László Endre.⁴ Working under the great pressure of an imminent deadline, the requisition groups frequently acted in an unjust and coarse manner, causing great anguish to the evicted and dispossessed Jews. In response to the demands imposed upon it, the Housing Department was rapidly turned into one of the largest departments—and bureaucracies—within the Council.

Isolation and Marking of the Jews

To facilitate the ghettoization and deportation processes, the Hungarian authorities decided to emulate one of the techniques that had been successfully applied elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe: the hermetic separation of the Jews from the Christians. The first major step toward this end was the adoption of a decree that prohibited the ownership and use of telephones by Jews. This was followed by many other decrees having the same object. These stipulated, among other things, that Jews could not travel, own automobiles, own radio receivers, listen to foreign radio stations, or change residence.⁵ Almost concurrently, the Sztójay government adopted a series of decrees that further exacerbated the Jews’ economic and social position in the country. These provided for a ban on the employment of non-Jews in Jewish households, the dismissal of Jewish civil servants and lawyers, and the exclusion of Jews from the press and theatrical establishments.

Restrictive as these measures were, they were overshadowed by the decree that called for the compulsory wearing of the yellow Star of David.⁶

Designed to separate and differentiate the Jews from the rest of the population, the decree was published on March 31 and stipulated that beginning April 5, every Jewish person more than six years of age must wear a 10 x 10 centimeter (3.8 x 3.8 inch) canary-yellow six-pointed star made of cloth, firmly sewn on the left chest side of the outer garment. Exempted from this requirement—and consequently from the other, harsher anti-Jewish measures, including ghettoization and deportation—were a relatively few Jews who fit into narrowly defined categories. Exemptions were granted to war veterans who:

- Had manifested great bravery during World War I, resulting in their earning of either one gold or two silver, first-class, medals.
- As company officers, had earned the sword-adorned iron cross order, third-class, or higher medal.
- As field officers, had earned a sword-adorned medal higher than the sword-adorned iron cross order, third-class.
- Suffered 75 percent disability from war wounds.
- Were exempted under the provisions of various other laws passed between 1939 and 1941.

Under pressure from the leaders of the Christian churches, the list of exemptions was extended a few days after the publication of the decree. Added to those exempted were active and retired pastors and deacons of Christian religious communities; the wives, widows, and children of Jews decorated for heroism; the widows and orphans of soldiers who had died in World War II; converts married to Christians; and Jews of foreign nationality with certification from the National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH).⁷

Almost immediately after the decree went into effect, the police and their *Nyilas* supporters started a veritable hunt for Jews. Many Jews were arrested and interned on the excuse that the color of their star was not the right canary-yellow, or that it was not of the prescribed size, or that it was not sewn on the garment properly.

The leaders of the Jewish Council, like the Zionist leaders, were generally familiar with the ominous implications of the badge. The latter had in fact been specifically warned against compliance by their colleagues in Istanbul.⁸ The Jewish masses and provincial community leaders, on the other hand, were completely unaware that the wearing of the badge was but the prelude to their ultimate destruction. Most of the Jews wore it with a matter-of-fact resignation; some wore it ostentatiously, reflecting a defiant pride in their Jewishness; others, mostly of assimilated-acculturated background,

viewed it as a shameful stigma. The Jewish masses were constantly reminded by the Council through the Nazi-censored Jewish paper to wear the badge and to ensure that it was of the right color and size.

Although the badge was introduced primarily to isolate and easily identify the Jews, it also was conceived as a means to humiliate and degrade them—a process that was soon extended to all other areas of social and intellectual life.

Social and Spiritual “Purification”

The drive that began in the 1930s for the reduction and eventual elimination of Jewish influence in the social and cultural spheres of Hungarian society was radically intensified almost immediately after the German occupation began. One of the first measures designed to ostracize the Jews from Christian society was the issuance of a decree that forbade Jews to wear military uniforms. Subsequently Jewish students were forbidden to wear school uniforms. Jews were prohibited from using public baths and swimming pools and could not frequent public restaurants, catering services, and similar establishments, including pastry shops, bars, espresso stands, and cafes.⁹ In some localities, especially smaller cities and towns where Jews did not have their own facilities, they were allowed, for a while at least, to patronize the same venues as the general public, under certain exceptional conditions and for a limited period—usually a few hours—specified by the local authorities.

The isolation of the Jews was coupled with a drive to protect the “spiritual purity” of Hungarian Christian society. Toward this end, the Sztójay government ordered the removal from public and school libraries of all books by Jews or Christians of Jewish background.¹⁰ Soon thereafter, carefully staged book destruction campaigns took place in Budapest and several other large cities.¹¹ Under the provisions of the same decree, the works of both Hungarian Jewish and foreign Jewish authors who were listed in a special appendix could no longer be printed, published, or distributed.¹² Businesses, institutions, and libraries in possession of copies of works by these authors were forbidden to sell or lend them out and were required to prepare a complete inventory of their possessions within fifteen days. An exception was made only for scientific works specified by the authorities and for some institutions and libraries which were allowed to keep the literary works of Jewish authors for research and studies to be conducted under strict supervision.

The drive for the spiritual purification of the country was spearheaded by Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa, a strongly antisemitic member of the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament, who after the onset of the German occupation also was appointed to serve as president of the National

Hungarian Press Chamber. He was also a founding member of the Hungarian Institute for the Researching of the Jewish Question, an institute dedicated to “the advancement of knowledge on the Jewish question.” Established under the guidance of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Ballensiefen, a Nazi expert on anti-Jewish propaganda, the institute was placed under the leadership of Zoltán Bosnyák, a notorious propagandist and author of several antisemitic tracts, who already was serving in a department dealing with Jewish affairs in the Ministry of the Interior—the office in charge of the dejewification process. The inauguration of the institute on May 12 coincided with the appearance of the first issue of *Harc* (Battle), the institute’s antisemitic organ.¹³ The activities of the institute gave additional impetus to the drive launched shortly after the beginning of the occupation for the expropriation of Hungarian Jewry.

The Pauperization and Expropriation of the Jews

Although the property of the Hungarian Jews was confiscated only after the Germans occupied the country, the pauperization of the Jews began in 1938, when Hungary yielded to German pressure and internal rightist agitation and adopted the previously mentioned so-called First Anti-Jewish Law (see chapter 1). The drive continued with the adoption of a number of other major laws and decrees aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating the Jews’ influential role in the national economy. By the time of the German occupation, the overwhelming majority of Hungarian Jews could hardly eke out a living. On the other hand, the small upper layer of Jewry, which played a leading role in the country’s industrial, commercial, and financial life, managed without too much discomfort to absorb the increasingly severe restrictions imposed upon it. Many among the members of this group were in fact converted Jews or Christians who were only identified as Jews under the laws then in effect, and who were protected not only by their wealth, but also by their close friends among the Christian aristocracy.

The systematic wholesale expropriation of the Hungarian Jewish community began almost immediately after the March 19 occupation. A day later, Jews with bank accounts and safe deposit boxes staged a rush on the banks to remove their deposits and valuables; this response threatened the collapse of the financial structure. Wisliceny and Krumei, the two members of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando* who had played a leading role that very morning in the establishment of the Jewish Council,¹⁴ felt it necessary repeatedly to reassure—that is, mislead—the Jews of Hungary about the ultimate intent of the Germans. They laid great stress on the avoidance of panic, in order not only to secure the planned orderly implementation of the Final Solution, but also to induce the Jews to redeposit the withdrawn funds

and valuables. They were obviously eager not only to protect the economic viability and financial stability of the country, but also—and above all—to preserve as much Jewish wealth as possible for eventual expropriation by the SS. In pursuit of these objectives, the SS officers requested the Jewish leaders to reassure the Jewish masses and at the same time urged the Hungarian authorities to intervene forcefully against any runs on the banks.¹⁵

The economic potential of the Jewish community declined drastically with the arrest of the most prominent Jewish industrialists and financiers in the early days of the occupation. The treasuries of the Jewish communities all over Hungary, especially that of Budapest, were strained to the limit by the constant and ever more exorbitant demands of the German and Hungarian authorities.

During the first two months of the occupation, when the Hungarian authorities refused to deal with the Jewish community and the Germans exercised de facto control, it was primarily the German authorities, including the SS and the *Wehrmacht*, that subjected the Jews to constant demands for a variety of goods and services. On the Hungarian side, the “official” demands at this time were advanced almost exclusively by the offices of Péter Hain and László Koltay, two of Eichmann’s closest collaborators. Acting as the complete masters that they were, the Germans simply confiscated whatever they needed from sequestered Jewish institutions and establishments.

The Germans’ continuing and ever more exorbitant confiscation of Jewish property during the first two months of the occupation alarmed the Hungarian authorities. Though they gave the Germans exclusive jurisdiction over the Jewish question during this period, they considered the wealth of the Jews to be part of the Hungarian national patrimony. While both the Germans and the Hungarians agreed on the desirability of expropriating the Jews, they differed sharply over the distribution of the spoils. The rivalry that underlay the pursuit of their particular national economic interests was fierce, since according to one estimate the Jews’ wealth was valued at between seven and nine billion gold pengő.¹⁶

MEASURES OF THE SZTÓJAY GOVERNMENT

No sooner had it been sworn in than the Sztójay government began a concerted Nazi-inspired “legislative” program to pauperize and expropriate the Jews. This was designed as the first major step prior to their planned ghettoization and deportation. Toward this end the government issued a veritable avalanche of decrees and orders. The relatively few Jews in the civil service were dismissed; Jewish lawyers were compelled to give up their practice; Jewish journalists and artists were expelled from their respective professional associations; Jewish pharmacists, patent agents, and suppliers

to state institutions were deprived of their licenses; and Jewish officers and employees of the stock and commodity markets were dismissed.

On April 6, the Ministry of the Interior issued a “highly confidential” general decree that instructed all police departments to take effective measures to prevent Jews from hiding jewelry and valuables, selling them privately, or giving them to Christian friends for safekeeping.¹⁷ Ten days later, the Council of Ministers adopted a sweeping measure designed to remove Jews and Jewish influence from all financial, commercial, and related enterprises.¹⁸ Under the decree, Jews were required to declare the current value of all of their property by April 30 at the nearest state financial office, using officially provided forms. The property of minors and wards had to be declared by their guardians or trustees. The Jews were required to declare all property with the exception of a maximum of ten thousand pengő of household items and clothing; objects of art, rugs, and silverware could not be included among the excepted household items. All legal transactions that had been entered into after March 22 by which Jews had transferred property rights to non-Jews were considered invalid, and the properties covered by these transactions also had to be declared.

The property declarations had to include all jewelry and gold, securities, and savings and checking accounts. Jews were permitted to withdraw only one thousand pengő per month from banks, irrespective of the number of accounts they had—a “privilege” that turned out to be of no consequence, as the deportation of the Jews began less than a month after the enactment of the decree. Jewish-rented safe-deposit boxes were blocked and the respective institutions were required to take inventory of their contents. Jewish commercial and industrial establishments were ordered to close and inventory was taken of their stock and equipment. Enterprises that were deemed important for the general economy were reopened under Christian managers assigned by the Hungarian authorities.¹⁹ The measures directed against Jewish businessmen and industrialists were gradually extended, in somewhat different form, to Jewish artisans, white-collar workers, and farmers. The “legal” charade continued even after the deportations were in full swing in the northeastern parts of the country. The decrees adopted after May 15 obviously had not only a confiscatory but also a psychological objective: to assure the orderly and panic-free implementation of the Final Solution by reinforcing the illusion of the predominantly assimilated Jews of Trianon Hungary that they would be spared.²⁰

Most Jews complied faithfully with the provisions of all the decrees. Some managed to hide some of their valuables or to “lend” them to Christian friends and neighbors. However, those suspected of such transactions were subjected to barbaric pressures and tortures when they were interrogated in the ghettos. Occasionally the Christians involved, scared by the warnings

of the regime and the extremely harsh penalties with which they were threatened, reported the transactions to the authorities.

Dispossessed and deprived of their livelihood, the Jews—already in the process of ghettoization—were also subjected to a curtailment of their food allowances. On April 27, the minister of supply issued a decree ordering that all Jews submit personal data to the mayor's office of their town by May 1, allegedly to facilitate the issuance of new ration cards and coupons.²¹ This was a ruse intended to double-check and complement the lists prepared earlier in the month at the request of László Baký for use by those Germans and Hungarians who would round up the Jews. Unwarned and unguided, most Jews complied with this order as well.

The spoliation of Jewish property was intensified after the completion of the ghettoization process. In theory the houses and apartments of the Jews were to be sealed and their contents inventoried. The property of the Jews was to be administered or disposed of by various officially designated governmental authorities. But no sooner were the Jews forcibly removed from their homes than looting of their property began. Jewelry and money often were taken by officials assigned to conduct the inventory; "sealed" apartments were broken into by German and Hungarian uniformed personnel, as well as by the greedy and morally bankrupt among the general population. In the villages, Jewish-owned cattle, farm machinery, and equipment were grabbed by local peasants as soon as the Jews were concentrated into the major ghettos, which were usually located at the county seats.

THE SS ACQUISITION OF THE WEISS-MANFRÉD WORKS: OBJECTIVES AND REACTIONS

In pursuit of their economic objectives, the Germans resorted not only to outright confiscation of Jewish property, but also to the bartering of a limited number of Jewish lives for goods and valuables. Such barter did not go counter to their Final Solution program. The SS would occasionally allow a limited number of Jews to escape their net—usually at a high price—as long as this would bring about the ghettoization and deportation of the Jewish masses. The price they normally expected from the wealthy and prominent Jews in order for them to be exempted from the anti-Jewish measures was exorbitant: the acquisition of sizable wealth, including industrial assets, and "cooperation." The latter category included some of the schemes that the SS officers in Hungary, especially *SS-Standartenführer* Kurt Becher, worked out with Rudolph (Rezső) Kasztner and other Zionist leaders, resulting in the rescue of close to twenty thousand Jews.²² Becher played an even more important role in acquiring German control over Hungary's most important industrial establishment—the Weiss-Manfréd Works of Csepel.

A diversified heavy-goods and armaments industrial complex employing over forty thousand workers, the Weiss-Manfréd Works was owned by four interrelated families, who also owned a large number of other industrial, mining, and banking enterprises.²³

In contrast to their behavior in other occupied countries, the Germans could not simply take over the industrial plants in Hungary, because, in accordance with the Schloss Klessheim agreement,²⁴ the Germans' presence was not supposed formally to violate the country's sovereignty. Both the German and the Hungarian authorities scrupulously adhered to this agreement and were careful to retain the facade of Hungary's independence. In the case of the Weiss-Manfréd Works there was the additional complication that the firm was legally in "Aryan" control.

The negotiations for the transfer of control over the firm to the Germans were conducted between Becher, who enjoyed the support of the highest Nazi authorities, and Ferenc Chorin, who represented the "family group." Becher was very careful, for the deal involved the rescue of Jews, however few in number, by the top echelon of the SS. The offer involved the transfer of the 51 percent of the shares owned by the Aryan members of the families. (The 49 percent owned by the Jewish members were subject to the provisions of the Hungarian decree, then in the process of adoption, that called for the sequestration of Jewish wealth.) In return for the controlling majority of the shares, the SS was to make possible the departure of forty-five to forty-seven members of the four families to Portugal and Switzerland, via the Reich, and to enable them to take along part of their valuables, including foreign currency. Under the final agreement signed on May 17, 1944, the Germans were allowed to administer the concern as a trusteeship for a period of twenty-five years, and were to return all the assets of the family group upon the expiration of the agreement. The fourth part of the agreement, which was the most embarrassing for the SS and which was never made public, made it possible for the members of the family group to leave Hungary and receive cash payments of \$600,000 plus 250,000 German marks. Becher and the SS were to get 5 percent of the gross income of the concern for their service as trustees.

The secrecy and speed with which the agreement was concluded aroused the anger of both the Hungarian government and the German Foreign Office. The Hungarians were not pacified by the explanations offered by Chorin in a letter to the regent forwarded almost immediately after the agreement was concluded. In this letter Chorin complained about the anti-Jewish and economic policies of the Sztójay government, emphasizing that one of the basic reasons the family group had refused to negotiate with the government was its conviction that had the government acquired control over the concern the company would have been mismanaged. He also

claimed that the concern's control by the SS was bound to serve long-range Hungarian interests, since under the able administration of Becher, with whom he had concluded a "gentleman's agreement," the safety, integrity, and productive capacity of the plants were safeguarded. Horthy apparently was not convinced by these arguments and instructed Sztójay not to permit the transfer to a foreign power of "agricultural, industrial, or commercial enterprises" without his consent and the approval of the Council of Ministers and the appropriate ministers. Sztójay expressed his "astonishment" over the deal to Edmund Veessenmayer on June 1 and to Hitler on June 6, clearly unaware that the agreement had been approved by both the Führer and Himmler.

At the June 1 Council of Ministers meeting the details and implications of the agreement for Hungary were outlined by Béla Imrédy, who had been appointed minister without portfolio in charge of economic coordination on May 23. In accordance with the Council's resolutions, Imrédy contacted Veessenmayer and other German government representatives in Hungary, seeking to work out a compromise.

Becher and the SS were, of course, interested in getting the Hungarian government's swift approval of the agreements with the family group. The Germans wanted to acquire immediate control over the plants, but it also was important to them to protect the facade of Hungarian sovereignty. Becher was able to circumvent the restrictions of the decree under which foreigners could not acquire Hungarian securities without the approval of the National Bank;²⁵ he did so simply by identifying himself and some of his closest collaborators as legal residents of Budapest.

Becher's cause was supported by Minister of Finance Lajos Reményi-Schneller and Minister of Industry Lajos Szász. Following the Council of Ministers meeting of August 17, the SS was given legal control over the firm. The top management of the reorganized firm included a number of Hungarian nationals, but domination by the SS was assured through a new holding company that included such Himmler appointees as *Generalfeldmarschall* Eberhard Milch, *SS-Brigadeführer* Baron Kurt Freiherr von Schröder, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Hans Jüttner, and *SS-Obergruppenführer* Oswald Pohl.

The SS's disagreement with the Hungarians was to some extent overshadowed by their encounter with the German Foreign Office, especially over the fourth part of the agreement with the family group. Reflecting the rivalry between Himmler and Ribbentrop, the SS kept the German Foreign Office in the dark about the negotiations. Ribbentrop, who was informed about the deal only on May 25, was so angered over the exclusion of the Foreign Office that he ordered an immediate and thorough investigation of the whole affair, only to learn that the Führer was also involved and on the

side of Himmler. Though Ribbentrop had no alternative but to consent to the agreement, he continued to voice his opposition over the “escape” of some Jews with the aid of the SS. After several postponements, the members of the family group left Hungary toward the end of June, in the company of SS escorts. Some reached Portugal via Stuttgart and Madrid; others arrived in Switzerland via Stuttgart; a few were kept in Vienna as “privileged hostages” to assure the silence of those in the free world.²⁶ By the time the family group members reached Portugal and Switzerland, Hungary, with the notable exception of Budapest, was already almost completely *judenrein*.

Preparations for the Roundup and Ghettoization of the Jews

THE FATEFUL DECISIONS

With the expropriation and isolation of the Jews well under way, the German and Hungarian officials associated with the Final Solution proceeded with their plans to bring about the ghettoization and concentration of the Jews in preparation for their deportation. The details of the drive as well as some aspects of the deportation process were worked out on April 4 at a meeting held in the Ministry of the Interior under the chairmanship of László Baky. Among the participants were high-ranking members of the *Wehrmacht* and of the Hungarian Army; Adolf Eichmann and members of his Special Commando; László Endre; Col. Győző Tölgyesy, the commander of Gendarmerie District VIII with headquarters in Kassa—the first area destined to be cleared of Jews—and Lt. Col. László Ferenczy.

Guided by the Nazi experiences in the other parts of German-occupied Europe, the participants discussed the general guidelines to be forwarded to the local organs of state power. They also selected the personnel immediately to be entrusted with the implementation of the ghettoization and concentration process. Supreme command over the implementation of this program was entrusted to Ferenczy, who had just a few days earlier been appointed liaison officer of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie to the German Security Police.²⁷ As the head of the Hungarian operational dejewification unit, Ferenczy immediately set up two headquarters: one in the County House of Pest; the other in the Lomnic Hotel on the Swabian Hill of Buda, not far from Eichmann’s headquarters. Reflecting his callousness and his desire to camouflage his anti-Jewish operations, Ferenczy had the door plate of his Pest office inscribed with the name: “International Storage and Transportation Company, Inc.” Acting under the overall guidance of Baky and Endre, Ferenczy lost no time in putting together his staff. His closest collaborators in the dejewification unit were Capt. Leó Lulay, who served as his chief aide;

Lajos Meggyesi; Péter Hain; László Koltay; and Márton Zöldi.²⁸ Among his closest collaborators in the gendarmerie were some of the most antisemitic and rightist-oriented commanders of the country's gendarmerie districts, including Tölgyesy, in charge of operations in Carpatho-Ruthenia; Col. Tibor Paksy-Kiss, entrusted with the anti-Jewish campaign in Gendarmerie districts IX and X, covering Northern Transylvania; Col. László Orbán, the commander of the operations in the southern areas of the country; and Col. Vilmos Sellyey, who was in charge of the operations in the country's other gendarmerie districts. In accordance with the April 4th instructions of Interior Minister Andor Jaross, Ferenczy kept a record of his operations against the Jews and submitted daily reports on the campaign to Section XX of the Ministry of the Interior.

The draft document relating to the roundup, ghettoization, concentration, and deportation of the Jews—the basis of the April 4 discussion—was prepared by Endre. It was issued secretly as Decree No. 6163/1944.res. on April 7 over the signature of Baky. This most fateful document, addressed to the representatives of the local organs of state power, spelled out the procedures to be followed in the campaign to bring about the Final Solution of the Jewish question in Hungary.²⁹ Supplementary specific details about the measures to be taken against the Jews were spelled out in several highly confidential directives, emphasizing that the Jews destined for deportation were to be rounded up without regard to sex, age, or illness.³⁰

The first concrete directives for the implementation of the decree were issued by the minister of the interior three days before the top secret decree was actually sent out. In a secret order, the minister instructed all the subordinate mayoral, police, and gendarmerie organs to bring about the registration of the Jews by the appropriate local Jewish institutions.³¹ These lists, containing all family members, exact addresses, and the mother's name of all those listed, were to be prepared in four copies, with one copy to be handed over to the local police authorities, one to the appropriate gendarmerie command, and a third to be forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior.³² To make sure that no Jews would escape the net, another registration order was issued by the minister of supply, allegedly to regulate the allocation of food for the Jews.

As unaware of the sinister implications of these lists as they were of the wearing of the yellow Star of David—the two interrelated measures designed to facilitate their isolation and ghettoization—the Jewish masses complied with the measures taken by their local Jewish communal leaders. In contrast to the national leaders of Hungarian Jewry, who were fully informed, the latter were as much in the dark as the masses they led.³³ In the smaller Jewish communities, especially in the villages, it was usually the community secretary or registrar who prepared the lists; in larger ones, they usually were

prepared by young men not yet mobilized for service in the military labor service system. They usually acted in pairs, conscientiously canvassing the entire community, eager not to leave out a single street or building so as not to “deprive people of their share of provisions.”

On April 5, the day the wearing of the yellow star became mandatory, Baky issued another “strictly confidential” order, instructing the head of the prosecutory-investigative section of the Center for State Defense to “supervise” the implementation of the police measures against the Jews, ostensibly “to forestall any accusations or abuses in connection with the solution of the Jewish question.”³⁴ Two days later, Baky held another important meeting, basically with the same people who had attended the April 4 conference. The focus was the “imminent evacuation” of the Jews from the area of Gendarmerie District VIII—that is, from Carpatho-Ruthenia and some parts of northeastern Hungary. The conferees decided on the operational techniques to be employed and the organizational structure to be set up. Munkács was selected as the headquarters of the command unit, which was to consist of both German and Hungarian experts on the anti-Jewish drive. In the other large Jewish centers of the area, including Huszt, Nagyszöllős, and Ungvár, the command was to be represented by special executive committees. The final detailed instructions relating to the planned anti-Jewish operations, corresponding to the provisions of the fateful decree issued that same day, were spelled out by Endre. He identified the specific locations where the Jews were to be concentrated: empty warehouses, abandoned or nonoperational factories, brickyards, Jewish community establishments, Jewish schools and offices, and synagogues.

THE MILITARY OPERATIONAL ZONES

Since the anti-Jewish measures could not be camouflaged and the mass evacuation of the Jews was bound to create dislocations in the economic life of the affected communities, the dejewification experts felt compelled to provide a military rationale for the operations. They assumed, it turned out correctly, that the local population, including some of the Jews, would understand the necessity for the removal of the Jews from the approaching front lines, “in order to protect Axis interests from the machinations of Judeo-Bolsheviks.” On April 12, the Council of Ministers—in an *ex post facto* act—declared Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania—the first two areas slated for dejewification—to have become military operational zones as of April 1.³⁵ The government appointed Dr. Vilmos Pál Tomcsányi to serve as government commissioner for the military operational zone in Carpatho-Ruthenia³⁶ and Béla Ricsóy-Uhlarik to serve in the same capacity in Northern Transylvania. The scenario for the removal of the Jews from

these so-called military operational zones was played out later in the month, when Edmund Veesenmayer, Hitler's plenipotentiary in Hungary, conveyed the *Wehrmacht*'s request to that effect.

The Ghettoization, Concentration, and Deportation Master Plan

The master plan worked out by the German and Hungarian anti-Jewish experts called for the ghettoization and concentration to be effected in a number of distinct phases:

- Jews in the rural communities and the smaller towns were to be rounded up and temporarily transferred to synagogues and/or community buildings.
- Following the first round of investigation in pursuit of valuables at these "local ghettos," the Jews rounded up in the rural communities and smaller towns were to be transferred to the ghettos of the larger cities in their vicinity, usually the county seat.
- In the larger towns and cities Jews were to be rounded up and transferred to a specially designated area that would serve as a ghetto—totally isolated from the other parts of the city. In some cities, the ghetto was to be established in the Jewish quarter; in others, in factories, warehouses, brickyards, or under the open sky.
- Jews were to be concentrated in centers with adequate rail facilities to make possible swift entrainment and deportation.

During each phase, the Jews were to be subjected to special investigations by teams composed of gendarmerie and police officials, assisted by local *Nyilas* and other accomplices, to compel them to surrender their valuables. The plans for the implementation of the ghettoization and deportation operations called for the launching of six territorially defined "mopping-up operations." For this purpose, the country was divided into six operational zones, with each zone encompassing one or two gendarmerie districts.³⁷ The operations were to be launched according to the following territorial order of priority:

- *Zone I.* The Jews in Gendarmerie District VIII (Kassa)—Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary.
- *Zone II.* The Jews in Gendarmerie Districts IX (Kolozsvár) and X (Marosvásárhely)—Northern Transylvania.
- *Zone III.* The Jews in Gendarmerie Districts II (Székesfehérvár) and VII (Miskolc)—the area of northern Hungary extending from Kassa to the borders of the Third Reich.
- *Zone IV.* The Jews in Gendarmerie Districts V (Szeged) and VI (Debrecen)—the southern parts of Hungary east of the Danube.

- *Zone V.* The Jews in Gendarmerie Districts III (Szombathely) and IV (Pécs)—the southwestern parts of the country west of the Danube.
- *Zone VI.* The Jews in Gendarmerie District I (Budapest)—the capital and its immediate environs.

The order of priority was established with an eye on a series of military, political, and psychological factors. Time was of the essence because of the fast approach of the Red Army. Politically it was more expedient to start in Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania, because the central and local Hungarian authorities and the local population had less regard for the “Galician,” Eastern,” “alien,” non-magyarized, and Yiddish-oriented masses than for the assimilated Jews. Their roundup for “labor” in Germany was accepted in many Hungarian rightist circles as doubly welcome: Hungary would get rid of its “alien” elements and would at the same time make a contribution to the joint war effort, thereby hastening the termination of the German occupation and the reestablishment of full sovereignty.

This order of priority was adopted against the original objections of Endre, who would have preferred to start with Budapest. He was won over by the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*, which convinced him of the desirability of launching the operations in the countryside, beginning with the northeastern parts of the country. According to Wilhelm Höttl, the German counterintelligence chief in Central Europe, the rationale behind this decision was to prevent the Jews of Budapest (the most sophisticated and assimilated in the country) from fleeing the capital and hiding in the countryside.³⁸ Following Horthy’s July 7 decision to halt the deportations, thereby saving the Jews of Budapest, Endre often reproached his colleagues for their earlier failure to heed his advice.

The Ghettoization Decree

Like the decision identifying Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania as military operational zones, the decree stipulating the establishment of ghettos was adopted on an *ex post facto* basis. The government decree, issued on April 26, went into effect on April 28.³⁹ This was twelve days *after* the roundup of the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia began. The rationale for, and the alleged objectives of, the decree were outlined by Jaross at the Council of Ministers meeting of April 26. He claimed that in view of their better economic status, the Jews living in the cities had proportionally much better housing than non-Jews and therefore it was possible to “create a healthier situation” by rearranging the whole housing situation. Jews were to be restricted to smaller apartments, and several families could be ordered

to move in together. National security, he further argued, required that Jews be removed from the villages and the smaller towns into larger cities, where the chief local officials—the mayors or the police chiefs—would set aside a special section or district for them.⁴⁰

The crucial provisions of the decree relating to the concentration of the Jews were included in articles 8 and 9. The former provided that Jews could no longer live in communities with a population of under ten thousand, while the latter stipulated that the mayors of the larger towns and cities could determine the sections, streets, and buildings in which Jews were to be permitted to live. This legal euphemism in fact empowered the local authorities to establish ghettos. The location of, and the conditions within, the ghettos consequently depended on the attitudes of the mayors and their aides.

6 PHASE II: GHETTOIZATION, CONCENTRATION, DEPORTATION

Zone I: Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northeastern Hungary

OPERATIONAL DECISIONS AND PROCESSES

Although the decree relating to the establishment of ghettos went into effect only on April 28, 1944, the roundup and concentration of the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary began on Sunday April 16, 1944, the first day of Passover.¹ The details of the anti-Jewish campaign in these areas were worked out at a conference held in Munkács on April 12 under the chairmanship of László Endre. This fateful meeting was attended by the top civilian, police, and gendarmerie officers from the cities, municipalities, and counties in the affected areas. The details of the operation in each county were worked out at local conferences held shortly after April 12, attended by the deputy prefects, mayors, police chiefs, and gendarmerie commanders of the particular counties. The local conferees worked from the written instructions of László Baký, and more importantly, from the oral communications given by Endre at Munkács. It was the function of the local conferences not only to determine the location and administration of the local ghettos, but also to establish the commissions or squads to be used for the roundup of the Jews and the special teams needed for the identification and confiscation of Jewish wealth.

The day the anti-Jewish operations began, László Ferenczy and his deJewification squad arrived to take command in Munkács, the area headquarters for the ghettoization, concentration, and deportation drive.

As was subsequently the case in all other parts of Hungary, the operation began with the roundup of the Jews in the hamlets and villages. The Jews were awakened by the gendarmes at the crack of dawn. They were usually given only a few minutes to pack essential clothes and any food they happened to have in the house and then they were taken to their local synagogues. There they were robbed of their money, jewelry, and valuables. Although their homes were “sealed” and the contents subsequently inventoried, they were soon plundered; poultry and farm animals were also simply removed. A few days after having been assembled, the Jews were marched to the nearest concentration centers, normally consisting of brickyards in the

larger cities, including Beregszász, Huszt, Kassa, Munkács, Nagyszöllős, Nyíregyháza, Sátoraljaújhely, Técső, and Ungvár.

CONDITIONS IN THE GHETTOS

The conditions under which the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary lived in the ghettos prior to their deportation were fairly typical of conditions in all the ghettos of Hungary. In the assembly centers—the county ghettos—the feeding of all Jews, including those transferred from neighboring communities, became the responsibility of the local Jewish Councils. The main and frequently only meal each day consisted primarily of a little potato soup. Even with these meager rations, though, the feeding problem became acute after the first few days, when the supplies the rural Jews had brought along were used up. The living conditions in the ghettos were extremely harsh, and often brutally inhumane. The terrible overcrowding in the apartments within the ghettos, with totally inadequate cooking, bathing, and sanitary facilities, created intolerable hardships as well as tension among the inhabitants. But deplorable as conditions were in the city ghettos, they could not compare to the cruel conditions that prevailed in the brickyards and the woods, where many of the Jews were kept for several weeks under the open skies. Inadequate nutrition, lack of sanitary facilities, absence of bathing opportunities, and inclement weather led to serious health problems in many places. The water supply for the many thousands of ghetto inhabitants usually consisted of a limited number of faucets, several of which were often out of order for days on end. Ditches dug by the Jews themselves were used as latrines. Minor illnesses and ordinary colds, of course, were practically ubiquitous. Many people also succumbed to serious diseases, including dysentery, typhoid, and pneumonia.

The poor health situation was compounded by the generally barbaric behavior of the gendarmes and police officers guarding the ghettos. In each ghetto the authorities set aside a separate building to serve as a “mint”—the place where sadistic gendarmes and detectives would torture Jews into confessing where they had hidden their valuables. Their technique was basically the same everywhere. Husbands were often tortured in full view of their wives and children; often wives were beaten in front of their husbands or children tortured in front of their parents. The devices used were cruel and unusually barbaric. The victims were beaten on the soles of their feet with canes or rubber truncheons; they were slapped in the face, and kicked until they lost consciousness. Males were often beaten on the testicles; females, sometimes even young girls, were searched vaginally by collaborating female volunteers and midwives who cared little about cleanliness, often in full view of the male interrogators. Some particularly

sadistic investigators used electrical devices to compel the victims into confession. They would put one end of such a device in the mouth and the other in the vagina or attached to the testicles of the victims. These brutal tortures drove many of the victims to insanity or suicide.

Though in some communities there were local officials who endeavored to act as humanely as possible under the extraordinary conditions, their example was the exception rather than the rule.

THE MAJOR GHETTO CENTERS

In Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary, the Jews were assembled in thirteen major ghetto and entrainment centers: Beregszász, Huszt, Iza, Kassa, Kisvárd, Máramarossziget, Mátészalka, Munkács, Nagyszőlős, Nyíregyháza, Sátoraljaújhely, Técső, and Ungvár.

The largest entrainment center was Munkács, which had two ghettos. One of these was set up in the facilities of the Sajovits Brickyards for the approximately fourteen thousand Jews brought in from the rural communities in Bereg County.² The other was set up in the Jewish sector of the city for the close to fourteen thousand local Jews. The internal administration of the ghettos was the responsibility of a Jewish Council headed by Sándor Steiner. Following the deportation of the rural Jews, beginning on May 15, the city ghetto dwellers were transferred to the brickyard for entrainment. The first transport of the city's Jews left the brickyards on May 19 and the last on May 24.³

In Ungvár, the Jews were concentrated in the Moskovits Brickyards and in the Gluck Lumberyard. The ghetto included the approximately seven thousand local Jews and about eighteen thousand Jews brought in from the rural communities in Ung County.⁴ The first transport left Ungvár on May 17; the last reportedly on May 31.

The Beregszász ghetto was located in the Kont and Vály Brickyards and the facilities of the so-called Weisz Farm. It contained approximately ten thousand Jews.⁵ They were deported in four transports, the first leaving on May 16 and the last on May 29.

The approximately thirteen thousand Jews in Ugocsa County were concentrated in the ghetto of Nagyszőlős, which was established in the four streets around the main synagogue and along the so-called Magyar Sor. Approximately forty-seven hundred of the ghetto's inhabitants were from the city itself and the remainder from the other communities in the county.⁶ They were deported between May 20 and June 3.

The ghetto of Huszt was located in the city's Jewish quarter and held close to nine thousand Jews, of which about five thousand were brought in from the rural communities in the districts of Alsószinevér, Gernyes, and

Varjac. The ghetto dwellers were deported in three transports, the first leaving on May 24 and the last on June 2.

For some unknown reason, the ghetto of Iza was under the internal administration of the Jewish Council of Huszt, which was headed by a certain Lazarovits. The ghetto contained approximately seven thousand Jews.⁷

The ghetto of Técső at one time held close to ten thousand Jews, including the approximately twenty-five hundred local Jews as well as the Jews brought in from the neighboring communities in the districts of Kerekhegy, Pálosremete, Szaplonca, and Visk.⁸ Located in the Jewish quarter of the town, the ghetto was administered by a Council headed by Jenő Róth.

About fifteen thousand Jews of Zemplén County, including those of Mád, Sárospatak, and Taktaharkány, were concentrated in the ghetto of Sátoraljaújhely, which was located in the Gypsy section of the city. The Council was headed by Lajos Rosenberg. The Jews were deported in four transports, the first of which left on May 16 and the last on June 3.

Although Máramarossziget, like Máramaros County as a whole, was geographically in Northern Transylvania, it was considered part of Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary for purposes of deJewification—presumably because it contained one of the largest concentrations of Orthodox and Hasidic Jews in Hungary, and thus the German and Hungarian officials were particularly anxious to clear the area of Jews as quickly as possible. The ghetto of Máramarossziget was set up in two separate peripheral sections of the city inhabited primarily by the poorer strata of Jewry. It held approximately thirteen thousand Jews, of whom a few more than ten thousand were from the city itself.⁹ The ghetto was among the first to be liquidated: the first transport left on May 16 and the fourth on May 22. In the vicinity of Máramarossziget there reportedly were two other smaller entrainment centers—Szlatina and Alsóvisó. According to some accounts, these centers handled the rural Jews who could not be accommodated in Máramarossziget.¹⁰

With one of the largest Jewish communities in Hungary, Kassa acquired the dubious distinction of becoming the transfer point from which the deported Jews were handed over to the Germans. The ghetto for the local Jews was set up in the Jewish section of the city. The Jews brought in from the rural communities in Abauj-Torna County were concentrated in the two brickyards on the outskirts of the city.¹¹ The brickyards also served as entrainment centers for the local Jews. Since Kassa was a railroad hub through which most deportation trains were scheduled to pass on the way to Auschwitz, the slightly more than twelve thousand Jews concentrated here were among the first to be deported. Two transports left the city on May 16, a third one on May 17, one on May 24, and the last one on June 3.

In the northeastern parts of Trianon Hungary, the most important ghetto and entrainment centers were those of Nyíregyháza, Mátészalka, and Kiskváda.

The ghettoization of the Jews in the rural communities of Szabolcs County began on April 14. The Jews of Nyíregyháza, the county seat, were ordered into the ghetto on April 24. In Nyíregyháza there were two ghettos—one for the local Jews and the other for those brought in from the other communities in the county.¹² By May 10, the two ghettos, both set up in the Jewish sectors of the city, held 17,580 Jews, including a Jewish Council headed by Gábor Fischbein. In preparation for their deportation, the Jews were transferred toward the end of April and during the first half of May to three farm areas in the neighboring ranch areas of Simapuszta, Nyírjespuszta, and Harangod. The deportation of the Jews of Szabolcs County began on May 17 with the entrainment in Nyíregyháza of the first transport from Nyírjespuszta. This was followed by a second transport from Harangod on May 23 and a third transport from Simapuszta on May 25. The fourth and fifth transports involved two groups from Nyírjespuszta, and were directed to Auschwitz on May 29 and June 6.

In Mátészalka the ghetto, set up within the Jewish quarter, held approximately eighteen thousand Jews, including close to two thousand local Jews. The remainder were brought in from the neighboring communities in northern Máramaros and Szatmár counties.¹³ The first transport left Mátészalka on May 19.

The Kiskváda ghetto was located in the Jewish quarter of the town and included about seven thousand Jews, of whom approximately half were local.¹⁴ The ghetto, which was under a Jewish Council headed by Sándor Katona, was evacuated in two transports, entrained on May 29 and May 31.

The “Emergency” Measures in Southern Hungary

Almost simultaneous with the identification of Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania as military operational zones, the Hungarian authorities, acting in conjunction with the German occupation forces, declared the southern parts of Hungary (neighboring Croatia and occupied Serbia) to be military operational zones. As a “precautionary” measure in the war against Tito’s partisans, the Fascist authorities found it necessary to round up the Jews living in these territories. Among the Jews affected were not only those who had previously lived in the Yugoslav areas, but also many who had lived in Trianon Hungary. Among the latter, the great majority were those of Csáktornya, Nagykanizsa, and Perlak districts of Zala County. As was the case in Carpatho-Ruthenia, the roundup here was undertaken several days before the official ghettoization decree had been issued.

The decision to round up the Jews in the districts bordering Croatia was taken on April 19, at a meeting, chaired by László Baky at the Ministry of the Interior, devoted primarily to the implementation of Decree No. 6163/1944.BM.VII.res. The participants decided to proceed with “a special emergency” measure against the Jews living in the southern zones of Gendarmerie districts III, IV, and V, covering the Dunántul (Southern Region) from the Ferenc Channel to the banks of the Tisza River all the way up to Martonos. The area included the cities of Csáktornya, Horgos, Nagykanizsa, Újvidék, Zenta, and Zombor. The operation began on April 26 and was completed within four to five days, and resulted in the ghettoization of 9,530 Jews. Following a first round of expropriation, the Jews were relocated into temporary ghettos, from which they were shortly thereafter deported. Of these Jews, 2,675 were rounded up in the southern part of Gendarmerie District III and transferred to two camps in Nagykanizsa. The 1,580 Jews apprehended in the southern zone of Gendarmerie District IV were taken to an internment camp in Barcs. The Jews of Barcs and Csurgó districts and of the small city of Szigetvár were later also taken to this ghetto, which was located in the Unió mill.¹⁵

The Dejewifiers’ “Triumphal Tour”

On April 24, 1944, when the ghettoization drive was in full swing in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary, a delegation consisting of the leading figures of the anti-Jewish drive left on a tour of the major ghetto centers in the area. The delegation included the top members of the *SS-Sonderkommando*, including Adolf Eichmann and Dieter Wisliceny, as well as the leading figures of the Hungarian dejewification unit. Among the latter, along with some lesser-known figures, were László Endre, his secretary Albert Takács, László Ferenczy, Leó Lulay, Lajos Meggyesi, and Márton Zöldi.

The delegation’s first stop was at Kassa, where it was joined by Sándor Pohl, the city’s mayor and an old political friend of Endre, and by Gen. Ferenc Feketealmy-Czeydner, “the hangman of Újvidék,” who, like Zöldi, had returned to Hungary with the invading German forces. From Kassa the delegation went on to inspect the ghetto of Sátoraljaújhely. The next stop was Ungvár, and then Nyíregyháza, Kisvárd, and Mátészalka. During the tour, the delegation members refined the procedures for the implementation of the Final Solution program in the area, including those pertaining to the transfer of the Hungarian Jews to the Germans at Kassa.

Upon his return from this inspection tour on May 2, Endre submitted a report to his superior, Minister of the Interior Andor Jaross, in which he stated that he had “found everything in order.” He emphasized that “the provincial ghettos have a veritably sanatorium-like character. The

Jews are finally getting fresh air and have changed their old lifestyle for a healthier one.”

Jaross rushed a copy of the report to Miklós Horthy, the head of state, who reportedly accepted its veracity at face value. Horthy at the time was more inclined to believe the reassuring news of his government officials than the “horror propaganda” accounts of “friends of the Jews.” Among the latter was Bishop László Ravasz, the head of the Reformed Church, who approached Horthy on April 28 to express his concern about the anti-Jewish drive in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary. Bishop Ravasz had been alerted about the horrors of this drive by Baron Zsigmond Perényi, the former vice president of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament, who in turn had been informed by Samu Kahán-Frankl, the president of the Orthodox Jewish Community and a member of the Central Jewish Council, and Imre Reiner, the community’s legal counselor. Baron Perényi—who was personally aware of what was going on in Nagyszöllös and in Ugocsa County, where he had his estate—and his son did their best locally to help alleviate the plight of the Jews by sending food to the Nagyszöllös ghetto.¹⁶

Reaction of the Central Jewish Council

No sooner were the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary placed into ghettos than reports began to reach the Jewish Council in Budapest. The reports were all basically the same, describing the deplorable conditions in the ghettos and beseeching the Council to do something about them. The Council received the reports in a circuitous fashion, often through the services of young Zionists who braved the many travel and other restrictions. Occasionally, the local Jewish community leaders managed to send their own messengers to Budapest.

The leaders of the Council had another inkling of the impending disaster when they were instructed to appear at the National Rabbinical Seminary, then a “detention house,” on April 26. There they were met by Wisliceny, Franz Novak, and Otto Hunsche, three leading figures of the Eichmann Special Commando, and bluffed into believing that the Nazis had no intention of destroying the community. They were told to “revitalize” the administrative setup of the Council by electing an executive officer. Wisliceny “assured” them that the Jews would be permitted to live in communities with populations of more than ten thousand. At the same time, he reminded them of the request the SS had advanced the month before, namely for them to prepare detailed maps and statistical data about the Jews and their institutions and organizations.

In their desperate effort to do something about the plight of the provincial Jews, the Council leaders then tried to get in touch with Endre. He merely exchanged a few hurried words with them and referred them to

Albert Takács, his secretary, who denied the “horror stories.” The Council then contacted Endre’s “superior,” Interior Minister Jaross, first by telegram on April 26 and two days later through a lengthy memorandum. In it they detailed the horrible conditions that existed in each county of the affected area.¹⁷ Having received no satisfaction, the Council leaders approached Eichmann on May 3. They sent him a German-language memorandum, providing detailed accounts about the deplorable conditions in the individual ghetto centers. Eichmann was, of course, unmoved by these revelations and proceeded with his own Final Solution schedule.

Internments through the Council

Frantic as the Central Jewish Council was about the ghettoization in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary, it also became tragically and, of course, involuntarily entangled in an internment program in Budapest. The Council was asked by the representatives of the German and Hungarian jewification units, especially that headed by László Koltay, to prepare and distribute summonses for the Jews identified on lists handed over to it, requesting them to appear “for work” at the National Rabbinical Seminary. The lists were usually handed over to either Zoltán Kohn or János Gábor—the former in his capacity as executive secretary and contact man with the authorities at the Rökk Szilárd Street detention house and the latter as the Council’s liaison to the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*.

The first list of this type included the names of 133 Jewish journalists who had been excluded from the Press Chamber (the official association of journalists). It had been put together by Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa and Jenő Gáspár, the president and the secretary of the National Hungarian Press Chamber, who handed it over to the Gestapo. In addition, the Council received two lists naming about 280 lawyers and three lists that included the names of about 300 “unreliable” Jews. These latter lists show signs of having been compiled by German agents: they include a large number of misspelled names as well as those of Jews who had died before the German occupation. The list of lawyers was compiled with the cooperation of the National Association of Hungarian Lawyers (MUNE).

The Council distributed the green-colored summonses immediately upon receipt of the lists from the Gestapo or its Hungarian counterpart.¹⁸ The distribution was carried out by a messenger service organized by Kohn. Most of the messengers were Jewish high school students who were drafted or who volunteered for the service. Most of the recipients of these summonses responded to the call and appeared “for labor service” at the specified time and place. Many of them had first gone to the Council’s headquarters to inquire about the meaning of the summonses. There they were generally

reassured that “only labor service was involved” and that failure to appear would result in grave consequences not only for themselves but also for their families. Instead of “labor service,” however, the summons respondents were transferred from the detention center to Kistarcsa, Horthyliiget, or some other internment camp in Hungary and shortly thereafter taken from there to Auschwitz, among the first to be deported there from Hungary.

Most of the Jews who failed to show up eventually escaped, primarily because the German and Hungarian Gestapo units simply did not have enough personnel to hunt for individual Jews. This was, reportedly, one of the basic reasons why these units asked for the “cooperation” of the Council. When some of the employees of the Council advised against assuming this task or actually suggested sabotaging it, Kohn allegedly admonished them and warned them that they were “exposing the entire Jewish Council to danger.” In his thankless position Kohn was bound to antagonize many of his coworkers. In the opinion of one of his contemporaries, this was due “not only to his ways, but also to his limitless cowardice.”¹⁹

The leaders of the Council rationalized the acceptance of this onerous task by arguing that it was better for the victims to be forewarned by the Council than to be picked up by the Gestapo without any advance notice. Under the Council-issued summonses, they argued, the victims had at least twenty-four to forty-eight hours to settle their last-minute affairs, to obtain needed equipment, or to make up their minds to escape: the summonses were distributed immediately by messengers on bicycles in order to give the victims as much time as possible.²⁰

Whatever the rationalization or explanation advanced by the Council leaders, the fact remains that with the exception of a few people on the lists who were advised by personal friends or acquaintances on the Council’s staff not to accept or respond to the summons, the victims were not given any inkling about the impending disaster.²¹ Whether the reason was pure naïveté, fear, or apprehension about possible greater immediate catastrophe, the fact remains that it was the Council that prepared and distributed the internment summonses, exposing itself to the charge of collaboration that was advanced both during and after the war. On the other hand, the explanations of the Council leaders also have considerable merit, inasmuch as the Gestapo agents could indeed have apprehended most, if not all, of those on the lists with their customary efficiency and brutality.

Zone II: Northern Transylvania

The ghettoization of the close to 160,000 Jews of Northern Transylvania, the area encompassing Gendarmerie districts IX (Kolozsvár) and X (Marosvásárhely), began on May 3 at 5:00 a.m. The roundup of the Jews was

carried out under the provisions of Decree No. 6163/1944²² as amplified by the oral instructions given by Endre and his associates at the two conferences on ghettoization plans in the region.

THE GHETTOIZATION CONFERENCES

The first conference was held in Szatmárnémeti on April 6 and was devoted to the de-jewification operations in the counties of Gendarmerie District IX, namely Beszterce-Naszód, Bihar, Kolozs, Szatmár, Szilágy, and Szolnok-Doboka. The second was held two days later in Marosvásárhely and was devoted to the concentration of the Jews in the so-called Székely Land, the counties of Gendarmerie District X: Csík, Háromszék, Maros-Torda, and Udvarhely. Both conferences were chaired by Endre. They were attended by the heads and representatives of the civil service, gendarmerie, and police of the concerned counties. Among these were the deputy prefects (in some cases the prefects themselves), the mayors of the cities and their top assistants, and the chief officers of the gendarmerie and police units. Endre's personal entourage included most of those who had participated with him in the "triumphal tour" of the major ghettos in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary. The size of the delegations from the various Northern Transylvanian counties and cities varied.²³

In each conference, Endre reviewed the procedures to be followed in the concentration of the Jews as detailed in Decree No. 6163/1944, and Lajos Meggyesi provided additional refinements relating to the confiscation of their wealth. The latter was particularly anxious to secure the Jews' money, gold, silver, jewelry, typewriters, cameras, watches, rugs, furs, and paintings. Ferenczy revealed the preliminary steps already taken toward the ghettoization of the Jews, identifying the cities of Dés, Kolozsvár, Nagybánya, Nagyvárad, Szamosújvár, Szatmárnémeti, and Szilágysomlyó as the planned major concentration centers in Gendarmerie District IX. In the course of the anti-Jewish operations, Beszterce was added as an additional center, while Szamosújvár was used only as a temporary assembly point, with those assembled there being transferred to the ghetto of Kolozsvár.

In Gendarmerie District X, the cities of Marosvásárhely, Szászrégen, and Sepsiszentgyörgy were selected as the major concentration centers. The last major item on the conferees' agenda for this district meeting was the composition of the various ghettoization commissions (that is, of the officers and officials in charge of the anti-Jewish operations), and the specification of the geographic areas from which the Jews would be transferred to the major ghetto centers. Since most of these ghettos were in the county seats, they were designated as the assembly and entrainment centers for the Jews in the various counties.

THE GHETTOIZATION DRIVE

In accordance with the decree and the oral instructions communicated at the two conferences, the chief executive for all the measures relating to the ghettoization of the Jews was the principal administrator of the locality or area. Under Hungarian law then in effect, this meant the mayor for cities, towns, and municipalities, and the deputy prefect of the county for rural areas. The organs of the police and gendarmerie as well as the auxiliary civil service organs of the cities, including the public notary and health units, were to be directly involved in the roundup and transfer of the Jews into ghettos.

The mayors, acting in cooperation with the subordinated agency heads, were empowered not only to direct and supervise the ghettoization operations, but also to determine the location of the ghettos and to screen the Jews applying for exemption. They were also responsible for seeing to the maintenance of essential services in the ghettos.

A few days before the scheduled May 3 start of the ghettoization drive in Northern Transylvania, the special commissions for the various cities and towns held meetings to determine the location of the ghettos and settle the logistics relating to the roundup of the Jews. The commissions were normally composed of the mayors, deputy prefects, and heads of the local gendarmerie and police units. While nearly the same procedure was followed almost everywhere, the severity with which the ghettoization was carried out and the location of and the conditions within the ghetto depended upon the attitudes of the particular mayors and their subordinates. Thus in cities such as Nagyvárad and Szatmárnémeti, the ghettos were set up in the poorer, mostly Jewish-inhabited sections; in others, such as Beszterce, Kolozsvár, Marosvásárhely, Szászrégen, and Szilágysomlyó, the ghettos were set up in brickyards. The ghetto of Dés was situated in the Bungur, a forest, where some of the Jews were put up in makeshift barracks and the others were left under the open sky.

Late on May 2, on the eve of the ghettoization, the mayors issued special instructions to the Jews and had them posted in all areas under their jurisdiction. The text followed the directives of Decree No. 6163/1944, though it varied in nuances from city to city.²⁴

The roundup of the Jews, which began at the crack of dawn on May 3, was carried out by special units or squads consisting of civil servants, usually including local primary and high school teachers, gendarmes, and policemen, as well as *Nyilas* volunteers. The units were organized by the mayoral commissions and operated under their jurisdiction.

The ghettoization drive was directed by a field dejewification unit headquartered in Kolozsvár. This unit was headed by László Ferenczy and operated under the guidance of several representatives of the Eichmann-

Sonderkommando. Contact between the dejewification field offices in Northern Transylvania and the central organs in Budapest was provided by two special gendarmerie courier cars that traveled daily in opposite directions, meeting in Nagyvárad—the midpoint between the capital and Kolozsvár. Immediate operational command over the ghettoization process in Northern Transylvania was exercised by Gendarmerie Col. Tibor Paksy-Kiss, who delegated special powers in Nagyvárad to Lt. Col. Jenő Péterffy, his personal friend and ideological colleague.

The Jews of the rural communities were first assembled in the local synagogues or Jewish community buildings. In some cities, the Jews were concentrated at smaller collection points prior to their transfer to the main ghetto. At each stage they were subjected to an expropriation process that assumed an increasingly barbaric character.

The ghettoization of the Jews of Northern Transylvania, as in the other parts of Hungary, was carried out smoothly, without known incidents of resistance on the part of either Jews or Christians. The Jewish masses, unaware of the realities of the Final Solution, went to the ghettos resigned to a disagreeable but presumably nonlethal fate. Some of them rationalized their “isolation” as a logical step before their territory became a battle zone. Others believed the rumors spread by some Jewish leaders and antisemitic elements that they were merely being resettled at Kenyérmező in Transdanubia, where they would be doing agricultural work until the end of the war. Still others sustained the hope that the Red Army was not very far away and that their concentration would be relatively short-lived.

The Christians, even those friendly to the Jews, were mostly passive. Many cooperated with the authorities on ideological grounds or in the expectation of quick material rewards in the form of properties confiscated from the Jews. The smoothness with which the anti-Jewish campaign was carried out in Northern Transylvania, as elsewhere, also can be attributed in part to the absence of a meaningful resistance movement, let alone general opposition to the persecution of the Jews. Neutrality and passivity were the characteristic attitudes of the heads of the Christian churches in Transylvania, as reflected in the behavior of János Vásárhelyi, the Calvinist bishop, and Miklós Józán, the Unitarian bishop. The exemplary exception was Áron Márton, the Catholic bishop of Transylvania, whose official residence was in Alba-Iulia, in the Romanian part of Transylvania.²⁵

The ghettoization drive in Northern Transylvania was generally completed within one week. During the first day of the campaign close to 8,000 Jews were rounded up. By noon of May 5, their number had increased to 16,144; by May 6 to 72,382; and by May 10 to 98,000.²⁶ The procedures for rounding up, interrogating, and expropriating property of the Jews, as

well as for the organization and administration of the ghetto, were basically the same in every county in Northern Transylvania. The Jews were rounded up at great speed, given only a few minutes to pack, and driven into the ghettos on foot. The internal administration of each ghetto was entrusted to a Jewish Council, usually consisting of the traditional leaders of the local Jewish community.²⁷ The living conditions in the Northern Transylvanian ghettos were similar to those that prevailed elsewhere.

THE MAJOR GHETTO CENTERS

The Kolozsvár ghetto, which was set up at the Iris Brickyard, included approximately eighteen thousand Jews, including those brought in from the other communities in Kolozs County. Many of these were first assembled in Bánffyhunyard and Szamosújvár.²⁸ The ghetto was evacuated in six transports, with the first deportation having taken place on May 25 and the last on June 9. The Kolozsvár Jewish Council was headed by Dr. József Fischer, the father-in-law of Rudolph (Rezső) Kasztner. Because of this relationship, Fischer reportedly was one of the few provincial Jewish leaders who was fully informed about the realities of the Nazis' Final Solution program. He and his family were among the 388 Jews who were removed from the ghetto of Kolozsvár and taken to Budapest—and eventually to freedom—on June 10, 1944, as part of Kasztner's controversial deal with the SS.²⁹

The ghetto of Dés was among the most miserable in Northern Transylvania. At the insistence of the virulently antisemitic local city officials, it was set up in a forest situated about two miles from the city. The Bungur, as the forest was called, served as the "residence" of around 7,800 Jews, including those brought in from the rural communities in Szolnok-Doboka County. Many of these were first assembled in the district seats of Bethlen, Magyarláros, Nagyilonda, and Retteg. The luckier among the ghetto dwellers lived in makeshift barracks; the others found shelter in homemade tents or lived under the open sky. The Jewish Council, headed by Lázár Albert, the former head of the local Orthodox Jewish community, was powerless to deal with the many problems of the community. The ghetto was liquidated between May 28 and June 8 in three transports.

The Jews of Szilágy County were concentrated in the Klein Brickyard of Somlyócehi, in a marshy and muddy area about three miles from Szilágysomlyó. At its peak, the ghetto included about 8,500 Jews.³⁰ Since the brick-drying sheds were rather limited in number, many of the ghetto's inhabitants were compelled to live under the open sky. As a result of tortures, poor feeding, and a totally inadequate water supply in the ghetto, the Jews of Szilágy County arrived at Auschwitz in very poor condition, so

that an unusually large percentage were selected for gassing immediately upon arrival. The deportations from Somlyócsehi were carried out in three transports between May 31 and June 6.

Because of the relatively large concentration of Jews in Szatmár County, the Hungarian authorities set up two ghettos in the county: one in Szatmárnémeti and the other in Nagybánya. Nagykároly was used as a major assembly center from which the Jews were eventually transferred to Szatmárnémeti. The ghetto of Szatmárnémeti, located in the Jewish quarter of the city, was by far the largest of the three, holding more than eighteen thousand Jews.³¹ The Jewish Council was headed by Zoltán Schwartz. The ghetto was liquidated through the deportation of the Jews in six transports between May 19 and June 1.

In Nagybánya also, two separate ghettos were set up for space reasons: one, using the vacant lots of the König Glass Factory, for the local Jews; the other, set up in and around a stable and barn in Borpatak, about two miles from the city, for the Jews brought in from the various communities in the Nagybánya, Nagysomkút, and Kápolnokmonostor districts of Szatmár County. The Nagybánya ghetto held approximately thirty-five hundred Jews and that of Borpatak over two thousand. Of the latter only two hundred found room in the stable and barn; the others had to be quartered outside. The population of the two ghettos was deported in two transports, on May 31 and June 5.

The approximately six thousand Jews of Beszterce-Naszód County were concentrated in the ghetto of Beszterce, which was set up in and around the Stamboli Farm, about two to three miles from the center of the city. The ghetto consisted of a number of barracks and pigsties, all woefully inadequate. Of the ghetto inhabitants, close to twenty-five hundred were from the city itself. They were deported in two transports that left the city on June 2 and 6.

The largest ghetto in Hungary—aside from that in Budapest—was that of Nagyvárád. Actually, Nagyvárád had two ghettos: one for the city's Jews, holding approximately twenty-seven thousand people and located in the neighborhood of the large Orthodox synagogue and the adjacent Great Market; the other, for the close to eight thousand Jews brought in from the other communities in Bihar County, at the city grange and around the Mezey Lumberyards.³² The ghetto of Nagyvárád was extremely overcrowded. The Jews of the city, who constituted about 30 percent of its population, were crammed into an area sufficient for only one-fifteenth of the city's inhabitants. The density was such that fourteen to fifteen Jews had to share a room. Like every other ghetto, the ghetto of Nagyvárád suffered from a severe shortage of food; its inhabitants also were the victims of the punitive measures of an especially vicious local administration. The antisemitic city

government often cut off electric service and the flow of water to the ghetto. Moreover, under the command of Lt. Col. Jenő Péterffy, the gendarmes were especially sadistic in operating the local “mint,” which was set up at the Dréher Breweries immediately adjacent to the ghetto. Internally, the ghettos were administered by a Jewish Council headed by Sándor Leitner, the head of the Orthodox Jewish community. The deportation of the Jews began with the “evacuation” of those concentrated in the Mezey Lumberyard on May 23. This was followed on May 28 by the first transport from the city itself. The last transport left Nagyvárád on June 27.

In Gendarmerie District X, covering the Székely Land, the Jews were placed in three major ghettos: Marosvásárhely, Szászrégen, and Sepsiszentgyörgy.

The ghetto of Marosvásárhely was located in a dilapidated brickyard encompassing an area of approximately twenty thousand square meters. It consisted primarily of one large brick-drying building with a broken roof and cement floors. Since the building had not been in use for several years, it was extremely dirty; also, it had space for only 2,400 of the ghetto’s population of close to 7,400 Jews. Of this population, around 5,500 were from the city itself. The remainder were brought in from the neighboring communities in the western parts of Maros-Torda County and in Udvarhely County, including Székelyudvarhely. Among the Jews taken to and deported from Marosvásárhely were those of Böződujfalú, descendants of the Székely who had converted to Judaism in the early days of the Transylvanian Principality (Sabbatarians). Allegedly these were given an opportunity to escape the ghettoization if they would declare that they were in fact Christian Magyars, but they refused to do so. The Jewish Council included Samu Ábrahám, the former head of the Orthodox Jewish community. The Jews were deported in three transports between May 27 and June 8.

At its peak, the ghetto of Szászrégen held four thousand Jews, of which approximately fourteen hundred were from the city itself. The remainder were brought in from the eastern part of Maros-Torda County and from the northern part of Csík County, including Gyergyószentmiklós. The ghetto, consisting of the brick-drying sheds of the local brickyard, was guarded by a special unit of forty gendarmes sent in from Szeged. It was liquidated with the deportation of its inhabitants on June 4.

The ghetto of Sepsiszentgyörgy held the local Jews as well as those from the small communities in Háromszék County and the southern part of Csík County, including Csíkszereda. The total ghetto population numbered only 850. The ghettoization of the few hundred Jews of Sepsiszentgyörgy differed from the procedure followed elsewhere. On May 2 the Jews were informed by the police to appear at 6:00 the following morning at police headquarters with all members of their families. One member of each family

was then allowed to return home in the company of a policeman to pick up the essential goods designated by the authorities. After this operation the Jews were transferred to an unfinished building that had neither doors nor windows. About a week later, they were transferred to Szászrégen for entrainment and deportation.

THE DEJEWIFIERS' ASSESSMENT

Shortly after the beginning of the ghettoization phase of the Final Solution in Northern Transylvania, Endre and his entourage went on a tour of inspection. At most stops they were joined by the officials in charge of ghettoization in the particular county, including the prefect, deputy prefect, gendarmerie and police commanders, and the mayor of the city in which the Jews were assembled. They first visited Mátészalka, in northeastern Hungary, and then Marosvásárhely. From there, they went on to Sepsiszentgyörgy, Kolozsvár, and Nagyvárad.

Upon his return to Budapest Endre gave an interview to a staff reporter of the Nazi-oriented *Új Magyarország* (New Magyardom), in which he declared that the conclusion of the deJewification campaign represented a gigantic step calculated to defend the life of the Hungarian nation, "by ridding it of the Jewish poison, a self-defense that will end Jewish predominance." He further asserted that in his view, "the population in all cities and communities hailed the government measures with genuine delight." This was especially true, he claimed, in the cities of Beregszász, Máramarossziget, Munkács, and Ungvár, "which had borne the brunt of the flood of Eastern Jews [and where] the population rejoiced and frequently supplied means of transportation to speed resettlement and get rid of the Jews."

Endre then proceeded to assuage the concern of those Hungarians who might show some sympathy for the Jews by declaring:

We adopted measures that were always carried out humanely and with consideration for moral factors. Really, no harm is befalling them. They can live among themselves in one group within the borders of the ghetto in accordance with their own folk and racial laws. We made it possible for them to cook with sesame oil, which enables them not to violate one of their important religious tenets. The ghettoization was carried out humanely and with the avoidance of all rough conduct. I issued instructions that good care be taken for their safety.³³

A few days later the mass deportations began.

7 DEPORTATION

The Master Plan

Unlike what happened in Poland, the Jews in Hungary lingered in ghettos for only a relatively short time. The ghettos in the villages lasted for only a day or two, and even those in the major concentration and entrainment ghetto centers, which were usually located in the county seats, were short-lived: they lasted only a few days in Zones III, IV, and V; in Zones I and II and in Budapest the ghettos lasted a little longer, ranging from two to five weeks.¹

While the technical details of the deportation program were not completed until May 8–9, 1944, agreement on the basic decision had been achieved a month earlier. It was reached in greatest secrecy by the Hungarian leaders involved in the anti-Jewish drive, including László Baký and László Endre, and by the representatives of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando* in accordance with the directives of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA).

The master plan for the implementation of the deportation decision called for a two-pronged tactical approach:

- The exploitation of the agreement involving Horthy and the Hungarian and German governments relating to the delivery of several hundred thousand Hungarian Jews “for war production purposes”;² and
- The “removal of the danger” represented by the large concentration of Jews in the northeastern parts of the country that were declared to have become military operational zones.

Since Horthy had consented to the transfer of the “Jewish workers,” Edmund Veessenmayer had no difficulty in persuading the Sztójay government to take immediate action for the delivery, as a first installment, of one hundred thousand workers needed for the aircraft manufacturing project in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.³ Prime Minister Döme Sztójay promptly assured him that Hungary would place at the disposal of the Reich fifty thousand able-bodied Jews within two weeks, and an additional fifty thousand soon thereafter. With the Jews at his disposal, Veessenmayer began to discuss the problem of their transportation with Otto Winkelmann, the Higher SS- and Police Leader in Hungary, and asked Berlin for instructions as to where in Germany the transports should be directed. On April 19,

Veesenmayer issued an urgent appeal for freight cars for the removal of the ten thousand Jews the Hungarian Ministry of Defense had already made available. The German Foreign Office informed him that the issue of Jewish resettlement fell within the jurisdiction of Eichmann, who would not take action before he received the final directive regarding the disposition of the Jews from Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the head of the RSHA.

A few days later, however, Veesenmayer changed his position after considering the imminent implementation of the last step in the Final Solution—the deportation of all of the Jews. On April 23, he recommended to the German Foreign Office that the original partial resettlement program involving the “Jewish workers” provided by the Hungarian Ministry of Defense be delayed so as not to jeopardize the planned massive anti-Jewish operation.

In the meantime, however, the Hungarian authorities proceeded with the fulfillment of their own responsibilities under the original agreement. On April 26, the Council of Ministers approved not only the measure “legalizing” the ghettoization program that had already been in process since April 16 in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary, but also the recommendation of the Ministry of Defense⁴ that Hungary immediately deliver the first installment of fifty thousand labor servicemen to Germany. The Council amended the recommendation by adding the stipulation that the labor servicemen had to be accompanied by “their families.”⁵ Three days later the first two transports, consisting of eighteen hundred Jews from Kistarcsa and about two thousand from Topolya—the two largest internment camps—were directed to Auschwitz. Both transports consisted exclusively of able-bodied Jews ranging in age from sixteen to fifty—these internment camps held primarily political internees and hostages at that time.

After April 23, Veesenmayer’s diplomatic pursuit of the “legitimate objectives” inherent in the Hitler-Horthy agreement gradually became intertwined with the RSHA’s ideological goals relating to the Final Solution. There are two versions of the scenario relating to the “justification” of the mass deportations. According to one version, Veesenmayer approached Sztójay toward the end of April, transmitting the *Wehrmacht*’s request that the Jews concentrated in the military operational zones in the northeastern and southern parts of the country be removed to the interior for security and other military-related reasons. Sztójay reportedly relayed the request to his minister of the interior, Andor Jaross, who in turn forwarded it to Endre, “the person entrusted with the handling of Jewish questions.” In accordance with a scheme worked out in advance, Endre reported that the fulfillment of the *Wehrmacht* request was impossible because of the great number of Jews in Carpatho-Ruthenia. He reminded his superiors that the Germans had offered to take over all Jews and that they had promised to send the able-bodied men

and women to labor camps and those not fit for labor, including the children and the aged, into concentration camps. Endre recommended acceptance of the German offer because, in his view, "Hungary could not support such a large number of Jews." Jaross forwarded the recommendation to Sztójay, who reportedly promptly approved it.

According to the second version, the deportation process was set in motion by a suggestion by the gendarmerie commander in Máramarossziget. He reportedly advised that in view of the inadequate space and sanitary facilities in the ghettos, either the ghettoization should stop or the "surplus Jews" should be sent to western Hungary or to Germany. The suggestion was allegedly conveyed to Dieter Wisliceny, who was in Munkács supervising the ghettoization in Carpatho-Ruthenia. Wisliceny went immediately to Budapest in the company of László Ferenczy, Leó Lulay, and Lajos Meggyesi. Upon arrival they met in Baky's office with Col. Győző Tölgyesy, Adolf Eichmann, Otto Hunsche, Franz Novak, and the mayor of Máramarossziget. Baky placed before Eichmann the matter of the situation in Máramarossziget and allegedly asked whether the ghettoization should be stopped or whether Germany was ready to take over the Jews. Eichmann, who helped work out the scenario, naturally opted for the latter. After the meeting, which lasted only fifteen minutes, Lulay and Novak were empowered to go to Vienna to make transportation arrangements with the leaders of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* (German Railways).

OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVES

Endre lost no time in working out the technical and organizational details of the deportation. Early in May, he issued a memo to his immediate subordinates, providing general guidelines relating to the anti-Jewish operation with emphasis on Hungarian-German cooperation in the drive.⁶ The details of the memo were discussed at a conference in Munkács on May 8–9 attended by the top administration, police, and gendarmerie officers of the various counties and county seats. The conference, chaired by Ferenczy, heard an elaboration of the procedures to be used in the entrainment of the Jews and the final schedule for the planned transports from the various ghetto centers. The schedule was in accord with the instructions of the RSHA as worked out by the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*, which called for the deJewification of the country from east to west. Accordingly, the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia, northeastern Hungary, and Northern Transylvania were to be deported first, between May 15 and June 11. The conference also agreed on the written instructions to be issued to the mayors of the ghetto and entrainment centers, specifying the procedural and technical details relating to the deportation of the Jews.⁷

TRANSPORTATION ARRANGEMENTS

The schedule of the deportations and the route plan were reviewed at a conference in Vienna on May 4–6 attended by the representatives of the railroad, the Hungarian gendarmerie, and the German Security Police (SIPO). The chief representative of the gendarmerie was Lulay, Ferenczy's aide; the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando* was represented by Franz Novak, the transportation specialist.

The conferees considered three alternative deportation routes. The first one, which was generally preferred, led through eastern Slovakia; the others were through Lemberg (Lvov) and via the Budapest-Vienna route. Although Hanns Elard Ludin, the German minister in Bratislava, had some misgivings about the Slovakian route, that was the one finally selected, since the two other routes had by that time become unsuitable: the route through Lemberg, while the shortest, had become "extraordinarily difficult for military reasons" (the Soviet forces had already reached the heart of Poland) and the transportation of the provincial Jews via Budapest-Vienna, it was felt, would make the Jews of the capital restless. The Vienna Conference thereupon decided to begin the deportation of the Hungarian Jews on May 15 and to carry it out using four trains daily. The trains were to be routed from Kassa to Auschwitz across eastern Slovakia; the route chosen was from Kassa through Prešov, Muszyna, Tarnow, and Cracow, and on to Auschwitz.

The *Wehrmacht* and the German Railways proved highly cooperative about providing the necessary rolling stock, an indication of the extent to which the single-mindedness of the Nazi leaders' pursuit of the Final Solution overshadowed even the military requirements of the Reich. The Nazi leaders continued to attach a greater priority to the deportation of the Jews than to the transportation needs of the *Wehrmacht*, even when Soviet troops were rapidly approaching the Carpathians.

Even prior to the settlement of the transportation schedule and route, the German and Hungarian experts on the Jewish question took steps to avoid any possible complications that might arise from the inclusion of Jewish citizens of enemy and neutral states in the general Hungarian anti-Jewish program. To aid in the solution of this problem, the German Foreign Office dispatched its top expert in the field—Adolf Hezinger—to act as liaison between the German Legation and the Hungarian and German authorities in charge of the Final Solution. Following his arrival in Hungary toward the end of April, Hezinger visited the major ghettos and entrainment centers, from which he selected from one hundred to two hundred Jews of foreign citizenship.⁸

Zones I and II: Carpatho-Ruthenia, Northeastern Hungary, and Northern Transylvania

The deportations from gendarmerie districts VIII, IX, and X (Carpatho-Ruthenia, northeastern Hungary, and Northern Transylvania), which were identified as Dejewification Operational Zones I and II, began on schedule on May 15 with four trains daily. Each train carried about three thousand Jews crammed into freight cars, each car being supplied with two buckets: one containing water and the other for excrement. One of the first ghettos to be cleared was that of Kassa, the rail hub through which almost all the deportation trains would leave the country and where the escorting Hungarian gendarmes were replaced by Germans.

The Jews were permitted to take along only a limited number of items for the “journey.” They were strictly forbidden to take along any currency, jewelry, or valuables. Immediately prior to their removal from the ghettos to the entrainment platforms, they were subjected to still another search for valuables. The brutality with which the searches were conducted varied, but they were uniformly humiliating. In the course of the searches, personal documents, including identification cards, diplomas, and even military-service documents were frequently torn up and their proud owners turned into nonpersons. Shortly thereafter they were driven to the entrainment points by well-armed gendarmes and policemen. In their eagerness to deport as many Jews as possible, the gendarmes usually crammed seventy to ninety Jews into each small freight car, which was then chained and padlocked.⁹

The progress of the deportations was recorded by both the German and the Hungarian dejewifiers. Ferenczy submitted daily reports to Section XX of the Ministry of the Interior. The reports of the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando* were sent to the Higher SS- and Police Leader, who routinely forwarded them not only to the RSHA but also—via Veesenmayer—to the German Foreign Office. According to these reports, the number of Jews deported within two days of the operation’s start was 23,363. By May 18, it had reached about 51,000. The number of those deported continued to climb dramatically as the days passed: May 19, 62,644; May 23, 110,556; May 25, 138,870; May 28, 204,312; May 31, 217,236; June 1, 236,414; June 2, 247,856; June 3, 253,389; and June 8, 289,357.¹⁰ The transport of June 7, which was reported the following day, was the last one from Zones I and II. With it, the dejewification experts achieved their target: within twenty-four days, they had deported 289,357 Jews in ninety-two trains—a daily average of 12,056 people deported and an average of 3,145 per train.

German Reactions and Camouflage Attempts

One week after the beginning of the deportations, Eberhard von Thadden, the specialist on Jewish Affairs in the *Inland II* section of the German Foreign Office, visited Budapest to assess the activities of the German agencies involved in the anti-Jewish operations. He summarized his findings in two reports dated May 25 and 26. With reference to the deportees from Zones I and II, Thadden reported that only one-third of them “were found suitable for work” upon their arrival in Auschwitz. He paid tribute to Endre and Baky, stating that the success of the operation was due to their wholehearted cooperation. He stressed that the Jews in the other parts of the country continued to remain calm because the “Jewish Council of Budapest was forced to announce that these measures applied only to Jews of the eastern areas, who had been preserving their Jewish peculiarities.”¹¹

Thadden’s assessment concerning the condition of the deportees from these zones was confirmed by *SS-Obergruppenführer* Oswald Pohl, the chief of the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office (VWHA), which was in charge of the concentration camps.

Fearing negative world reaction to the deportations, Paul K. Schmidt, chief of the Information and Press Division of the German Foreign Office, proposed on May 27 that the German and Hungarian authorities provide “external causes and reasons” for the “current and planned operations” against the Jews of Hungary. He suggested “the discovery of explosives in Jewish clubs and synagogues, the unearthing of sabotage organizations, attempts at coups, attacks on police, and involvement in foreign currency dealings designed to undermine the Hungarian food supply system.” Schmidt’s particular concern with the possible reactions to the “re-settlement” of the Budapest Jews was quickly allayed by Veessenmayer, who correctly pointed out that world public opinion would be no more shocked by the proposed measures against the Jews of Budapest than it had been by the deportations from Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania.¹²

Schmidt’s suggestions probably were motivated by the desire to overcome the possible impact of revelations about the brutalities committed against Jews in the course of their deportation. The Germans, in their concern about their image, managed to win, however temporarily, a propaganda battle at the expense of the Hungarians. During the deportations from Nagyvárad, the Nazis secretly produced a film showing the brutality of the Hungarian gendarmes in contrast to the “humanitarian” and “civilized” behavior of the Germans.¹³ The first part of the film showed the gendarmes at work beating women with rifle butts, chasing lagging children with whips, and tearing wedding bands off the helpless victims. It also focused on the omnipresent cock-feathered gendarmes pushing the Jews into the freight cars like cattle

and on the two buckets that were placed in each car. The second part, filmed partially in Kassa, where the Germans took over the transports, showed how German Red Cross nurses threw open the sealed cars and, horrified and scandalized, removed the corpses, distributed fresh water and provisions to the emaciated victims, and bathed and disinfected the afflicted. Once they were refreshed and rested, the Jews were shown being led away, supposedly to some easy job somewhere in Germany.

The film was shown in several neutral countries under the sponsorship of German authorities, but by that time in the summer of 1944 the world—already aware of the Final Solution—could no longer be fooled by the Nazis' propaganda gimmickry.¹⁴

Hungarian Official Camouflage

Although the press was completely silent about the character and scope of the deportations, the population at large was well aware of its inevitable outcome: the end of ghettoization as well as the end of the lives of the Jews in the entrainment centers. All of them witnessed at least some aspects of the ordeal of the Jews, and quite a few even took advantage of it. The attitude of the population was fostered by the public pronouncements of government officials who reassured the people that the Jews were being removed merely for security reasons or for employment in agriculture or war-related projects and that no physical harm would befall them.

The beginning of the deportation coincided with the inauguration of new pro-Nazi county prefects, a development that was exploited by various members of the Sztójay government to elaborate on the anti-Jewish measures. Speaking in Székesfehérvár on May 11, Baky emphasized that the final solution of the Jewish question would assure the unity of the home front and final victory. Three days later, he was quite specific about the objectives of the anti-Jewish measures. He stated:

First and foremost we must rid the Hungarian people of Jewry. Segregation of the Jews has partly taken place. As a final result of all these operations, we shall remove every Jew from the country: not a single one is going to stay here. On the territory east of the Tisza, so far 320,000 Jews have already been taken into concentration camps.¹⁵

Having been notified of the intention to remove all Jews from the country, the Hungarian population had to be assured that no physical harm would befall them. Lajos Szász, the minister of industry, emphasized this point in his Nyíregyháza speech of May 22—the very day the Jews were being entrained in the city:

In connection with the solution of the Jewish question let us be clear about the following: Nobody aims at the extirpation, destruction, or tormenting of the Jews. The government has not taken any measures so far that would lead one to believe that it is pursuing goals unworthy of Hungarians.¹⁶

In his inaugural speech in the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament on May 25, Prime Minister Sztójay was more laconic but also more emphatic. He stated: “We want to implement all the theoretical and practical objectives of the politics of race defense, including the radical solution of the Jewish question.”¹⁷

While some Hungarian government figures were busy swaying public opinion with declarations of their noble intentions, those in charge of the Final Solution proceeded with the systematic implementation of their program in accordance with the pre-established schedule.

Zone III: Northern Hungary

In launching the ghettoization and deportation campaign in Zones III–VI, the German and Hungarian dejection experts took into consideration the experience they had gained from the implementation of the drive in Carpatho-Ruthenia, northeastern Hungary, and Northern Transylvania. Just before beginning the campaign in Zone III, Ferenczy consequently issued detailed instructions.¹⁸ He ordered that:

- the rounding up and concentration of the Jews be effectuated by suitable gendarmerie and police forces covering smaller territorial units.
- the deportations begin immediately after the completion of the concentration of the Jews in entrainment centers.
- the internal command of the camps and the technical supervision of entrainment continue to be the responsibility of the German Security Police while the external security and guarding of the camps become the task of the Hungarians.
- meetings be held in the Ministry of the Interior with the concerned county prefects and gendarmerie commanders only a few days before the launching of an operation in a particular territory, and meetings with local mayors and police officials take place only one day before the beginning of the operation.
- the ill, the aged, and their families be deported in the first transports rather than in the last, as had been the case earlier.

In the master plan for the dejection of Hungary, Zone III encompassed the area of northern Hungary extending from Kassa to the borders of the Third Reich north of Budapest. Zone III covered the territories

of Gendarmerie District II (Székesfehérvár) and VII (Miskolc), including the counties of Bars, Borsod, Fejér, Győr, Heves, Komárom, and Nógrád.

The operational details for the concentration and entrainment of the Jews were discussed at a conference held in the Ministry of the Interior on May 25. Held under the chairmanship of Baky, the conference was attended by the prefects and the gendarmerie and police chiefs of the concerned counties, the SD commander, and the leaders of the *Sonderkommando*, including Eichmann. The conferees decided to begin the concentration of the originally estimated sixty-five thousand Jews gathered in the ghettos in Zone III on June 5 and to carry out the deportations between June 11 and 16.¹⁹ The launching of the anti-Jewish operations in this zone was envisioned to coincide with the completion of the deportations from Northern Transylvania. The details of the drive in this zone were discussed on June 3 at a meeting held at the headquarters of the gendarmerie's investigative unit in Budapest. The meeting, chaired by Ferenczy, was attended by the mayors of the communities as well as by two top police officials and three transportation experts in the affected area.

For the direction of the anti-Jewish operations, the dejewification squads set up their headquarters in Hatvan, a small town northeast of Budapest. In accordance with Ferenczy's directives, the Jews, who already had been assembled for weeks in their local ghettos, were not concentrated in the entrainment centers until just a few days before their planned deportation.

The concentration of the Jews began on schedule at 5:00 A.M. on June 5; by June 10, 51,829 Jews had been transferred to eleven entrainment centers. Six of these centers were in the area of Gendarmerie District II and five in that of Gendarmerie District VII (see [table 1](#)).

GENDARMERIE DISTRICT II

In this district there were six major entrainment centers: Dunaszerdahely, Érsekújvár, Győr, Komárom, Léva, and Székesfehérvár. Close to 24,000 Jews were concentrated in these centers.

The ghetto of Dunaszerdahely was set up in the Jewish section of the city and held 2,840 Jews, including those from seventy-two small rural communities in Komárom County. Approximately 350 Jews were brought in from Somorja and another 350 from Nagymagyar. The ghetto was administered internally by a Jewish Council headed by József Wetzler. The Jews were entrained on the night of June 15.

The Jews of Érsekújvár were concentrated within the city, while those brought in from the districts of Érsekújvár, Galánta, and Vágssellye were assembled in the Kurzweil Brickyard. The close to 5,000 Jews were deported in two transports, which left the city on June 12 and 15.

Table 1

NUMBER OF JEWS IN THE GHETTOS AND ENTRAINMENT CENTERS IN GENDARMERIE DISTRICTS II AND VII

<i>Gendarmerie District II</i> (Székesfehérvár)		<i>Gendarmerie District VII</i> (Miskolc)	
Dunaszerdahely	2,840	Balassagyarmat	5,820
Érsekújvár	4,843	Eger	2,744
Győr	5,635	Hatvan	3,800
Komárom	5,040	Miskolc	13,500
Léva	2,624	Salgótarján	2,240
Székesfehérvár	2,743	Total	28,104
Total	23,725		

SOURCE: Ferenczy Reports of June 7 and 12, 1944.

The ghetto of Győr was located in the Sziget District (Győrsziget). It consisted of buildings with about 430 rooms that had previously housed about 1,200 people. Of the more than 5,600 Jews concentrated here, all but approximately 1,000 were from the city itself. The remainder were from the neighboring communities in Győr-Moson County.²⁰ Fate played an especially cruel game with many of the Jews of Győr. They were to have been among the beneficiaries of the Eichmann-Kasztner deal under which about 30,000 Jews—15,000 from Budapest and 15,000 from the provinces—were to be routed to Strasshof, Austria, for “safekeeping” pending the outcome of a mission to exchange “blood for trucks.” However, because of the oversight of a *Scharführer*, the train containing them was routinely directed to Kassa and on to Auschwitz rather than to Austria.²¹

The Komárom ghetto was set up in a fort and included more than 5,000 Jews, of whom approximately 2,000 were from the city. The remainder were brought in from the neighboring communities.²² The ghetto’s inhabitants were deported in two transports that left the city on June 13 and 16.

The ghetto of Léva was set up in the local military barracks and held more than 2,600 Jews, of whom about 1,200 were from the town itself.²³ Their deportation took place on June 15.

The Jews of Székesfehérvár were first assembled in a temporary ghetto within the city. After a short while they were transferred to the Szabó Tile Works and the cavalry barracks located at the edge of the city. The

ghetto, whose Jewish Council was headed by Imre Neuhauser, held 2,743 Jews, of whom a few more than 2,000 were from the city itself.²⁴

GENDARMERIE DISTRICT VII

The slightly more than 28,000 Jews in the area encompassing this gendarmerie district were concentrated in the centers of Balassagyarmat, Eger, Hatvan, Miskolc, and Salgótarján.

There were 5,820 Jews concentrated in Balassagyarmat. Of these, about 2,000 were local and were ghettoized in the Jewish section of the town. The remainder were brought in from the neighboring rural communities in Nógrád County.²⁵ These were concentrated in the old section of the town. Internally, the ghetto was administered by a Jewish Council headed by Mihály Lázár. Just before their deportation on June 12 and 14, the Jews were relocated about five kilometers from the city to the tobacco barns at Illéspuszta, which had the necessary entrainment facilities.

In Eger, the ghetto was set up in the Jewish quarter of the city and included 2,744 Jews, of whom about 1,600 were local. Approximately 1,500 other Jews from various communities in Heves County, including Füzesabony and Heves, were taken into the workers' quarters of a deserted mine called Bagólyuk, located near Egercsehi and Szücs, northwest of Eger. Before entrainment, the Jews were concentrated for a few days in the brickyards at Kerecsend. They were deported on June 8 from the neighboring Maklár Railway Station.

The headquarters of the dejewification squad in operational Zone III, in Hatvan, had about 3,800 Jews concentrated in the local sugar factory, including those brought in from the neighboring communities.²⁶ During their entrainment on June 12, another train containing approximately 600 labor servicemen pulled into the station. On orders of Márton Zöldi, a leading member of the dejewification unit, the freight cars containing the labor servicemen were attached to the deportation train and taken to Auschwitz.

Of the 13,500 Jews in the ghetto of Miskolc, a few more than 10,000 were from the city itself. The local Jews were concentrated in the Jewish quarter of the city. The Jews from the districts of Edelény, Mezőcsát, Mezőkeresztes, Mezőkővesd, Miskolc, Ózd, and Sajószentpéter in Borsod County, as well as those of some of the neighboring communities in the District of Szerencs in Zemplén County, the District of Szikszó in Abauj-Torna County, and the District of Putnok in Gömör-Kishont County, were concentrated in the local brickyards.²⁷ Internally, the ghetto was under the administration of a Jewish Council headed by Mór Feldman.

The ghetto of Salgótarján was set up in the stables of the local mining company. It held 2,240 Jews.²⁸

Zone IV: Southern Hungary East of the Danube

The anti-Jewish operations in Zone IV affected the Jews living in Gendarmerie Districts V (Szeged) and VI (Debrecen). The zone included the southeastern parts of Trianon Hungary extending from the Danube and the formerly Yugoslav-held area of the Délvidék.

The ghettoization, concentration, and deportation operations in this zone were directed from Kiskunfélegyháza, where the dejewification squads had their headquarters.

The concentration process began at 5:00 A.M. on June 16, the very day the deportations from Zone III were completed. It ended just four days later with the establishment of seven concentration-entrainment centers: four in Gendarmerie District V and three in Gendarmerie District VI. The plan originally called for these centers to be located in Békéscsaba, Berettyóujfalu, Debrecen, Kecskemét, Szabadka, Szeged, and Szolnok and for the deportations to begin on June 21, the day after the completion of the concentration.²⁹ The plan was then revised, with the later version calling, among other things, for the replacement of Szabadka by Bácsalmás as one of the main entrainment centers and for delaying the deportation date by four days.

Among the major ghettos that were liquidated as a result of the concentration drive were those of Hódmezővásárhely, Kalocsa, Kecel, Kiskőrös, Makó, Nagykáta, Szarvas, and Szentés in Gendarmerie District V, as well as those of the so-called Hajdú towns (Hajdúböszörmény, Hajdúdorong, Hajdúhadház, Hajdúnánás, and Hajdúszoboszló), Karcag, and Téglás in Gendarmerie District VI.³⁰

As a result of the drive, 40,505 Jews were concentrated in the seven entrainment centers of Zone IV. Of these, 21,489 were concentrated in the four centers in Gendarmerie District V and 19,016 in the three centers in Gendarmerie District VI (see [table 2](#)).

The Jews concentrated in this zone were deported between June 25 and 28. Some of the transports from this zone, in accord with the so-called Kasztner-Eichmann deal, were directed to Strasshof, Austria, where most of the deported Jews survived the ordeal.

GENDARMERIE DISTRICT V

The district's four major concentration and entrainment centers were those of Bácsalmás, Kecskemét, Szeged, and Szolnok.

The ghetto of Bácsalmás held 2,793 Jews, including those brought in from Baja, Madaras, Jánoshalma, Szabadka and the neighboring communities in northern Bácska. About 700 of these Jews—mostly from Szabadka—were among the lucky ones. When their train reached Szeged, their freight

Table 2
 NUMBER OF JEWS IN THE GHETTOS AND ENTRAINMENT CENTERS IN GENDARMERIE
 DISTRICTS V AND VI

<i>Gendarmerie District V</i> (Szeged)		<i>Gendarmerie District VI</i> (Debrecen)	
Bácsalmás	2,793	Békéscsaba	3,113
Kecskemét	5,413	Debrecen	13,084
Szeged	8,617	Nagyvárad	
Szolnok	4,666	(Bihar County) ^a	2,819
Total	21,489	Total	19,016

SOURCE: Ferenczy Report of June 29, 1944

^aIncludes only Jews from the rural communities in the county after the Jews of Nagyvárad had been deported.

cars were detached from the train going to Auschwitz and attached to the one that was directed to Strasshof.

The ghetto of Kecskemét included 5,413 Jews, of whom close to 1,500 were from the city.³¹ The Jewish Council here was under the leadership of Dezső Schönberger. The ghetto was set up on the premises of an unused plant at the outskirts of the city; that plant also served as the entrainment point. The Jews were deported in two transports that left the city on June 27 and 29.

The capital of Csongrád County, Szeged, had one of the most active Jewish communities before the occupation. As a concentration center, Szeged contained 8,617 Jews, of whom fewer than half were from the city itself.³² The ghetto for the local Jews was located in the Jewish quarter near the synagogue and the Jewish schools and was administered by a Jewish Council headed by Róbert Pap. About 2,000 Jews from the rural communities were held for a while in the pigsties of the sausage plant at Dorozsma. The ghetto of Szeged was liquidated on June 16–17 by the transfer of the Jews to the Rokus sports field and to the brickyards that already held many of the Jews from the neighboring rural communities. The three transports from Szeged left between June 25 and 28 from the Rokus Railway Station. Of these, two were directed to Strasshof, where most of the deportees survived.

The ghetto of Szolnok was located in and around the synagogue, the Jewish school, and the adjacent community building. On June 16, the ghetto population was transferred to the facilities of the local sugar factory,

which was used as the concentration and entrainment center for the Jews of the neighboring communities in Jász-Nagykun County. At its peak, the sugar plant held 4,666 Jews, of whom approximately half were from Szolnok.³³ The deportations took place on June 29, with one transport of 2,567 Jews directed to Strasshof and the other to Auschwitz.

GENDARMERIE DISTRICT VI

The district had three major concentration and entrainment centers: Békéscsaba, Debrecen, and Nagyvárad. The latter served primarily for the concentration and entrainment of the Jews in the rural communities of Bihar County.

The ghetto and entrainment center of Békéscsaba was set up in the local tobacco factory and its environs and included 3,113 Jews, of whom about 2,500 were from the city proper. The others were brought in from the neighboring villages and towns.³⁴

Debrecen had two ghettos including more than 13,000 Jews. One of them was set up for the local Jews and consisted of two parts—the “large” and the “small” ghettos, divided by Hatvan Street in the Jewish quarter of the city. The ghetto administration was headed by Pál Weiss. The other ghetto was set up at the Serly Brickyards and included the Jews brought in from the neighboring communities.³⁵ On June 21, the Jews of Debrecen, too, were transferred to the brickyard for entrainment.

About three weeks after the liquidation of the original ghetto, Nagyvárad’s entrainment facilities were used once again, this time to deport the Jews in the section of Bihar County in Trianon Hungary that was in Zone IV. On June 16–17, 2,819 Jews from the small communities south and southeast of Debrecen, including Derecske and Konyár, were concentrated in and deported from Nagyvárad.

The Special Case of the Délvidék and Southwestern Hungary

Approximately 10,000 Jews of this area of Hungary adjacent to Croatia and occupied Serbia—in Gendarmerie Districts IV and V—were rounded up and deported concurrently with the drive against the Jews in Zones I and II. Of these, slightly more than 2,700 were from around the Croatian border in the Csáktornya, Nagykanizsa, and Perlak districts of Zala County.³⁶ As part of the anti-Jewish operations in the Délvidék, approximately 1,600 Jews from the southern border of Baranya County were concentrated in Barcs.

The concentration of the Jews from the various ghettos in the Délvidék was carried out on a territorial basis. Those in the communities

along the western bank of the Tisza River in the eastern section of the Bácska were taken to Szeged.³⁷ Those living in the central zone of the Bácska, including Újvidék, were concentrated in Szabadka. The Jews living in the communities situated along the Danube in the western parts of the Bácska and in the Baranya region along the Dráva River, including those of Zombor, were taken to Baja for entrainment. The major ghetto and concentration centers from which the approximately 5,200 Jews of the Délvidék were deported were those of Baja, Szabadka, and Szeged.

A large number of Jews from the Délvidék area were concentrated in three camps in Baja. Two of these camps held the Újvidék Jews transferred from Szabadka; the third, the other Jews from the Délvidék not concentrated in Bácsstopolya, Szabadka, or Szeged. The deportations from Baja started on May 27, approximately a month before the general deportations in Zone IV. According to an eyewitness, the density and cruelty with which the Jews were entrained in Baja were such that when the doors of the freight cars were first opened at Gänsendorf a few days later, forty-five corpses were found, along with a number of Jews who had gone mad as a result of the ordeal. The local Jews were concentrated in the Jewish quarter of the town. The deportation of these Jews took place in three phases. The first phase involved the arrest on April 14 of about 150 Jews, including many of the communal leaders and professionals. These were taken, presumably as hostages, to the internment camp at Bácsstopolya, and were deported from there at the end of the month. The second phase involved the mass deportations of May 27, which included 640 local Jews. At this point, the number of Jews still remaining in the town was down to approximately 400. These were transferred to Bácsalmás on June 17 and deported together with the other Jews in the camp on June 25.³⁸

The Jews of Szabadka were placed into a ghetto near the railway station early in May, almost a week after the ghettoization of the other Jews in the Délvidék. The Jews who were brought in from the adjacent communities, including Újvidék, were held in an abandoned four-story flour mill. The Jewish Council was headed by Zoltán Loránt. For purposes of deportation, the central Bácska Jews were transferred to Baja on May 15. The Jews of Szabadka remained in their ghetto until June 16, when most of them were transferred to Bácsalmás.

The Strasshof Transports

The Jews who had lived in Gendarmerie Districts V and VI fared relatively better than their counterparts in the other provincial gendarmerie districts. This was due to a combination of good luck and a new element introduced in the so-called blood for trucks negotiations between Rudolph (Rezső)

Kasztner, the leader of the Budapest Relief and Rescue Committee of Budapest (Vaadah), and the SS.³⁹ On June 14, during the deportations from Zone III, Eichmann unexpectedly informed Kasztner that he was willing to allow thirty thousand Hungarian Jews to be “laid on ice” in Austria as a demonstration of his goodwill. He demanded, as counterdemonstration of goodwill, an immediate payment of five million Swiss francs. Since the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania had already been deported, Eichmann insisted that only Jews from Trianon Hungary could be considered for the transfer. He referred to the former as “ethnically and biologically valuable elements,” whom he would not allow to remain alive. As originally envisioned, half of the thirty thousand Jews were to come from Budapest and half from the provinces. Kasztner revealed the details of the new Eichmann offer to the Jewish Council that very day.⁴⁰

Eichmann’s offer was based on instructions he had received from Ernst Kaltenbrunner. The head of the RSHA, as the evidence reveals, was besieged by Austrian entrepreneurs operating war industries and by government officials, including *SS-Brigadeführer* Karl Blaschke, the mayor of Vienna, with requests to provide them with desperately needed slave labor. Since Hungarian Jewry was at that time the one still relatively untapped reservoir of Jewish labor, Kaltenbrunner requested that Eichmann have a few transports of deportees diverted to Austria.⁴¹

From the Germans’ point of view the deal with Kasztner offered several distinct advantages:

- It provided an opportunity for a demonstration of goodwill in the “blood for trucks” negotiations.
- It supplied the Austrian industrial and agricultural entrepreneurs and local government officials with needed slave labor.
- It enriched the coffers of the *Sonderkommando*.

The selection of the Jews for the Austrian transports appears to have been the responsibility of the Zionist or other well-known Jewish leaders in the concentration and entrainment centers in the affected zones, acting on instructions received from Kasztner.

Kasztner had expected that the first trainload of Jews would be leaving from Győr and Komárom, the areas from which Jews were being deported at the time. Although this plan reportedly had the approval of Eichmann, all the transports from Gendarmerie Districts II and III, including of course those from Győr and Komárom, were routinely directed to Auschwitz, presumably due to the inertia of some of the officers in charge of the transports.⁴² Eichmann decided to compensate Kasztner with a transport from Zone IV.

It was during the deportations from this zone of anti-Jewish operations on June 25–28 that six or seven transports were directed to Strasshof, a camp near Vienna. The approximately twenty thousand Jews in these transports came mostly from ghettos in Gendarmerie District IV.

After their arrival in Strasshof during the first days of July, the Jews were sent to labor in industrial and agricultural enterprises in a number of communities in eastern Austria, including Gmund, Weitra, Wiener-Neustadt, and Neunkirchen. Many of them worked under the auspices of the Todt Organization. Their treatment varied with the disposition of the individual employers and foremen. On the whole they were often treated quite humanely and about 75 percent of them, including children and the elderly, survived the war. Organizationally, they were under the control and command of a central office in Vienna headed by *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Hermann Alois Krumeý, a leading member of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando* in Hungary.⁴³

Zone V: Western Hungary

This zone of anti-Jewish operations encompassed the area west of the Danube—Transdanubia—corresponding to Gendarmerie Districts III (Szombathely) and IV (Pécs). The plans for the concentration and deportation of the Jews were completed at a conference on June 22 at Siófok. In addition to the leading members of the dejewification team, the conference was also attended by administrative, gendarmerie, and police officials of the two gendarmerie districts.

According to the plans worked out by Ferenczy, the Jews assembled in the various ghettos in Zone V were concentrated in eight centers having adequate entrainment facilities (see [table 3](#)).⁴⁴ The transfer of the Jews from the ghettos began at 5:00 A.M. on June 30 and was completed on schedule at 8:00 P.M. on July 3.

GENDARMERIE DISTRICT III

Of the 29,405 Jews rounded up in Zone V, 17,201 were placed in the five entrainment centers in this gendarmerie district: Pápa, Sárvár, Sopron, Szombathely, and Zalaegerszeg.

The ghetto of Pápa was located in the Jewish section of the city and included close to 2,600 Jews. A few days before their deportation, they were transferred to a fertilizer plant in the Gypsy section of the city where 992 Jews from the neighboring communities in the Devecser, Pápa, and Zirc districts in Veszprém County already had been concentrated.⁴⁵

The seat of one of the major internment camps in Hungary, Sárvár, located east of Szombathely, served as an entrainment center for 3,521

Table 3

NUMBER OF JEWS IN THE GHETTOS AND ENTRAINMENT CENTERS IN GENDARMERIE DISTRICTS III AND IV

<i>Gendarmerie District III</i> (Szombathely)		<i>Gendarmerie District IV</i> (Pécs)	
Szombathely	3,609	Pécs	5,963
Zalaegerszeg	3,209	Kaposvár	5,159
Pápa	3,557	Paks	1,082
Sopron	3,305	Total	12,204
Sárvár	3,521		
Total	17,201		

SOURCE: Ferenczy Report of June 30, 1944.

Jews, of whom approximately 750 were from the town itself. The others were brought in from the neighboring communities in the Celldömölk and Sárvár districts, including Jánosháza. The synagogue and the adjacent Jewish community buildings served as the ghetto for the local Jews. The Jewish Council was headed by Jenő Fischer. A few days before their scheduled entrainment on July 4 and 6, the ghetto inhabitants were transferred to the local silk plant, which had suitable loading facilities. After the deportation of the Jews, the local authorities discovered that a number of infants and children had been left behind, possibly in collusion with some sympathetic Christians. These were picked up and handed over to the SS “for labor in Germany.” The Jewish political inmates in the local internment camp were picked out and deported by the SS on August 5. Only a few physicians, veterinarians, and engineers needed by the Hungarians were left behind.

In Sopron, according to one report,⁴⁶ there were at least four ghettos. One of these was at Új Street, another—the largest—in the so-called Paprét section of the city, the third in the Jakobi Factory, and the fourth in the facilities of the new Evangelical Teacher-Training Institute, located not far from a railroad line. The first three housed the close to 1,900 local Jews until June 19, when they were transferred to the fourth, which originally held only the approximately 1,500 Jews brought in from the neighboring communities including Csepreg, Csorna, and Kapuvár. The local Jewish Council was headed by Zsigmond Rosenheim. The Jews were entrained on July 5 and deported from the Southern Station of the city. The Christian

Jews, who escaped deportation in the summer, were rounded up during the *Nyilas* era and interned—together with many labor servicemen—in two “Christian ghettos.” One of these was set up in the buildings of the Teacher-Training Institute that survived the bombings, and the other in the so-called Kurucdomb.

The number of Jews concentrated in Szombathely was 3,609;⁴⁷ of these, slightly more than 3,000 were from the city itself.⁴⁸ The ghetto was located in the Jewish section of the city and was administered by a Jewish Council headed by Imre Wesel. Toward the end of June, the Jews were transferred to the Hungarian Motor and Machine Works, where they were entrained on July 4.

In Zalaegerszeg the 3,209 Jews were concentrated in a ghetto consisting of two streets in the Gypsy section of the city. Approximately 900 of them were local.⁴⁹

GENDARMERIE DISTRICT IV

The 12,204 Jews rounded up in the area of Gendarmerie District IV were concentrated in Kaposvár, Paks, and Pécs.

The ghetto of Kaposvár was set up in the Jewish section of the city and was administered by a Jewish Council headed by Ödön Antl. Toward the end of June, the close to 2,500 local Jews were transferred from the ghetto to the artillery barracks near the railroad lines. The barracks held 5,159 Jews, over half of whom were brought in from the neighboring communities in Somogy County, including Tab.

The Paks ghetto was also located in the Jewish section of the town that included the synagogue and the Jewish school. It held 1,082 Jews, a number of whom were brought in from Dunaföldvár, Fadd, and Szekszárd.

The majority of the 5,963 Jews concentrated in Pécs were placed in the ghetto located in the Jewish section of the city. Some of the Jews were quartered in the local warehouse of the Hungarian Railways. Internally, the ghetto was administered by a Jewish Council headed by József Greiner. On June 28–29, the ghetto population was transferred to the Lakics Military Barracks, from which they were entrained and deported five days later.

Zone VI: Budapest and Its Environs

The drive for the concentration and deportation of the Jews in Gendarmerie District I, which included Budapest, was launched during the entrainment of the Jews in Zone V. The Jews of Budapest were spared because the regent, Miklós Horthy, decided for a variety of reasons to halt the deportations on July 7.⁵⁰ However, the Jews in the cities ringing the capital, including Budafok, Csepel, Kispest, Pestszenterzsébet, Rákoscsaba, Rákospalota,

Sashalom, Soroksár, Szentendre, and Újpest, were not as lucky.⁵¹ They suffered the same fate as the provincial Jews. Most of them were deported on July 7 and 8—after Horthy's decision to halt the deportations.

With a few exceptions, the Jews of the cities surrounding Budapest were placed into ghettos or yellow-star-marked buildings between May 22 and June 30.⁵² For entrainment these Jews were transferred to the brick-yards of Budakalász and Monor, located respectively to the northwest and southeast of Budapest.

Budakalász, which had a Jewish community of only 35 (thirteen families), served as a concentration center for the ghetto inhabitants in the communities north of Budapest, including Kíspest, Pesterzsébet, and Újpest. Also brought into Budakalász were the approximately 17,500 Jews held in various camps on Csepel Island, including many of the lawyers and journalists who had been interned on the basis of the lists handed over to the Jewish Council of Budapest, and the close to 3,000 Jews who had been arrested during a special raid on Üllői Road on July 3. The entrainment of many of those deported from Budakalász took place at Békásmegyer.

Monor, located southeast of Budapest, served as the concentration and entrainment center for the approximately 350 local Jews and for those in the communities south and east of Budapest. Among the approximately 7,500 Jews deported from Monor were the Jews brought in from some of the communities in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County, including Jászárokszállás, Jászberény, Jászfényszaru, and Jászkisér.

The 24,128 Jews concentrated in Budakalász, Monor, and some other minor centers in Zone VI, but excluding Budapest proper, were deported in eight trains on July 6–8. With the completion of this phase of the anti-Jewish operations, Ferenczy was able to report that 434,351 Jews had been deported between May 15 and July 8 in 147 trains (see [table 4](#)).⁵³ Within less than four months after the German occupation, Hungary, with the exception of the Jews of Budapest and those in labor service companies, had become *judenrein*.

Table 4

DATA RELATED TO THE GHETTOIZATION AND DEPORTATION OF HUNGARIAN JEWRY BY OPERATIONAL ZONES AND GENDARMERIE DISTRICTS

Operational Zone	Gendarmerie District	Area of Hungary	Number of Ghettos or Concentration Centers	Date of Ghettoization or Concentration	Date of Deportation	Number of Trains	Deportation Figures	
							Ferenczy's	Veesenmayer's ^a
I	VIII. (Kassa)	Carpatho-Ruthenia	16	Apr. 16–	May 15–June 7	92	288,333	289,357
II	IX. (Kolozsvár) X. (Marosvásárhely)	Northern Transylvania	11	May 3–				
III	II. (Székesfehérvár) VII. (Miskolc)	Northern Hungary ^c	6 5	June 5–10	June 11–16	23	23,725 28,104	50,805
IV	V. (Szeged) VI. (Debrecen)	Southeastern Hungary ^d	4 3	June 16–20	June 25–28	14	21,489 19,016	41,499
V	III. (Szombathely) IV. (Pécs)	Western and Southwestern Hungary	5 3	June 30–July 3	July 4–6	10	17,667 11,889	55,741
VI	I. (Budapest)	(Suburbs)	2	June 30–July 3	July 6–8	8	24,128	
Total			55			147	434,351	437,402

SOURCE: Ferenczy Reports of May 3–July 9, 1944.

^aBraham, *Destruction*, Docs. 174, 182, 193.^bIn his report of June 8, 1944, Ferenczy lists the number of those deported from Gendarmerie districts VIII, IX, and X as 275,415. His later reports, however, brought the figure closer to that of Veesenmayer.^cNorth of Budapest from Kassa to the frontier of the Reich.^dEast of the Danube, not including Budapest.^eWest of the Danube, not including Budapest.

8 THE FATE OF THE JEWS OF BUDAPEST

Concentration of the Jews of Budapest

A plan for the establishment of a large ghetto in Budapest, similar to the one that had existed in Warsaw, was put forward shortly after the capital was subjected to a major air attack on April 2, 1944. The authors of this ghettoization plan—the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando* and Péter Hain's office—had considerable support among the ultra-rightists, but—at least until late November—were compelled to desist from implementing it. Two major factors that militated against the plan were decisive. For one thing, the area proposed for the ghetto was the home not only of Jews, but also of a relatively large number of Christians whose sensitivities the German and Hungarian police authorities did not wish to offend. Second, and more important, the authorities feared that if the Jews were “segregated out,” the Allies would concentrate their bombing exclusively on Christian-inhabited neighborhoods.

Thus, for the time being, after the early April bombing raids no concrete decision was made about ghettoization. However, many of the Jews of Budapest were compelled to give up their private homes and apartments and make them available to Christian bombing victims. The relocation of the Jews, like the requisitioning of their homes and apartments, was carried out under the auspices of the Central Jewish Council, as ordered by László Endre's office.¹

Establishment of Yellow-Star Houses

Following the launching of the mass ghettoization program in the countryside,² various plans were again advanced for the concentration of the Jews of Budapest. As a first step, an order for the identification and registration of apartments and buildings in which Jews lived was issued on May 3. Endre's plans called for the concentration of all Jews in specially designated buildings. These plans were informally communicated to the Jewish Council by József Szentmiklóssy, the head of the social policies section of the Municipality of Budapest, who was slated to be in charge of the relocation program. A decent official, Szentmiklóssy abhorred the planned

measures but decided to accept the new assignment at the urging of the Jews, who feared that otherwise someone less understanding might be appointed. Although he was unable to induce his superiors to reject or postpone the implementation of the plan, he kept the Jewish leadership abreast of the developments in his office, enabling the Jews to make contingency plans.

Szentmiklóssy's office completed the identification and registration of the Jewish-inhabited apartments and buildings early in June 1944, on the basis of data supplied by the National Statistical Office. The results of the inventory were published by the antisemitic press with the customary vitriolic commentary.³

Since the idea of a centralized, territorially contiguous ghetto had been rejected, the authorities decided to relocate the Jews of Budapest into specially selected buildings throughout the city, which were to be identified as "yellow-star houses." The selection of the buildings was based on a number of criteria, including the percentage of Jews inhabiting them, the condition and location of the buildings, and the background and influence of the Christian tenants. Using these criteria, 2,681 of the close to 36,000 residential buildings in Budapest were originally designated as yellow-star houses, to be inhabited exclusively by Jews. However, as a result of a pressure campaign by many of the Christian tenants affected by the planned relocations, the yellow-star designation was removed from 700 to 800 buildings, further aggravating the housing situation of the Jews.⁴ The adjustments could not, of course, remedy all the complaints advanced by the Christians either. In the end, close to twelve thousand of them had to remain in yellow-star houses. While some of them took advantage of their privileged position, many proved of great assistance to the persecuted Jews. They were especially helpful during the curfew by shopping or doing errands for the Jews, and by hiding or safekeeping their valuables.

"Legal" Provisions Relating to the Relocation of the Jews

The decrees for the relocation and concentration of the Jews of Budapest were issued on June 16 over the signature of Ákos Doroghi Farkas, the newly inaugurated city mayor. Each of the fourteen districts of the capital was the subject of a separate decree that identified the yellow-star houses by street and number. The general provisions relating to the relocation of the Jews and the specific instructions for their implementation were incorporated in the decree pertaining to District I.⁵ So that the yellow-star houses easily could be identified, the decree stipulated the use of special signs on all entrances to the buildings. The signs were to consist of a canary-yellow Star of David, 30 centimeters in diameter, on a 51 x 36 centimeter black background. The

acquisition and maintenance of these signs were made the responsibility of the landlords. The decree originally stipulated that all relocations had to be accomplished by June 21—that is, within three days. This was later extended to eight days; after that deadline, no Jew was permitted to live anywhere except in a yellow-star house.⁶

Responsibility for the relocation of the Jews rested with the Jewish Council under the supervision of the authorities. Within the Council, overall responsibility for the implementation of this task was exercised by Rezső Müller, the head of the Council's Housing Department. An able and energetic man, Müller carried out his tasks with a bureaucratic promptness and exactitude that irritated many of the Jews affected by the relocation measures.

Immediately after the relocation was completed, a separate regulation drastically restricted the Jews' freedom of movement outside their assigned apartments. Posted all over the city on June 25, the regulation stipulated, among other things, that Jews were permitted to leave their dwellings only between 2:00 and 5:00 P.M., and even then exclusively for medical treatment, cleaning, and shopping.⁷ Under the regulation, they were forbidden to entertain guests or to carry on conversations with persons across the street through the windows.

To protect themselves against surprise attacks or raids, the male inhabitants of the yellow-star houses took turns guarding the major building entrances in order to warn their fellow Jews of any impending disaster. The approximately two hundred thousand Jews of Budapest,⁸ who until that time hardly had been touched by the sorts of measures enacted against their brethren in the provinces, now began to feel the brunt of the Nazi program directly. Many of them were so fearful that they went to bed fully clothed and with their bags and knapsacks packed for every eventuality. Their apprehension was fully justified, because the periodic rumors about their possible imminent deportation were reinforced by the measures adopted by the authorities for the separation of converts, who had their supporters in the various Christian churches, and by the political-military maneuvers of the ultra-rightists.

The Separation of the Converts

As a result of the intervention of the Christian churches and of the leaders of the Association of the Christian Jews of Hungary (*Magyarországi Keresztény Zsidók Szövetsége*), a plan was devised to separate converts from the followers of the Jewish faith. In conformity with this plan, the mayor of Budapest issued an appeal on July 11 asking all persons who had converted before August 1, 1941, to register with the appropriate denominational authorities

between July 12 and 17. These converts were to be relocated by August 6 into separate yellow-star houses that would be additionally marked with a cross. The spokesmen for the Jewish Council argued against the separation, emphasizing that the relocation of forty thousand to fifty thousand people would not only lead to added hardships, but also cause renewed panic and a new wave of suicides among the Jews, who would interpret it as a sure sign of their impending deportation. György Auer, the head of the Association of Christian Jews, however, was quite eager to effectuate it, requesting merely that the Christian Jews be allowed more time for the relocation and that families not be broken up because of the date-of-conversion stipulations of the law.

Although some of the Jews and converts did change their living quarters at this time, mass relocations did not take place. The many rumors, threats, and maneuverings notwithstanding, the anticipated mass deportation of the Jews of Budapest was also averted. The designs of the perpetrators were frustrated primarily because of the rapidly deteriorating military position of the Axis and the concurrent rise of domestic and foreign opposition to the continuation of the deportation program.

The Halting of the Deportations

The enthusiasm with which the Baky-Endre group carried out the roundup and deportation of the Jews in the Hungarian countryside was not shared by all the political and governmental figures of Hungary. Voices of apprehension over the possible impact of the deportations on the reputation and political future of the country were occasionally heard not only among Horthy's trusted confidants, but also—albeit less frequently and more feebly—among some members of the Sztójay administration itself. The issues revolving around the Final Solution of the Jewish question were periodically debated in the Council of Ministers, usually on the basis of the reports submitted by Andor Jaross, the minister of the interior, who had immediate jurisdiction and direct responsibility in this sphere and, along with his close associates in the Ministry, Endre and Baky, had been given a free hand with respect to the Jewish question.

The Council of Ministers itself originally had been given a free hand with regard to the Jewish question by Horthy, whose original position was revealed at the March 29, 1944, meeting of the Council at which the first batch of major anti-Jewish decrees was adopted. The minutes of that Council meeting (item 66) record Horthy's position as follows: "His Highness has granted full powers to the government under his leadership in respect to all anti-Jewish regulations, and in the matter he wishes to exercise no influence whatever."⁹ The reports by Jaross and his subordinates,

which usually disguised the deportations as “transports of Jews for labor in Germany,” were consistently approved, if not always applauded, by the Council members—at least during the first three months of the German occupation. The one member of the government who tried to focus attention on the counterproductive aspects of the Final Solution was Deputy Foreign Minister Mihály Arnóthy-Jungerth; he openly revealed his position at the Council meeting of May 17, when Jaross routinely informed his colleagues about the beginning of the mass deportations two days earlier, explaining that they were “made necessary by military considerations.”¹⁰

The horrors of the ghettos and the barbarism practiced during the entrainment and deportation of the Jews were witnessed by many Christians, as well as their local lay and religious leaders all over the country. They were also the subject of innumerable memoranda forwarded by the central and local Jewish Councils to various governmental and political figures of both the ruling and the opposition parties. Many of the memos were forwarded, by diplomatic or illegal means, directly or indirectly, not only to the representatives of the major international Jewish organizations in Switzerland and elsewhere, but also to the leaders of various Allied and neutral countries, the Vatican, and the International Red Cross. Their response, especially after these accounts—and those relating to the extermination program in Auschwitz—were published in the Swiss press,¹¹ gradually brought about a change in Horthy’s attitude. This change was further encouraged, if not actually determined, by the constantly deteriorating military position of the Reich and, above all, the landing of the Western Allies in Normandy. Hitler’s refusal to recall the German occupation forces, especially the Gestapo and the SS units as requested by Horthy in his letter of June 6—the day Sztójay first met the Führer as prime minister—further strengthened Horthy’s resolve.

Early in June Horthy sent Sztójay a request that certain categories of Jews, including converts and professionals valuable for the national economy (engineers, doctors, and technicians), be exempted from the anti-Jewish measures. Apparently in an attempt at self-justification, he also reminded his prime minister that the Jewish question had been handled contrary to Hungarian conceptions or interests and that, “according to his latest information,” the measures adopted against the Jews of Hungary had exceeded those taken in Germany itself. Although he halfheartedly demanded the removal of Endre and Baky, he was not yet ready to request Sztójay to urge, nor did he order himself, the suspension of the deportations. Edmund Veesenmayer, who was kept apprised of this communication—as he was about practically everything that was going on within the government—was not far off the mark when he informed Joachim von Ribbentrop that Horthy’s probable motives were to shift the blame for the handling of the Jewish question entirely to the government, and to get into the good graces of the “English

and the Americans in case the war ends badly.”¹² At the June 10 meeting of the Council of Ministers, convened to hear the report on his meeting with Hitler, Sztójay—who was obviously as aware of the atrocities committed against the Jews as Horthy—expressed his concern that the anti-Jewish excesses might lead to “the rise of a philo-Semitic trend,” and suggested that in order to avoid this undesirable development the deportations should be carried out more humanely.

The Council took up the issue again at its meeting of June 21. Arnóthy-Jungerth, well armed with facts and figures, informed the members of the government about the reality of the “solution” of the Jewish question, emphasizing that the Hungarian Jews were in fact being taken to Auschwitz, where they were gassed and cremated. He warned the Council about the vulnerability of Hungary, which as a small nation would need the sympathy and help of the great powers in a postwar settlement, and urged that the deportations and atrocities be ended. His appeal went unheeded, as his colleagues tended to give greater credence to Jaross, who reassured the Council that the “rumors” about the atrocities were just that—false rumors. Béla Jurcsek, the minister of agriculture, also was involved in the attempt to ease concerns: he publicly cited again the standard Nazi explanation for the deportation of *all* the Jews: “The infants and the aged are being taken along because Jewish workers work better when their families are around.”

At the June 21 meeting, Baky and Endre, who were invited to report directly, presented a glowing account of the whole ghettoization and deportation process, assuring the Council that there was nothing to worry about.¹³ Arnóthy-Jungerth, who was visibly shocked by the brazen lies of the two officials, remarked sarcastically that in light of what he had just heard, “one can be really sorry not to be Jewish and unable to take part in these excursions.” Lt. Gen. Gábor Faragho, the commander of the gendarmerie, reported that of the twenty thousand gendarmes that had taken part in the anti-Jewish operations only three had had to be disciplined—a cynical observation that was compounded by Endre’s remark that the only ones who molested the Jews were the Jewish policemen in the ghettos. Miklós Mester, the political secretary of state in the Ministry of Religion and Education, presented a more sobering picture of the anti-Jewish drive. A former ultra-rightist, during the summer of 1944 Mester had adopted a more moderate position on the Jewish question and was taking an increasingly anti-German stand. He reviewed the domestic ramifications of the deJewification program, emphasizing the reaction of the Christian churches and the possible consequences of the deportation of many internationally known scientists and scholars. He complained that the exemptions granted to many Jews were being ignored by the local authorities, who were often receiving contrary instructions from Baky and Endre. While various suggestions were voiced

for removing jurisdiction over the Jewish question from the Ministry of the Interior, the Council took no action to end the deportations. It concluded its session with only two requests: Baky and Endre were to put an end to the atrocities, and the issue of exemptions was to be settled.

In the meantime, Horthy was being subjected to increasing pressure from both within and outside the country. Ernő Pető, a leading member of the Jewish Council, exploited his connections with the Horthy family, especially Miklós Horthy Jr., to bring the Vrba-Wetzler Report to the attention of the regent. Pressure was also exerted on Horthy by the heads of the Christian churches and by his closest friends and confidants, including Count Móric Esterházy and Count István Bethlen. The pressure by the outside world began late in June, after the Swiss press published a series of excerpts from the Vrba-Wetzler Report and exposed the realities of the Final Solution in Hungary. Pope Pius XII addressed a personal plea to Horthy on June 25. President Roosevelt followed suit the following day, and the king of Sweden on June 30. The president of the United States demanded an immediate end to the deportations and a cessation of all anti-Jewish measures, threatening further armed reprisals in case of refusal. With no immediate response from the Hungarians, the president's message was reinforced on July 2 by an unusually heavy air raid on Budapest.

The domestic and international protests against the Jewish persecutions were the subject of a special Crown Council meeting on June 26; it had been convened by Horthy partially because of the inconclusiveness of the Council of Ministers' meetings of June 21 and 23. The regent was in an aggressive mood, reviewing both the pressures exerted on him and the excesses committed against the Jews in the course of the deportations. He referred to a number of reports, emphasizing the horrors that eyewitnesses had reported from Komárom and Kiskunhalas. The regent's account was corroborated and further elaborated by Arnóthy-Jungerth. Although some of the cabinet members tried to shift all blame onto the Germans, others, including Béla Imrédy, Sztójay, and Lajos Reményi-Schneller, defended them. The regent was obviously annoyed by the buck-passing attempts of his subordinates and ended the discussion by stating:

I shall not tolerate this any further! I shall not permit the deportations to bring further shame on the Hungarians! Let the Government take measures for the removal of Baky and Endre! The deportation of the Jews of Budapest must cease! The Government must take the necessary steps!¹⁴

The Council of Ministers met the following day but took no action to halt the deportations. Arnóthy-Jungerth reproached his colleagues for the speed with which Hungary was solving the Jewish question, pointing out

that the other Nazi satellites, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria—countries in which there also had been a large number of German troops (since 1939, 1940, and 1941, respectively)—still had relatively large numbers of Jews. He also reviewed the offers made by Sweden on behalf of three hundred to four hundred Jews, by the Swiss for the emigration to Palestine of about seven thousand Jews, and by the American War Refugee Board to help the Jews in the ghettos and camps. Despite the opposition of Imrédy, Jaross, Jurcsek, and Reményi-Schneller, the Council approved the Foreign Ministry's recommendations concerning the Swedish and Swiss offers but rejected the offer of the United States. To blunt the criticism directed from abroad, Sztójay instructed the Hungarian representatives in the friendly and neutral capitals to reply to the "allegations that appeared in the enemy and neutral press about the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Germany" by relying on the following explanation:

In view of the position of the labor market in Hungary as well as of the full share this country takes in the war, the government has not been able to raise the contingent of Hungarian workers for Germany but has wished to comply with the requests of the Germans by placing Jews at their disposal. It was on the grounds of this agreement that Jews were sent to Germany for work. Experience having proved that in foreign countries the Jews' willingness to work diminishes when they are separated from their families, the members of their families were sent along with them.¹⁵

In addition to providing the standard rationale for the deportation of the young and the aged, Sztójay's telegram appears to be the only available official document proving that the deportation of the Jews was the consequence of an *agreement* between the Germans and the Hungarians.

The Hungarian acceptance of the Swedish and Swiss offers¹⁶ was communicated to Veesenmayer on June 27.¹⁷ Baky and Endre were nominally "relieved" of their functions relating to the Jewish question on June 30, but were allowed to continue to serve as secretaries of state in the Ministry of the Interior. This formal action by Jaross had no more effect on the fate of the Jewish communities in Transdanubia and around the capital than did Horthy's outbursts and instructions at the Crown Council meeting. The deportations continued unhindered—for a while at least. Horthy's vacillating position was highlighted by Veesenmayer in one of his many communications to the German Foreign Office. According to the German plenipotentiary, Horthy was really interested not in saving the Budapest Jews, but only in the postponement of their deportation until the total deJewification of the countryside had been completed.

In July, Horthy finally decided to act. The relentless domestic and foreign pressures were reinforced by the spectacular victories of the

Allies, the bombings of Budapest, and above all, the coup attempt by Baky early in that month. By this coup Baky, acting in collusion with Endre and Jaross, was resolved to put an end to the perceived vacillations within the government, overthrow the ruling elite, and acquire power for Ferenc Szálasi and his National Socialists. Another major objective of the planned coup was to complete the liquidation of Hungarian Jewry. Baky's scenario involved the simultaneous achievement of both objectives. The first step of the coup, calling for the infiltration of the royal palace and the arrest of Horthy, failed. The second step called for the use of gendarmerie units under Baky's immediate command. The occasion was to have been the ceremony honoring a particular gendarmerie unit in Budapest on July 2. While the gendarmes were in the capital for the celebrations the plotters hoped to use them not only in the coup, but also in the subsequent roundup and deportation of the Jews, scheduled for July 10. However, the sudden appearance of gendarmes in the capital, reinforcing intelligence reports about the impending coup, induced Horthy to take firm countermeasures. He called off the ceremonies, ordered the gendarmes to return to their bases, had the officers in charge of the coup arrested, and had loyal troops brought into Budapest.¹⁸

On July 5, the regent intimated to János Vörös, the chief of the General Staff, that he intended to "prevent the further removal of the Jews in order to retain at least those living in Budapest." He made his resolution public two days later, when he ordered the halting of "the transfer of Jews to Germany," finally carrying out the intentions he had outlined at the Crown Council meeting of June 26. Horthy's decision was preceded by a Council of Ministers meeting on July 5. While Arnóthy-Jungerth again reviewed the negative implications of the anti-Jewish measures, Sztójay discussed the positions of Switzerland and of the Anglo-Americans, emphasizing that according to the latter the deportations in fact meant the gassing of six thousand Jews daily. In a gesture of public relations gimmickry, he suggested that since no Jews had been killed in Hungary and the deportations involved merely the supply of labor for Germany, the "rumors" about the atrocities should be adequately countered and foreign public opinion properly enlightened. Jaross gave a report on the status of the deportations and, undeterred by Arnóthy-Jungerth's pleas, urged the necessity of completing the process in the following few days with the deportation of the Jews of Budapest, "since otherwise opinion about the government would deteriorate a great deal."¹⁹ Jaross's attempts to frustrate the regent's plans were quite successful. Acting in collusion with Baky, Endre, and the other members of the deJewification team, he managed to continue the systematic entrainment and deportation drive for two more days, completing the liquidation of the Jewish communities surrounding the capital.²⁰

The Hungarian leaders felt honor-bound to alert the Germans about their impending decision. On July 4, still upset over the Baky coup attempt, Horthy requested through Veesenmayer that the Germans recall the Gestapo in order to reestablish Hungarian sovereignty, and expressed his dissatisfaction with Sztójay and his contempt for Baky and Endre. With respect to the Jewish question, he mentioned the pressures to which he was subjected and indicated his readiness to intervene immediately on behalf of Christian Jews and to prevent the deportation of physicians and of labor service companies engaged in important war-related work. Additional and more specific details were revealed to Veesenmayer by Sztójay two days later. Expressing his chagrin over the reportedly more lenient treatment of the Jews in neighboring Romania and Slovakia and over the SS-Weiss-Manfréd deal that allowed the escape of several members of the Chorin and Weiss families,²¹ Sztójay informed Veesenmayer about the impending decision to halt the further deportation of the Jews. Sztójay also revealed that the Hungarian leaders, both inside and outside of the government, had been alerted to what was really happening to the deported Jews, but hastened to add that he himself did not believe the “horror stories.” Moreover, he said, those stories left him cold because if the Axis side won the matter would be of no interest, and if the opposite were true his life would come to an end in any case.

Out of fear or as a tactical maneuver, Horthy was still ambivalent about fully revealing his decision to Veesenmayer. On July 8, he informed Veesenmayer about the actions taken against the gendarmerie in view of Baky’s attempted coup and about his decision to bring about the segregation of the converted Jews. He felt compelled to cushion the impact of this relatively nonconsequential communication by adding that he would “soon” allow the deportation of more nonconverted Jews from Budapest. Sensing Horthy’s ambivalence, Veesenmayer insisted on the immediate resumption of the anti-Jewish operations, emphasizing “the danger presented by hundreds of thousands of Jews to the capital of a country in its fifth year of war.”²² He tried to convince Sztójay that same day that if the deportations resumed he would persuade the leaders of the Reich to heed the Hungarian-supported requests advanced by the Americans, Swedes, and Swiss on behalf of a limited number of Jews.

The Kistarcsa and Sárvár Tragedies

Chagrined over the sudden suspension of the deportations, Eichmann decided not only to test Horthy’s resolve but also to reassert the dominant role of the Germans in the handling of the Jewish question. Toward this end the head of the *SS-Sonderkommando* turned his attention to the deportation of

Jews interned in the Kistarcsa and Sárvár camps and the National Rabbinical Seminary at Rökk Szilárd Street. The internment camp at Kistarcsa was by far the largest and the oldest. Aside from the political internees of the preoccupation era, the camp²³ included a large number of hostages and Jews arrested in so-called individual operations by both the German and the Hungarian authorities after the German invasion on March 19, 1944. It was from here that the first transport of eighteen hundred "Jewish laborers" was shipped to Auschwitz on April 28 in accordance with the Hitler-Horthy agreement on the supplying of workers for the aircraft production project.²⁴ The number of inmates at Kistarcsa was usually somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000. Their lot was harsh, though quite tolerable in comparison with the situation of the Jews in many of the ghettos. Their comparative well-being was due to the assistance provided by the Welfare Bureau of Hungarian Jews (MIPI) and the Orthodox Jewish community, as well as to the decency of the camp commander, Police Inspector István Vasdényei.²⁵

The tragic episode of the Jewish internees of Kistarcsa began on July 12, when Vasdényei tipped off Sándor Bródy, the MIPI representative in the camp, that the dejewification squad was planning the deportation of the inmates despite Horthy's ban. The plan called for the deportation of 1,500 Jews—1,000 from Kistarcsa and 500 from the National Rabbinical Seminary—who were to be put on trains at the Budapest penitentiary. About 1,450 Jews were indeed brought in from the two camps, and to complete the number an additional 50, including some journalists and lawyers, were taken to the penitentiary from Horthyliget, another, smaller internment camp on Csepel Island. However, the Jewish Council, having been alerted by Bródy of the planned transport, notified the regent and some of the leaders of the Christian churches, as well as the representatives of the neutral states, who all also approached the regent on the matter. As a result of the massive intervention, Horthy summoned Jaross and ordered him to prevent the deportation. Consequently, Capt. Leó Lulay, Ferenczy's deputy, caught up with the train near Hatvan and brought it back to Kistarcsa.

Furious over this Hungarian "interference," Eichmann devised another, even more devious plan a week later. To isolate the Jewish leaders from the rest of the world, he summoned all the members of the Jewish Council to appear in his Majestic Hotel office early in the morning of July 19. While they were held incommunicado, being kept busy by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Otto Hunsche, one of Eichmann's deputies, *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Franz Novak, the Special Commando's transportation specialist, went to Kistarcsa and rounded up 1,220 victims of the earlier transport. Acting in conjunction with the Hungarian dejewification squad, especially Baky and Pál Ubrizsi, the police officer in charge of the auxiliary internment camp at Rökk Szilárd Street, Novak managed to quickly transfer the victims to Rákócscsaba, where

they were entrained. By the evening, when the Council members were released, the train was already well on its way to Auschwitz.

The harshness of Horthy's reaction was matched by the concerns expressed by the representatives of the neutral states and of the International Red Cross. Reményi-Schneller, who was then doubling as acting prime minister, tried to soothe the world by asserting that the deportation had been carried out by lower-ranking German authorities without the knowledge or consent of the Hungarian government. He further stated that the Hungarians had lodged a protest with the German government and that the incident would not be repeated, because "the handling and implementation of the Jewish question will in the future become the exclusive responsibility of the Hungarian government and its organs." Reményi-Schneller's assurances notwithstanding, another, equally brazen "incident" took place less than a week later. On July 24, approximately 1,500 internees were suddenly deported from the Sárvár internment camp. (The SS and their Hungarian accomplices outmaneuvered the officials.) After this date the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices were no longer able to smuggle larger transports out of Hungary, although they managed to deport small groups or individual Jews to Auschwitz almost up to the time the installations there were dismantled in the fall of 1944.²⁶

The Agony and Hopes of the Budapest Jews: July 7–October 15, 1944

PERSISTENT DEPORTATION RUMORS

The Eichmann-initiated deportation of the Jews in the Kistarcsa and Sárvár camps in defiance of Horthy's orders emboldened the de-jewification experts to resume their preparations for the deportation of the Jews of Budapest, which had originally been scheduled for July 10.²⁷ The new target date was reportedly set as August 5. The preparatory work that the Nazis undertook at Békásmegyer, the camp from which the Jews of the Budapest suburbs had been deported on July 6–8, created a very despairing atmosphere among the Jews in the capital. As rumors ran rampant about the imminence of the deportation, they prepared themselves physically and psychologically for the worst. Their fears proved unfounded at this time, mostly because the Hungarian gendarmerie was no longer as readily available to the Germans as it had been before July 8. Moreover, Baky and Endre had by this time been relieved of jurisdiction over Jewish affairs and László Ferenczy, the officer in charge of the ghettoization and deportation program, was visibly searching for an alibi.

The passing of the August 5 deadline and the replacement of Minister of the Interior Jaross with Miklós Bonczos two days later were

greeted with great relief. However, the sudden escape on August 9 of Fülöp Freudiger, a leading member of the Jewish Council, together with his family and some friends, brought forth a new shock wave of fear:²⁸ since he was widely believed to be one of the best-informed members of the Jewish community, his sudden departure was construed as a harbinger of imminent deportation. The panic spread following the subsequent arrest of the top leaders of the Jewish Council, which reminded many of the Jews of the tactics used by the Nazis in the deportation of the Kistarcsa inmates.²⁹

Shortly after the governmental reorganization of August 7, Sztójay assured Veessenmayer that the deportations would be resumed “within eight to fourteen days.” A similar promise was made to Eichmann by Bonczos, the new minister of the interior, on August 13. After two postponements, the deportation of the Jews of Budapest was rescheduled for August 25—a date selected on the assumption that by then the exit visas for the Swiss and Swedish groups would be available. The plan reportedly called for the exclusion of Jews with foreign citizenship, who were to be interned the following day, and of about three thousand “exempted” Hungarian Jews in whom Horthy had shown a special interest.³⁰ The deportation program was to be completed by September 18.

The anxiety of the Jews was heightened by plans for the relocation of the “protected” Jews—those in possession of Swiss and Swedish “protective passes” (*Schutzpässe*)—into special yellow-star houses on Pozsonyi Road with the concurrent transfer of the “unprotected” occupants to the apartments thus vacated. These special houses would become the first so-called protected houses, which later served as the nucleus of the “international ghetto” during the Szálasi era.³¹ This population exchange was viewed as still another sign of impending disaster. It also became the source of a vehement dispute within the Jewish Council. One of the leaders who was particularly upset about the selection of the buildings on Pozsonyi Road was Lajos Stöckler. Emerging as the champion of the “unprotected” Jews, Stöckler thought it would be a great injustice to the inhabitants of the affected buildings, who had been assigned there just a few weeks earlier, to be relocated once again for the benefit of a relatively smaller number of newly privileged Jews, many of whom had good personal relations with the leading members of the Council.³²

While subjected to severe criticism from within, the leaders of the Council had good reason to be concerned about their own personal safety. Ferenczy, who was then searching for an alibi, reportedly tipped them off that the Germans, having learned their lesson over the Kistarcsa affair, had concluded that the successful completion of the deportation program in Budapest required the prior elimination of the Jewish leadership. The Council leaders pleaded with their friends among Hungarian officialdom

and the representatives of the neutral countries and the Vatican to intercede against the resumption of the deportations. The neutrals and the Holy See obliged on August 21. In an unusually blunt note, they emphasized that the world was aware of the realities behind the deportations and that their resumption would “deal a death blow to the reputation” of Hungary.³³

FERENCZY AS AN “ALLY”

In their desperate struggle for survival, the Council leaders suddenly acquired some unexpected “allies.” Drawing the logical conclusion from the untenable military position of the Axis, a number of Hungarian political and military officials began to have second thoughts about their continued involvement in the anti-Jewish drive and became actively involved in a search for alibis. One of these was Lt. Col. László Ferenczy, who decided to ingratiate himself with the regent and the Jewish leadership. Shortly after Horthy’s decision to halt the deportations, Ferenczy began to “demonstrate” his Hungarian patriotism by taking a stand against the Reich. Ferenczy hoped to persuade the regent that he was a nationalist eager to protect Hungarian national interests against encroachment by the Germans, and to convince the Jewish Council that he was the savior of the Jews of Budapest. Since he could not see the regent directly, he decided first to inform his immediate superiors in the government—the minister of the interior and the prime minister—about his conviction that the Germans were ready to transform Hungary into a protectorate unless the Final Solution were brought to completion. After his appeal to Jaross and Sztójay for permission to see Horthy went unheeded, Ferenczy decided to exploit the connections of the Jewish Council with the palace, and to take the opportunity to persuade the Council leaders of his readiness to save the Jews of Budapest.

The opportunity arose shortly after the arrival of Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest. The Swedish envoy, who reached Budapest on July 9 on a special mission to help the beleaguered Jews of Hungary,³⁴ had brought with him a list of 630 Hungarian Jews whose immigration into Sweden was being sponsored by friends, relatives, or business associates there and for whom the Swedes had issued the necessary visas. When the list was given to Ferenczy for handling, along with the Swiss list of 2,000 Jews approved for emigration to Palestine, he had a good pretext for approaching the Council.

Ferenczy’s first contact was with István Kurzweil, a leading member of the Council’s Housing Department, whom he tried to convince that his office already had completed all of the arrangements for the emigration of the 2,600 Jews in the very near future. He requested that “for reasons of security” the Council make available a number of yellow-star houses exclusively for these Jews. The Council leaders received Kurzweil’s report

with ambivalence: on the one hand, they did not want to jeopardize the possible emigration of a considerable number of Jews, but on the other they were afraid that Ferenczy's plan was just a ruse that would lead only to renewed deportations. This first contact was followed by others, with the involvement of several other leaders of the Council. Ferenczy tried to impress the Jewish leaders by informing them about the "life-and-death struggle" he and his close associates were waging against the Gestapo and to persuade them of his innocence in the anti-Jewish drive by "proving" that the deportations and all the horrors associated with them were the exclusive responsibility of the Germans.

After a while Ferenczy's contacts were restricted mostly to Stern, Pető, and Wilhelm—the three leading figures of the Council. Taking advantage of Ferenczy's apparently changed position and bolstering his ego by singling him out as the possible savior of the Jews of Budapest, the Jewish leaders along with Ferenczy worked out a secret plan for preventing further deportations. According to the plan the Hungarian authorities, including, of course, the gendarmerie, would simulate continued cooperation with the Germans, but when it came to actual deportation of the Jews, the Hungarian forces would in fact intervene to prevent their removal. They also discussed with Ferenczy the possibility of active resistance against the Germans and their Hungarian hirelings, the *Nyilas*, with the collaboration of organized labor. The support of the latter was promised by two prominent trade union leaders who also met Ferenczy at the behest of the Jewish leaders.³⁵

The palace was kept abreast of these developments via Pető, who had close personal relations with Horthy Jr. It was these contacts that Ferenczy exploited to obtain an audience with the regent. During his first meeting with Horthy early in August, Ferenczy brought the Hungarian head of state up to date on the activities of the Gestapo and the troop strength of the various German units in the country. He also submitted the text of a protest note, in German, which he had prepared with the cooperation of the Council for transmission to Veessenmayer. Consisting of five major points, the draft protest note called, among other things, for the recall of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*.³⁶

The deportations scheduled for August 25 did not take place. One of the primary reasons was Romania's abandonment of the Axis two days earlier. Indeed, Hungary's traditional enemy had not merely asked for an armistice, but had actually joined the Allied powers and shortly thereafter had declared war on both Germany and Hungary. Horthy discussed the implications of Romania's volte-face with Veessenmayer on August 24, informing the German plenipotentiary of his plans to bring about radical changes in the government. With respect to the Jewish question, the regent emphasized that his conscience forbade the further deportation of Jews to

Germany and that instead he would have them transferred from the capital to various camps within the country. A similar message was transmitted by Bonczos to Eichmann that same day. Himmler's reaction to the developments in Hungary was pragmatic. In a telegram addressed to Otto Winkelmann, the Higher SS and Police Leader in Hungary, the *Reichsführer-SS* agreed with the suspension of the deportations from Hungary. Following Romania's change of sides, Himmler had become especially eager to safeguard Hungary's alliance with the Reich, even at the expense of an envisioned temporary partial failure of the Final Solution. Himmler's decision did not, of course, denote a fundamental change in his attitude toward the Jews; it merely reflected a tactical retreat, based upon military considerations, with the aim of safeguarding the position of German troops in Romania and elsewhere in the Balkans by assuring that their supply lines and avenue of escape via Hungary were not cut off. At the time Himmler was also actively searching for a possible separate peace with the Western Powers. The Final Solution was to be resumed after the expected stabilization of the military situation or the failure of his peace feelers.

The decision of the Hungarians to prevent the further deportation of Jews was officially communicated to Veessenmayer on August 25 by Reményi-Schneller. At practically the same time, Ferenczy—presumably with the concurrence of the top Jewish Council figures—was given almost exclusive jurisdiction over the handling of the Jewish question in Hungary. He so informed the Jewish Council in a note dated August 28, emphasizing that from that date forward no other representative of any Hungarian or "allied" (i.e., German) organ could negotiate with the Council or issue orders or instructions to it. The following day Bonczos notified all the prefects and requested that they cooperate fully with Ferenczy in the implementation of his duties.

While Horthy and the other Hungarian leaders were reasserting their country's sovereignty and the political climate was conducive to Hungary's possible emulation of Romania, Ferenczy appeared to carry out his functions as the new "Czar" on Jewish affairs quite satisfactorily. However, the Jewish leaders continued to remain apprehensive about possible double-dealing by Ferenczy. Unfortunately, their foreboding proved well-founded. Shortly after the Szálasi coup of October 15, Ferenczy once again assumed an openly active role in the anti-Jewish drive. The top leaders of the Council, who knew too much about Ferenczy's revelations to the regent, had to run for their lives: he did not want to become the subject of blackmail or have any potentially "dangerous" witnesses around. The prevailing evidence clearly indicates that Ferenczy never really intended to switch sides. His primary objective in gaining access to Horthy seems to have been his desire to obtain details about the regent's plans for a volte-face and to transmit them to the Germans, whose trusted informer he presumably always was.

BETWEEN DESPAIR AND EUPHORIA

Between July 7 and October 15, 1944, the mood of the Jews of Budapest alternated between despair and euphoria. Shocked by the “illegal” deportations from Kistarcsa and Sárvár and haunted by the periodic specter of their own possible deportation, the Jews of the capital would often revert to the illusory confidence that was so characteristic of this assimilated Jewish community. Horthy’s decision and the continued worsening of the Reich’s military situation rekindled in them the illusions that had sustained them before the German occupation and even during the deportations from the provinces. Their confidence was further boosted by the governmental changes of August 7 and especially by the appointment on August 29 of Gen. Géza Lakatos, the former commander of the First Hungarian Army, as the new prime minister.³⁷

The public pronouncements of the new prime minister concerning Hungary’s domestic and foreign policies were designed primarily for foreign, especially German, consumption. They called for the further involvement of Hungary in the war for the defense of its frontiers, the preservation of law and order, and an increase in industrial and agricultural production. The objectives Lakatos was really pursuing in accord with Horthy’s mandate included the reestablishment of Hungarian sovereignty, the initiation of measures for the possible extrication of Hungary from the war, and the termination of the anti-Jewish measures.

In accord with these objectives, responsibility over Jewish matters in the Ministry of the Interior was entrusted to Gyula Perlaky, who held the rank of ministerial counselor. One of Perlaky’s first acts was to free the Jews being held at Horthyliget and the 220 hostages still held at Kistarcsa. Bowing to the pleas advanced by a Jewish Council delegation headed by Stöckler, the new foreign minister, Gusztáv Hennyey, persuaded the Red Cross and the Swedish authorities to send parcels (presumably food and clothing) to the deported Jews. (The parcels were stolen by the Germans on arrival.) The Jews, appreciative, expressed their gratitude to the new Hungarian leaders.³⁸

The developments following Horthy’s halting of the deportations had a tremendous impact on the collective life of the Jewish community in Budapest. They had a special effect on their educational-cultural, religious, and economic activities.

EDUCATIONAL-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

During the second half of August 1944—and especially after the crisis of August 25 had passed—the Jewish lay and religious leaders devoted considerable attention to the educational needs of the children crammed into the yellow-star houses. Though the state-run and the non-Jewish denominational

elementary and secondary schools continued to practice their exclusionary policies, they were already willing to admit the children of converts and of exempted Jews who were themselves converted or were covered by the exemption ruling. The education of the surviving Jewish children became the primary responsibility of the rabbinate and of the Educational and Cultural Section of the Jewish Council. Their decisions relating to all education matters, including the registration dates and procedures and the identification of the institutions where instruction would be offered, were published in *Magyarországi Zsidók Lapja* (Journal of the Jews of Hungary), a publication that, though censored by the authorities and used during the deportations from the provinces as one of the primary means to mislead the Jewish masses, was their only means of communication at the time.

In addition to instruction at the primary levels, the rabbinate organized a number of classes for religious instruction. Interested children were also offered refresher or regular courses at the secondary school level. Indicative of the leaders' dedication to education and learning was the decision to reopen several institutions for professional training. Among these were the Goldmark School of Music, the National Rabbinical Seminary, and the National Jewish Teacher Training Institute.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Another sign reflecting the new trend in the government's Jewish policy was the decision to permit the Jews greater freedom of movement during the upcoming High Holy Days. During the two days of Rosh Hashana (September 18 and 19) and on Yom Kippur (September 27) the Jews of Budapest were allowed outside their homes from 9:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. and on the eve of the Holy Days they were allowed to be out from 5:30 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.³⁹ The plans for the services were worked out by the rabbinate, which was often at odds with the Jewish Council. At its meeting of July 26, for example, the rabbinate adopted a statement that bitterly accused the Council, rejecting any responsibility for the catastrophe that befell the Jews of Hungary and for the "spiritual disintegration" of the community.⁴⁰ The tension between the leaders of these two Jewish institutions grew considerably during the fear-ridden days before the planned deportation of the Budapest Jews on August 5 and 25, and during the subsequent weeks when plans were made for their concentration in the provinces. Among the many issues that set the rabbinate and the Jewish Council at loggerheads, none were more acrimonious than those relating to the conversion epidemic that swept the community and to the issuance of a limited number of exemptions by the Hungarian authorities.

CONVERSIONS AND THE CONVERTS

The Jews of Hungary, and especially those in the so-called Trianon part of the country, constituted one of the most acculturated and assimilated Jewish communities in Europe. The process of assimilation, begun shortly after the emancipation of the Jews in 1867, led not only to their embracing of the Magyar cause, but in quite a few cases to Christianity as well. During the "Golden Era" of Hungarian Jewry, the tendency to conversion was especially noticeable among the assimilated families of the upper bourgeoisie. Many of these converts were motivated by gratitude and genuine patriotism.

During the counterrevolutionary period after World War I, however, many of the converts were motivated by opportunism, both to escape the wrath of the antisemites and to advance their own artistic, literary, and professional careers.⁴¹ This trend gained momentum after the adoption of the major anti-Jewish laws in the late 1930s. As we already have seen, following the outbreak of World War II, the number of converts to the country's two major Christian denominations was large enough to form separate organizations.⁴²

The readiness of many Jews to convert after Hungary's occupation by the Germans was motivated almost exclusively by the dictates of survival. Since the Christian churches had launched a fairly well organized drive to have converts exempted from the worst measures adopted against the Jews, many Jews decided to find protection under the umbrella of Christianity and were ready to convert to whichever Christian denomination proved receptive to their pleas. This avenue of escape was largely restricted to Budapest, because in the provinces, where the masses were not really aware of the impending disaster, the ghettoization-deportation process was so swift that there was little if any time for escape by conversion. Indeed, conversion emerged as a real means of escaping further persecution only after Horthy's decision to halt the deportations on July 7 and the consequent establishment of the Association of the Christian Jews of Hungary, which had close organic relations with, and enjoyed the support of, the various Christian churches. In response to vociferous demands by the Christian churches, the converts received a number of governmental guarantees, including the suspension of their "dispatch for labor abroad" and their separation from the Jews who remained true to their faith.

According to various reports, the 1944 summer conversion fever was triggered by a rumor that those converted up to July 11 would be immune to further persecutions. The rumor had a basis in fact. For one thing, Veessenmayer informed the German Foreign Office on July 8 that he had received assurances from Horthy that after the separation of the converts he would "soon" permit the deportation of the Jews of Budapest.⁴³ Second,

in response to the pressure and threats advanced by Jusztinián Cardinal Serédi and other church leaders, Sztójay emphasized the measures adopted on behalf of the converts and the government's decision to exempt converts from any future possible deportations.⁴⁴ As the news of this alleged decision leaked out, however distortedly, the number of Jews willing to convert increased dramatically.

The German and Hungarian dejewification experts opposed this decision and launched a campaign to disseminate the Nazi view of "racial" identity: that the converts were identical with those clinging to their Jewish faith. Their intention, of course, was to treat the surviving converts in Budapest the same way the converts were largely treated in the countryside, namely to include them in the expected final phase of the Final Solution. In this drive the Nazis managed, via Zoltán Bosnyák, to maneuver one of the members of the Jewish Council into giving an interview in the July 29, 1944, issue of *Harc* (Battle), the Hungarian antisemitic journal.⁴⁵

The natural tendency of many Jews to avoid persecution by conversion aroused great controversy in both Jewish and antisemitic circles. Though most converts merely behaved like the Conversos (Marranos) of the Spanish Inquisition, professing to accept Christianity—they did so only as a means to avoid persecution—while secretly clinging to their faith, the devout leaders of the Jewish community condemned them for their ostensible abandonment of Judaism and disruption of communal harmony. The antisemites, in turn, agitated against conversions in order to assure the completion of the Final Solution. It should be noted in this connection that in terms of absolute figures, the number of those who formally converted was not very great, even in Budapest. In 1938, the year of the first major anti-Jewish law, 2,716 Jews converted in the capital and approximately 8,000, or around 2 percent of the entire Jewish population, in the country. Within the framework of the Jewish community of Pest, the country's largest, the number of Jews who declared their conversion to Christianity was 2,260 in 1940; 1,463 in 1941; 1,858 in 1942; and 994 from January through the end of September 1943.⁴⁶

Aside from the converts, another category of "protected and privileged" Jews consisted of those who were exempted.

THE EXEMPTION SYSTEM

The system of exempting certain categories of Jews from the general anti-Jewish measures was originally introduced in the late 1930s, when the first major anti-Jewish laws were adopted. The German occupation and the consequent almost immediate adoption of a large number of draconic measures placed the exempted Jews in an especially privileged category. Although

many of the anti-Jewish decrees contained provisions relating to exemptions, these were not always uniform or consistent. To avoid the confusion caused by many of the discrepancies in these acts, the Sztójay government issued a special decree relating exclusively to exemptions. Adopted on May 10, 1944, the decree provided for five major exemption categories, of which by far the most important were those relating to decorated war heroes and to Jews classified as *bona fide* Christians.⁴⁷

At first, Jews, especially veterans, who felt that they were covered by the exemption provisions of the various decrees could apply for verification of their status to the National Valiants' Bench. After April 30, the power of verification and of determining exemptions was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior, dominated by the Baky-Endre-Jaross group.⁴⁸ Between March and July 31, Jaross approved only 550 exemption applications, which covered approximately one thousand Jews.

The Germanophile Hungarian authorities were not very eager to take account of the exemption provisions of the decrees. This was especially true in the countryside, where many of the Jews in the exempted categories were nevertheless included in the ghettoization-deportation process: the documents proving their exemption were simply either ignored or destroyed.

Following Horthy's decision to halt the deportations, a question was raised about the regent's granting of special exemptions to certain Jews not covered by existing legislation.⁴⁹ The idea of special exemptions was not acted upon until August 21, when Horthy, reasserting his role as head of state, was instrumental in the adoption of a new decree providing such exemptions for certain groups of Jews not covered by previous legislation. Issued over the signature of Reményi-Schneller, the decree authorized the regent to provide, on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers, special exemption to persons who had made great contributions to the nation in various fields, including the arts, the sciences, and the economy. The decree stipulated that the Jews so exempted would still be subject to the provisions of the racial Third Anti-Jewish Law of 1941 and that their property rights would be spelled out in the individual exemption certificates.

The idea of special exemptions was pushed by Miklós Mester and Gyula Ambrózy, the head of the regent's Cabinet Office. Even before the adoption of the decree, Ambrózy issued special "provisional" exemption certificates entitling the holders to remain in their apartments and to remove the yellow star from their garments. It was in this manner that, to the shock and consternation of several of their colleagues, the three leading figures of the Jewish Council—Stern, Pető, and Wilhelm—appeared without their tell-tale badges for the Council meeting of August 17. As a result of Ambrózy's and Mester's efforts, some of the most outstanding Jewish writers, artists, scientists, and academicians were granted special exemption status.⁵⁰

The exemption system soon came under criticism not only by those who deplored some of its abuses, but also by those who opposed it on principle. The accusation that the system was beset by corruption had some basis in fact. While several thousand Jews in the categories specified by the decrees received their exemption only after they had furnished voluminous documentation, others with connections and money received theirs without any special effort. In contrast to the extreme rightists, who viewed the system as an obstacle to the implementation of the Final Solution, several Jews, including some Jewish leaders, looked upon it as another source of dissension within the community. These Jews refused to take advantage of their exemption opportunity, preferring to demonstrate their solidarity with the masses. Among these was Lajos Stöckler, who later became head of the Council. This position was also adopted by the rabbinate as a whole. Under a resolution adopted on August 30, the rabbinate declared that its members would not accept exemption status until all the Jews were exempted, excluding those occasions "when they have to appear before a governmental authority in behalf of a fellow Jew or the community."⁵¹

The system of exemptions engendered a flurry of activity on behalf of individual Jews, including some who had already been deported. Even before the adoption of the special exemption decree, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs actually submitted several official notes to the Germans requesting the return of both the exempted Jews and those who had been deported "illegally" or "by mistake" due to the overzealousness of the gendarmerie. The Germans, of course, were usually unable to satisfy the request, even if so inclined, as most of the people involved had already either been killed at Auschwitz or deployed without trace to one of the many German concentration camps. Theodor Horst Grell, the expert on Jewish affairs in the German Legation in Budapest, tried to "explain" Germany's dilemma by arguing, among other things, that the return of the Jews previously handed over to the Germans was not only impossible, but would violate the German-Hungarian agreement concerning "the dispatch of Jews for labor to Germany."⁵²

The privileges enjoyed by many of the exempted Jews were short-lived. They were rescinded shortly after the acquisition of power by the *Nyilas* on October 15.⁵³

Aside from the issues relating to conversions and exemptions, in the months preceding the *Nyilas* coup the Jewish community of Budapest was also torn by the various plans advanced by the Hungarian authorities partially to appease the Germans. These pertained to the possibility of a useful employment of the able-bodied Jews and to the relocation of the entire community to various internment camps in the provinces for alleged security reasons.

Plans for the Employment and Concentration of the Jews

With the easing of the pressure following the original decision to halt the deportations early in July, the Jewish leaders devoted increasing attention to improving the living conditions of the surviving Jews. With the financial and material resources of the community almost depleted, they tried to use the intercession of political, governmental, and church leaders to obtain more freedom of movement for the Jews and above all to obtain permission for the useful employment of physically and mentally able Jews. A plea to this effect was included in their lengthy memorandum addressed to the government on July 24. Their endeavors yielded the first result toward the end of the month, when the Budapest municipal authorities requested two thousand Jews for rubble-clearing operations.⁵⁴ By the first half of August, the headquarters of the Jewish Council had become an official "labor service recruitment center," operating in close cooperation with the Ministry of Defense. Toward the end of the month, the Hungarian authorities decided to expand the work assignment of able-bodied Jews beyond rubble-clearing. The plans for the possible mobilization of Jews for labor soon became intertwined with those calling for the internment of all the Jews in various provincial camps for security reasons.

The idea for the removal of the Jews from Budapest and their concentration in camps in the provinces was advanced by Ferenczy during his first meeting with Horthy early in August.⁵⁵ It was advanced allegedly to appease the Germans after they were told that Hungary would no longer permit the deportation of Jews to Germany. The Jewish leaders were, of course, aware of the possible pitfalls of the planned concentration of the Jews. For tactical reasons they decided ostensibly to go along with the plan, but at the same time to do everything in their power to delay and eventually forestall its implementation. In this connection, they took advantage of a loophole that called for the camps to be up to "European standards." The concentration of the Budapest Jews was to be initiated only after the completion of the camps and their verification by the Red Cross as being up to standards.

The first authoritative news about the nature and dimension of the Jews' mobilization for labor was published on September 7. The newspapers emphasized the difficult position of Hungary and the intolerable situation under which thousands of Jews had been living for months without work or income, while the country was suffering from an acute shortage of labor. They reported that henceforth all Jews between the ages of fourteen and seventy, irrespective of sex, would be employed "for defense work within the country" after undergoing an examination of their fitness. Exception was

to be made only in a limited number of cases, including war invalids, foreign nationals, and those already at work in various capacities.⁵⁶

In the meantime, Ferenczy pursued an intensive campaign for the concentration of the Budapest Jews in specially designated internment camps in the countryside. His zealousness induced the Jewish leaders to do everything in their power to delay and if possible prevent the concentration, rightfully fearing that once concentrated the Jews would become an easier target for deportation. In this effort they approached the Red Cross as well as the regent. Samu Stern paid a visit to Horthy, incognito, in mid-September, and informed him about the danger represented by the proposed concentration of the Jews. He emphasized that the Jews so interned would not only become more easily deportable but would also be vulnerable to bombing by German planes using disguised aircraft markings, as had happened in Kassa in June 1941.⁵⁷ He left feeling assured that the Jews of Budapest would be neither deported nor concentrated.

The plans for the useful employment of the able-bodied Jews, on the other hand, went full speed ahead. The momentum was provided by the new prime minister. In his inaugural speech of September 21 before a joint session of the Hungarian Parliament, Lakatos stated, among other things:

With regard to the regulation of the Jewish question, we are in the process of implementing a procedure that will assure, through the strict application of legal means, the gradual employment for useful work of the most harmful elements and the unemployed.⁵⁸

Shortly thereafter, and in accord with these objectives, the Jews were permitted greater freedom of movement.

While the Hungarians became increasingly accommodating, the Germans appeared ever more impatient. They continuously evoked the danger “the large number of Jews” represented to their security in the capital. They demanded that the Jews be interned as planned and that at least some of them be deported. For tactical reasons, they first insisted on at least a token resettlement of one thousand Jews.⁵⁹ Their tactics apparently aimed at establishing the principle of resettlement *per se*; if their test case proved successful, they expected to follow it up first by mass resettlement into the Hungarian countryside and then with deportation. The annoyance of the Germans was reflected in Veesenmayer’s telegram of September 15 to the German Foreign Office. The plenipotentiary complained not only about the failure of the Hungarian government to carry out its commitments, but also about the activities of the representatives of neutral countries on behalf of the Jews.⁶⁰

The Germans continued to rely on Ferenczy for information and cooperation. In a memorandum to his superiors dated September 26, Grell emphasized Ferenczy's assurances not only about the Jewish leaders' involvement in the relocation scheme but also about his own personal commitment to it, demanding "symbolic German support" for his efforts.⁶¹

In another secret memorandum, dated September 28, Grell was even more optimistic about the final outcome, having been told by Ferenczy that a new drive was planned against the Jews of Budapest in which fourteen so-called flying commissions, each able to seize between four hundred and five hundred Jews a day, would systematically search every house. The first transport of around five thousand Jews was expected to depart within four to five days. An addendum to the memorandum listed the assembly centers in Budapest as well as the "evacuation centers"—concentration camps—in the provinces.⁶² Grell's memoranda reflected the Germans' alternating moods about the chances of the Final Solution. These memoranda were forwarded by Veessenmayer to the German Foreign Office on October 10, with a cover note suggesting that the Reich's attitude be changed and that new measures be initiated "in order to carry out the evacuation of the remaining Jews from Hungary or Budapest either through German forces themselves or through pressure on the Hungarian government."⁶³

The Germans' annoyance and frustration over the failure to complete the Final Solution program were matched by their anger over the Hungarians' almost overt attempts to extricate themselves from the war. The Hungarians were indeed desperately seeking an honorable way out of their alliance with the Reich. Their hesitant and occasionally quixotic attitude, however, led them to disaster. Their calculations were upset by the Romanians, who acted more discreetly and more resolutely on August 23. This added a new and unexpected dimension to the problem, for the Hungarians now had to be concerned not only with their possible extrication from the war but also with the fate of Transylvania.⁶⁴ At the end neither objective was achieved. Horthy's amateurish approach to the planned volte-face ended in his arrest and deportation to Germany and the conquest of power by the *Nyilas*. Transylvania eventually was once again reunited under Romanian sovereignty.

9 THE ARROW CROSS ERA

The Szálasi Coup

Shortly after the inauguration of the Géza Lakatos government on August 29, 1944, Horthy proceeded with his plan for the honorable withdrawal of Hungary from the war. The plan was originally scheduled to have been carried out on September 8, but was postponed while the regent's closest associates, including Minister of Defense Lajos Csatay, tried to find a solution for a glaring obstacle Horthy himself had introduced: the regent had allegedly pledged to Hitler and Edmund Veessenmayer that he would inform them in advance about Hungary's resolve to quit the war.¹ In fact, of course, the Germans did not need any special communication from the regent, as they were constantly fully and accurately informed about every move of the Hungarian leaders by their many agents, among whom were numerous high-ranking Hungarian governmental officials. The Germans consequently lost no time in taking measures to safeguard the interests of the Reich.

Despite Horthy's machinations, Veessenmayer continued to prefer to keep him as the formal head of state but to prevent him from wielding any real power. He correctly concluded that Horthy not only represented the formal sovereignty of the Hungarian nation, but also provided legitimacy for the actions of the government. While opting for this course of action, he and the other agents of the Reich took a series of contingency measures not only to prevent Hungary's planned volte-face, but also to assure the pro-German orientation of any future government. Along these lines, they provided special protection for the Arrow Cross leaders, whose arrest Horthy had ordered on September 16.² *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Otto Skorzeny was ordered to Budapest, reportedly on Hitler's personal instructions, to coordinate military operations in conjunction with General Friesner, the new commander of the German forces in the capital, and Otto Winkelmann, the Higher SS and Police Leader. *SS-Obergruppenführer* Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, the chief of the antipartisan units then stationed in Warsaw, was assigned to take command of all local police and SS units and to be in charge of *Operation Panzerfaust* (Operation Armored Fist), the military code name for the anti-Horthy drive.

While under the protection of the Germans, awaiting a summons to take over power, Ferenc Szálasi was preoccupied with his plans for the future “Hungarist” regime. Among these was his grand design for the solution of the Jewish question in the country. (By that time, of course, only the Jews of Budapest were still alive in Hungary, aside from the labor servicemen.) In theory at least, Szálasi’s solution was less radical than that advocated by the champions of the Final Solution. It stipulated, among other things:

Jews shall perform labor service for the nation inside the country; their treatment is to be determined by their behavior; their legal status is to be regulated by law; no difference is to be made between one Jew and another. When the war is over, all Jews are to be removed from Hungary to a place to be determined by international agreement. The Jews are never to be allowed to return to Hungarian soil. Mixed marriages are to be annulled and everyone may enforce application of this right. Those who fail to do so are to fall into the same category as the Jewish spouse; in such cases the children are to count as Jews.³

While the *Nyilas* were biding their time, Horthy and his trusted advisers proceeded with their poorly concealed plans for the conclusion of an armistice. The pro-armistice faction of the Hungarian leadership, who hated Bolshevism even more than Nazism, finally came to the realization that the Western Allies were not planning the invasion of the Balkans. Neither were they planning the deployment of special airborne troops to Hungary, as Hungarian leaders had originally hoped. The Western Powers, it seemed, had wittingly or unwittingly consented to domination of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union.

Horthy had no alternative but to yield. He accepted the Soviets’ armistice conditions on October 11 and initially planned to announce Hungary’s withdrawal from the war a week later. However, for a variety of reasons, including the pressures exerted upon him by both the Nazis and the Soviets, he decided to act on October 15, catching all of his potential supporters off guard. The troops deemed loyal to him could not be brought to the capital, the Jewish labor servicemen could not be armed, and the workers promised by the leaders of the weak resistance movement could not be mobilized in time to come to Horthy’s aid.

Horthy’s actions on October 15 had all the ingredients of a tragedy-comedy. By the end of the day, one of the darkest in the country’s history, the Horthy era had come to an end—along with the “historical” Hungary that was supported by an ever weaker feudal-bourgeois socioeconomic structure. The regent apparently gambled on the advantages of surprise and on the expected loyalty of the Hungarian army. The Germans must have been

apprised of the regent's plans: shortly before his scheduled appearance before the Crown Council at 10:00A.M., they arrested Miklós Horthy Jr., the regent's only surviving son, who was a staunch anti-Nazi. As head of the "extrication office," Miklós Jr. had maintained close contact with the leaders of the various resistance groups, with several members of the Jewish Council, and reportedly also with some representatives of Tito's partisan movement. Following the Crown Council meeting, which was devoted not only to the regent's decision but also to an evaluation of the bleak military situation,⁴ Horthy met Veessenmayer to inform him about Hungary's resolve. He also met Rudolf Rahn, Hitler's special envoy, who had just arrived "to ease the tension . . . and to find a compromise." Neither envoy was successful in changing the regent's mind. Horthy reaffirmed his decision and expressed the hope that there would be no military confrontation between the former comrades-in-arms, and that the Germans would be enabled by the Hungarians to withdraw peacefully.

Horthy's historic proclamation was read to the nation over Hungarian State Radio around 1:00P.M. In it, the regent emphasized the responsibility of the Germans for having dragged Hungary into the war and for the many crimes the Germans had committed in the country. With respect to the handling of the Jewish question following the occupation, Horthy placed exclusive blame on the Gestapo, conveniently ignoring the ignominious role played by the Hungarian gendarmerie and the other instrumentalities of power in the implementation of the Final Solution. On this issue, he had the following to say:

Under the protection of the German occupation, the Gestapo took the handling of the Jewish question into its hands, employing the means used elsewhere in this sphere and using the well-known methods that contrast with the requirements of humanitarianism.⁵

In his Order of the Day addressed to the Hungarian armed forces, Horthy called upon the soldiers to remain loyal to their oath and to carry out his instructions. Shortly after the order was broadcast, however, the troops received different instructions issued in the name of the chief of the General Staff. The troops were told that the proclamation did not apply to them and that they should continue their military operations. By late afternoon, when the broadcasting station was occupied by the *Nyilas* and their German allies, the order to continue to fight had been broadcast to the troops several times.

The contradictory news and instructions filling the airwaves that afternoon left the armed forces and the civilian population confused and bewildered. The general attitude of the Hungarian masses was as passive as it had been on Sunday, March 19, when the Germans had invaded the country.

The only jubilation, however short-lived, came from the Jewish community and from the traditionally anti-Horthy and anti-*Nyilas* elements. Some of the Jews tore off their yellow badges and left the yellow-star buildings in a state of euphoria. Many members of the labor service companies removed their yellow armbands and threw away their shovels and pickaxes. But by late afternoon their ecstasy had been replaced by a feeling of doom. The armed forces, the gendarmerie, and the police sided with those advocating “the continuation of the struggle against Bolshevism.” The jubilation of the surviving Jews had proved premature. Instead of facing liberation, they were about to enter one of the most horrible phases of the war.⁶

The *Nyilas* Terror

No sooner was the radio broadcasting station in the hands of the *Nyilas* than it began a vicious campaign against the “Judeo-Bolshevik menace,” inciting the mob to anti-Jewish violence. By this time the Jewish community had been reduced to one-third of its numbers at the beginning of the year. An estimated 150,000 Jews were serving in various labor service companies, and from 150,000 to 160,000 were either concentrated in Budapest in the yellow-star buildings or living under relatively unrestricted conditions because of their protected or exempt status. An undetermined number were in hiding or living with forged Christian identification documents.

Intoxicated by years of antisemitic propaganda and incited by their leaders, frenzied gangs of *Nyilas* youths, many of them in their early teens, began an anarchic spree of murder and looting. They were armed with various types of weapons, including automatic rifles and grenades. The stunned and helpless Jews who were the object of their fury cowered in their yellow-star buildings, expecting the worst. During the first night of the coup, the *Nyilas* gangs murdered several hundred Jews, including labor servicemen. The latter were singled out as a special target because some of them had been involved in active resistance against the *Nyilas* a few hours earlier. Many of the Jews were taken to the banks of the Danube and shot, their bodies falling into the river.

The atrocities in Budapest were matched by those perpetrated in the countryside, where many of the labor service companies were stationed. One of these, the so-called Jolsva company, suffered a particularly cruel fate shortly after the coup. The company of 216 servicemen, composed almost exclusively of physicians, engineers, and other professionals, was slaughtered at Pusztavám, a small community northwest of Székesfehérvár.

On October 16, the yellow-star houses of Budapest were sealed off for about ten days. Jews were not permitted to leave their buildings, whatever the emergency. Women in labor could receive no outside help;

the dead could not be buried; the ill and disabled could not be treated unless there happened to be a doctor in the particular building; and all had to rely on whatever food was still at hand, since shopping was impossible. The *Nyilas* rounded up several thousand Jews, including Chief Rabbi Ferenc Hevesi, and herded them into two large synagogues on Rumbach Sebestyén and Dohány Streets. (They were freed a few days later, following the energetic intervention of the representatives of the neutral countries as well as many outraged Hungarians.)

The *Nyilas* governmental leaders soon recognized that the uncontrolled plundering and murdering spree by the gangs represented a danger to the stability of the nation. Gábor Vajna, the antisemitic minister of the interior, felt it necessary to issue a statement that clarified the Arrow Cross Party's attitude toward the Jewish question while including a thinly veiled warning to anarchy-bent thugs. In his statement of October 18, he emphasized that his government would solve the Jewish question with the ruthlessness "the Jews deserve by reason of their previous and present conduct," and that he looked upon all Jews as belonging to the Jewish race, recognizing no differences between Jews in terms of their religious affiliation or possession of foreign protective certificates or passports. The gangs were warned that they would not be allowed to become "an arbitrary or self-appointed judge of the Jews, because the solution of the Jewish question [is] the task of the state."⁷

The Systematic Drive against the Jews

One of the fundamental reasons for the Germans' support of the *Nyilas* government was their commitment to the completion of the Final Solution in Hungary. Eichmann returned to Budapest on October 17 and a day later concluded an agreement with Vajna on the "solution" of the Jewish question. Under the terms of the agreement:

- The Hungarian minister of the interior, despite Szálasi's earlier decision in principle no longer to permit the deployment of Hungarian Jews to the Reich, consented to the transfer of fifty thousand Jews, "to replace the worn-out Russian and other POWs in German plants."
- The Jews were to be dispatched on foot under the supervision of German commandos.
- The remaining able-bodied Jews were to be placed into four camps near the capital and utilized on various domestic projects.
- The Jews not suited for labor were to be placed into ghettolike camps.
- The Eichmann-*Sonderkommando* would escort the foot marches and act as advisers, but the action itself would be carried out by the Hungarian gendarmerie under the command of Ferenczy.⁸

Eichmann's ultimate intentions went beyond these scaled-down demands. As Veessenmayer informed Ribbentrop, after the successful completion of the first phase of the new anti-Jewish drive Eichmann planned to ask repeatedly for additional groups of fifty thousand Jews until none were left. The Germans tried to sugar-coat their anti-Jewish drive by assuring the new Hungarian authorities that, in accordance with Hitler's directive, they were ready to cooperate on the emigration of the 8,412 Jews sponsored by the Swedes, Swiss, and others—if the remaining Jews were deported “for labor in Germany.”⁹

The systematic drive against the Jews began on October 20. *Nyilas* elements accompanied by policemen entered the yellow-star buildings at the crack of dawn and ordered all Jewish males to gather in the courtyards. There they were told that those between the sixteen and sixty years of age had to be ready for departure within one hour. Later that morning the Jews selected by the *Nyilas*/police squads were taken either to the racetrack at Kerepes Street or the KISOK sport field. The health and fitness criteria and age limitations specified by the authorities were often ignored by the “recruiting officers”: many of the recruited Jews were physically handicapped or well beyond the specified maximum age. Jews holding foreign protective passes or exemption or medical certificates did not fare any better.

The recruitment drive was expanded on October 22, when a new announcement appeared on the streets of Budapest, ordering all Jewish males in the sixteen to sixty age group who had not been recruited two days earlier, and all Jewish women between eighteen and forty years of age, to report for “recruitment.” By October 26, approximately thirty-five thousand Jews had been mobilized, of whom about ten thousand were women. They were hastily organized into labor companies and deployed to dig trenches and construct defense fortifications along the southern and southeastern periphery of the capital. Most of the Jews were exceedingly ill-equipped for the hardships that awaited them. Some died on the way to their work assignment; others were tortured to death by the *Nyilas* guards; still others died of exhaustion and starvation within a few days. The surviving Jews had to work very long hours with almost no food, under constant pressure from their tormentors. Many were quartered under the open sky, without protection from the chill of the late autumn nights.

The plight of the Jews in the trench-digging companies worsened considerably after the Soviet forces launched a new offensive against Budapest on November 2. Many of these companies were withdrawn toward the capital and Transdanubia, together with the panicking German and Hungarian forces. Already emaciated by almost two weeks of privations and torture, the Jews were herded along the roadbeds and trenches by the accompanying *Nyilas* thugs and gendarmes, who mercilessly shot those who could not keep

pace. Some companies were subjected to particularly brutal treatment while crossing Budapest. The number of Jewish casualties was especially high when the companies were marched over the major bridges, where *Nyilas* guards and soldiers would amuse themselves by shooting straggling Jews into the Danube. The slaughter assumed such dimensions that special police units had to be called out to protect the Jews from the raging *Nyilas*.

Later in November, after the Soviet offensive stalled for a short while, many of the trench-digging companies were returned to the left side of the Danube to build additional fortifications. When the offensive resumed, most of the surviving trench diggers were taken to Óbuda and quartered in the local Újlaki Brickyards. After a few days they were made to march on the “death road” to Hegyeshalom, where they were transferred to the control of the Germans to work on the construction of the “East Wall” for the defense of Vienna.

The Death Marches to Hegyeshalom

By the time the survivors of the trench-digging units were transferred to the Óbuda Brickyards, thousands of other Jews—men and women alike—already had been force-marched under the most horrible conditions toward Hegyeshalom, the Hungarian checkpoint on the road to Vienna. The death marches had their origin in the agreement pushed through by the Germans within a week of the coup, under which Szálasi, reneging on his earlier pronouncements, had allowed the transfer of twenty-five thousand able-bodied Jewish males “for labor in the Reich for half a year.”¹⁰

On October 26, Károly Beregfy, the *Nyilas* minister of defense, authorized the transfer to the Germans of seventy labor service companies.¹¹ Jewish women, too, were mobilized for the same purpose. They were the subject of two special call-up orders issued on November 2 and 3. For the implementation of these decrees and orders, the Ministry of Defense acted in close cooperation with the police authorities in Budapest. On November 7, the latter instructed all building superintendents and air-raid wardens to make doubly certain that no Jews were hiding in buildings under their supervision. The Jews apprehended in Budapest and those already employed in trench-digging operations were later officially classified as a distinct category of Jews—those “to be lent to the Germans for work in behalf of Hungary.”¹²

The marches toward Hegyeshalom officially began on November 8, with some overeager *Nyilas* having already taken action two days earlier. Each day, about two thousand Jews were dispatched from various transit centers in Transdanubia, including Albertfalva, Budafok, and Pünkösdfürdő, as well as from the Óbuda Brickyards, the main recruitment center under the command of András Szentandrassy. The Jews were kept in the brickyards

for two to three days under conditions reminiscent of those that prevailed in the provinces at the height of the ghettoizations and deportations. Thousands were kept in the brick-drying barns, which had roofs but no walls, and many others were compelled to remain in the rain in the courtyard. They were given little or no food, and the *Nyilas*, who exercised real power although nominally the police were entrusted with keeping order, robbed them of their valuables, clothing, blankets, and whatever supplies they had.

Several hundred Jews were lucky enough to escape the ordeal of the death marches. Many of these were rescued through the interventions of church leaders and, above all, the neutral states: Raoul Wallenberg and Charles Lutz paid frequent visits to the brickyards to reclaim their wards and to distribute protective passes. Many others were smuggled out in daring rescue operations undertaken by young *Halutzim* (Zionist youth pioneers) disguised in SS or *Nyilas* uniforms.¹³ Still others were saved by being provided with Christian identification papers, often with the cooperation of sympathetic police officers.

Most of the Jews taken to the Óbuda Brickyards, however, fared less well. Usually, after a few days the Jews, regardless of age or sex, were started on the march to Hegyeshalom, following the Piliscsaba, Dorog, Süttő, Szőny, Gönyő, Dunaszeg, and Mosonmagyaróvár route. The escorting of the Jews and their feeding and housing en route were to be handled by the Ministry of Defense in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, in accordance with a predetermined schedule. In fact, the Jews were neither fed nor housed en route. The marches were so horribly barbaric that the route became a veritable highway of death that shocked not only the observers from the neutral countries and the International Red Cross, but also some top Hungarian police and German SS officials.¹⁴

Upon their arrival in Hegyeshalom, the surviving remnants of the ragged and emaciated columns of Jews were taken over by the local Hungarian commanders. Within a day or two they were taken to the German border, where they were transferred to a German commission headed by Dieter Wisliceny, the leading figure of the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*, who had previously played a prominent role in the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews in the provinces.¹⁵ In contrast to the Germans, who reportedly were interested primarily in receiving able-bodied Jews, the Hungarian officers usually were eager to clear Hungary of all Jews, regardless of their physical condition. To make Hungary totally *judenrein*, the Hungarians reportedly insisted that the Jews marched to the frontier, including the labor servicemen, be put to work only within the borders of the Reich. In pursuit of this objective, they were even willing to use Christian civilians to build fortifications within Hungary.¹⁶ The Jews who were lucky enough to escape the death marches were soon placed into ghettos: the “protected Jews” ended

up in the so-called international ghetto and the others in the hermetically closed-off ghetto of Budapest.¹⁷

The “International Ghetto”

The plan for the separation of the “protected” Jews—those possessing valid foreign provisional passports, safe-conduct passes, or protective certificates—was originally devised by Lt. Col. László Ferenczy late in August, when, convinced that the regent was about to extricate Hungary from the Axis, he tried to ingratiate himself with the Jewish leadership. Under the more liberal conditions of the Lakatos era, the plan was shelved because several of the Jewish leaders vehemently rejected it as fundamentally divisive and unfair.¹⁸ This time around, these Jewish leaders had no alternative but to abide by the decision of the Szálasi government. Their fears were fully justified. The “unprotected” Jews were simply removed from the buildings designated as “protected houses.” Males between sixteen and sixty years of age, and females between eighteen and forty, were taken to the Óbuda Brickyards, from which place most of them shortly thereafter were marched to Hegyeshalom; the rest were moved to other yellow-star buildings, most of those quarters in the area that later became the ghetto of Budapest.

The Szálasi government decided to separate from the masses of Jews those Jews protected by the neutral countries and the Vatican; this was an attempt to gain the recognition of those states for the *Nyilas* government. The government’s decision to effect this separation was communicated to the Jewish Council by Ferenczy on November 7. The neutral countries, the Vatican, and the International Red Cross were informed by Foreign Minister Gábor Kemény three days later. In accordance with official instructions issued on November 12 over the signature of Deputy Police Chief János Solymossy, the “protected” Jews were to be relocated by November 15 into specially designated yellow-star buildings in the Fifth District of the capital.

The Jews holding foreign protective passes constituted one of the six major categories of Jews devised by the Szálasi government as part of its “final plan” to solve the Jewish question in Hungary. The other categories were:

- *Jews to Be Lent to the German Government.* These “loan Jews” were to be “employed by the German government for the advancement of the common war effort.”
- *Jews Awaiting Departure from Hungary.* These were to be placed into ghettos, awaiting departure. Included in this category were the Jews to be lent to Germany but whose departure had been delayed; children, the aged, pregnant women, the sick, and others unable to march or unsuited for transport; children under the protection of the International Red Cross; and

Christian Jews, who were to be put into separate buildings in the ghetto, marked by crosses.

- *Jews Holding Exemption Certificates.* These fell into three subcategories: Jews holding Horthy-issued exemption certificates that had been reviewed and accepted by the minister of the interior; Jews holding exemption certificates issued by the previous minister of the interior and reconfirmed by the *Nyilas* minister of the interior; and some highly decorated or war-wounded Jews recognized by the minister of the interior as worthy of special treatment.
- *Clerics.* Priests and nuns of Jewish origin, who were to be placed in special buildings and eventually relocated abroad.
- *Jews of Foreign Citizenship.* A category that also included Hungarian-Jewish nationals with valid exit papers who were expected to leave the country by December 1, 1944.¹⁹

Szálasi's memorandum dealing with the six categories of Jews was forwarded to the German Foreign Office by Theodor Horst Grell, the Budapest German Legation's expert on the Jewish question, who emphasized in his cover letter of November 20 that it was designed primarily for foreign use.²⁰

Szálasi's grandiose plan aimed not only to counteract the protest notes of the Christian churches and the neutral states, but also to provide a political-legalistic framework for the planned and already implemented actions against the remaining Jews of Budapest, including those holding foreign protective passes.

Under the agreement between the Hungarian government and the legations of the neutral states and the Papal representative, slightly more than 15,000 Jews were identified as officially eligible for relocation into protected houses. Of these, 7,800 were under the protection of Switzerland; 4,500 of Sweden; 2,500 of the Vatican; 698 of Portugal; and 100 of Spain.²¹ Although the relocation deadline was extended by forty-eight hours, the mass movement in opposite directions of "evicted" and "protected" Jews—all carrying the few possessions they still had—recalled the scenes of the previous June when the Jews of Budapest had first been compelled to move into the yellow-star buildings. Conditions were even worse this time, since the *Nyilas* were on a rampage, plundering and killing the helpless Jews. Ironically, the "protected" Jews were often subjected to greater abuse than the "unprotected" ones, since the *Nyilas* gangs believed they were wealthier. The living conditions in the "protected buildings," which soon came to be identified collectively as the "international ghetto," were quite dismal. The close to 15,600 Jews holding genuine protective passes were assigned to apartments that previously had housed only 3,969 persons. Even these apartments were not really fully available, since many of them were

occupied by Jews with forged protective documents. Though “protected” and under the nominal command of a police officer named Zoltán Tarpataky, the buildings constituting the ghetto were systematically raided by the *Nyilas* under various pretexts. The most often invoked reason was a check on the validity of the protective passes. In the course of these raids many of the Jews were robbed; others, whose papers were either destroyed or found to be forged, were taken to the banks of the Danube, where they were shot into the river. Still others were attached to the Hegyeshalom death-march columns.

The “little ghetto,” as the international ghetto was also known, remained in existence for only a short time. Early in December, when the Red Army was approaching Budapest and the Szálasi government had given up all hope of establishing normal relations with the neutral states, the ghetto population was subjected to particularly great pressure. Following the establishment of what came to be known as the “large ghetto” of Budapest, many of the protected Jews were persuaded to transfer to the new ghetto for their own safety. The situation of those who stayed became so critical by January 1945 that Raoul Wallenberg arranged to have many of the Swedish-protected Jews transferred to the large ghetto as well. This was followed by the transfer of many of the Jews under the protection of other neutral states and the Vatican. As it turned out, the life of the protected Jews in the large ghetto did not change for the better, as the *Nyilas* fury rampaged there as well.²²

The Ghetto of Budapest

Concurrent with the original relocation of the protected Jews, the Szálasi government decided to place the remaining Jews in a ghetto. The decision to this effect was communicated to the Jewish Council on November 18 by János Solymossy, the deputy police chief of Budapest, who had just been appointed ministerial commissioner in charge of the concentration of Jews. The area designated as the ghetto, in District VII of Budapest, had 162 yellow-star buildings, of which only eighteen were inhabited exclusively by Jews, and 133 Christian buildings. The plan called for the relocation of the close to twelve thousand Christians from the proposed ghetto area into Jewish apartments in the yellow-star buildings to be vacated, and the concentration of about sixty-three thousand Jews in the ghetto. The details of the plan were incorporated in Decree No. 8935/1944.B.M., which also included the ghetto map. Signed by Vajna, the decree dealt to a large extent with the rights and privileges of the Christian population to be removed from the ghetto area.²³

The relocation of the Jews began toward the end of November and was virtually completed by December 2. Most of the Christians were moved

out of the ghetto area only after the bulk of the Jews had been brought in. The property left behind by the relocated Jews was theoretically inventoried and stored before the Christian tenants moved in. In reality, however, there was little if any attempt to comply with this provision of the decree.

As was the case during the relocation of the “protected” Jews, the *Nyilas* preyed on the Jews straggling toward the ghetto. Many were attacked, robbed, and massacred. On December 3, *Nyilas* gangs also attacked the special camp on Columbus Street where a large number of Jews were “awaiting emigration.” The camp, which originally had been used by the Kasztner group,²⁴ was then under the territorial jurisdiction of the International Red Cross (IRC). This did not stop the gangs from invading it and from killing several of its inhabitants, including the chief physician.

The ghetto encompassed an area of 0.3 square kilometers (0.1 square miles)—a small fraction of the city’s 207 square kilometers (80 square miles). Like the Warsaw ghetto, it was surrounded by a tall wooden fence, with gates facing in each direction, through which, according to Szálasi, Jews were to be brought in but no longer permitted to leave. Again as in Warsaw, the fence was built at Jewish expense and with Jewish manpower. The ghetto population increased rapidly throughout December; by the end of the month the number of Jews in the ghetto reached fifty-five thousand. During the weeks preceding liberation in January 1945, the ghetto held close to seventy thousand Jews. Most of the ghetto population consisted of children under the age of sixteen, the ill, and men and women over fifty years of age.

The sharp and rapid increase in the ghetto population was caused, in part, by the transfer of approximately six thousand children from homes that had been under the protection of the IRC. The Children’s Protection Division of the IRC was at the time under the leadership of Ottó Komoly, the head of the Relief and Rescue Committee, who also was a member of the reorganized Jewish Council and who enjoyed exempt status as a decorated war hero. Convinced that the children were better off under the protection of the IRC outside the ghetto, Komoly, working together with many friends of the persecutees, including Charles Lutz, Raoul Wallenberg, and Gábor Sztehló, an Evangelical clergyman,²⁵ did everything in his power to prevent their relocation into the ghetto. These leaders’ efforts were in vain—the *Nyilas* authorities completed the children’s relocation by December 24.

The increase in the ghetto population was further fueled by the constant relocation by the *Nyilas* of Jews apprehended in hiding. There was also a small voluntary influx of Jews no longer able to survive in hiding on their own after their resources were exhausted. To many, the ghetto seemed a last refuge. However miserable the conditions there, it offered the comfort of shared sorrow as well as occasional free meals. Moreover, many of the

Jews were drawn to the ghetto by the hope that the Russians would vent their fury against the rest of the capital but safeguard the integrity of the ghetto.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GHETTO

Although the ghetto of Budapest was in existence for only about seven weeks, it had a well-developed administrative apparatus and a network of communal services. Overall responsibility for its administration rested with the Jewish Council, which was of course accountable to the authorities for all of its actions. The ghetto was divided into ten districts, each headed by a district leader assisted by two deputies. The functions and responsibilities of the district leaders, who were appointed by and directly responsible to the Council, were many and crucially important. They included the provision of utilities, food, and services, the preservation of order, and the keeping of records. Each district consisted of a number of buildings in contiguous streets, and each building was under the control of a "building commander" appointed by the Council. This commander was responsible for the upkeep of the building and for the implementation within the building of all the directives of the Council or of the authorities. Each apartment within a building was under the control of an "apartment commander," who was responsible for cleanliness in the apartment, for the care of children and the aged, and for reporting all changes in apartment population to both the district leader and the Council.

Public safety within the ghetto was entrusted to a "ghetto police" that worked closely with the apartment, building, and district leaders. Acting under the overall command of Miksa Domonkos, one of the most indefatigable and effective members of the Council, the ghetto police organization was made up of generally elderly Jews (their average age was sixty) whose "uniform" consisted of a black cap distributed by the Council and a rubber truncheon. The primary function of the ghetto police was to maintain law and order among the Jews and to assure the performance of vital services within the ghetto. Despite the extraordinary conditions under which the ghetto population lived, the ghetto police had relatively little to do.

As in the Nazi concentration camps, most of the crimes committed by Jews against Jews involved the theft of food. During the harsh winter weeks in the ghetto, the emaciated and half-frozen Jews were also desperate to obtain anything that could be used as fuel—coal, wood, lumber, furniture. Ghetto police power had to be used with increasing frequency to induce the able-bodied inhabitants of the ghetto to render essential social and communal services. Under the conditions of famine and cold, aggravated by the Soviet siege, fewer and fewer Jews volunteered to help the communal organs in

supplying the kitchens with water and wood, caring for the children or the ill, and burying the dead. However, unlike their counterparts in many ghettos in Nazi-dominated Europe, the ghetto policemen of Budapest and, by the same token, those of the other ghettos of Hungary, never faced the morally repugnant and physically excruciating task of having to select Jews for deportation and extermination. This task was performed exclusively by the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices.

The lack of food and supplies was an especially difficult problem for the Jewish leadership in the ghetto. The Council's Division of Public Feeding, which was established under the leadership of Lajos Stöckler toward the end of November, did its best to organize public kitchens and to acquire fuel, food, and water—tasks that increased in difficulty with the expansion of the ghetto population. Water for cooking and dishwashing was taken from the relatively few buildings that still had running water during the siege as well as from the natural wells in the ritual-bath facilities in the ghetto. The fuel problem was largely “solved” by the Soviet bombardments: buildings destroyed by the raids would be stripped of their wood. By far the greatest difficulty was caused by the lack of food. Its acquisition was financed by the municipality, the IRC, and the internal reserves of the community. The amount of food assigned to the ghetto dwellers was minimal. The Jewish leaders were told on December 2 that the daily ration specified for Jews was to be 150 grams of bread, 40 grams of flour, 10 grams of oil, and 30 grams of legumes. Jews also were to receive 600 grams of salt per month and 100 grams of meat per week, “if available.” The food allocated to the Jews contained 690 to 790 calories (as against 1500 for prison inmates). Even these meager rations were frequently undelivered, either because of the dislocations caused by the siege or because the *Nyilas* guarding the main ghetto gates simply refused the entry of food shipments. Had it not been for food deliveries arranged by the exempted Jews, the underground *Halutzim*, and the neutral powers' representatives, an even larger number of Jews would have died of starvation. The situation became desperate after the Soviet encirclement of Budapest on December 25, when starvation became intertwined with a series of sanitary and medical problems.

The combination of hunger, overcrowding, and the inadequacy of sanitary facilities contributed to a major health problem with which the Jewish leadership could hardly cope. The absence of soap and disinfectants, the totally inadequate health and hospital care, and the lack of facilities to bury the dead taxed the ghetto population to the limit. Bathing was virtually impossible. Those fortunate enough to live in apartments with bathrooms were no better off than those without them: there was not enough water or fuel. Moreover, the tubs were normally used to store water. The danger of epidemics posed by uncollected garbage was averted only because of the

cold winter. The very ill were treated in two makeshift hospitals outside the ghetto limits and in several smaller auxiliary units within the ghetto. Special permission had to be obtained from the authorities for admission into the former. These facilities were nominally identified as Red Cross establishments in order to safeguard them from the *Nyilas*, who often disregarded the designation. The “hospitals” were overcrowded not only because of an excessive number of legitimate patients, but also because of the large number of Jews who sought refuge there. Though the “unauthorized” Jews were periodically removed into the ghetto, their places were soon taken by new waves of persecutees. During the last few weeks before liberation, patients had to be laid on the floor, even in the nurses’ and the doctors’ quarters. The overcrowding problem was aggravated by the lack of drugs and a large number of dead bodies.

Before the encirclement of Budapest by Soviet troops on December 24, burial was relatively orderly. Ritual services were held within the ghetto and the coffins were handed over at the ghetto gate to Christian drivers for transfer to the cemetery. After that date, however, many of the bodies were interred in various parts of the ghetto, while the remainder were merely stacked up. A large number of corpses were collected in the community’s ritual-bath building or stored in the courtyards of various community buildings and in emptied storage areas or warehouses. When the ghetto was liberated on January 17, approximately three thousand bodies were awaiting burial. More than twenty-two hundred of these were eventually buried in several mass graves in the garden surrounding the Heroes’ Temple adjacent to the great Dohány Street Synagogue.²⁶

It is remarkable that despite the unbelievable difficulties, the Jewish leaders managed to devote considerable attention to the advancement of the religious and educational needs of the ghetto inhabitants. Religious services and instruction were well organized and well attended. While services were regularly held in the synagogues of the ghetto, attendance was naturally highest on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. Special services and social welfare programs were organized for the various denominations of converted Jews as well. The religious education of children was the responsibility of volunteering teachers and of rabbis. Classes were normally held in empty commercial establishments near air-raid shelters; the children were fed in these establishments, too.²⁷

THE LAST PHASE

Although the encirclement of Budapest heralded the long-awaited liberation, the Szálasi regime, which earlier had transferred its headquarters to the Sopron and Kőszeg areas of western Hungary, continued to operate as if

all were well. Completely oblivious to the realities of the Soviet siege, it continued to issue decrees and hold meaningless parliamentary sessions. Some of these continued to deal with the Jewish question. Minister of the Interior Vajna, for example, issued an order requiring that all streets, roads, and squares named after Jews, or whose names had any connection with Jews, had to be renamed immediately. In another order, he called on all Jews in hiding to report within twenty-four hours to the Jewish Council for transfer to the ghetto.²⁸ The order virtually “legalized” the manhunt for Jews in hiding. In their zeal to fulfill what they imagined was their patriotic duty, the *Nyilas* brought into the ghetto not only Jews caught in hiding places or denounced by their neighbors, but also Jews of foreign citizenship, “protected” Jews, and even a few non-Jews.²⁹

The *Nyilas* exploited the chaos and anarchic conditions that prevailed in the areas still under their domination. Their reign of terror went almost completely out of control during the month before the liberation of the capital. Gangs of armed *Nyilas* roamed Budapest and the other territories under their “jurisdiction,” looting and killing defenseless Jews. They attacked Jews huddled in their shelters, cellars, and homes outside the ghetto, in the international ghetto, and in the large ghetto. Their attacks became increasingly daring and ever larger in scale, with the number of Jews “executed” nightly varying between fifty and sixty. Usually, the Jews were first robbed of their last remaining valuables. Many were shot on the spot; others were taken to the banks of the Danube and shot into the river.³⁰

Frequently the *Nyilas* attacked and massacred Jews in hospitals and other institutions. On December 28, for example, they attacked the Jewish Hospital on Bethlen Square, terrorizing it for twenty-four hours and then withdrawing with twenty-eight able-bodied Jews, whom they massacred two days later. Three days later, they attacked the so-called Glass House, the Swiss-protected building at 29 Vadász Street, killing three Jews and wounding many others. That same day, a *Nyilas* gang abducted Ottó Komoly from the Ritz Hotel and murdered him shortly thereafter. The same fate befell Miklós Szegő, the former head of the Jewish community of Székesfehérvár, who was then a leading member of the Jewish Council. On January 11, 1945, the *Nyilas* robbed, tortured, and massacred ninety-two patients, doctors, and nurses at the Maros Street Hospital in Buda. Three days later, they attacked another hospital in Buda—the Orthodox Hospital in Városmajor Street—claiming many victims. On January 19, another *Nyilas* gang invaded the almshouse maintained by the Orthodox *Chevrah Kadisha* (burial society), removing ninety inhabitants who were subsequently massacred.

As the Soviet forces entered the outskirts of Budapest, the Jewish leadership feared that the *Nyilas*, acting in concert with the SS, might as a last act of revenge turn their fury against the large ghetto. This ghetto

was periodically invaded by *Nyilas* gangs and by members of various uniformed and armed units—both German and Hungarian. In response to the repeated pleas for help advanced by Stöckler and Domonkos, Ernő Vajna, the representative of the Arrow Cross Party assigned to the defense of Budapest, issued an order prohibiting entry into the ghetto to unauthorized personnel. Dated January 10, the order stipulated that entrance into the ghetto could occur only through two specified gates, and was to be restricted to persons holding special permits issued by the top local *Nyilas* authorities.³¹

The order notwithstanding, the *Nyilas* continued to invade the ghetto and to commit some of the most heinous crimes, including the massacre of forty-three Jews at 27 Wesselényi Street. It was in response to this crime that on January 12, 1945, Pál Szalai, the *Nyilas* Party's liaison to the police,³² had a number of police and "loyal *Nyilas*" units transferred to the ghetto to patrol the streets and guard its gates.

Rumors soon began to circulate about alleged plans by the SS and their *Nyilas* accomplices to destroy the ghetto in a combined lightning operation before the entry of the Soviet forces. Szalai claimed that it was due to his interventions with Ernő Vajna and, above all, with Gen. Schmidhuber, the commander of the *SS-Feldherrenhalle* armored division, whose political views appeared to differ from those held by other German generals in Hungary, that the attack on the ghetto was averted.³³ While credit for saving the ghetto is claimed by or attributed to many other people as well, including Raoul Wallenberg, it was in the last analysis the rapid advance of the Soviet forces that played the decisive role. The Pest part of the capital, in which the ghetto was located, was liberated on January 17–18, 1945. It took almost another month of constant battles before the Red Army could free Buda.

The liberation of the Jews of Budapest did not put an end to the suffering of Hungarian Jewry. There were still thousands of trench diggers and labor servicemen, some in western Hungary and the rest within the eastern borders of the Reich, building the East Wall for the defense of Vienna. Many of these were set free by April 4, when all of Hungary was finally liberated. Before the liberation of their area, others were removed to various German concentration camps, where they shared the fate of the other victims of Nazism, including the many thousands of Jews deported from the Hungarian countryside, until the end of the war on May 8.

10 ATTITUDES AND REACTIONS: DOMESTIC

The attitudes and reactions of the Jewish and Christian citizens of Hungary to the persecution of the Jews, both before and after the German occupation began, were varied. The variation among the masses was as great as that among the secular and religious leaders.

The Jews: Attitudes and Reactions

Like the Jews everywhere in Nazi-dominated Europe, the Jews of Hungary were essentially helpless and defenseless. As demonstrated earlier, their attitudes and reactions to the systematic drive waged against the Jews in the neighboring countries were largely determined by their checkered history since 1867. Though subjected to ever harsher civil, socioeconomic, and military-related discriminatory measures since 1938, they continued to enjoy a measure of physical protection up to the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. To the very last moment they were convinced that while the Jewish communities in the other countries in Nazi-dominated Europe might be diminished, if not totally destroyed, they would somehow survive the war, though economically worse off.

THE JEWISH MASSES

Guided by a basically decent, hardworking, but generally anti-Zionist and assimilationist leadership, the Hungarian Jewish masses were kept in the dark about the realities of the Nazis' Final Solution.¹ They tended to dismiss the accounts of mass murder that occasionally reached their communities as horror stories spread by anti-Nazi propaganda. In spite of the ever more difficult conditions under which they lived, they were ready to accept the public explanations that treated the deportation and subsequent massacre of thousands of "alien" Jews at the end of August 1941 and the slaughter of close to a thousand Jews in the Bácska area in January–February, 1942, as mere aberrations.² Misled by their history and influenced by their leaders, Hungarian Jews rationalized their "special" status, arguing that what had happened in Poland and elsewhere could not possibly happen in Hungary. Having survived the first four and a half years of the war, during which time much of German-dominated Europe already had become virtually *judenrein*,

they became ever more convinced that the rapid advance of the Allied forces would make the implementation of the Nazis' sinister designs in Hungary all but impossible.

Even after the German occupation, the Hungarian Jewish masses were convinced that Miklós Horthy, the Hungarian head of state, would continue to protect them—at least physically.³ When the ghettoization and deportation drive began in Zones I and II (Carpatho-Ruthenia, northeastern Hungary, and Northern Transylvania), those in the “assimilated” parts of Trianon Hungary argued that only the “Eastern” or “Galician” Jews were being resettled from the “military operational zones”; when the Jews of the Great Plains and of the Transdanubian parts of Hungary were being rounded up and deported, the Jews of Budapest argued that what had happened in the countryside could not possibly happen in the supposedly more civilized capital, in full view of foreign diplomats. Budapest's Jewry awoke to reality only when the Jews were being deported from that city's suburban communities and the first gendarmes appeared on the streets of the capital, early in July 1944.

The wishful thinking of the Jewish masses and their local leaders was reinforced by rumors that the authorities helped to spread and by the “assurances” given to the Central Jewish Council leaders by the German and Hungarian dejewifiers. In the ghettos of Carpatho-Ruthenia, for example, the rumor was spread that the Jews would be taken for agricultural labor to the Hortobágy area, the plains covering a large part of Hajdú County. The Jews of Northern Transylvania were “informed” that they would be taken to Kenyérmező (essentially, a fictitious area), where they would be engaged in agricultural labor and enabled to take care of their families. Another rumor, especially widespread in Nagyvárad, which had the country's largest provincial ghetto, was that the Jews were being transferred for labor to Mezőtúr, the center of an agricultural region just southeast of Szolnok.

The Jewish Leaders: The Central Jewish Council

The dejewifiers waged their psychological warfare primarily through the Central Jewish Council. Their objective was to assure the submissiveness of the Jewish leaders, and to create a climate of nonresistance during the anti-Jewish operations. At first, the authorities “assured” the top Jewish leaders that the “operations” were being restricted to the eastern areas. To further mislead them, they even adopted a number of anti-Jewish “legal measures” pertaining to the areas of Hungary not yet purged—thus implying that the Jews in these areas were destined to remain alive. Many of the Jews, especially in Budapest, were deceived by this ploy: “If they wanted to annihilate us why would they pass these decrees?” they asked themselves.

After the German occupation those deliberately misleading the Jewish leaders also included Adolf Eichmann, the head of the *SS-Sonderkommando*, who promptly “assured” them that no drastic measures would be taken against the Jews if they remained loyal and refrained from joining the Ruthene partisans or Tito’s units. Further, the same leaders were misled by the Hungarian governmental leaders, whose public statements and private assurances camouflaged the Sztójay regime’s concurrence with the Final Solution. Several of the most influential members of the cabinet, including Minister of Industry Lajos Szász and Minister of Finance Lajos Reményi-Schneller, “reassured” the Jewish leaders that no one was planning “the extirpation, destruction, or torment of the Jews,” and claimed that the government had not even discussed the question of deportations. While the German and Hungarian officials were busy swaying public opinion with declarations of their noble intentions, they were proceeding with the implementation of the Final Solution in accordance with the master plan worked out earlier. By the time the Jewish leaders awoke to reality, it was too late.

Although aware of what the Nazis had done in the other parts of German-occupied Europe, the top Jewish leadership engaged in tactics that were designed “to win the race with time.” These tactics were based on the quite realistic assumption that the military situation was favoring the Allies and that the liberation of Hungary was relatively imminent, with the Soviet forces already approaching the Carpathians. Yet the Jewish leaders, helpless and abandoned, failed to realize the top priority that the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices attached to the speedy and effective implementation of their genocidal program. It was precisely because the Nazis realized that the Axis would lose the war that they redoubled their effort at winning at least the war against the Jews. Lacking any type of effective defense, the Jewish leaders continued to rely primarily on techniques that had worked quite effectively under the more normal conditions of the preoccupation era. They appealed and submitted petitions to the various governmental and church authorities, desperately trying to save what could still be saved.

REVOLT AGAINST THE COUNCIL

While the Jewish Council leaders became increasingly mired in their own traditional methods, a number of younger Jews, seeing only the Council’s cooperation—if not collaboration—with the authorities, adopted an increasingly more militant position toward them. A confrontation took place around June 10, when the perpetrators, having completed their operations in Zones I and II, turned their attention to Zone III, in Trianon Hungary proper. Speaking on behalf of a delegation consisting of labor servicemen and leftist

and resistance-oriented Jews, Dr. Imre Varga, a young Budapest physician, implored the Council to change course and adopt more suitable methods to prevent total catastrophe. After discussion, however, the Jewish leaders' conclusion was still that, given the vulnerability of Jewry and the passivity of the Hungarians, including those ideologically opposed to both Nazism and the Germans, "Jewish resistance would be a useless sacrifice that would be crushed within minutes and would unimaginably aggravate the situation of the others."⁴ Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, Varga committed suicide the following day.

Following the example of Jewish Councils elsewhere in Nazi-dominated Europe, the Jewish leaders of Hungary tried to save the ever dwindling remnant of Jewry by adopting a rescue-through-labor strategy.⁵ In a lengthy memorandum dated June 7, the Council appealed to the Hungarian government, pleading that the Jews be retained in the country and employed on projects of vital interest to the nation.⁶ The Jewish leaders also tried to persuade the Germans to the same effect. They reminded the Germans of the crucial role the Jews were playing in the economy of Hungary, whose industrial and agricultural production at the time was to a large extent subordinated to the German war effort. This strategy proved as useless in Hungary as it had elsewhere.

In the absence of any meaningful resistance to the Nazis and in view of the passivity, if not open hostility, of the Christian population in general, the Council could not engage in any mass rescue efforts. Nevertheless, individual Council members managed to save a few Jews by personal dealings with some of the leading figures of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*. Particularly effective in this respect was Fülöp Freudiger.⁷

As the anti-Jewish operations proceeded into Zone IV, the Council became frantic. It was around this time that the first batches of postcards began arriving from Auschwitz for delivery to the relatives and friends of many of those deported earlier. Postmarked "Waldsee," a fictitious geographic name, the cryptic messages were often written by the victims just before they were gassed.⁸ Designed by the Nazis to lull the Jews still awaiting deportation into a false sense of security, some of these cards contained the grisly truth encoded in Hebrew. One of these reached Freudiger, who managed to decode it and even challenge Hermann Krumei about its veracity.⁹

In a desperate effort to save the remaining provincial Jews and to forestall the deportation the Jews of Budapest, who were in the process of being relocated into specially designated yellow-star houses, the Jewish Council continued to bombard the government with petitions. In particular, the petition addressed to Sztójay on June 22 contained a detailed account of the horrors that had been perpetrated up to that time, including a complete breakdown of the number of Jews affected in the various ghetto centers, as well as an impassioned plea for mercy.¹⁰

After the relative calm that followed the suspension of the deportations by Horthy early in July, the Council was again confronted by almost impossible tasks in the wake of the *Nyilas* acquisition of power on October 15. A new Council leadership emerged after the three leading figures of the Council—Samu Stern, Ernő Pető, and Károly Wilhelm—went into hiding shortly after the coup, and adopted a more activist stand in view of the new emergency. Particularly effective among the new Council officials were Miksa Domonkos and Ottó Komoly, both exempted Jews, who were engaged not only in the day-to-day functions of the feeding and housing of the Jewish community, but also in the organization of a variety of defense and rescue activities.

The Relief and Rescue Committee

The most controversial rescue operations in Hungary were associated with the activities of the Budapest Relief and Rescue Committee (Vaadah). Nominally headed by Komoly, it was in fact under the leadership of Rudolph (Rezső) Kasztner, a Zionist leader from Kolozsvár who had settled in Budapest after Northern Transylvania was acquired by Hungary in 1940. The Vaadah leadership, which included Joel Brand, represented the major semilegal Zionist organizations in operation at the time. Limited in membership, each of these organizations had its own distinct views and tactics, which inevitably led to internecine conflicts within the Vaadah. These were occasionally exacerbated by sharp personality differences among the leaders.

Established in January 1943, the Vaadah was at first primarily concerned with rescuing Jews from Nazi-dominated Poland and Slovakia and helping refugees already in Hungary. It pursued these objectives with the assistance and directives it received from its sister organization in Istanbul, as well as through contacts with various national and international Jewish organizations in Bratislava and Geneva.¹¹

After the German occupation, the Vaadah became primarily concerned with attempts to rescue Hungarian Jewry. Toward this end its leaders, above all Kasztner and Brand—rivals and friends, of different backgrounds and clashing personalities—exploited their previous contacts with the German counterintelligence figures that each of them had dealt with in earlier illegal operations. They managed to establish contact with the leaders of the SS occupation forces, above all with those concerned with the “solution” of the Jewish question. Additional contacts were initiated by Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel of Bratislava, who brought Dieter Wisliceny, one of the leading members of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*, to the attention of Fülöp Freudiger. Rabbi Weissmandel had been convinced that the halting of the deportations from Slovakia in June 1942 was due to his bribing of Wisliceny. He suggested that Freudiger establish contact with him for the

possible rescue of Hungarian Jewry within the general framework of the so-called Europa Plan.¹² While Freudiger soon established good “working relations” with Wisliceny and exploited them for rescuing a limited number of Jews and eventually for saving himself and his family, it was Kasztner who took over the negotiations with the SS. These negotiations emerged as one of the most controversial chapters of the Holocaust in Hungary.

The decision to rescue Hungarian Jewry through negotiations with the SS was based on perfectly logical assumptions at the time. During the first phase of the occupation, when the Hungarian authorities categorically refused to deal with the Jewish representatives with the explanation that the Jewish question fell under the jurisdiction of the Germans, the Vaadah leaders concluded that their best chance was to deal directly with those who seemed to wield real power in the country.

Kasztner and Brand held their first meeting with the SS on April 5—the day the Jews of Hungary began to wear the telltale Star of David. Kasztner inquired whether the *Sonderkommando* was ready to deal on economic terms with the illegal Vaadah for an alleviation of the anti-Jewish measures. Employing the deception tactics he had used so successfully in Slovakia, Wisliceny hastened to assure the Zionist leaders that while the Jews could not avoid wearing the Star of David and their influence would have to be eliminated in all spheres of life, they would be neither placed into ghettos nor deported, “unless the Hungarians appeal directly to Berlin over the head of the *Sonderkommando*.”¹³ He was, of course, well aware at the time of all the measures the SS had already taken, in concert with their Hungarian accomplices, for the liquidation of Hungarian Jewry.

The SS preferred to negotiate with the Vaadah rather than with the Jewish Council leadership, as they valued the international contacts and foreign currency sources of the Zionists more highly than they did the limited resources of the domestically oriented Council leaders. The *Sonderkommando* leaders very quickly got around to discussing the Vaadah’s proposal. They immediately perceived it as an opportunity not only to assure a smooth, orderly, and revolt-free implementation of the Final Solution, but also to exploit Jewish economic resources before the Hungarian authorities, who also were eager to acquire them, could.¹⁴

Although the Vaadah leaders were familiar with the Nazis’ Final Solution elsewhere in German-occupied Europe, they, like the Council leaders, were trying desperately to win “the race with time”—to delay or minimize the implementation of the program in the well-founded conviction that the military position of the Axis was very precarious and that the Red Army, which was already approaching the Carpathians, would soon liberate Hungary. At the start of their negotiations, they were not yet fully aware that the

German forces directly under the control of the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando* numbered fewer than two hundred; that without the support of the Hungarian instruments of power, the SS could not possibly carry out the ghettoization and deportation program; that Wisliceny, Eichmann, and the other representatives of Himmler's agency had no independent decision-making power over the anti-Jewish drive, and were merely authorized to make relatively minor concessions in order to assure the ultimate success of the Final Solution; and that negotiations with the SS would help lull Jewish masses into a false state of optimism, deterring them from other possible avenues of escape.

As part of the bargain, Wisliceny demanded \$2 million, the same amount as was involved in the Europa Plan initiated by the Slovak Jewish leaders. Of this sum he wanted \$200,000 in pengő within a very short time as proof of the Zionists' goodwill and financial liquidity. Wisliceny insisted that the SS be paid at the black-market rate, which came to approximately 6.5 million pengő. Samu Stern, who must have been persuaded about the feasibility of Kasztner's bargain with the SS, took it upon himself to collect the money, but managed after a few weeks' effort to raise only 5 million pengő. With the remainder covered by the Vaadah's own resources, Kasztner delivered the first installment of 3 million pengő to Hermann Krumei and Otto Hunsche, two of Eichmann's closest associates, along with the plea that the agreement with Wisliceny be upheld. At the time Wisliceny himself was already in Munkács, the headquarters for the drive to clear the Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary; he was directing the campaign for their roundup and internment.

Kasztner delivered the second installment of 2.5 million pengő to Krumei and Hunsche on April 21, when the ghettoization in Gendarmerie District VIII was already in full swing. It should have been clear to Kasztner and the other Jewish leaders that the SS could not, or would not, keep its side of the bargain. To ease the impact of the ghettoization drive on the Jewish leadership, the SS freed a number of prominent Jews and informed Kasztner of a special emigration opportunity provided by the *Sonderkommando*. This offer emerged as a central theme in the further negotiations between the Vaadah and the SS. Krumei informed Kasztner that the Germans were ready to permit the emigration of a certain number of Jews either to America or to any neutral state that was willing to admit them.

The offer, it turned out, was based on a communication that Chaim Barlas, the head of the Istanbul Vaadah, had forwarded to the Budapest Palestine Office on March 16, 1944, informing its head, Miklós (Moshe) Krausz, that a ship in Constanța, Romania, was ready to pick up six hundred holders of Palestine immigration certificates. The Germans became aware of this through Charles Lutz of the Swiss Legation, who had approached

them shortly after the occupation at Krausz's behest to obtain the necessary exit permit. Kasztner, who of course was aware of the Barlas telegram, accepted the offer. Shortly thereafter, Krumey informed him about Berlin's concurrence with the emigration of the six hundred certificate holders and offered to permit an additional one hundred Jews to emigrate, providing he received a per capita payment of one hundred thousand pengő.

Fearing that party factionalism would render the Palestine Office impotent, Kasztner decided to entrust the preparation of the emigration list to Ottó Komoly and Ernő (Zvi) Szilágyi, who were leading figures of the Palestine Office as well as of the Vaadah. This unilateral decision further exacerbated the already venomous relations that existed between Kasztner and Krausz, relations that became ever more strained in the course of time due to clashing personalities and ambitions as well as deep-seated intra-Zionist-party conflicts. While the list was being prepared,¹⁵ the German and Hungarian authorities proceeded with the implementation of their Final Solution in accordance with their preestablished schedule. The Nazis' scheme to deter attention from the ongoing anti-Jewish measures and lull the Jewish masses into submission acquired another dimension toward the end of April. Having the support of his superiors in Berlin, Eichmann came forth with a grandiose new plan that went beyond the scope of Hungarian Jewry and had clearly discernible international political and military overtones.

THE BRAND MISSION

On April 25, Eichmann summoned Vaadah member Joel Brand and offered a deal under which the Nazis would "sell" one million Jews in exchange for certain goods to be obtained outside of Hungary. Toward this end, he was ready to allow Brand to go abroad and establish contact with the representatives of world Jewry and the Allied Powers. Just why Eichmann selected Brand, when there were so many other more suitable persons for this mission, remains shrouded in mystery.

According to Andreas ("Andor") Biss,¹⁶ the SS selected Brand on the recommendation of Andor ("Bandi") Grosz, a shady character who also occasionally used the aliases Andreas or Andre György and Andreas Greiner and was involved in various other contacts. A multifaceted agent in the employ of several intelligence services, including the *Abwehr* (the German Counterintelligence Service headed by Adm. Wilhelm Canaris), Grosz also worked as a paid courier for the Vaadah. Through his Vaadah contacts in Istanbul, one of the major centers for his clandestine activities, Grosz reportedly also got to know a number of American and British intelligence officers. These contacts came in handy after the German occupation, when Grosz shifted his allegiance from the *Abwehr* to the *Sicherheitsdienst*

(Security Service), the Budapest unit of which was under the command of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Otto Klages.¹⁷

Klages and his aide, Fritz Laufer, reportedly asked Grosz to get in touch with his Anglo-American contacts during his next mission to Istanbul and arrange a meeting between a number of high-ranking German security officers, “except Himmler, who is unable to leave Germany,” and an equal number of Anglo-American officers to discuss the possibility of a separate peace between the *Sicherheitsdienst* and the Allies.¹⁸ The Nazis’ selection of Grosz as their intermediary in this quest was a logical one. If the Western Powers had reacted positively, the negotiations would most probably have been continued (without Grosz) at a higher official level; but if the British and Americans rejected the peace feelers, the Nazis could always disavow Grosz as the shady multiple agent that he was.¹⁹

In his discussions with Brand, Eichmann never revealed Grosz’s other mission. As outlined in the “blood for trucks” scheme, the one million Jews in question were not to be allowed to remain in Hungary, since he had promised Endre and his friends that he would help make the country *judenrein*; they were to be delivered, via Germany, after the receipt of the specified goods.²⁰

The Budapest Rescue Committee urgently got in touch with its counterpart in Istanbul to arrange for Brand’s arrival. Accompanied by Krumei, Brand²¹ and Grosz left for Vienna on May 17—two days after the beginning of the mass deportations, which continued unabated. Brand’s mission ended in failure, primarily because the ultimate objectives of the Nazis remained unchanged: the completion of the Final Solution in Hungary and the possible breakup of the anti-Axis Alliance.

The scope of Brand’s mission was brought to the attention of the Western Allies. The British remained adamant in their convictions and informed Washington that, in their view, the German offer was designed to:

- Extract material concessions of war materiel from Allied governments.
- Embroil the United Kingdom and United States governments with the Soviet government, by representing to the latter that the former were negotiating with the enemy.
- Elicit a rejection, which then would be represented as justification for extreme measures against the Jews.

The American Jewish leaders, especially Nahum Goldman,²² tended to support the position of the *Yishuv* (Jewish community of Palestine) leaders and urged President Roosevelt “not to allow this unique and possibly last chance of saving remnants of European Jewry to be lost.” The Jewish Agency urged that the Western Allies support its proposal that the

Germans be contacted “through appropriate channels . . . to discuss rescue and transfer of the largest possible number of Jews,” and be told that the “immediate discontinuance of deportations [is] a preliminary condition to any discussion.”

The British resisted, and also vetoed several other ideas for contacts with the Germans. Fearful that Brand’s return might be construed as the first step in some form of negotiation that might lead them “into very dangerous issues,” the British brought him to Cairo, where Grosz had been kept in a military prison since early June. Both men were interrogated for days on end. At one point, Brand claimed, he was even questioned by Lord Moyne, the minister of state for the Middle East, who reportedly expressed concern over acquiring responsibility for one million Jews in case the Germans kept their side of the bargain.

The Western Allies informed the Soviets about the offer, without providing details, on June 15. The Soviet reply was as swift as it was predictable. The Soviet government did not consider it “expedient or permissible to carry on any conversations whatsoever with the German government on the question touched upon.” While the Americans were inclined to be more flexible, at the end the Western Allies deferred to the Soviet position. Whatever hopes the Jewish leaders still had in connection with the mission dissipated in the evening of July 19, when the BBC brought it to public attention. The following day, the British press picked up the story, stressing that the “monstrous offer” of the Germans to barter Jews for munitions was a loathsome attempt to blackmail and sow suspicion among the Allies.

Brand was freed by the British early in October and allowed to go to Palestine. A bitter and disappointed man, he felt for a long time that the chance to save a million Jews had been missed because of the shortcomings of the Jewish leaders and the passivity and insensitivity of the Allies. However, shortly before his death in 1964, Brand admitted that he had made a “terrible mistake” in passing the Eichmann offer to the British. It had become clear to him, he stated, corroborating the original position of the British, that “Himmler sought to sow suspicion among the Allies as a preparation for his much-desired Nazi-Western coalition against Moscow.”²³

Brand’s failure to return to Hungary as originally planned placed the Budapest Vaadah leaders in a very delicate situation vis-à-vis the *Sonderkommando* as well as the Hungarian authorities. Kasztner and Hansi Brand, Joel’s wife, had the unenviable task of trying to explain to Eichmann the “difficulties” associated with the mission. They also encountered problems with the Hungarian police, who were eager to learn details about the mission and, above all, about the monies and valuables the Vaadah gave to the Germans. They were arrested together with some other members of the Vaadah on May 27; they were released on the sixth day of their incarceration,

following the intervention of the SS. The latter were not only eager to protect the “Reich secrets” shared by the Vaadah leaders, but also anxious to proceed with various other rescue plans then in progress.

The Kasztner Line

Upon his release, Kasztner resumed his negotiations with Eichmann. Since the mass deportations were proceeding at full speed and the resolve of the SS and of their Hungarian accomplices to make Hungary *judenrein* had become increasingly apparent, Kasztner and his colleagues attempted to save at least part of the Jewish community. The negotiations were based on the Germans’ “consolation prize,” revealed by Krumei on April 21, under which six hundred holders of Palestine immigration certificates would be allowed to leave for any neutral country or Allied-controlled territory except Palestine. The offer was confirmed and renewed by Eichmann on May 22.

Some of the specifics were ironed out on June 3, when Eichmann, following the scenario previously worked out with Wisliceny, agreed to permit the “prominent” provincial Jews, constituting half of the Palestine immigration certificate holders, to be brought to Budapest. In a shrewd move, Eichmann promised that he also would allow a special group from Kolozsvár to come to the capital—a bait Kasztner could hardly be expected to resist. The understandable eagerness with which he accepted the opportunity to save his family, friends, and some of the most “deserving” members of the Kolozsvár Jewish community contributed to his downfall shortly after the war. It also raised some agonizing questions. Was Eichmann’s offer one of the devices used to buy off or compensate Kasztner for his “services”? Was it his expression of gratitude for the smooth way Eichmann had been enabled to carry out the anti-Jewish drive, avoiding another Warsaw-type uprising? Did Kasztner fail to see through Eichmann’s intentions? Since the opportunity for informing the Jewish masses, both before and immediately after the beginning of the German occupation, about the realities of the Nazis’ Final Solution was missed and the deportations were already in progress, did Kasztner feel that it was his responsibility to save at least those few Eichmann was willing to spare?

Eventually 388 of the approximately 18,000 Jews in the ghetto of Kolozsvár were brought to Budapest in a special train on June 10.²⁴ They were placed in barracks especially built in the courtyard and gardens of the Wechselmann Institute for the Deaf on Columbus Street, together with many of the other “prominent Jews” brought in from the provinces.²⁵ The Columbus Street Camp, or “privileged camp” as it came to be known, emerged as one of the safest spots for Jews in Hungary, since it was protected by the SS.

The negotiations for the organization and departure of the “Kasztner transport” were conducted in part in conjunction with those for the “laying on ice” of thirty thousand other Jews in Austria.²⁶ One of the most potentially difficult aspects of the exchange for the Vaadah people was the financial one: they had agreed to pay the *Sonderkommando* five million Swiss francs, plus \$1,000 in Swiss francs for each individual to be included in the transport. This problem was “solved” through the decision to sell approximately 150 places to wealthy individuals.²⁷ The valuables collected by the Vaadah were delivered to the SS in three suitcases on June 20. One of those accepting the delivery was *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Kurt Becher, whom Kasztner later identified as the person really responsible for Eichmann’s “concessions.”

Shortly after this encounter, Kasztner developed a mutually beneficial relationship with Becher that lasted until the end of the war. The relationship was particularly valuable since Becher had a direct link to Himmler. However, it ultimately proved fateful for Kasztner: shortly after the war, as will be shown, it emerged as a chief cause for his ruin and tragic death.

The transport, which was originally supposed to consist of the 600 holders of Palestine immigration certificates, left Budapest on June 30 with 1,684 Jews. Among these were nationally known figures such as Nison Kahán, the Zionist leader; György Polgár, the head of MIPI; and Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the fiercely anti-Zionist leader of the Szatmár Hasidic sect, along with many of the family members, relatives, and friends of the Vaadah and Jewish Council leaders, including those of Biss, Brand, Kasztner, Komoly, Offenbach, and Stern. After a few days’ stop at Mosonmagyaróvár, Vienna, and Linz, the transport arrived in Bergen-Belsen on July 8.²⁸ There they were placed in a *Bevorzugtenlager* (camp for privileged inmates) adjacent to the notorious camp that contained a large number of Hungarian Jewish deportees.

The fate of the Bergen-Belsen group became intertwined with Kasztner’s further dealings with Becher. At the urging of Stern, Kasztner first gave Becher \$20,000 (US) to intercede with Himmler for the prevention of the deportations from Budapest and then offered to resume negotiations along the “Europa Plan.”

In accordance with a plan worked out by the Vaadah leaders in conjunction with their counterparts in Istanbul, these negotiations were to be resumed in Portugal with the participation of Kasztner, Becher, and Joseph J. Schwartz, the American Jewish Distribution Committee (AJDC) representative in Europe. However, Kasztner’s arrest by the Hungarian gendarmerie²⁹ and the Western Powers’ refusal to permit their nationals to get involved in any talks with the Germans formally killed this quixotic plan.

The new negotiating partner, selected with the cooperation of Roswell McClelland, the WRB representative, was Saly Mayer, the head of the AJDC in Switzerland. Mayer's freedom of action was limited; his basic task was to drag out the negotiations and make no firm commitments relating to the delivery of goods or money—a position his critics, especially the leaders of the oppressed Jewish communities, could neither understand nor condone. With the negotiations back on track, Kasztner urged Becher to allow the Bergen-Belsen group to proceed to a neutral country. Upon his return from Berlin on August 2, Becher informed Kasztner that Himmler was ready to permit the emigration of Jews from Europe upon delivery of goods and that the first group of five hundred Jews from Bergen-Belsen was authorized to travel to a neutral country.

The first round of negotiations was scheduled to take place in Switzerland on August 21, to coincide with the arrival of the first group.³⁰ Since Mayer could not obtain Swiss visas for Becher and his aides, the negotiations took place on a bridge linking Austria and Switzerland. The negotiations were inconclusive: Becher emphasized the elements of the "blood for trucks" proposal, while Mayer and his colleagues were transparently dilatory in their responses.

The second series of meetings took place at the same spot on September 3–5, but without Becher, who felt humiliated at having to negotiate on a bridge. Although Mayer's position remained basically the same, the Germans got the impression that the Jewish leaders, and possibly their Western mentors, were interested in the Nazi offer and were ready to continue the negotiations. The third meeting was initiated by Mayer, who was under great pressure to do something on behalf of the Slovak Jews, who were at that time being subjected to a new deportation drive for their "involvement" in the national uprising of late August.³¹ In an attempt to induce the SS to halt their operations, Mayer informed Budapest on September 26 that he was ready to open an account for the Nazis in a Swiss bank. The meeting, held three days later, appeared to be more productive than the earlier ones. Becher was informed via Herbert Kettlitz, the SS negotiator, that funds would be placed at his disposal for the purchase of goods in Switzerland on the condition that the deportation of the Slovak Jews be discontinued; the Germans abandon their plan to deport the Jews of Budapest; and the remainder of the Bergen-Belsen group be allowed to leave for Switzerland.

Following the *Nyilas* coup of October 15 that exacerbated the situation of the Budapest Jews, adding to the urgency that existed in Slovakia, Mayer and McClelland were compelled to readjust their tactics, though not their ultimate objective. On October 25, Mayer cabled Kasztner that he was ready for a new round of discussions—this time inside Switzerland. McClelland persuaded the Swiss to grant entry visas for all the negotiators,

including Becher. Upon his arrival on November 2, Becher announced that Himmler had authorized the departure of the remnant of the Bergen-Belsen group.³²

At the St. Gallen meeting of November 4, Becher explained that the Slovak Jews had been “liquidated for military reasons,” and restated the SS position on the exchange of Jewish lives for certain specified goods. The following day, he met McClelland in Zurich. Becher was subjected to great psychological pressure, McClelland and Mayer emphasizing the goodwill he could earn by cooperating in the rescue of Jews in view of the inevitable defeat of the Third Reich. He was also given a basis for believing that his mission was not in vain: Mayer showed him the text of Cordell Hull’s telegram of October 29, in which the American secretary of state had indicated that twenty million Swiss francs would be placed at his (Mayer’s) disposal. (Becher was, of course, never informed either about the conditions attached to the actual expenditure of the funds or about the State Department’s consistent opposition to any transfer of funds for any deals with the Germans.) He was, however, quite content to meet McClelland, whom he described as “the personal representative of President Roosevelt,” as he was convinced that it might lead to deals transcending the Jewish question.

With the Red Army approaching Budapest, Becher became more concerned with his own record than with the acquisition of goods. As a realist, he had no difficulty in seeing through Mayer’s tactics, though, wisely, he never revealed these to Himmler. He began to accumulate good points as a “rescuer” and protector of Jews. Among other things, he intervened with the SS and *Nyilas* authorities to ease and eventually halt the foot marches from Budapest; he persuaded Himmler—at least so he claimed after the war—to suspend the Final Solution and dismantle the gas chambers;³³ and he exerted considerable effort to prevent the destruction of the concentration camps so that their inmates might be safely transferred to Allied hands.³⁴

Pressured by the SS, and especially by Eichmann, who had constantly threatened the Budapest Jewish leaders that he would destroy the remaining Jews, Kasztner pursued his negotiations in Switzerland not only with Mayer but also with other representatives of the major Jewish organizations, including the HIJEF and the *Hehalutz*. These negotiations continued practically until the end of the war.³⁵

Hailed as a savior in Switzerland and elsewhere shortly before and after the end of the war, Kasztner and his family settled in Palestine in 1946. Shortly thereafter, he began to be beset by personal and legal problems. As a journalist and Zionist political figure associated with the Mapai Party, which dominated Israeli politics in the early years after achieving independence, Kasztner became embroiled in a libel suit in the early 1950s revolving around his wartime activities and his postwar affidavit in support of Becher. After a

sensational trial that became interlocked with domestic party politics, Judge Benjamin Halevi of the Jerusalem District Court concluded that “Kasztner sold his soul to the Devil,” by sacrificing the interests of the Jews for the opportunity to save a “select few.” The judgment proved as devastating to Kasztner as it was embarrassing to Mapai and the government, which fell (on June 29, 1954) in its wake. A special panel of the Supreme Court of Israel was convened after Kasztner and the attorney general appealed the verdict; it reached its conclusions almost four years later. The opinions of the five justices were read on January 15–17, 1958. The majority opinion, written by Shimon Agranat, cleared Kasztner of the stigma of “collaboration,” rejecting the findings of Judge Halevi.³⁶ Kasztner, however, did not survive to see his ultimate vindication. He died on March 15, 1957, eleven days after he was shot by an assassin outside his home in Tel Aviv.³⁷

The Krausz Line

In his capacity as executive secretary of the Budapest branch of the Palestine Office, Miklós (Moshe) Krausz had established good and useful relations with the Hungarian authorities involved in security and emigration matters, and with many foreign diplomatic officials. He had had particularly close contacts with the British and, after their departure following Hungary’s entry into the war, with the Swiss, who represented the interests of the Allies in Budapest.

After the German occupation began it was natural for the Jewish leaders to ask Krausz to establish closer links with the Swiss as well as with the representatives of the other neutral powers. A brief encounter with the Gestapo induced him to seek refuge in the Swiss Legation, where he became an employee in charge of emigration matters. In this capacity he was exempted by the Hungarian authorities from wearing the yellow star and enabled to perform many useful services for the community. Taking advantage of his close relations with Consul Charles Lutz, who was primarily concerned with the representation of foreign interests, Krausz involved himself in two actions that proved highly beneficial to Budapest’s Jewry. While at first he was not opposed to Kasztner’s negotiations with the SS, by early June he had become convinced that they would not yield the expected results. On June 8, he so informed the Zionist leaders at a meeting to which he did not invite Kasztner, the latter’s rival. Krausz suggested the possible pursuit of the “Hungarian line” of rescue, based on cooperation with anti-Nazi and anti-Sztójay Hungarian politicians, and the intensification of contacts with the neutral powers.

The initiative for Krausz’s first positive action came from Switzerland. Through a messenger provided by Georges S. Mantello and Chaim

Pozner, on June 19, 1944, Krausz forwarded to Geneva an abbreviated copy of the Vrba-Wetzler Report together with a report on the operations against the Hungarian Jews up to that date. Thanks to the efforts of Mantello, the reports were publicized in the Swiss press, making a great impact in the free world. Shortly thereafter, President Roosevelt, the king of Sweden, the Vatican, and the Swiss government began to pressure Horthy to halt the deportations.³⁸

Krausz's second achievement is interlinked with the first. As a result of foreign pressures, the Hungarian government decided at its meeting of June 26 to approve the emigration of around seventy-eight hundred Jews, of whom seven thousand were sponsored by the Swiss. Krausz and his colleagues interpreted the seven thousand to mean family heads, which in effect meant around forty thousand people. The registration of so many Jews required the expansion of the legation's facilities. A building at 29 Vadász Street (the Glass House),³⁹ not far from the Swiss Legation, was acquired and opened for this purpose on July 24. Enjoying extraterritorial status, it was identified on the outside as "Swiss Legation Representation of Foreign Interests. Department of Emigration." Guided by Krausz and Weisz, the office operated with a staff of a few hundred, mostly young Zionists, who were supplied with Swiss and Hungarian identification papers. As "Swiss employees" they were exempted from wearing the badge, which gave them many privileges.

Within a short while, a Swiss collective passport including approximately twenty-two hundred names was completed and supplied with a Hungarian exit and a Romanian transit visa. The Jewish leaders in Geneva and Istanbul were immediately informed and they, in turn, began a concentrated drive to induce the British and the Americans to make possible the immigration of these Jews into Palestine. Krausz had assumed that the Germans would place no obstacle to the emigration scheme. He was, of course, as unaware as the foreign Jewish leaders and the Western Allies were that Hitler had consented to the emigration of seventy-eight hundred Jews only "if Horthy agreed to deport the remaining Jews of Hungary." Consequently, the office got itself embroiled in a long and often heated controversy over what came to be known as the "Horthy offer" on the emigration of certain categories of Hungarian Jews.⁴⁰

Because of the cover and protection it offered, the Swiss Legation building at 29 Vadász Street became the center of rescue operations by the *Hehalutz* youth. The Young Pioneers used the building for several illegal activities, including the production and distribution of a variety of forged documents, the rescue of their comrades from internment camps, and the transfer of Jews into neighboring countries—activities that were not always condoned by the official leaders of the building.⁴¹

Komoly's Line

As a captain decorated for heroism in World War I, Ottó Komoly was exempted from the anti-Jewish laws and retained his freedom of movement. An engineer by profession, Komoly was the official head of the Hungarian Zionist Association and of the Vaadah. He assumed a more active role after the departure of the Kasztner transport, which he helped organize, and especially after Horthy had halted the deportations early in July. By his background and range of contacts, Komoly was eminently suited to pursue the Hungarian line of rescue originally advocated by Krausz. His temperament and prestige made him the natural and logical choice for dealing with leading Hungarian figures, many of whom were not only anti-Nazi but also anti-German. Some of them, including Miklós Horthy Jr., Miklós Mester,⁴² and Rev. Albert Bereczky, were directly or indirectly associated with the emerging resistance movement.

Komoly played a pivotal role in preventing the concentration of the Budapest Jews demanded by the Germans and their Hungarian supporters in July and August. During this same time, when the threat of deportation continued to hang over the head of the Jews, supplies were dwindling, and the rapidly approaching front entailed many dangers, Komoly's primary concern became the protection of Jewish children. With the cooperation of Friedrich Born, the delegate of the International Red Cross (IRC) in Hungary, Komoly was influential in establishing early in September a special department (Department A) of the IRC for this purpose.⁴³ Under his leadership, the department bought or rented a number of buildings to house the children and store supplies.

The value of the children's homes became apparent during the *Nyilas* era, when they emerged as a source of refuge for thousands of children, and for adults too.⁴⁴ After Komoly was co-opted into the Jewish Council, the work of Department A was greatly expanded and closely coordinated with that of the Council in the administration and supplying of a large number of homes for children and orphans, hospitals, and public kitchens. During the *Nyilas* era many of the buildings protected by the IRC were used for underground activities by young *Halutzim*, who enjoyed virtual immunity as employees of Department A.⁴⁵

Resistance Efforts

While the official leaders of Hungarian Jewry identified with the Central Jewish Council and the Vaadah pursued their efforts to safeguard the interests of the Jews as they perceived them, a number of individuals associated with various underground groups not only deplored those efforts as basically

useless, but also advocated the adoption of more radical measures. Their views ranged from the advocacy of appeals to Christians to a call for passive or even active resistance. While in retrospect those associated with the underground had a more accurate perception of the intentions of the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices, in the context of the Nazi era it is somewhat unfair to compare their activities with those of the Council or of the Vaadah. The latter were openly identified as established leaders—whether designated, elected, or self-appointed—and had the dual responsibility of carrying out the tasks imposed by a relentless enemy and fulfilling their obligations, however meagerly, to a constantly dwindling community. Those associated with the resistance position, on the other hand, had no such explicit responsibilities and enjoyed a modicum of security by virtue of their cover of anonymity.

Jewish resistance in Hungary consisted mostly of individual and collective rescue actions. In terms of armed rebellion, sabotage, or subversion, the Jewish record of resistance is not fundamentally different from those of the minuscule leftist and progressive forces of Hungary. The odds were totally against the Jews: most of the men of military age were serving in the labor service companies; unaware of the Final Solution, the Jews were herded into ghettos that were hermetically isolated from each other and from the rest of the world; the Christians, with a few notable exceptions, were basically passive, if not openly hostile; the progressive forces were fundamentally ineffective and not particularly interested in saving Jews qua Jews. These odds were compounded in the countryside by the speed with which the Jewish communities were liquidated.

The failure of the national Jewish leaders to share the secret of the Final Solution with the Jewish and non-Jewish masses—a failure basically motivated by their conviction that what happened in Poland could not possibly happen in a civilized Hungary led by a generally anti-Nazi conservative-aristocratic elite with which they had close and mutually advantageous relations—was revealed in all its tragic consequences after the German occupation.⁴⁶ It was only after the mass deportations were well under way, having begun in Trianon Hungary early in June, that an attempt was made to overcome this mistake. The initiative was undertaken by a handful of intellectuals, consisting mostly of middle-echelon officials of the Jewish Council, shortly after a dramatic confrontation between the Council leaders and a delegation of labor servicemen and leftist and resistance-oriented Jews (as described previously in this chapter). Over the objections of the Council, they prepared and mimeographed an appeal to Hungarian Christian society in which they revealed the horrors of the anti-Jewish measures and beseeched their fellow citizens to come to their rescue.⁴⁷ The emotional tone of the appeal was geared to the presumed psychological makeup and

receptiveness of the Hungarian intelligentsia. It ended with the following dramatic paragraph:

But if our beseeching voice, appealing for our bare lives, is in vain, then we only request the Hungarian nation to put an end to our suffering here at home before the deportation with its accompanying horrors and cruelties, so that we can at least be buried in the land of our birth.⁴⁸

The attempt to enlighten the Hungarian intelligentsia and to arouse Hungarian public opinion was basically a failure, but this was not the only initiative: an effort was made also to arm the labor servicemen, near the end of the Lakatos era.

In September–October 1944, at a time when the country was planning to extricate itself from the Axis alliance, a plan was worked out for the possible arming of the labor servicemen and for their participation in a general uprising of the anti-Nazi opposition.⁴⁹

The provision of arms to the labor servicemen was scheduled to begin on October 15. The plans and all the hopes built on them collapsed, however, when the regent, to the surprise of the leaders of the Hungarian Front, announced that very day—three days earlier than originally planned—Hungary's decision to sue for an armistice. Instead of bringing liberation, Horthy's ill-fated decision led to the *Nyilas* coup and the beginning of the darkest chapter in the history of the Budapest Jews.⁵⁰ Within a few hours of the coup, a few labor servicemen already in possession of arms engaged the *Nyilas* in combat in two adjacent areas of the capital. The tragic result was inevitable: with the support of the German forces, the *Nyilas* routed them. They later used this incident of Jewish resistance as an excuse to unleash their terror against the Jews.

A more effective rescue-oriented resistance movement, which was particularly active during the *Nyilas* era, was composed of Young Zionist Pioneers (*Halutzim*). Numbering only a few hundred, the *Halutzim* took a much more militant position toward the rescue of Jews than the Jewish Council and the Vaadah leaders ever dared think of. The Pioneers never engaged in open combat and they failed to sabotage any of the many rail lines leading to Auschwitz (they did not have this kind of power), but their heroic rescue operations clearly can be classified as acts of resistance.

The movement was under the leadership of young Zionists belonging primarily to the leftist *Hashomer Hatzair* and the centrist *Dror* groups. The dominant grouping in the movement was composed primarily of young Polish and Slovak refugees who had come to Hungary between 1942 and 1944. After the onset of the German occupation, the movement

acquired special vitality through the active participation of a large number of Hungarian *Halutzim*.

The nature and scope of the Pioneers' activities varied with the changing situation. Before the occupation, they were primarily engaged in the "legalization" of refugees and the rescue of Jews from Polish, Slovak, and other camps. In this they worked closely, though not always harmoniously, with the Vaadah and the Palestine Office.

After the occupation began, the Pioneers were particularly concerned with rescuing their comrades from the various provincial ghettos and with transferring as many people as possible into neighboring Romania and Slovakia, where the situation at the time was more tolerable, and to Tito-controlled areas in Yugoslavia. They were also involved in the mass production and distribution of a variety of false documents, including Aryan papers and protective passes (*Schutzpässe*) issued by representatives of the neutral states and the Vatican. Perhaps the most heroic actions undertaken by the Pioneers involved the rescue of Jews from the hands of the *Nyilas*. In these attempts, they showed up dressed in the uniform of the SS, the *Nyilas*, or one of the other Hungarian military, paramilitary, and auxiliary forces, and in possession of guns and automatic weapons, as well as the appropriate orders and documents. They rescued Jews from the locked yellow-star buildings, the internment camps, and the Óbuda Brickyard; they even managed to snatch condemned Jews from prisons and from columns being driven by the *Nyilas* gangs to execution along the banks of the Danube.

In pursuit of their objectives, the Pioneers maintained contact with the small, loosely organized non-Jewish resistance organizations. The Pioneers provided these organizations with whatever identification papers they requested; they, in turn, provided the *Halutzim* with some arms and occasional shelter.⁵¹

One of the more ambitious plans called for the Jewish resistance forces to be organized, trained, and led by the Palestinian parachutists who were dropped into partisan-controlled territory in Yugoslavia early in 1944. One of these was the legendary Hannah Szenes, who was arrested shortly after she crossed the Hungarian border early in June. The other two—Joel Nussbecher (Palgi) and Peretz (Ferenc) Goldstein—managed to get to Budapest on June 20, but their traces were picked up by the political police and they were arrested shortly thereafter.⁵² The mission turned into a nightmare not only for the parachutists but also for the Vaadah leaders—their contacts—who were drawn into an "espionage" affair at the very time they were engaged in the "Europa Plan" discussions with the *Sonderkommando*. Hannah Szenes was executed on November 7 after a mock trial by a *Nyilas* court; Goldstein was deported to Auschwitz, where he perished;

and Nussbecher was freed by the *Halutzim* with the aid of the non-Jewish underground and eventually settled in Israel.

Though their mission was a failure, the bravery of the parachutists had a positive influence on many of the Zionist Pioneers and unaffiliated younger Jewish intellectuals who had become disillusioned with the leadership and policies of both the Jewish Council and the Vaadah. The failures of these organizations, like the basic shortcomings of the Pioneers, were to a large extent due to the extremely hostile climate in which they operated and to the passivity of the Christian world around them.

The Christians: Attitudes and Reactions

The illusions of the Hungarian Jews about their chances of survival while the neighboring Jewish communities were being systematically destroyed were shattered almost immediately after the German occupation. The major pillars upon which these Jewish illusions were based collapsed following the establishment of the Sztójay government. The conservative-aristocratic ruling faction of the Hungarian Right on which the Jews counted so heavily for their continued protection was eliminated; the leftist and progressive opposition whom they expected would take a stand against the Nazis at that late hour of the war remained an impotent shell; the Christian churches, which openly supported many of the anti-Jewish measures of the preoccupation era, were primarily interested in protecting the interests of converts; and the Christian neighbors with whom they thought they had shared a common destiny for so many centuries remained basically passive. This was especially true in the countryside, where the Jewish communities were liquidated at lightning speed.

THE CHRISTIAN MASSES

The generally passive, if not openly hostile, attitude of the Christian population was shaped by many factors. Subjected for more than two decades to a vicious antisemitic propaganda campaign, a large percentage of the population had developed a distorted picture of the Jews' historical role in Hungary. In the course of time, many Christians came to accept the ultra-rightist image of the Jews and blamed them for all the failures and shortcomings of the country. As did the Germans, they viewed the Jews both as harbingers of Communism and as champions of plutocratic capitalism. The anti-Jewish bias of the population was reinforced by the vicious campaign of the German-financed ultra-rightist press, the constant preoccupation of the state radio stations with the Jewish question, the agitation of the representatives of the extremist parties and movements, and the frequent policy declarations of antisemitic parliamentarians.

As a result, Hungarian public opinion was well prepared for the avalanche of ever harsher anti-Jewish decrees that were adopted almost immediately after the German occupation. In fact, many segments of the Christian population looked forward to a number of the anti-Jewish measures. Those with more rapacious instincts applauded even the most drastic measures, including the deportation, hoping to take over the homes, professional offices, and businesses of Jews.

A segment of the population viewed the measures against the Jews with helpless disgust, but these people, feeling helpless to prevent them, usually internalized their indignation. A few officials, including some prefects, had the courage to protest the measures by resigning from their positions. Overall, though, the Christian population at large was passive. Their passivity was not necessarily because of a lack of concern for their Jewish neighbors; quite often, it resulted from fear inspired by the government. As part of the anti-Jewish drive, non-Jews were threatened with heavy fines and penalties, including internment, for hiding or protecting Jews or their property. Furthermore, the Christian population at large, like the Jewish masses, had no inkling about the ultimate scope of the Final Solution.

A rather large segment of the Christian population openly collaborated with the Nazis. Many in this category were mere opportunists eager to satisfy their rapacious instincts; others embraced the cause of their Nazi allies for ideological or “patriotic” reasons. The identification of the anti-Jewish measures with the national interests of the country was one of the frequent propaganda themes exploited by the architects of the program to rid Hungary of Jews. In his appeal of April 15, 1944, for example, László Báky declared:

It is in the national interest that the anti-Jewish decrees be carried out one hundred percent. I therefore request every honest Hungarian's cooperation in the implementation of the decrees. Those who become aware that the decrees issued in connection with the Jewish question are being violated, circumvented, or evaded must, as their patriotic responsibility, report these to the nearest security (gendarmérie, police) organ.⁵³

The response of the Hungarians was quite enthusiastic. During the occupation, the Hungarian and German authorities received from thirty thousand to thirty-five thousand denunciations of Jews in all parts of the country. The collaborative instincts of this group of Hungarians were boosted by the Führer, who suggested that those engaged in anti-Jewish activities be rewarded with confiscated Jewish capital. The enthusiasm and extent to which many of the Hungarians responded to the appeals for “cooperation”

astonished even the Germans. The Germans were, of course, even more impressed with the collaboration of the Hungarian authorities, who placed the instruments of state power at their disposal—the police, gendarmerie, and civil service, without which the Final Solution could not have been carried out.⁵⁴

Only a comparatively small number of Christians dared publicly to criticize the inhumanity of the measures enacted against the Jewish neighbors with whom they had lived in harmony and friendship for many generations. Yet there were also a few who risked their freedom, and some even their lives, by hiding Jews or bringing food to their former neighbors, friends, or employers in the ghettos and entrainment centers.⁵⁵ In some cases these Christians were beaten savagely, and a few were actually forced to join the Jews on the journey to Auschwitz.

The Christian Churches and Their Leaders

The climate of antisemitism that determined the passivity and often the open hostility of large segments of Hungarians was greatly fostered by the attitude of the Christian churches toward the Jews and the Jewish question. Major pillars of the reactionary regimes both before and after World War I, the Christian churches were in the forefront of the national-Christian campaigns that aimed not only to retain the antiquated semifeudalistic social order, but also to protect the country from the “radical” ideas and “damaging influence” of the Jews.

Having opposed the liberal policies of the pre–World War I governments, the Christian churches embraced the counterrevolutionary forces that triumphed after the disintegration of the Dual Monarchy. Through their press organs and political parties and movements, the churches legitimized the extremist policies of the Right, including those advocated by the numerous “patriotic” associations. Perhaps the most disastrous position taken by the leaders of the Christian churches came after the Nazis’ acquisition of power in Germany, and especially after the *Anschluss*. Though these leaders were fully aware of the dangers Nazism posed to the churches and organized religion, they fully supported, and occasionally even spearheaded, policies aimed at the reacquisition of the lost Hungarian territories with the aid of the Third Reich. Fully embracing the cause of revisionism, they also provided a fertile ground for antisemitic propaganda by condoning the equation of Jews with Bolshevism and of National Socialism with Christianity.

The successful molding of public opinion by years of vicious antisemitic propaganda made the Christian churches’ support of the major anti-Jewish laws both logical and praiseworthy. The leaders of the Christian churches supported the adoption of the first two major anti-Jewish laws,

albeit with decreasing enthusiasm.⁵⁶ Their primary concern, both before and after Hungary's entry into the war in June 1941, was the welfare of converts and Christian Magyars of Jewish origin. This preoccupation with the converts was also characteristic of their position during the German occupation.

The record of the Christian church leaders during the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry is mixed. Although they abhorred the methods used by the Nazis and visibly sympathized with the suffering Jews, they undertook no effective measures to counteract the designs of the dejewification squads. Their activities may with generosity be classified as too little and too late. Dignitaries of the various Christian denominations usually acted singly and on their own when they contacted the leaders of the government in attempts to alleviate at least the means used in "solving" the Jewish question.

Although the national leaders of the Christian churches occasionally considered the desirability of taking a public stand, at no time did they actually arouse public opinion against the injustices being committed against the Jews. The failure of Jusztinián Cardinal Serédi to speak out in public had a negative influence on the other clergymen, and their common silence emboldened the enemies and discouraged the potential rescuers of Jewry.⁵⁷ Although the heads of both the Catholic and Protestant churches prepared pastoral letters to be read in their churches, these were withdrawn or confiscated on a variety of excuses. The few bishops who dared to broach the Jewish persecutions in their sermons or who formally protested against them could not stem the tide, as their messages reached only limited audiences. These few did everything in their power to induce the local authorities to alleviate the plight of the Jews. They also often contacted their church superiors and selected officials of the government. Again, with a few exceptions, their approach was private.⁵⁸

Only three of the bishops spoke out in public. Baron Vilmos Apor, the bishop of Győr, raised the issue of the anti-Jewish measures in his Whitsunday sermon. Endre Hamvas, the bishop of Csanád, speaking at the ordination ceremony for new priests in the Szeged cathedral on June 25, when the Jews of the district were being deported, eloquently condemned the measures that were then enacted in the name of Christianity. Perhaps the most courageous public stand was taken by Bishop Áron Márton, whose diocese covered all of Transylvania and who frequently preached in Kolozsvár although his bishopric had its seat in Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár), the Romanian-held part of the region. Speaking in St. Michael's Church of Kolozsvár on May 18, when the Jews of the surrounding area were still in the local ghetto, he movingly condemned the measures adopted against the Jews—in contrast to his Protestant counterparts in the area, who kept silent.⁵⁹

The tactics of the top church leaders continued basically unchanged during the *Nyilas* era as well. They continued to rely primarily on discreet interventions with Ferenc Szálasi and other *Nyilas* leaders without taking a public stand. The heads of the Protestant denominations were somewhat more aggressive in their approaches toward alleviating the plight of the Jews. Cardinal Serédi, who was already very ill at the time, was reluctant to join his Protestant colleagues in several of the proposed measures not only because of his illness, but also because of his conviction that they would prove useless.⁶⁰

THE CONVERTS' ORGANIZATIONS

While the church leaders continued to grapple over tactics and approaches, a number of clergymen were actively involved in saving Jewish lives. By far the most active among these were those associated with the ecclesiastical institutions of converts: the Holy Cross Society and the Good Shepherd Mission. Devoted to the protection and advancement of the interests of Jews converted to Catholicism, the Holy Cross Society, as we already have seen, was established in 1939 and was under the leadership of József Cavallier. Before the German occupation, it was primarily concerned with aiding the refugees and converts who were affected by the major anti-Jewish laws. It cooperated in this regard with the leading Jewish welfare organizations. After the occupation began, it was heavily involved in protecting converts from the anti-Jewish measures and in providing aid and comfort to many of the refugees in the country, irrespective of their religious background. The society worked closely with the Catholic hierarchy as well as with the papal nuncio. It played a leading role in the establishment of the Association of the Christian Jews of Hungary, which took over the Jewish Council's jurisdiction over the converts. The society's effectiveness was brought to an end in November 1944, following a number of *Nyilas* raids on its offices. On November 17, Cavallier himself was shot and wounded and taken away by the *Nyilas* together with approximately 150 Jews who were applying for papal protective passes. Most of the society's activities were absorbed at this time by the Good Shepherd Mission.

The cooperation between the society and the Good Shepherd Mission, the association of Jews converted to Protestantism, was the most visible aspect of the Christian churches' involvement in the plight of the Jews. Established late in 1942, the mission, as we have already seen, was under the leadership of Rev. József Éliás.⁶¹ Its functions were basically analogous to those of the Holy Cross Society. During the Sztójay era, the mission was perhaps the more active of the two in providing opportunities for conversions—real or merely formal—and in distributing protective passes

issued by the legations of the neutral powers. After the *Nyilas* coup, it became particularly involved in the rescue of Jewish children. In this sphere an especially important role was played by Rev. Gábor Sztehló, who was assigned to the Mission in May 1944 by Bishop Sándor Raffay, the head of the Evangelical Church. The mission sheltered and fed approximately fifteen hundred children in thirty-two homes, with the help and cooperation of the International Red Cross. The IRC established for the mission a special department (Department B), which under the leadership of Sztehló worked closely with Komoly's Department A. Although some of the children were forced into the ghetto after its establishment early in December 1944, many of them were smuggled back with the connivance of Sztehló⁶² and the IRC.

During the relatively short life of the ghetto, both the society and the mission were actively involved in serving the spiritual needs of the converts among them. They also provided solace and comfort for many of the downtrodden Jews.⁶³ In addition to the Jews who were saved or aided by the clergymen associated with the society and the mission, a few hundred Jewish children and adults were rescued by nuns, monks, ministers, and priests affiliated with a variety of Christian religious orders. These Jews were hidden, fed, and protected in the convents, monasteries, missions, schools, and institutes of the various denominations.⁶⁴ Those associated with these religious communities often acted in cooperation with lay Christians who had volunteered to help the persecuted Jews. Some acted with great bravery, exposing themselves to danger and even deportation. A few of these perished in Auschwitz together with the Jews they had tried to save.⁶⁵

Hungarian Resistance

Unfortunately, the heroism of the men and women involved in individual rescue activities could not compensate for the absence of collective resistance against the Nazis or in support of the beleaguered and persecuted Jews. The Hungarian resistance movement, which came to life only months after the beginning of the German occupation, was weak and ineffective and directed its energies primarily toward the extrication of Hungary from the war. The representatives of the various parties and movements that constituted the Hungarian Front (*Magyar Front*), like those associated with the other, lesser known and equally ineffective, anti-Nazi groups, were more concerned with the contours of the new order to be established and the composition of the democratic unity government to be formed than with the rescue of Jews.

Though postwar Communist Hungarian historiography would have us believe that resistance, especially in 1944–45, was both widespread and effective, it was basically neither. The true nature of the resistance movement in Hungary can more accurately be gauged by how it impressed Edmund

Veesenmayer. In a statement issued after the war, this former plenipotentiary of Hitler's declared: "A day in Yugoslavia was more dangerous than a year in Hungary."⁶⁶ Indeed, the postwar inflation of the number and accomplishments of "heroes" and "resistance fighters" notwithstanding, the fact remains that the Germans succeeded in occupying the country and subsequently, with their enthusiastic Hungarian accomplices, implementing the anti-Jewish measures without encountering any resistance anywhere. As Gyula Kádár, the former head of the Hungarian Military Intelligence Service, put it: "If [Hungary] had had as many 'resistance fighters' before March 19, 1944, as it had in May 1945 and later, Hitler would not have risked the occupation of the country because he would have been afraid of paralysis in the production and deliveries of goods and the necessity of resorting to arms."⁶⁷

11 ATTITUDES AND REACTIONS: INTERNATIONAL

Although aware of the Nazis' Final Solution program since the summer of 1942, if not earlier, the leaders of the free world, including those of the Vatican and the International Red Cross (IRC), attached no particular urgency to the rescuing of Jews. With a few exceptions, they did not even speak up, let alone act, on behalf of the Jews until late June 1944. They rationalized their silence and inaction in terms of their particular national and institutional interests. The Allies, while concerned, were reluctant to liberalize their immigration policies or to allow the Jewish tragedy to affect their war strategy. They also refused to divert resources from their war effort, arguing—not without merit—that the quickest possible defeat of Nazi Germany was also in the best interests of the oppressed Jews. The neutral countries, some of which originally sympathized with the Axis and, as we know in retrospect, even benefited from their dealings with Nazi Germany, refused to engage in any operations that might jeopardize their neutrality or burden their societies with alien elements. The Vatican was careful to protect its special position and the worldwide interests of the Roman Catholic Church. The IRC believed that intervention on behalf of the civilian persecutees—the Jews—not only was beyond its scope but would actually jeopardize its traditional activities in support of prisoners of war. Two pro-Axis states, Slovakia and Romania, immediate neighbors and enemies of Hungary, emerged as unofficial havens for a limited number of Jews after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944.

It was only after the details of the deportations from Hungary and of the realities of Auschwitz were disclosed in the Swiss press late in June 1944 that the world began to take a relatively more active interest in the plight of the Jews. However, by this time, a few weeks after D-Day, much of Europe, including the Hungarian countryside, already was *judenrein*.

The Allies

THE WESTERN ALLIES

While united in the war against the Axis, Great Britain and the United States also had divergent interests in many parts of the world. These were reflected in their attitude toward the persecuted Jews: although both Western

Powers abhorred the cruel and immoral racial policies of the Third Reich and occasionally publicly condemned them, they were often at odds as to how best to alleviate the plight of the Jews. Britain was as opposed to opening the gates of Palestine as the United States was to liberalizing its own immigration policies.¹

As a result of internal pressures, the American administration decided early in 1944 to assume a more active role on behalf of the victims of Nazism. Under Executive Order 9417, issued on January 22, 1944, President Roosevelt brought about the establishment of the War Refugee Board (WRB). The order stipulated that it was the policy of the American government "to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death or otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war." The WRB faced its first major test in the case of Hungary.

The WRB, which operated under the leadership of John W. Pehle, the head of Foreign Funds Control in the Treasury Department, expressed its concern for the treatment of the Jews of Hungary even before the German occupation of March 19, 1944. Its deeper involvement took place after the occupation, but its good intentions notwithstanding, the WRB proved no match for the German and Hungarian Nazis bent on the quickest possible implementation of the Final Solution. The Western Powers were alerted about the dangers confronting Hungarian Jewry on March 21. In a telegram addressed to the heads of the World Jewish Congress units in these countries, Gerhart Riegner, the congress's representative in Switzerland, urged the free world repeatedly to warn the Hungarians not to allow the extermination of the Jews and to impress upon them the fact that their attitude toward the Jews would be one of the most important tests of behavior during the postwar peace settlements.

President Roosevelt complied three days later. In a statement issued that day, he not only condemned the Nazis and their allies for the heinous crimes committed in the course of the war, but also warned the Hungarians against allowing themselves to get involved in any act of savagery against the Jews. That same day, Secretary of State Cordell Hull urged the Hungarians to resist the Germans, implying that only thus could Hungary "hope to regain the respect and friendship of free nations and demonstrate its right to independence."

Great Britain, in the meantime, clung to its White Paper policies, which restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. Nevertheless, eager not to appear totally callous, the British followed the American lead. Anthony Eden (later Lord Avon) associated himself with the American president. In his statement of March 30, the British foreign secretary emphasized that the

“persecution of the Jews has in particular been of unexampled horror and intensity,” and repeated the determination of the Allies to bring to justice all those guilty of such crimes.

The WRB coupled the frequent issuance of similar warnings with a series of rescue-related activities. These turned out to be too little and too late for the provincial Jews, who were being annihilated at lightning speed. However, they were helpful to the Jews of Budapest, who were spared by Horthy’s suspension of the deportations early in July 1944.

Shortly after the beginning of the occupation, the WRB explored, among other measures, the possibility of providing escape routes via partisan-held Yugoslav territories; urged the Turks to provide transit visas for Jews holding Palestine immigration certificates; demanded that Jews holding documents issued by states in the Western Hemisphere be accorded all rights and privileges of such nationals; and requested that the IRC “send effective representation to Hungary in order to protect the well-being of groups facing persecution.” A few days after it received the first reports about the beginning of the mass deportations on May 15, the WRB instructed the American missions in Ankara, Bern, Lisbon, Madrid, and Stockholm to prevail upon the governments of the neutral states, “in the interest of most elementary humanity to take immediate steps to increase to the largest possible extent the number of . . . diplomatic and consular personnel in Hungary and to distribute them as widely as possible throughout the country.”²

The WRB’s expectations that the presence of foreign observers might curtail the drive of the deJewifiers proved unfounded. Aside from the failure of the neutral countries and institutions—like the Vatican and the IRC—to cooperate fully in the rescue effort recommended by the WRB, the few special delegates who were assigned for this purpose, including Raoul Wallenberg, arrived too late as far as the provincial Jews were concerned. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the WRB was limited by more than the neutral states’ reluctance to become actively involved in the rescue of Jews, as there were also the restrictions resulting from its general policy framework: it could undertake no measures that might be construed as inconsistent “with the successful prosecution of the war” or as violating British and American immigration policies. These policies, motivated by national interest, were clearly reflected in the Allies’ attitude and reaction to Brand’s “blood for trucks” mission, to the demands for the bombing of Auschwitz, and to the so-called Horthy offer to permit the emigration of a limited number of Jews.

While the Western Powers’ conclusion that Brand’s mission³ was primarily a sinister attempt by the Nazis to split the Allies (a conclusion that Brand also reached shortly before his death in 1964) was quite rational, their failure to heed the appeals of Jewish leaders, both in the free and the

Nazi-occupied world, to bomb the extermination facilities at Auschwitz and the rail lines leading to the camp in order to save lives reflected their basic reluctance to help Jews qua Jews. The stated reason for their refusal was that the suggested air operations were “impracticable,” counterproductive because they involved the diversion of aircraft needed for the success of military operations, technically unfeasible, or difficult in the absence of accurate information on the location of the camps. These were basically spurious arguments, which aimed to camouflage the Allies’ resolve not to be deterred by considerations of rescue or morality in the successful prosecution of the war and their national interests.⁴

The Western Powers’ reaction to Horthy’s offer to permit the emigration of a number of Hungarian Jews was somewhat more positive in tone, but ultimately also totally unproductive. The offer originated with the Hungarian government’s acceptance on June 26 of the Swiss and Swedish proposal to permit seventy-eight hundred Jews holding immigration certificates to Palestine, Sweden, and elsewhere to leave the country.⁵ This decision was communicated to all interested parties. The Germans were informed about it via Edmund Veesenmayer on July 8—one day after Horthy had decided to halt the deportations.

Confronted with this reality, Hitler, heeding the advice of his plenipotentiary in Hungary and of Joachim von Ribbentrop, expressed his readiness to cooperate in the emigration scheme, “provided the Hungarians allow the speedy resumption of the deportation of the remaining Jews.”⁶ Even this condition was merely a ploy: Himmler and Eichmann were committed to making Hungary totally *judenrein*. Himmler was resolved under no circumstances to permit the emigration of these Jews to Palestine, since, as we have seen, he considered them to be “without exception, biologically valuable material.” Eichmann, moreover, was dedicated to completing the Final Solution in Hungary, come what may. He was ready, if necessary, “to seek a new decision from the Führer,” but he was confident that he would not have to resort to this ultimate step since, as Veesenmayer reported, he intended to “carry out the expected expulsion of the Jews from Budapest, once it is proceeded with, with the utmost suddenness and with such speed that they will be driven out before anyone has had a chance to obtain a travel document or visa to a foreign country.”⁷

Neither the Jewish leaders nor the Allies were, of course, aware of Hitler’s conditions or Eichmann’s plans. Miklós (Moshe) Krausz, the head of the Palestine Office, with the full cooperation of Charles Lutz, the Swiss Consul in Budapest, proceeded with the preparation of collective passports and the acquisition of exit permits for the seven thousand Jews “in possession of Palestine immigration certificates.”⁸ The British and the American governments were informed about this scheme on July 18 and 19, respectively.

The Jewish leaders of the free world, who were simultaneously informed, began a direct and indirect pressure campaign to induce the Western Powers to cooperate. Moshe Shertok (a leading figure of the Jewish Agency and later prime minister of Israel), among others, asked the Foreign Office (on July 20) to take "immediate action to explore and take advantage of the offer." A similar plea was advanced to the leaders of the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees (IGC), the agency that represented the one positive outcome of the Evian Conference of 1938. The Foreign Office was also approached by Eleanor F. Rathbone (on July 31) in her dual capacity as member of the House of Commons and as head of the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror.

The British were concerned about the possibility of large numbers of Jews suddenly arriving in Allied-held territories, especially Palestine.⁹ On August 3, the issue was taken up by the War Cabinet, which was confronted with the dilemma of rejecting the offer and thereby arousing hostile public opinion or accepting it at the risk of civil war in Palestine. The outcome was that Britain was willing to admit into Palestine, within the framework of the White Paper, a limited number of Jews who held genuine immigration certificates.

The United States adopted a more positive tone, possibly because the Hungarian emigration scheme involved Palestine, and the United States was in the midst of a presidential election. While it showed no willingness to liberalize its own immigration laws, the United States argued that the Horthy offer "must be accepted as quickly as possible in order to save the largest number of lives possible." The Western Allies wrangled for about three weeks over the response to be given to Hungary. For tactical reasons they finally decided to respond in a positive fashion, but without assuming any specific commitments. Presumably this decision was based on the realization that the emigration scheme could not possibly be implemented, given the status and location of Hungary and the expected swift and inevitable defeat of the Axis. The response was incorporated in their joint statement of August 17, which stated, among other things, that:

Despite the heavy difficulties and responsibilities involved, [the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States] have accepted the offer of the Hungarian Government for the release of Jews and will make arrangements for the care of such Jews leaving Hungary who reach neutral or United Nations territory, and also that they will find temporary havens of refuge where such people may live in safety. Notification of these assurances is being given to the governments of neutral countries who are being requested to permit the entry of Jews who reach their frontiers from Hungary. The Governments of the United Kingdom and the United

States emphasize that, in accepting the offer which has been made, they do not in any way condone the action of the Hungarian Government in forcing the emigration of Jews as an alternative to persecution and death.¹⁰

Although discussions about the details of implementing the emigration scheme began immediately after the issuance of the statement, no one showed a particular sense of urgency. The British hastened to inform their Palestinian representatives and friends that they intended that there be no departure from existing Palestine immigration policy. The IGC itself became bogged down in questions of financing, accommodation, and transportation. The neutral countries and the smaller Allies were perplexed over the failure of the greater powers to absorb larger numbers of refugees.¹¹

The dilatory manner in which the Western Allies treated the issue of rescue made the Horthy offer a moot question. Their anxiety, which in retrospect proved unfounded in view of the Nazis' position on the subject, was considerably relieved by the rapid advance of the Red Army and Romania's withdrawal from the Axis on August 23, making the suggested emigration via Romania and Bulgaria all but impossible.¹²

THE USSR

A leading member of the Grand Alliance, the Soviet Union was not particularly involved—or interested—in the political-diplomatic campaigns for the rescue of Hungarian Jewry. It was involved in a gigantic military struggle for survival and would permit no humanitarian considerations to interfere with its war effort. It was primarily in consequence of this Soviet war effort that the Jews of Budapest and thousands of Jews in labor service and concentration camps were saved.

While the Soviet government issued relatively frequent warnings to the Nazis and their accomplices about possible retribution for war crimes—often in response to pressure from the Western Allies—it always maintained an aloof position vis-à-vis the rescuing of Jews or, for that matter, any other groups oppressed by the Nazis. Long fearful of a possible rapprochement between the Western Allies and the Third Reich that might lead to an anti-Communist capitalist coalition, the Soviet leaders were highly suspicious of any attempts to deal with the Nazis on matters of rescue. Therefore, they ignored almost completely the plight of all those suffering under the hands of the Nazis, including the Soviet prisoners of war. They treated the Hungarian Jewish labor servicemen who escaped to the Soviet side or were captured by the Red Army just as they treated all POWs they themselves had taken.¹³

The Soviet government vehemently opposed any dealings with Brand and condemned the Horthy offer as an attempt by the Hungarians

to ingratiate themselves with the Western Powers, and ended up never issuing any official public declarations condemning the extermination of the Jews. The Soviets adhered to the Allied declaration of December 17, 1942, but consistently refused to issue a separate Soviet declaration, which the Western leaders, including those of the Jewish communities, frequently requested. Eden, for example, believed that such a separate declaration would be particularly effective in view of the victorious advance of the Red Army. In a July 13 communication, Eden tried to persuade Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov that a Soviet declaration “couched in terms of unambiguous frankness and proclaiming that the Soviet armies and retribution for these crimes would enter Hungary together, might have the effect of at least reducing the scale of the horrible outrages against the Jewish population.”¹⁴ Although they could have called on partisan forces and resistance units, the Soviets never utilized them to sabotage or destroy the extermination machinery of the death camps or the rail lines leading there. Neither were Soviet air forces ever used for this purpose, even though strategically they were in a more advantageous position than the Western Allies.

The Neutral Countries

The rescue efforts of the neutral countries, like those of the Western Powers, were of use primarily for the Jews of Budapest. Although the representatives of these countries were careful not to antagonize either the Third Reich or the Hungarian government, they tried with varying degrees of enthusiasm to alleviate the plight of the Jews in Budapest and in some of the labor service companies. Their active involvement began toward the end of June and gathered momentum after the Szálasi coup of October 15, 1944. Of the Budapest representatives of the five neutral countries—Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey—by far the most active were those of Switzerland and Sweden.

SWITZERLAND

Following Hungary’s involvement in the war against the Allies, the Swiss agreed to represent American and British interests in the country. In this capacity they also assumed responsibility for the handling of Palestinian immigration matters affecting Jews in Hungary. It was in this context that the Swiss became involved with the various rescue schemes that originated with the six hundred Palestine immigration certificates the Budapest Palestine Office received from the Vaadah in Istanbul just three days before the German occupation began. These certificates served as a basis for the SS-Kasztner negotiations that led to the various controversial rescue schemes.¹⁵

The Swiss also were actively involved in arranging the possible emigration of seven thousand Jews for whom the British raised the possibility of entry into Palestine. Although the Swiss Legation in Budapest raised this issue on April 26, 1944, when it approached the Hungarian authorities for exit permits, the Sztójay government failed to consider it until June 26–27. Preoccupied until that time with the ghettoization and deportation drive in the countryside, the government took up the issue at the urging of Horthy, who was under great internal and external pressure following the revelations by the Swiss press of the realities of the Final Solution in Hungary and Auschwitz.¹⁶

The two men who were particularly concerned with the Swiss-sponsored emigration scheme were Miklós (Moshe) Krausz and Charles Lutz, the Swiss consul general in Budapest. The latter soon emerged as one of the heroes of the Holocaust period in Hungary.¹⁷ Taking advantage of the relative relaxation of tension that followed Horthy's halting of the deportations, Lutz visited Sztójay in the company of Maximilian Jäger, the Swiss minister, on July 21. He requested that the Hungarian government, among other things, exempt the Jews slated for emigration from all current and future anti-Jewish measures, and intercede with the Germans to acquire their consent to, and the necessary exit permits for, the emigration scheme.

Though the attitude of Sztójay and some of his colleagues was reassuring, Lutz was concerned over the positions expressed by Interior Minister Andor Jaross and Horst Grell, the German Legation's expert on Jewish affairs, at a meeting held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 23. Jaross suggested that the Jews slated for emigration be concentrated in yellow-star buildings on certain specified streets, while Grell insisted that the departure of these Jews was "dependent on the settlement of a political question between the German and Hungarian governments"—a clear reference to Hitler's condition for Germany's concurrence with the scheme, namely the resumption of deportations.¹⁸

Unaware of these difficulties, Krausz and Lutz proceeded with their plans for the emigration of the Jews as authorized by the Hungarian authorities. They provided for the classification of these Jews as "foreign nationals" exempt from all anti-Jewish measures and had them relocated in specially assigned "Swiss-protected" buildings. These Jews eventually were supplied with protective passes, which stated that their owners were included in a collective Palestine passport.¹⁹ The German exit permit for which Lutz and Krausz applied on August 3 was formally rejected eleven days later.

The Swiss repeated their requests several times, but Romania's extrication from the Axis Alliance on August 23, 1944, rendered the whole issue practically moot. Lutz and Krausz tried various other schemes, includ-

ing the possible transfer of the “foreign nationals” to the Black Sea via the Danube River or to the West via Switzerland and Portugal, but the results were equally negative.

Following the *Nyilas* coup, the Swiss were particularly helpful in saving Jews by recognition of their protective passes and by providing an umbrella for the rescue and resistance operations of the young Zionist Pioneers. Eager for recognition by the neutral powers, the Szálasi regime permitted the issuance of a limited number of protective passes, including seven thousand for the Swiss-sponsored Jews. Since these Jews could not leave by the envisioned November 15 deadline, they were transferred into what came to be known as the “international ghetto.” Using the Swiss Legation’s extension in the “Glass House” as their safe headquarters, the *he-Halutz* youth were actively involved in rescue operations. As we have seen, they duplicated and distributed Swiss and other protective passes to thousands of Jews and, dressed in SS or *Nyilas* uniforms, saved many Jews from certain death.²⁰

These activities came to the attention of the RSHA, and Veessenmayer was urged to have Szálasi lodge a protest with the Swiss concerning the “sabotaging of the Hungarian-German war effort.” His interventions proved quite successful: the Swiss-protected buildings in which many Jews with forged protective passes had been hiding were raided. Designed to winnow out those with forged papers, the raids were organized by the *Nyilas* in cooperation with Theodor Dannecker of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*. Many of those caught were shot into the Danube or attached to the death march columns being herded toward Hegyeshalom.²¹

SWEDEN

The rescue of a considerable proportion of the Jews of Budapest is rightly attributed to Raoul Wallenberg, the special emissary from Sweden. Yet Sweden did not officially react to the anti-Jewish drive in Hungary until June 11, 1944, when the deportations from Carpatho-Ruthenia, northeastern Hungary, and Northern Transylvania had already been completed. On that day, Carl I. Danielsson, the Swedish minister in Budapest, requested that the Hungarian government allow the Swedish Red Cross to join the Hungarian Red Cross in feeding and housing orphaned and abandoned children and in caring for victims of air raids. He also asked the government to permit the emigration of three hundred to four hundred Jews who had relatives or business contacts in Sweden.

Following the Hungarian government’s favorable reaction on June 26, Valdemar Langlet, a member of the Swedish Legation and a Swedish-language lecturer at the University of Budapest, was appointed as the

delegate of the Swedish Red Cross. The Swedes became more deeply involved in aid and rescue work after they were requested by U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull to persuade the Hungarians “to desist from further barbarism.” The request was forwarded via Herschel Johnson, the U.S. minister to Stockholm, and Ivor C. Olsen, the WRB representative—two American officials who were particularly active on behalf of Hungarian Jewry. Pressure also was exerted on the Swedish officials by the leaders of the Swedish Jewish community, including Chief Rabbi Marcus (Mordechai) Ehrenpreis; Norbert Masur, the industrialist and World Jewish Congress representative; and Gunnar Josephson, the head of the Stockholm Jewish community.

After the revelations of the horrors of the deportations and the realities of Auschwitz by the Swiss press, which were also picked up by the Swedish press late in June 1944, King Gustav of Sweden added his voice to those of President Roosevelt and Pope Pius XII in protesting to Regent Horthy, demanding an end to the persecutions. As the Swedish press intensified its campaign, paying special attention to the background of the king’s action, the decision was reached to send Raoul Wallenberg on a special relief and rescue mission to Budapest.

Wallenberg’s selection can be traced to Kalman Lauer, a Swede of Hungarian-Jewish background, who headed a large export-import firm in Stockholm. Wallenberg became associated with the firm in 1941, and in that capacity he visited Budapest in 1942 and in 1943. Following the German occupation of Hungary, Lauer and other Jews of Hungarian background who were anxious to save their relatives hit upon the idea of sending Wallenberg to Budapest for that purpose. Although supported by Johnson and Olsen, Wallenberg’s appointment suffered considerable delay, primarily because Rabbi Ehrenpreis at first had some misgivings about his youth and his request for large sums of money to be used for bribing officials.²²

Appointed third secretary of the Swedish Legation in Budapest, Wallenberg arrived in the Hungarian capital on July 9, 1944, shortly after Horthy had halted the deportations. By that time virtually no Jews were left in Hungary except for those in Budapest and in labor service.

Entrusted with the organization of mass-relief operations and with reporting “on the situation with respect to persecution of Jews and minorities,” Wallenberg took over the leadership of Department C of the Swedish Legation. He soon established contact with the official leaders of Hungarian Jewry through László Pető, the son of Ernő Pető, one of the leading members of the Jewish Council.²³ Wallenberg then became well acquainted with the tragedy that had befallen the Jewish community and with the rescue activities that were being undertaken under the auspices of the neutral states, above all Switzerland.

Danielsson's list of 300 to 400 Hungarian Jews eligible to receive Swedish citizenship was supplemented by one brought by Wallenberg. Wallenberg's list included close to 650 Jews. László Ferenczy, the gendarmerie officer in charge of the ghettoization-deportation program, would attempt to use that list in his effort to establish contact with the Jewish leaders and with Horthy in his desperate search for a personal alibi. These Jews were supplied with provisional passports and eventually relocated—to the chagrin of many unprotected Jews and some Council members—from their yellow-star buildings into the protected "Swedish Houses" on Pozsonyi Road.²⁴ The number of Jews holding genuine and forged Swedish protective passes increased tremendously after the *Nyilas* coup of October 15. The number of persons with genuine papers soon increased to 4,500—a figure approved by the Szálasi government on October 31 in the expectation of swift diplomatic recognition by Sweden. As the *Nyilas* terror continued unabated, the number of those holding genuine passes increased to over 7,000 and of those with forged ones to well over 10,000. Many of these Jews, including of course the holders of genuine passes, were housed in the thirty-two buildings protected by the Swedes.

The care of these and many other persecuted Jews required a large organization. At the height of its operations during the Soviet siege, Wallenberg's organization included 355 employees, forty physicians, two hospitals, and a soup kitchen. Most of the staff were Jews or converts who as a result of this work gained immunity for themselves and their families. Valuable assistance in the relief and rescue operations also was provided by the other members of the Swedish Legation, including Minister Danielsson, Per Anger, Lars Berg, and Gote Carlsson. Langlet's activities within the framework of the Swedish Red Cross were enhanced by those of Asta Nilsson, who was particularly concerned with the protection of children.²⁵

Wallenberg and his staff worked indefatigably during the death marches to Hegyeshalom, saving many of the unfortunate Jews from the columns and the Óbuda Brickyards by supplying them with protective passes. Wallenberg's role took on heroic proportions during the Soviet siege of Budapest. The government had relocated to the western parts of the country²⁶ and Budapest was in a state of anarchy, with armed *Nyilas* roaming the streets and venting their frustrations on the helpless Jews. Wallenberg's tasks were staggering: in addition to saving Jews from the hands of the *Nyilas*, he struggled to obtain food for the tens of thousands of Jews in the ghetto and in the protected buildings. He also played a crucial role in protecting the ghetto from the designs of the SS and their Hungarian allies. He warned both the German military commander and Ernő Vajna, the *Nyilas* leader entrusted with full powers for the defense of Budapest, of dire retribution by the Allies if the ghetto were destroyed or if any large number of Jews were killed.

Wallenberg provided a heartening and rare example of great personal courage and self-sacrificing humanitarianism. Sadly, like many another heroic figure in history, he ended up sharing the fate of the victims he had come to help. In a cruel and ironic twist, however, his tragic end was brought about not by the Germans, but by the Soviets, who had been so eagerly awaited as the liberators from the long nightmare of Nazism.²⁷

SPAIN

Like Switzerland and Sweden, Spain became involved in rescue work in Hungary only after the deportations from the provinces were ended. Spain was approached on July 5, 1944, by Jewish leaders, including Eliahu Dobkin of the Jewish Agency for Palestine and I. Weissmann of the World Jewish Congress, via the Spanish Ambassador in Lisbon with the request that it help Sephardic Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe. The ambassador reported that the Spanish government had already decided to grant protection to all Sephardic Jews who claimed “their Spanish origin or nationality at Spanish consulates.”²⁸ A week later, the Tangier Committee for Aid to Refugees²⁹ informed the Jewish Council of Budapest that Tangier was ready to admit five hundred children—two hundred of them on a list prepared by the committee and three hundred to be selected by the Council.

Angel Sanz-Briz, the Spanish chargé d'affaires, suggested that the Council ask Madrid to instruct its Budapest Legation to issue visas for the five hundred children and also for fifty to seventy adults who would need to accompany them. Sanz-Briz also advised the Council that it should try to implement the emigration scheme through the IRC. The practical implementation of the emigration program began on July 29, when György Gergely, a leading official of the Council, and Friedrich Born of the IRC discussed the details of the registration and protection of the children until their departure. According to German reports, the Spanish government was ready to issue visas to two thousand Jews.

The planned emigration of children and adults with Spanish visas never took place. After the *Nyilas* coup on October 15, the primary concern was the protection and survival of the children. About a week after the coup, Ballensiefen, the SS propaganda expert in Budapest, informed RSHA headquarters in Berlin that the Spanish Legation in Budapest had offered to protect Jewish orphans aged fourteen to sixteen years. On November 13, Veesenmayer reported that the Spaniards had requested exit visas for “additional Hungarian Jews having family relationships in Spain.”³⁰ Reportedly, Sanz-Briz and his aides returned to Spain during the Szálasi era, and his duties were quietly taken over by Giorgio (Jorge) Perlasca.³¹ An Italian, Perlasca had been a frequent visitor to the Spanish Legation, where

a personal friend used to work; his assumption of duties was therefore not viewed with suspicion by the lower-rank Legation personnel or by the *Nyilas* Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Perlasca is said to have distributed three thousand Spanish protective passes. Like the holders of the Swiss and Swedish passes, the holders of these Spanish passes were relocated into the so-called international ghetto after November 15. Early in January 1945, they were transferred into the large ghetto of Budapest.

The care of the Spanish-protected children was the primary concern of the IRC, with Ottó Komoly and László Szamosi playing a key role.³²

PORTUGAL

Until the summer of 1944, Portugal's representatives in Budapest were not involved in rescue activities except for the rescue of Portuguese minister Carlos de Sampayo Garrido's Jewish secretary and her parents.³³ On July 15, Liz-Teixeira Branquinho, the Portuguese chargé d'affaires who acted for the Legation after the minister's departure the previous month, intervened on behalf of nine Hungarian Jews who had family or business relations in Portugal. Shortly thereafter, Branquinho authorized the issuance of Portuguese passports to all Jews who could prove that they had relations in Portugal or Brazil.³⁴

After the *Nyilas* coup, the Portuguese also began to issue protective passes. Although they promised Foreign Minister Gábor Kemény that no more than five hundred would be issued, in fact more than seven hundred were given out. At first both the Germans and the Hungarians refused to recognize them, but since the *Nyilas* were eager to gain recognition by the neutral powers, they relented at the end. After November 15, the Portuguese-protected Jews, like those protected by the other neutral powers, were ordered to relocate into special protected buildings.³⁵

The Portuguese also extended their protection to a number of Jews serving in labor service companies. As the *Nyilas* terror raged ever harsher, however, the lot of the Portuguese-protected Jews, like that of the others, worsened. On November 26, the labor servicemen protected by the Portuguese were taken to the Albrecht barracks, from where they were transferred to the Sopron area of western Hungary to build the east wall for the defense of Vienna. On January 4, 1945, at the height of the Soviet siege, the Portuguese-protected Jews of Budapest were relocated into the ghetto.

TURKEY

Despite strong urging by the Americans, Turkey was reluctant to get involved in any meaningful campaign to rescue Hungarian Jews. Under persistent

pressure from Washington, however, Turkey began to act late in 1944 by issuing a limited number of protective passes.³⁶

The Vatican and the Budapest Nunciature

The ambivalent, if not indifferent, attitude of Pope Pius XII toward the wartime plight of the Jews has been fully documented. Although aware of the Nazis' drive to exterminate the Jews, the pope consistently refused to take a public stand to condemn it despite the frequent requests to this effect by the Jewish and non-Jewish leaders of the free world.³⁷ The pope's first direct involvement on behalf of Jews took place late in June 1944, when he appealed to Admiral Horthy "to save many unfortunate people from further pain and sorrow." In his telegram of June 25, 1944, the pope referred to the pleas addressed to the Vatican in hopes that it would use its influence "to shorten and mitigate the sufferings that have, for so long, been endured on account of their national or racial origin by a great number of unfortunate people."³⁸

Appeals of this kind were made by various sources after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the Apostolic delegate in Istanbul (later to become Pope John XXIII) and one of the Vatican's main sources of information about the Nazis' designs against the Jews, was among the first to alert the Vatican and the apostolic delegate in Budapest about the dangers confronting Hungarian Jewry.³⁹ On March 24, the WRB urged the pope via the apostolic delegate in Washington to use his influence to protect the Jews of Hungary. The appeals became more frequent after the beginning of the mass deportations on May 15. On May 22, the pope was appealed to by Rabbi Isaac Herzog and Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Uziel, the chief rabbis of Palestine, and four days later by Harold Tittman, America's representative at the Vatican.

It was only after the Swiss and Swedish press publicized the horrors of Auschwitz and the deportations from Hungary late in June, however, that the pope sent his own plea to Horthy—without mentioning the word *Jew*. By that time, a few weeks after D-Day and with the deportations from the provinces coming to a close, Horthy himself was already considering the idea of halting the deportations.

A considerably more active stand in Hungary was taken by Angelo Rotta, the apostolic delegate (nuncio), who was also the dean of the diplomatic corps in Budapest. An able and compassionate man, after the beginning of the German occupation the nuncio took the lead in warning the members of the newly established Sztójay government against any anti-Jewish excesses. Prior to the beginning of the mass deportations, his interventions were primarily aimed at redressing injustices. These were made

either in person or through Gennaro Verolino, the secretary of the Nunciature. The nuncio was also in the forefront of the protest measures undertaken by the Christian churches of Hungary. At this time, however, like the Hungarian church leaders, he was especially concerned with the fate of the converts and the Christians of Jewish origin.

Monsignor Rotta began to take a more vigorous stand after the beginning of the deportations; the focus continued to remain the fate of the converts. On May 15, the first day of the deportations, the nuncio submitted a note condemning the actions of the government, emphasizing that the whole world knew what the deportations meant. While the nuncio protested the measures enacted against the Jews and asked the Hungarian government “not to continue its war against the Jews beyond the limits prescribed by the laws of nature and God’s commandments,” his three specific requests addressed to the government hardly touched on the Final Solution. He requested that:

- The government differentiate between Jews and converts, and Christians be exempted, as in Slovakia, from the antisemitic measures.
- Fundamental human rights be observed in the implementation of measures deemed necessary by the government in defense of state interests.
- The government take appropriate steps to prevent the repetition of abuses and assaults against church institutions and persons such as those the police had committed during the raid against the Holy Cross Society.

Along with the protest note, the nuncio sent Sztójay a personal note pleading for his support on the three demands and pointing out that he was keeping the Vatican fully informed about developments in Hungary. The Council of Ministers took up the nuncio’s pleas on May 17, after similar demands were advanced by the Hungarian church leaders. Some concessions, pertaining mostly to converts, were granted by the government—but in practice these, too, were ignored in the provinces. The government also decided to set up a mechanism under which certain people might be exempted from the anti-Jewish laws for reasons of national interest.

The nuncio touched on the issue of deportations in his note of June 5, deploring the inclusion of the elderly, the ill, and the children. In response to the government’s standard explanation that the deportations involved only the supplying of Germany with Jewish labor and that the family members were included for humanitarian and practical reasons, he expressed, somewhat sarcastically, his surprise that the authorities had extended to the Jewish laborers the favor of sending along their families when they provided no such opportunities for the thousands of Hungarian Christian workers who had been allowed to work in Germany for years.

The government's position on this issue was restated in Sztójay's note to the nuncio, dated June 30. It stated, among other things:

We take this opportunity to mention that Hungarian Jews are not slated for deportation. A large number of Jewish manual laborers are being placed at the disposal of the German Government, and the fact that their families were sent together with them to Germany is the result of the decision to keep families undivided, since greater performance can be expected from Jews when they are relaxed by the presence of their families.

The nuncio was incensed by the callousness with which Sztójay tried to cover up the realities of the anti-Jewish drive. He gave vent to his outrage during a discussion on July 6. Mincing no words, he identified the handling of the Jewish question as "abominable" and as "dishonorable" for Hungary. He complained especially about the cruelties perpetrated by the gendarmerie. Yet he was particularly chagrined by the fact that many Hungarians who were born as Christians or had lived as Christians for thirty to forty years were being treated in the same outrageous manner as the Jews. In his attempt to at least partially recapture the goodwill of the Vatican, Sztójay supported a special request by the nuncio to have fourteen baptized Jews exempted from the anti-Jewish drive.

When after Horthy's halting of the deportations early in July the Jewish community of Budapest was subjected to periodic threats of "resettlement," Monsignor Rotta cooperated with the representatives of the neutral powers in protesting the planned measures.

The nuncio's interventions on behalf of the remnant of Hungarian Jewry intensified after the Szálasi coup of October 15. In addition to pursuing a diplomatic approach, he also became actively involved in rescue operations, often acting in concert with the IRC and the legations of the neutral powers. He contacted Foreign Minister Kemény on October 18, and Szálasi himself on October 21. He asked them to exercise great restraint and moderation in the handling of the Jewish question and to assure that the concessions made during the Horthy era be honored. When in light of the death marches and *Nyilas* excesses it became clear that these requests were not being met, the nuncio joined the Swedish minister on November 17 in requesting that Szálasi rescind the measures enacted against the Jews and ensure humane treatment for those forced to live in concentration camps.

When on October 30, following the interventions of Friedrich Born of the IRC, the Szálasi government decided to recognize the protective passes issued by the neutral powers, the nuncio ordered that all Roman Catholics affected by the anti-Jewish laws be issued passes stipulating that their holders were under the protection of the Vatican. Although the Nunciature was

authorized to issue only twenty-five hundred such certificates, it actually issued many more. In a short while, approximately fifteen thousand such safe-conduct certificates were in circulation.⁴⁰

Many of the Jews holding these protective passes were housed in a few buildings in the international ghetto that were identified by special plates at the main entrance indicating that they were under the protection of the Vatican. One of the persons responsible for the safeguarding of these buildings was Tibor Báránszky, a secretary in the Nunciature.⁴¹ The effectiveness of the Nunciature's rescue work during the Szálasi era was enhanced by its cooperation with the International Red Cross.⁴²

The International Red Cross

Until the middle of July 1944, the IRC was not directly involved in the protection of the rights and interests of Jews *per se*. The organization scrupulously adhered to the German interpretation that the Jews were not *internees*, but *détainees*—a penal rather than civil category. It consistently rejected the suggestion of the major Jewish organizations that it confer upon the Jews held in the ghettos and the labor and concentration camps the status of *civilian internees*—a procedure that would have enabled the IRC to carry out local inspection visits, send food parcels, provide medical aid, and in the process perhaps save hundreds of thousands of lives.

The IRC maintained its traditional position on the Jews even after the initiation of the German occupation of Hungary. Until the Swiss press began the campaign of unmasking the realities of Auschwitz and the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry, the attitude of the IRC representatives in Budapest remained unchanged. Friedrich Born, who replaced Jean de Bavier in May 1944, began to manifest a more active role early in July. He contacted the Hungarian authorities as well as Theodor Horst Grell, the specialist on Jewish affairs in the German Legation, on behalf of the deportees. Grell assured him that the Hungarian Jews were well off in Germany. He rejected Born's request to allow visits to the camps, claiming that the sites were spread throughout the Reich and Poland and that their location could not be revealed because they were engaged in the production of war materiel.

On July 7 (the day Horthy halted the deportations) Max Huber, the head of the IRC, contacted the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He wanted all available information that would ease the worldwide restlessness over the events in Hungary, as well as permission for an IRC representative to visit some of the camps and distribute food and clothing. Following the interventions of Imre Tahy, the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Bern, Robert Schirmer, the IRC delegate in Berlin, arrived in Budapest on July 21. Schirmer requested, among other things, that he be allowed to visit some

yellow-star houses and that the “shipment of Jews for labor abroad” cease. He also suggested that the Jews be concentrated in ghettos similar to the one in Theresienstadt, the Reich’s “model ghetto,” which an IRC delegation had visited and approved on June 23.

After considerable wrangling, the Hungarian authorities allowed his delegation to visit the Kistarcsa and Sárvár internment camps and a few carefully selected yellow-star houses and Jewish institutions. A few days before the visit the Germans had managed, with the connivance of their Hungarian accomplices, to smuggle close to three thousand Hungarian Jews out of the camps; by the time of the visit (July 27 and 28), most of the camp’s inhabitants were non-Jewish political prisoners, and the IRC delegation found the conditions generally satisfactory, although overcrowded.

While in Budapest Schirmer also contacted Veessenmayer, requesting permission to send packages to the deportees, to visit a camp, and to accompany the inmates of a deportation train to Kassa. Veessenmayer’s views coincided with those of Adolf Hezinger, the German Foreign Office’s expert on the treatment of Jews of foreign citizenship, who suggested the rejection of the last request but left open the possibility of a camp visit “after thorough preparatory work in cooperation with Eichmann.” The sending of packages to the deportees was made contingent on the “resumption of the transfer of Jews into the Reich”—the response Hitler gave on July 10 to the Hungarians’ request that Germany cooperate in the “emigration” of a limited number of Jews.

In August the IRC became more involved in two other plans of interest to the Jewish community: support of the Spanish, Swiss, and Swedish-initiated emigration schemes, and the protection of children. After Tangier, which was then under Spanish jurisdiction, expressed its readiness to admit five hundred children, the IRC was persuaded by the Jewish Council to take these “foreign-protected” children under its aegis. As a result, the IRC acquired a legal framework by which to expand its activities to include the protection of “foreign” civilians. Within a short time, the Hungarian authorities expressed their readiness to recognize the competence of the IRC in all aid and emigration matters that it represented or initiated with the Hungarian government. The IRC cooperated in the so-called Horthy offer and other emigration schemes, but despite the mostly belated and halfhearted efforts no Jews were ever permitted by the Germans to leave Hungary under this plan.

By far the most important contributions of the IRC to the Jewish community in Budapest were the sheltering of children and the safeguarding and supplying of Jewish institutions, including the ghetto, during the *Nyilas* era. Under Born’s leadership two sections dealing with children

were established within the framework of the IRC: Section A, which was placed under the leadership of Ottó Komoly; and Section B, which was entrusted to Rev. Gábor Sztehló of the Good Shepherd Mission. The IRC took under its protection a relatively large number of Jewish and non-Jewish institutions—hospitals, public kitchens, homes for the handicapped and the aged, research and scientific institutes, and shops. Each of these institutions was identified by a plate posted at the main entrance; the sign read: “Under the Protection of the International Committee of the Red Cross” in Hungarian, German, French, and Russian. Thanks to Born’s interventions, the Szálasi government recognized the protective passes issued by the Vatican and the foreign legations and granted extraterritorial status to all institutions and buildings protected by the IRC.

The effectiveness of the IRC during this period was enhanced by its cooperation with the representatives of neutral states and with the Nunciature. Its main liaison with the latter was Sándor György Újváry, a well-known writer-journalist. He was particularly involved in the protection of the IRC-sponsored children’s homes and the distribution of baptismal certificates.

Shortly after the Budapest ghetto was established early in December 1944, Hans Weyermann arrived from Geneva to assist Born. During the Soviet siege, Born directed the activities of the IRC in Buda, and Weyermann concentrated on the Pest part of the capital. They continued their activities until the liberation of the city by Soviet troops in February 1945.

While the relief and rescue activities of the neutral states, like those of the Vatican and the IRC, came to the fore only toward the end of June 1944, when the deportations from the countryside were drawing to an end, two Axis-allied countries—Slovakia and Romania—provided “unofficial haven” to most of those who dared to escape from Hungary after the German occupation began.

Slovakia

Slovakia had the dubious distinction of being the first country to deport large numbers of Jews to Auschwitz. But after the first wave of deportations ended with the “resettlement” of fifty-two thousand Jews between March and June 1942, the anti-Jewish drive of the Slovak authorities abated.⁴³ Most of the remaining Jews (between fifteen thousand and eighteen thousand) received special legitimation, “protective letters” certifying that they were essential to the nation’s economy.

After the Germans occupied Hungary, Slovakia emerged as a refuge not only for the many Slovak Jews who had found haven in Hungary, but

also for many Hungarian Jews who dared to cross the border. This avenue of escape was, of course, known to the Germans as well. Immediately after the Germans moved into Hungary, the RSHA alerted the Bratislava authorities about the “danger” of illegal crossings along the Hungarian border. With the continuing “infiltration” of Jews from Hungary to Slovakia, however, Veessenmayer concluded that the problem could be solved only through the simultaneous deportation of the remaining Jews of Slovakia. To achieve this objective, Veessenmayer approached the German Foreign Office on June 14, at the height of the mass deportations from Hungary, requesting a meeting with Hanns Elard Ludin, the German minister in Bratislava. Although Ribbentrop wholeheartedly consented, the meeting had to be postponed several times because the leading figures of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando* were busy with the deportations from Hungary. The idea then had to be temporarily shelved, because in the meantime Horthy halted the deportations and the Germans were under increasing military pressure from both the Red Army and the Slovak partisans.

The Germans continued to insist that the difficulty in implementing the anti-Jewish operations in Hungary was partially due to the “leniency” with which the Jewish problem was being handled in both Slovakia and Romania. Veessenmayer bombarded the German Foreign Office and his counterparts in Bratislava and Bucharest with notes to this effect. The Slovaks, under great pressure, made one major concession. They showed no interest in most of their Jewish nationals in Hungary, and allowed them to be included in the general deportation measures. As to the Hungarian Jews who managed to escape to Slovakia, Alexander (Šano) Mach, the deputy prime minister, assured Ludin that their number was small, inasmuch as the Slovak borders with Hungary were under heavy guard.

The changed attitude of the Hungarian government six weeks after the halting of the deportations was reflected, among other things, in its renewed interest in the few bona fide Jewish Hungarian nationals abroad. On August 25, 1944, the Council of Ministers decided to extend the validity of the passports held by Hungarian Jews living in Slovakia.

Ironically, by that time, when the situation of the Jews in Hungary was gradually improving under the policies of Gen. Géza Lakatos, the conditions in Slovakia were taking a sharp turn for the worse. Unexpected developments played into the hands of Ludin and Veessenmayer, enabling them to see the attainment of their cherished objective: the liquidation of the remaining Jewish community of Slovakia together with most of the Hungarian Jewish escapees. This took place between October 1944 and March 1945, following the crushing of the Slovak uprising that began in August.⁴⁴

Romania

In 1942, shortly after Slovakia had completed its first wave of deportations, Romania decided to oppose the German demands for the implementation of the Final Solution program. While the Germans were still hopeful that year that Romania might go along with their demands,⁴⁵ the Romanians became involved in a major scheme to allow the emigration of seventy-five thousand to eighty thousand Jews to Palestine.⁴⁶

This course of the Romanian government was all the more dramatic in light of its earlier positions on the Jewish question. The anti-Jewish policies of the Goga-Cuza government in the 1930s, coupled with the excesses perpetrated against Jews in the wake of the territorial losses suffered by Romania in 1940, prepared the ground for the large-scale massacres that were perpetrated by ultra-rightist elements in 1941. Hundreds of Jews were massacred in Bucharest, Jassy, and elsewhere in January 1941, when the Iron Guard—the Romanian Nazi elements led by Horia Sima—rose in an attempt to overthrow General (later Marshal) Ion Antonescu. The drive became more vicious after Romania joined the Reich in the war against the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Flushed by their early military successes and driven by feelings of revenge, many Romanian units vented their hatred of the Jews. They subjected the Jews to barbarous treatment in the recaptured areas of Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia and in the conquered territories in the Ukraine. Their drive was particularly vicious in Bălți, Cernăuți, and Odessa. During the early phase of the war, atrocities also were committed in some of the communities of Old (pre-1918) Romania. In Jassy, for example, thousands of Jews were killed during the pogroms of June 29–30, 1941.

In August 1941, the Romanian government began the roundup and deportation of “alien” Jews to Transnistria, the Romanian-occupied part of the Ukraine between the Dniester and the Bug. These continued through the summer of 1942, by which time the population of the various camps had reached approximately 185,000 Jews. Almost all of the deportees were from Bukovina, Bessarabia, and the Herta region—the areas formerly ceded to the USSR.⁴⁷

The Jews of Old Romania (Muntenia, Oltenia, and Moldavia), Southern Transylvania, and Southern Bukovina fared much better. Although deprived of their basic rights and livelihoods, nearly all of the Jewish communities in these areas had survived almost intact. The decision of the Antonescu regime to change course on the treatment of the Jewish question was due primarily to its realization that the Axis would lose the war. This was reinforced by the crushing defeat the Romanian and German armies suffered at Stalingrad in January 1943.

The Romanians' failure to implement the Final Solution angered the Germans. The German Foreign Office and the RSHA did everything in their power to bring about a reversal of the Romanian position, but to no avail. On January 14, 1943, Heinrich Müller, the head of the Gestapo, assessed the situation in Romania very pessimistically. Six days later, Himmler himself concluded that nothing else could be done in Romania and suggested the recall from Bucharest of *SS-Sturmabannführer* Gustav Richter, the German Legation's expert on the Jewish question.

In 1944, when various Romanian political and military elements were actively engaged in finding an effective and reasonably quick way out of the Axis alliance, Romania also became a haven for thousands of Jewish refugees from neighboring countries, including Hungary. Soon after its occupation of Hungary, Germany warned Romania, as it did Slovakia, to prevent the illegal crossing of the borders by Jews and to take effective countermeasures against infractors and people in Romania who attempted to provide assistance to them.

The Romanian government formally complied on May 29, when it enacted a stiff law that mandated the death penalty for Jews entering the country fraudulently, as well as for those who aided them. The Romanians, with a few exceptions, nevertheless continued to treat incoming refugees with a considerable degree of indulgence. According to a report, they had in fact issued confidential instructions to their border control authorities to facilitate the admission of Jewish refugees from Hungary. On June 2, 1944, the prime minister of Romania advised the Romanian delegate to the IRC that he might give formal assurances that Jewish refugees from Hungary would be allowed to enter Romania notwithstanding formal declarations to the contrary, and that "their safety would be looked out for by the Romanians." The Romanians' level of tolerance continued to increase until August 23, when Romania withdrew from the Axis. From that time on, of course, the status of the Jews, both indigenous and foreign, became radically different. The new anti-Nazi government undertook not only to abolish the anti-Jewish measures, but also to protect its North Transylvanian Jewish nationals still under Hungarian-German domination.

Between March 19 and August 23, 1944, the initiative for the rescue of Hungarian Jews was taken by the Hungarian-speaking Jews of Southern Transylvania and the Hungarian-Jewish refugees in Bucharest. The latter acted in close cooperation with the IRC and with the official and Zionist leaders of Romania. One of the leading figures among these was Ernő Marton, the former editor-in-chief of *Új Kelet* (New East), the Hungarian-language Jewish daily of Kolozsvár. Aware of the realities of the Final Solution, Marton had escaped to Bucharest in May 1944. While in the

Romanian capital, he was instrumental in organizing the Committee for the Aid of Jewish Refugees From Northern Transylvania.

During the early phase of the anti-Jewish drive in Hungary (March–June 1944), the rescue effort was carried out mainly by the leaders of the Jewish communities of Southern Transylvania bordering Hungary. Some of the largest ghettos in Hungarian-held Northern Transylvania, for instance those of Nagyvárad, Kolozsvár, and Marosvásárhely, were very close to the Romanian border. Nevertheless, only a few thousand Jews availed themselves of the opportunity to escape into Romania. Among the reasons for this were the absence of most able-bodied males (who were in the labor service companies); the reluctance of the physically fit to leave behind the very young and the older members of their families; the risks associated with the illegal border crossing; and, above all, the failure of the Jewish leaders to keep the masses informed.

The few thousand Hungarian Jews who did manage to escape successfully into Romania used various means. Some were well off and bribed the guards; others had good contacts with Romanian diplomatic officials; still others followed the leadership of Zionist couriers (*shlichim*).⁴⁸

After Romania's about-face the committee headed by Marton acquired legal status. From that time, it concentrated its efforts on legalizing the status of the refugees and providing them with monetary and material assistance through the AJDC. Late in October, when almost all of Transylvania had been liberated, the committee was consolidated into a General Jewish Curatorium of Northern Transylvania, designed to represent all the Jews of the region. The curatorium's sphere of activities encompassed administrative, legal, and economic functions. It also claimed to represent the social and political interests of the liberated Jews. One of its primary concerns was to help bring about the liberation or at least the easing of the lot of the North Transylvanian Jews still in German and Hungarian hands. Toward this end, it worked closely with the Romanian authorities in the liberated parts of Transylvania.⁴⁹

12 CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Losses of Hungarian Jewry

The magnitude of the crime committed by the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices against the Jews of Hungary is indicated by the statistical accounts revealed after the war. By far the most comprehensive statistical overview was provided by the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress.¹ While not totally accurate, especially with regard to the casualties suffered by the “alien” Jews at Kamenets-Podolsk in August 1941 and the labor servicemen in the Ukraine, these statistics represent the best available approximation of the losses incurred by the Jewish communities. They are broken down by towns and cities, counties, and provinces. There was no attempt during the postwar period officially to assess the losses of Hungarian Jewry, as the territorial changes brought about by the end of the war (the areas acquired by Hungary from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia in 1938–41 reverted back to the corresponding successor states) made an “accurate” assessment all but impossible. The unofficial postwar estimates and the censuses conducted in some of the successor states reflected primarily their conflicting national interests. With the imposition of Communist rule in 1946–48, the issue of the Jewish losses, like that of the Holocaust as a whole, was sunk in the Orwellian black hole of history.

According to the census of 1941, Hungary then had a Jewish population of 725,007, representing 4.94 percent of the total population of 14,683,323. Of these, 400,981 lived in Trianon Hungary and 324,026 in the territories that had been acquired from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Under the antisemitic legislation of 1941, approximately 100,000 converts and Christians of Jewish origin also were identified as racial Jews. Of these, 89,640 lived in Trianon Hungary (62,350 in Budapest alone). In the acquired territories, which had a strong Orthodox tradition, there were only 10,360 converts and Christians classified as Jews (see [table 5](#)).

Prior to the German occupation of March 19, 1944, the Jewish community suffered approximately 63,000 casualties during the war. Of these, about 42,000 were labor servicemen, most of whom were killed or died along the Ukrainian fronts; close to 20,000 Jews were deported as “aliens” in July–August 1941, and most of these were massacred near Kamenets-

Table 5
LOSSES OF HUNGARIAN JEWRY DURING WORLD WAR II

	<i>Trianon Hungary</i>			<i>1944 Hungary</i>	
	<i>Budapest</i>	<i>Provinces</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Ceded Areas</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Number of Jews in 1941</i>					
Jews	184,453	216,528	400,981	324,026	725,007
Converts and Christians of Jewish origin ^a	62,350	27,290	89,640	10,360	100,000
Total	246,803	243,818	490,621	334,386	825,007
<i>Losses Prior to German Occupation on March 19, 1944</i>					
Labor servicemen	12,350	12,500	24,850	17,150	42,000
Alien Jews deported in 1941 ^b	3,000	2,000	5,000	15,000	20,000
Bácska massacres of 1942	—	—	—	1,000	1,000
Total	15,350	14,500	29,850	33,150	63,000
<i>Number of Jews at the Time of the Occupation</i>					
Total	231,453	229,318	460,771	301,236	762,007
<i>Impact of the Occupation</i>					
Fled abroad	2,000	1,000	3,000	2,000	5,000
Deported, killed, or died	105,453	222,318	327,771	290,236	618,007
<i>Number of Jews on December 31, 1945</i>					
Returned from deportation	20,000	40,000	60,000	56,500	116,500
Liberated labor servicemen	5,000	6,000	11,000	9,000	20,000
Liberated in Budapest	119,000	—	119,000	—	119,000
Total	144,000	46,000	190,000	65,500	255,500
<i>Losses of Hungarian Jewry</i>					
Losses prior to the occupation	15,350	14,500	29,850	33,150	63,000
Net losses during the occupation	85,453	182,318	267,771	233,736	501,507
Total	100,803	196,818	297,621	266,886	564,507
Loss to the community by escape abroad	2,000	1,000	3,000	2,000	5,000
Grand total	102,803	197,818	300,621	268,886	569,507

SOURCE: Based on data in *Hungarian Jewry before and after the Persecution* (Budapest: Statistical Department of the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress, n.d.), 2.

^aIdentified as racial Jews under the legislation in effect in 1941.

^bJews who could not prove their citizenship, deported and subsequently killed near Kamenets-Podolsk.

Podolsk; and close to 1,000 were killed in the so-called Délvidék (Bácska) area in January–February 1942. Of the 63,000 preoccupation casualties, 29,850 were from Trianon Hungary (15,350 from Budapest) and 33,150 from the annexed territories.

During the occupation, the Jewish community suffered 501,507 casualties. The overwhelming majority of these were among the close to 440,000 Jews who were deported to Auschwitz between May 15 and July 8, 1944. Of the casualties suffered during the occupation, 267,771 were Jews from Trianon Hungary (85,453 from Budapest and 182,318 from the provinces) and 233,736 were from the acquired territories. Thus, the overall losses of Hungarian Jewry during World War II, discounting those who fled abroad, came to 564,507. Of these, 297,621 were from Trianon Hungary (100,803 from Budapest) and 266,886 from the acquired territories.

At the end of 1945, there were 255,500 Jews in the territories that had been controlled by Hungary in 1944, of whom about 190,000 lived in the Trianon part of the country—including 144,000 in Budapest. Of the Budapest residents, 119,000 had been liberated in the city: about 69,000 in the ghetto, approximately 25,000 in the protected houses of the so-called international ghetto, and about 25,000 who had been in hiding (most with forged Aryan papers). The returnees to Budapest included about 5,000 liberated from labor service and 20,000 from concentration camps.

Of the 46,000 Jews who lived in the provincial communities of Trianon Hungary at the end of 1945, approximately 6,000 had been liberated from labor service companies and 40,000 had returned from various concentration camps. Many of the latter had been deported in June 1944 to the family work camps in and around Strasshof, Austria. Of the 65,500 Jews who lived in the annexed territories at the end of 1945, about 9,000 were former labor servicemen and 56,500 were returnees from concentration camps.²

The staggering losses of Hungarian Jewry were compounded by the negative demographic structure of the surviving Jewish population, whose distribution by age and sex was highly unfavorable in 1945–46. The negative factors were particularly discernible in the countryside, where the dejewification process had been virtually completed. The returnees to the provinces, excepting the few areas from which the Jews had been deported to Strasshof, consisted almost exclusively of persons twenty to fifty years old. The demographic structure was considerably better in Budapest, where a large number of the elderly survived in the ghetto and thousands of children were rescued by the International Red Cross and the various Christian denominations and orders.

The age distribution of the losses in Trianon Hungary's Jewish community, excluding converts and Christians of Jewish origin, is a dramatic reflection of the consequences of the Holocaust. Whereas in the countryside

the number of Jews declined from 216,507 in 1941 to 47,124 in 1946 (a loss of 78.23 percent), the corresponding decline in Budapest was less pronounced: from 184,473 to 96,500 (47.69 percent). In the countryside, the losses were particularly high for those under twenty and above sixty years of age.³

When the survivors are compared by sex, however, Budapest does not fare as well as the rest of the country. Of the 96,500 Jews living in Budapest in 1946, 59,053 were female—a ratio of 1,577 females to 1,000 males.⁴ The greater survival rate of women in the capital was the consequence of Horthy's halting of the deportations on July 7, 1944, and the high losses among the males serving in the labor service system after 1942: wartime losses among the Budapest labor servicemen aged twenty to forty were 68 percent, and among those forty to sixty, 57 percent.⁵

In the countryside, where the losses among the labor servicemen were somewhat lighter and the deportations affected the entire Jewish population, the male-female ratio of the survivors was considerably better. In 1946 there were 24,604 male survivors and 22,520 female survivors (915 females to 1,000 males). In the vital twenty to sixty age group, the number of males (19,619) exceeded that of females (16,685) by 2,934. The exact ratio, of course, varied from community to community.

The unfavorable demographic factors resulting from the war were aggravated by occasional pogroms, the failure of restitution, the socialization policies of the postwar regime, and the emigration waves they engendered.⁶ Collectively, these factors rendered the hopes for the reestablishment of a vibrant and flourishing Hungarian Jewish community difficult, if not impossible.

Punishment

The evidence reveals that the Nazis could not have carried out their designs in Hungary without the cooperation of the government of Döme Sztójay, which was appointed with the consent of Miklós Horthy, the Hungarian head of state. It was this government that placed the instruments of state power—the police, gendarmerie, and civil service—at the disposal of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*, which had fewer than one hundred SS-men under its immediate command. With the additional might provided by the three state agencies, the German and Hungarian dejewifiers were able to carry out the various phases of the Final Solution—the isolation, expropriation, ghettoization, concentration, and deportation of the Jews—very quickly and with a routine and efficiency that impressed even the top Nazis.

As the Soviet forces advanced, many thousands of the perpetrators fled, together with countless other Fascists, to the West. Many among them managed to escape altogether; others were captured by the British or the

Americans in occupied Austria and Germany. An unknown number among the latter managed to hide their criminal background and ended up in various parts of the free world, especially Argentina, Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, where they lived out their lives—or continue to live—undetected, having exploited their credentials as reliable anti-Communists during the cold war.⁷

The major Hungarian war criminals who had played a leadership role in the various pro-Nazi governments and political parties and were actively involved in the planning and implementation of the anti-Jewish measures were unable to hide their background. The subject of special investigative efforts, these Hungarian governmental and political figures in Allied hands were easily unmasked, as were a number of top German officials with whom they had collaborated during the occupation.

The postwar Hungarian government requested that the Western Allies arrest and make possible the extradition of 483 Hungarian and 38 German suspected war criminals. The Hungarian demands for the extradition of these criminals, especially those of German nationality, caused considerable friction between the Hungarian and American authorities.⁸ The tensions were eased when 390 of the Hungarian suspects were returned and the Americans consented to the extradition of three top SS officials who had been active during the occupation to serve as witnesses in the major Hungarian war crimes trials. These were *SS-Brigadeführer* Edmund Veessenmayer, Hitler's plenipotentiary; *SS-Obergruppenführer* Otto Winkelmann, the Higher SS and Police Leader; and *SS-Standartenführer* Kurt Becher, Heinrich Himmler's "economic" representative.

The major Hungarian war criminals were rounded up and first interrogated by a team headed by Martin Himler, a Hungarian-American who headed the Hungarian Section of the Office of Strategic Services in Salzburg, Austria. Most of these were returned to Hungary in October 1945 escorted by Lt. George Granville, an American army officer of Hungarian background. Among these were practically all the leading figures of the Sztójay and Szálasi governments. On their return to Budapest, they were handed over to Maj. Gen. Gábor Péter, the head of the Political Police.⁹

Of the three Germans extradited by the Western Allies to serve as prosecution witnesses, only Veessenmayer was eventually tried, as will be discussed in the following. However, many other German and Austrian nationals who had been involved in the Hungarian chapter of the Nazis' Final Solution were tried elsewhere. Among the most important of these trials were those held in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Israel. A number of Hungarian nationals, in turn, were tried outside Hungary, in Romania, Yugoslavia, the United States, and Canada. Some, such as those who were tried in Yugoslavia, were extradited by the Hungarian government; others,

many of whom originally had been tried in absentia in Hungary, were placed on trial abroad after being unmasked.

Hungary

By far the most important trials relating to the destruction of Hungarian Jewry were naturally those held in Hungary. Many of the accused who had been active in the roundup, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews were tried in the appropriate county people's tribunals. The major war criminals—those who had served in top government positions and collaborated with the SS and other German agencies in the planning and implementation of the Final Solution—were tried in Budapest.

Hungary undertook to cooperate in the apprehension and trial of persons accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity in accordance with the provisions of Article 14 of the Armistice Agreement of January 20, 1945. In compliance with these provisions, the Provisional National Government adopted Decree No. 81/1945.M.E. on January 25, 1945, establishing a system of people's courts. These were envisioned to function only until a duly elected legislature could set up a permanent court system.¹⁰ Under the decree, two types of courts were established: (1) people's tribunals, lower trial courts that functioned in most county seats, with each court presided over by a professional judge acting in conjunction with five lay judges or "people's assessors";¹¹ (2) the National Council of People's Tribunals (NOT), which heard appeals from these courts, and was headed by a professional judge appointed by the minister of justice. NOT operated through several appellate councils, each consisting of five professional judges working in conjunction with lay deputies representing the coalition parties.¹²

The trials of the major war criminals began shortly after their extradition by the Western Allies. However, even before their return to Budapest, so-called revolutionary courts tried and convicted a number of Hungarian officers and guards who had committed horrendous crimes against labor servicemen, especially in the Ukraine and Serbia.¹³

The series of trials involving the major war criminals began in Budapest on October 29, 1945. The first to be tried was former prime minister László Bárdossy. During his eleven-month tenure as premier (April 1941–March 1942), Hungary participated in the invasion of Yugoslavia, declared war on the Soviet Union and the United States, and became firmly committed to the Third Reich. It was also during his premiership that Hungary adopted the third major anti-Jewish law (clearly based on the Nazis' Nuremberg Law of 1935), exacerbated the Jewish labor service system, rounded up and deported close to eighteen thousand "alien" Jews (most of whom were

slaughtered near Kamenets-Podolsk in late August 1941), and witnessed the massacre of close to a thousand Jews (along with two thousand to three thousand Serbs) by Hungarian army and gendarmerie units in the Bácska area in January–February 1942. Convicted on November 3 and after an unsuccessful appeal to NOT, Bárdossy was shot by a firing squad on January 10, 1946.¹⁴

Bárdossy's trial was followed by that of former prime minister Béla Imrédy. He was accused of crimes associated with his involvement in pro-Reich and anti-Jewish activities during his brief tenure as premier (May 1938–February 1939) and especially in connection with his services in the quisling government of Döme Sztójay. Imrédy, originally an Anglophile, was indicted for, among other things, his responsibility in the enactment of the major anti-Jewish laws of 1938 and 1939 and preparing the ground for the close cooperation with the Third Reich. During the German occupation, he had served as minister without portfolio in charge of economic coordination. Convicted on November 23, 1945, Imrédy was executed on February 28, 1946.¹⁵

Of greatest interest in connection with the destruction of Hungarian Jewry in 1944 was the trial of the three top officials of the Sztójay government in charge of handling the so-called Jewish question, Minister of the Interior Andor Jaross, and his two state secretaries, László Baky and László Endre. The “deportation trio,” as they were popularly referred to, went on trial on December 18, 1945. By the time the proceedings ended on January 4, 1946, Hungary and the world at large had heard the gruesome details of the planning and implementation of the Final Solution. In addition to responsibility for the destruction of the Jews, the three war criminals were also accused of plotting and cooperating with the SS to the detriment of Hungary's national interests. They were sentenced to death on January 2, 1946; Baky and Endre were hanged on March 29, and Jaross was shot by a firing squad on April 14.¹⁶

Another major trial that aroused great interest was that of Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the Nazi-type Arrow Cross Party and head of the government that was established with German assistance following the anti-Horthy coup of October 15, 1944. He and several leading figures of his regime were charged with crimes against the Jews, especially those of Budapest, and with political and military-related activities that virtually ruined Hungary during their six-month rule.¹⁷ A major point of the indictment was their collusion with the SS in preventing the regent from extricating Hungary from the war. The trial also provided details about the background and evolution of the various Right-radical Arrow Cross movements and parties and about the reign of terror that characterized the Szálasi era.

The last major trial of interest in connection with the Holocaust was that of Döme Sztójay, the former Hungarian minister in Berlin, who had been appointed prime minister in conjunction with the German occupation. It was during his tenure that the Jews of Hungary, excepting those of Budapest, were liquidated. Sztójay's chief codefendants in the trial that began on March 14, 1946, were members of his government, including Antal Kunder, Jenő Rátz, Lajos Reményi-Schneller, and Lajos Szász. On March 22, all the accused were found guilty of sacrificing the interests of the nation by collaborating with the Third Reich. Kunder was condemned to life imprisonment; the others were condemned to death and executed shortly thereafter.¹⁸

Concurrent with these mass trials, the people's courts held individual trials for several persons who had played important roles in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. Among these were Lt. Col. László Ferenczy, the gendarmerie officer in charge of the ghettoization and deportation program, and Péter Hain and László Koltay, the leaders of the State Security Police. All three were found guilty and executed in the early spring of 1946. Their trials were succeeded by those of a relatively large number of officials who had played a "secondary" role in Hungary's political life during the Nazi era.

The Hungarian people's tribunals continued their activities for several years, handling progressively fewer and less important cases. By March 1, 1948, criminal proceedings had been initiated against 39,514 persons, and 31,472 cases had been disposed of. Of these, 5,954 were dismissed and 9,245 ended with not guilty verdicts. Of the 16,273 convictions, 8,041 resulted in imprisonment of less than one year and 6,110 in terms between one and five years. Only 41 individuals were condemned to life at forced labor. In the country as a whole, 322 individuals were condemned to death but only 146 of these sentences were carried out, while the rest were commuted to life imprisonment.¹⁹ There is no way to determine how many of the convicted criminals were released or had their sentences commuted under the various amnesty programs of the Communist regime. György Berend, the former deputy president of NOT, summed up the record of the Hungarian people's tribunals as follows: "When one takes into account how many leaders in respectable positions, how many warmongers and agitators against the people, and how many thousands of forced labor company murderous guards and *Nyilas* mass murderers were produced during the 25 years before the liberation, the above statistics elicit serious doubts even in the most ardent opponents of the people's tribunals."²⁰

Hungarian nationals accused of involvement in the destruction of Jews—and of crimes against Romanians and Serbs—were tried not only in Hungary, but in Romania and Yugoslavia as well. Their trials took place soon after the war and involved crimes committed in Hungarian-occupied Northern Transylvania and the Bácska, respectively.

Romania

In connection with the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry, two trials were held in 1946 in Cluj (Kolozsvár), the capital of Transylvania, in people's tribunals set up under the provisions of Decree-Law No. 312 of the Ministry of Justice, dated April 21, 1945. The structure and organization of these tribunals were basically the same as those of Hungary's counterparts. In the first of the mass trials, sixty-three individuals were accused of crimes against Romanians and some Jews during the occupation of Northern Transylvania by Hungarian troops in September 1940. The destruction of the Jews of Northern Transylvania was the subject of the second mass trial, with 185 indictments. Among the accused were the government, military, police, and gendarmerie officers and officials of the counties and cities that had been involved in the implementation of the Final Solution in the province. The sentences handed down by the court were stiff—twenty were condemned to death and many more to life imprisonment. However, many of the accused were tried in absentia. This group included those that received the harshest sentences; among them was Col. Tibor Paksy-Kiss, the gendarmerie officer in charge of the ghettoization in the province. Of these only a few were eventually tried, mostly in Hungary. None of those condemned to death was executed.²¹

Many of the criminals in custody were freed shortly after Romania's transformation into a Soviet-style people's democracy early in 1948. These were deemed "socially rehabilitated and politically re-educated"; among them were a number of Fascists who had been condemned to life imprisonment for crimes against Jews.²²

Yugoslavia

In accordance with the provisions of Article 14 of the Armistice Agreement, the Hungarian authorities extradited to Yugoslavia several top-ranking Hungarian officers charged with complicity in the massacre of thousands of Serbs and Jews in the Bácska, the area occupied by Hungary during 1941–44. The accused, including Gen. Ferenc Szombathelyi, the former chief of the General Staff; Gen. Ferenc Feketeahalmi-Czeydner, the commander of the Fifth Army Corps; Maj. Gen. József Grassy; and Capt. Márton Zöldi, were first tried in Hungary.²³ The trial in Hungary of Grassy and Zöldi, who were also accused of active involvement in the Final Solution in 1944, began on January 8, 1946. They were condemned to death by hanging four days later. The Hungarian trials of Generals Feketeahalmi-Czeydner and Szombathelyi began on March 21 and March 28, respectively. They too were found guilty by the court. All four were then handed over to the

Yugoslavs, who retried them together with several Hungarian county and city officials active in the Bácska area during the occupation era. The trial began on October 24, 1946, in Novi Sad (Újvidék), the site of the greatest massacre. All of them were condemned to death six days later. They were executed early in November.²⁴

The destruction of Hungarian Jewry was also the subject of several major war crimes trials held in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Israel. These involved top-ranking Nazi officials associated with the German Foreign Office and the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), especially the Eichmann-*Sonderkommando*.

West Germany

TRIALS BY NON-GERMAN COURTS

Prior to the emergence of the Federal Republic of Germany as a sovereign entity, the crimes committed against the Jews of Hungary were the subject of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the twelve cases tried before the U.S. Military Tribunals, and the trials conducted by the British in their zone of occupation. At Nuremberg, the tragedy that befell Hungarian Jewry was dealt with primarily in the cases involving RSHA chief Ernst Kaltenbrunner and Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. The Americans brought up the issue of Hungarian Jewry in connection with the cases involving Oswald Pohl; the Flick, I.G. Farben, and Krupp combines; and the so-called Ministries Cases. The British dealt with it primarily in the case involving Josef Kramer and forty-four other defendants associated with the Auschwitz, Natzweiler, and Bergen-Belsen camps. The two other occupation powers, France and the USSR, also held a few war crimes-related military trials that dealt peripherally with the wartime plight of Hungarian Jewry. The French courts were primarily concerned with crimes committed in concentration and forced labor camps. Of the Soviet trials, the most important from the Hungarian Jewish point of view was that of Franz Jäckeln, the Higher SS and Police Leader, *Ostland*, who was commander of the forces that slaughtered more than twenty-three thousand Hungarian and Ukrainian Jews near Kamenets-Podolsk in late August 1941. Jäckeln was executed in 1946.²⁵

By far the most important trial relating to Hungarian Jewry was that of Edmund Veessenmayer, the former plenipotentiary of the Third Reich in occupied Hungary. As a leading defendant in the Ministries Case (1948), Veessenmayer was convicted on several counts of the indictment and condemned in April 1949 to twenty years' imprisonment.²⁶ In pursuit of

U.S. postwar policy objectives in Germany, John J. McCloy, the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, commuted Veessenmayer's sentence in January 1951 to ten years. He was freed a year later on the recommendation of a special U.S. clemency board.²⁷

GERMAN TRIALS

The reconstituted German courts held a number of trials that dealt specifically with the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry. The most important of these was that of *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Herman Alois Krumei and *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Otto Hunsche, two leading figures of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando* in Hungary. Though they played a crucial role in Hungary,²⁸ they lived in West Germany undisturbed for fifteen years after the war. They were tried and convicted shortly after their arrest in 1960, only to be freed by an appellate court. They were retried in 1964–65 in Frankfurt-am-Main; Hunsche was acquitted and Krumei was sentenced to five years at hard labor (on February 3, 1965). On the prosecutor's appeal, the appellate court at Karlsruhe nullified the Frankfurt court's decision in 1968 and ordered a new trial. This time Krumei was condemned to life imprisonment and Hunsche was sentenced to twelve years (August 29, 1969). Their conviction was upheld on January 17, 1973.²⁹

In the Auschwitz Trial (December 1964–August 1965), the catastrophe of Hungarian Jewry was discussed especially in connection with the case against Victor Capesius, the Transylvanian pharmacist who had served as Josef Mengele's assistant on the selection ramp in Auschwitz. He was condemned to nine years' imprisonment but was freed shortly afterward, following the Karlsruhe higher court's order that the years Capesius spent in internment after the war be counted as part of his sentence.³⁰

The West German authorities started criminal proceedings against three other high-ranking officials of the Third Reich who had played an important role in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry: Horst Wagner and Eberhard von Thadden, the two leading officials of the *Inland II* Section of the German Foreign Office, and Albert Theodor Ganzenmüller, state secretary in charge of the railways in the Reich Ministry of Transport. None of them served any time in prison. Thadden was killed in a car accident on November 8, 1964; Wagner, whose trial actually began on May 29, 1972, but was suspended and periodically postponed because of illness, died in Hamburg on March 13, 1977.³¹ Ganzenmüller, who was indicted for, among other things, providing the railroad cars used in the deportation of the Jews, went on trial on May 3, 1973. The trial was first delayed because of his lawyer's involvement in another prolonged case, then indefinitely postponed on medical grounds. Like many another of his Nazi colleagues,

Ganzenmüller too escaped punishment.³² Among the several top-ranking Nazi officials who had served in Hungary during the occupation but who were never brought to trial were Winkelmann and Becher.³³

Austria

Two of the major war crimes trials held in Vienna related directly to the Holocaust in Hungary. The first one was that of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Siegfried Seidl, the former commander of the Theresienstadt concentration camp and a leading member of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando*. In Hungary, Seidl had served as an expert advisor in the roundup and deportation of several large Jewish communities, including those of Eger, Marosvásárhely, Mátészalka, Nyíregyháza, and Székesfehérvár. Found guilty as charged, Seidl was executed in Vienna on October 4, 1946.

The second trial involved *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Franz Novak, the *Sonderkommando*'s transportation expert and liaison with the Reich Ministry of Transport. After living unmolested for fifteen years in Vienna, he was subjected to what turned out to be a whole series of trials. In his first trial (in November 1964), Novak was condemned to eight years in prison. On appeal, the Appellate Court of Vienna nullified the judgment and ordered a new trial. After the second trial, held in September 1966, the court ordered Novak's release a month later because the jury was deadlocked over the issue of "superior orders." In February 1968, the appellate court nullified the verdict in the second trial, forcing Novak to stand trial once again on December 20, 1969. Convicted this time on one count, he was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment. However, the appellate court concurred this time with the appeal by the defense and ordered still another trial scheduled for August 1971. The fourth trial was held in March 1972 and the jury adopted the position of its predecessor in the first trial. Novak was condemned to seven years in prison on April 13, 1972.³⁴

Also of interest in connection with the destruction of Hungarian Jewry was the trial in Vienna early in 1972 of Walter Dejaco and Fritz Karl Ertl, the SS officers and architects who designed and built the Auschwitz gas chambers and cremation furnaces. Both defendants were acquitted and released from custody on March 10, the jury having concluded that they had acted under military orders and were ignorant of the use to which the death ovens would be put.³⁵

Other Countries

Trials of interest to Hungarian Jewry were held also in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Israel. In Poland, the liquidation of Hungarian Jewry was a subject in the trial of Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Höss, the former commandant of

Auschwitz. He was condemned to death by a Warsaw tribunal on March 29, 1947, and executed in Auschwitz a few days later.

In Czechoslovakia, the Bratislava trial of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Dieter Wisliceny, a leading member of the *Eichmann-Sonderkommando* in Hungary, was of special interest. Wisliceny played a determining role in the roundup and ghettoization of the Jews, an expertise he had acquired in the liquidation of the Jewish communities of Slovakia and Greece. Convicted on February 27, 1948, Wisliceny was hanged in Bratislava on May 4.³⁶

In Israel, many details of the Holocaust in Hungary—and the tragic fate of European Jewry as a whole—came to light during the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the former head of Section IV.B.4. of the RSHA. Captured by Israeli agents in Argentina in May 1960, Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem in 1961. He was hanged in Ramla on May 31, 1962.³⁷

The catastrophe of Hungarian Jewry was also at the core of one of the most controversial trials ever held in Israel. It involved Rudolph (Rezső) Kasztner, the former *de facto* head of the Budapest Relief and Rescue Committee—the Vaadah.³⁸

THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

A few Hungarian nationals also were the subject of judicial proceedings in the United States and Canada. The United States initiated and successfully completed denaturalization proceedings against two individuals who were found to have been involved in various aspects of the anti-Jewish drive in Hungary. Canada proved unsuccessful in its first and only criminal proceeding against an accused war criminal. The case involved a former Hungarian gendarmerie captain indicted for crimes committed during the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews of Szeged, one of Hungary's largest cities.

These North American democracies became more sensitive to issues relating to the Holocaust only after the easing of the cold war in the era of *détente*. They became increasingly responsive to allegations that they were harboring thousands of individuals who had been actively involved in the Final Solution. Many among these suspected war criminals lived undisturbed for decades, hiding behind the cloak of anonymity. Others, enjoying the support of sundry ultra-conservative elements, prospered openly as frontline champions of anti-Communism.

The United States was the first to act, largely as a result of the legislative initiative of Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman (D-NY). In 1979, it brought about the establishment of the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) within the framework of the Department of Justice. Relying exclusively on civil suits (the United States lacks jurisdiction to bring criminal prosecutions against individuals whose crimes were committed outside the country, against non-American citizens), the OSI achieved considerable progress in

identifying and taking legal action against Nazi perpetrators residing in the United States. By the end of 1997, it had succeeded in stripping sixty such persons of U.S. citizenship and removing forty-eight from the United States.

Among these were two former Hungarian nationals: József Szendi, a former gendarme who was involved in the deportation of so-called alien Jews in 1941 and participated in the Hungarian anti-Jewish drive in 1944, and Ferenc Koréh, the former “responsible editor” of *A Székely Nép* (The Székely People), an antisemitic daily published in Sepsiszentgyörgy in Northern Transylvania. Koréh was also associated with other anti-Jewish and anti-Allied journals and had served in the Hungarian Propaganda Office during the Holocaust. In America since 1958, Szendi lived and worked as a janitor in Cookeville, Tennessee, until his retirement in the 1970s. It was Szendi’s political predilection and personal vanity that led to his unmasking. He revealed part of his background in a book published in Hungary shortly after the collapse of the Communist system.³⁹ The OSI initiated denaturalization proceedings against him on September 9, 1992, and on June 18, 1993, the U.S. District Court in Cookeville revoked his citizenship. Under an agreement that was not totally unfavorable to him, Szendi left the United States a few days later and went back to Hungary.

Koréh, eighty-six years of age in 1996, had worked for several decades after his arrival in America in the early 1950s as a Hungarian specialist for Radio Free Europe. The OSI began denaturalization proceedings against Koréh in the early 1980s, but for some internal reason the case was left dormant until the early 1990s. After lengthy legal wranglings, a Federal District Court in Newark, New Jersey, awarded summary judgment to the U.S. government in June 1994 on finding, among other things, that Koréh’s admitted service as responsible editor of the *Székely Nép* constituted “advocacy and assistance in persecution” and “membership and participation in a movement hostile to the United States.” The court’s order revoking Koréh’s citizenship was upheld by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia on July 14, 1995. On April 19, 1996, the U.S. Justice Department initiated deportation proceedings against Koréh, who tried to remain with his family in New Jersey on grounds of advanced age and illness. He died in 1997.

The pitfalls of the criminal approach followed by Canada almost forty years after the war were revealed in the ill-fated “Finta case” (October 1989–May 1990). The trial involved Imre Finta, a Hungarian gendarmerie captain who was charged, among other things, with the confinement, imprisonment, and robbery of 8,617 Jews who had been concentrated in the brickyard ghetto of Szeged, one of the largest provincial cities of Hungary, in 1944. Reportedly the head of a special gendarmerie investigative unit, Finta would have been in charge of gendarmes who, often working in plain clothes, allegedly interrogated and tortured Jews for the “recovery” of their hidden

wealth. He and his gendarmes also were charged with active involvement in the June 25–28, 1944, deportation of the Jews from Szeged.⁴⁰

Finta's trial was initiated by the Canadian Department of Justice following the recommendations of a special commission headed by Justice Jules Deschenes. According to the commission's report, which was submitted to the Canadian Parliament on March 12, 1987, only 20 of the 882 investigated cases included *prima facie* evidence of war crimes warranting urgent legal action. Shortly after the criminal code was amended to make possible the prosecution of these cases, the Canadian attorney general gave his consent to the indictment of Finta on August 18, 1988; one might presume that he considered this case as the prosecution's strongest. However, the trial, which took place in the Supreme Court of Ontario in Toronto, emerged as an unfortunate test case in the criminal pursuit of suspected war criminals. Although the Canadian Department of Justice made a tremendous effort and invested relatively large sums of money for the collection of documentary evidence, the roundup of witnesses, and the recruitment of a variety of experts, the prosecution could not, more than forty years after the commission of the crime, satisfy the judiciary requirements of a Western criminal court. The jury reached a verdict of not guilty just one day after it was charged, on May 24, 1990. The outcome was upheld by the Court of Appeal for Ontario on April 29, 1992, and by the Supreme Court of Canada on March 24, 1994.⁴¹

The German and Hungarian perpetrators tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity represent but a fraction of those who, to various degrees, were actively engaged in "solving" the Jewish question. Clearly, the Allies' wartime commitment to retribution and pursuit of justice was subordinated to the postwar demands of the cold war; their postwar activities in pursuit of conflicting national interests reflect the triumph of expediency over morality and justice. Many of the newly independent states, on their part, have shown themselves increasingly less interested in shedding light on the bloodstains bespattering their national histories; they would rather not pursue Holocaust-related trials that might highlight their own deplorable wartime records. With the passage of time the dictates of national history-cleansing have superceded the demands of historical truth and justice.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Braham, *Politics*, 2.
2. The Jews of Hungary were emancipated under Law No. XVII of December 22, 1867. On October 1, 1895, the Jewish faith was legally recognized by the state (Law No. XLII) as a “received” (i.e., recognized) religion having a status equal to that of the Christian churches.
3. For example, of the 4,807 physicians in Hungary in 1900, 2,321 (48 percent) were Jewish. While between 1890 and 1900 the total number of attorneys in Hungary grew by 7.2 percent, the number of Jewish attorneys increased by 68.6 percent. Braham, *Politics*, 9.
4. This view was articulated by Count Pál Teleki, one of the key political figures of the interwar period. Ibid., 145.
5. Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 17.
6. On November 20, 1940, Hungary was the first country to join the Tripartite Pact, which had been concluded by Germany, Italy, and Japan two months earlier. Shortly thereafter, Hungary also joined the Anti-Comintern Pact and left the League of Nations.
7. According to the census of 1941, the Felvidék area had a Jewish population of 67,876; Carpatho-Ruthenia, 78,087; Northern Transylvania, 164,052; and the Délvidék, 14,202. For some details on the acquired territories, see Braham, *Politics*, 133–35, 148–51, 167–76, 184–85.
8. For details on the many ramifications of these laws, see *ibid.*, 125–30, 151–60, 200–201.
9. By far the most important among these were the National Jewish Aid Campaign (OMZSA), basically a fund-raising organization, and the Welfare Bureau of Hungarian Jews (MIPI), supported primarily through OMZSA funding.
10. The Neolog (also known as Reform or Congressional) congregations consisted primarily of the assimilationist strata of Hungarian Jewry that adopted “more modern, progressive” ecclesiastical practices. The adherents of the Orthodox congregations clung to the traditional rituals and practices of Judaism. The relatively small Status Quo (also known as Status Quo Ante) congregations were composed of those who rejected the positions of both major groups. For details, see Braham, *Politics*, 86–92.
11. Ibid., 129–30.
12. For a detailed statistical overview of the losses of Hungarian Jewry, see *ibid.*, 1296–1301. See also László Varga, “The Losses of Hungarian Jewry: A Contribution to the Statistical Overview” in *Studies on the Holocaust in Hungary*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 256–65. For a different accounting of the losses of Hungarian Jewry, providing

much lower figures, see Tamás Stark, *Magyarország második világháborús embervesztesége* (The human losses of Hungary during the Second World War) (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1989).

Chapter 2

1. Braham, *Politics*, 77–79.
2. For details on the congregations and communal organizations, see *ibid.*, 86–92.
3. According to the terms of this law, the Israelite Confession was no longer identified as equal in law with the Christian denominations. The bill went into effect as Law No. VIII on June 19, 1942. Under it, the representatives of the Jewish community in the Upper House were deprived of their seats, and the payment of dues by Jews to their congregations could no longer be enforced.
4. The Relief and Rescue Committee (*Vaadat ha'Ezra ve'ha'Hatzalah*) of Budapest identified the number of Jewish refugees in Hungary in November 1943 as approximately 15,000. Of these, 6,000 to 8,000 were from Slovakia; 1,900 to 2,500 from Poland; 300 to 500 from Yugoslavia; 3,000 to 4,000 from Germany and Austria; and 500 to 1,000 from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. *Der Kastner-Bericht*, 45.
5. For details on the KEOKH, see Braham, *Politics*, 206–7.
6. For further details about the deportation of the “alien” Jews and their massacre near Kamenets-Podolsk, see *ibid.*, pp. 207–14. See also Judit Fejes, “On the History of Mass Deportation From Carpatho-Ruthenia in 1941,” in *The Holocaust in Hungary. Fifty Years Later*, Randolph L. Braham and Attila Pók, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 305–28.
7. On January 17 a fuller and more authentic account of the events in the Sajkás area was given to Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky by Rezső Ruppert, a fellow member of the Lower House. The two parliamentarians communicated their findings to Prime Minister László Bárdossy two days later. See also Enikő Sajti, *Megtorlás vagy konszolidáció? Délvidék 1941–1944* (Reprisal or consolidation? The Délvidék, 1941–1944), in *The Holocaust in Hungary. Fifty Years Later*, 379–88.
8. For further details see Braham, *Politics*, 214–22.
9. *Ibid.*, 1324–25.
10. For more details, see chapter 1.
11. For details see Randolph L. Braham, *The Hungarian Labor Service System, 1939–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972). Cited hereafter as Braham, *Labor Service*.
12. For details on the functions and responsibilities of the KMOF, see *ibid.*, 9–11.
13. Following the acquisition of Northern Transylvania from Romania in August–September 1940 and of the Délvidék (southern region) and Baranya regions from Yugoslavia in April 1941, the number of army corps was increased to nine. For some details on these army corps, see *ibid.*
14. Decree No. 23 123. eln. Ib.-1942 of the Ministry of Defense. Elek Karsai, comp., *Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön* (They stood unarmed in the minefields)

- (Budapest: A Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőlete, 1962), 1:524–25. Cited hereafter as *FAA*.
15. For further details see Erzsébet Sinka, “Hazatérés után. Zelk Zoltan írásai” (After the return home: From the writings of Zoltán Zelk), *Kritika* (Criticism) (Budapest), no. 4 (1983): 6–7. See also the account by Zoltán (Csima) Singer in *The Wartime System of Labor Service in Hungary: Varieties of Experiences*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 42–46.
 16. See Order No. 121 480. eln. KMOF-1942, dated December 19, 1942 in *FAA*, 2:178–84. Nagy issued a new set of orders on March 9, 1943, concerning the treatment of labor servicemen stationed within Hungary. Decree No. 110 160 eln. KMOF-1943 contained detailed provisions relating to the general principles underlying the treatment of labor servicemen, the procedures to be employed in disciplining them, and their supervision and employment. For text see *ibid.*, 286–304.
 17. Outstanding among these were men such as Sgt. Sándor Majer of Field Company No. 110/34; Dr. Attila Juhász, the humane commander of a company in the Ukraine, who was hanged by the *Nyilas* in the fall of 1944; 1st Lt. Elek Szerdahelyi and Nándor Tosch of Company No. 101/14; László Seress of Field Company No. 110/60; Antal Kőrössi, the commander of Company No. 108/15; László Ocskay, the commander of Company No. 101/359; and 1st Lt. Barna Kiss, the commander of Field Company 101/2. One must mention in this context Col. Imre Reviczky, the commander of Labor Service Battalion No. X of Nagybánya, who saved thousands of labor servicemen throughout his tenure and especially during the German occupation. Virtually all of the above have been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. The same honor has been bestowed on Gen. Vilmos Nagy.
 18. Decree No. 55 000. eln. oszt.-1942 of the Ministry of Defense. For text see *Honvédségi Közlöny* (Gazette of the armed forces) (Budapest), no. 58 (December 28, 1942).
 19. See his *Végzetes esztendőik, 1938–1945* (Fateful years, 1938–1945) (Budapest: Körmendy, n.d.).
 20. See Decree No. 111 470 eln. KMOF-1943 in *FAA*, 2:370–78. Acting on behalf of the Ministry of Defense, Gen. Imre Ruzsiczay-Rüdiger also signed the decree (July 6, 1943) relating to the implementation of the agreement. For details on the background and implications of the deployment agreement, as well as on the specific labor service companies that were selected for deployment, see Braham, *Politics*, 343–49.
 21. The number of victims could not be determined with any degree of exactness. Zalman Teichman, one of three survivors of the ordeal (though gravely wounded, he managed to crawl out of the mass grave) estimated the number of those killed as between 1,000 and 1,500. Yugoslav sources, however, established the number of those executed at 700. See Zdenko Lowenthal, ed., *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and Their Collaborators Against the Jews of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Federation of Jewish Communities of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, 1957), 36, 185. For Teichman’s account see

- Nathan Eck, "The March of Death From Serbia to Hungary (September 1944) and the Slaughter of Cservedka," *Yad Vashem Studies* (Jerusalem), 2 (1958): 255–94. See also György Nagy, "History of Labor Service Company 108/84 of Bor," in *The Wartime System of Labor Service in Hungary*, 55–127.
22. Lowenthal, *Crimes of the Fascist Occupants*, 36, 182–84. For further details see Nagy, "History of Labor Service Company 108/84 of Bor," 55–127.
 23. These elements tried to sabotage the rescue measures whenever they could. On June 7, 1944, for example, Lt. Col. László Ferenczy and his German and Hungarian accomplices—enraged by the humanitarian actions of some officers at Jászberény, who allowed about six hundred labor servicemen to take a ten-day leave—staged a raid at the Hatvan Railway Station and had the cars carrying the returning labor servicemen attached to a deportation train. Braham, *Politics*, 696.
 24. See Decree No. 151 158. eln. 42.-1944 repealing Decree No. 110 160. eln. KMOF-1943, in *FAA*, 2:548–52.
 25. For details on the *Nyilas* era, see Braham, *Politics*, 956–71.
 26. See *ibid.*, 1368–70. The appendix identifies the labor companies that were affected as well as the date of their transfer. See also Szabolcs Szita, "A magyarországi zsidó munkaszolgálat" (The Jewish labor service system of Hungary), in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later*, 329–46.
 27. For details see Braham, *Politics*, 963–69.
 28. For further details, see *ibid.*, 363–65.

Chapter 3

1. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 111.
2. The withdrawal of the Hungarian forces was the subject of the discussion Gen. Ferenc Szombathelyi, the chief of the General Staff, had with Hitler and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel on January 24, 1944. It was also echoed in Horthy's personal letter to Hitler dated February 12, reiterated in Szombathelyi's memorandum addressed to Keitel on February 14, and in Kállay's communication to Keitel later that month.
3. The other members of the delegation were Minister of Defense Lajos Csátay, Foreign Minister Jenő Ghyczy, and Szombathelyi. These were joined by Döme Sztójay, the Hungarian minister in Berlin.
4. Hitler cited, among other things, the contacts between Anglo-American representatives in Istanbul and a Kállay-approved Hungarian delegation composed of Prof. Albert Szent-Györgyi, the Nobel-prize-winning scientist; András Frey, an editor of *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian nation), the highly respected Budapest daily; and Prof. Gyula Mészáros (who turned out to have been a double agent). Hitler was also angered by the journalistic activities of Pál Szvatkó, who often echoed the aspirations of the anti-Nazi forces in Hungary through his columns in the *Magyarország* (Hungary). For further details see Braham, *Politics*, 389–90.
5. Nicholas Horthy, *Memoirs* (New York: Robert Speller, 1957), 215. Horthy is silent about why or how the Jews of Hungary, including the refugees, were in fact deported while he was in office.

6. C. A. Macartney has demonstrated that Horthy had prepared four different—and mutually inconsistent—versions of his encounter with Hitler and that “all of them pass over, practically entirely, the concessions to which Horthy undoubtedly agreed.” For further details see Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, 2:234.
7. For details on the so-called *Jägerstab* (Fighter Aircraft Staff) project and Horthy’s consent, see Braham, *Politics*, 396–401.
8. See chapter 2.
9. Among these were Maj. Gen. József Heszlényi, commander of the IVth Army Corps, and Lt. Gen. Sándor Homlok, the Hungarian military attaché in Berlin. One of their major contacts was Dr. Karl Clodius, the deputy chief of the Economic Policy Division of the German Foreign Office, who had frequently visited Budapest.
10. Elek Karsai, *A budai vártól a gyepűig, 1941–1945* (From the fort of Buda to the borderland, 1941–1945) (Budapest: Táncsics, 1965), 203–6.
11. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 74.
12. For details on these first mass deportation plans, see Braham, *Politics*, 283–93.
13. See Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 134.
14. This was revealed during the trial of Veessenmayer. See the Ministries Trial (Court IV, Case XI), testimony of July 22, 1948, transcript p. 13243.
15. Ministries Trial, testimony of October 18, 1948, transcript pp. 26172–73.
16. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, 2:238–39. See also Kienast’s statement of August 14, 1947 (NG-2528).
17. Ministries Trial, Veessenmayer’s testimony on July 22, 1948, transcript p. 13260.
18. See Lévai, *Fekete könyv*, 128. See also László Karsai and Judit Molnár, eds., *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per* (The Endre-Baky-Jaross trial) (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1994), 105.
19. Lévai, *Fekete könyv*, 128.
20. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, 2:283.
21. Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt?*, 142. See also Karsai and Molnár, *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per*, 343.
22. Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt?*, 142. For the transcript of Bishop Ravasz’s testimony in the 1945–46 trial of László Baky, László Endre, and Andor Jaross, see Karsai and Molnár, *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per*, 341–45.
23. Jenő Lévai, ed., *Eichmann in Hungary* (Budapest: Pannonia Press, 1961), 119.
24. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, 2:239, 280.
25. Nuremberg war crimes trial document NOKW-1912.
26. See Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 112.
27. For further details on the composition of the Legation, see Braham, *Politics*, 407–11. On Bosnyák and the Institute for the Researching of the Jewish Question, see *ibid.*, 534–37.
28. See the many documents to this effect in Braham, *Destruction*.
29. For further details on the background and leadership of *Inland II* and its role in the Final Solution, see Braham, *Politics*, 410–11. See also Christopher R. Browning, “‘Referat Deutschland’ in Jewish Policy and the German Foreign

- Office (1933–1940),” in *Yad Vashem Studies* (Jerusalem), 12 (1977): 37–73. See also his *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978).
30. For biographical details on Winkelmann and the other representatives of the RSHA in Hungary, see Braham, *Politics*, 411–17.
 31. For some biographical details on Eichmann, see *ibid.*, 415–16. For bibliographical references to his wartime activities and capture and trial in Jerusalem, consult Randolph L. Braham, comp., *The Eichmann Case. A Source Book* (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1969).
 32. Antal was also entrusted with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education and Jurcsek with the Ministry of Supply.
 33. Elek Karsai, *Itél a nép* (The people judge) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1977), 200. See also Endre’s testimony in Karsai and Molnár, *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per*, 43.
 34. *Magyarország* (Hungary), Budapest, March 29, 1944.
 35. *New York Times*, March 23, 1944.
 36. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, 2:252.
 37. See chapter 2.
 38. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, 2:246.
 39. Ervin Hollós, *Rendőrség, csendőrség, VKF2* (Police, gendarmerie, VKF2) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1971), 390.
 40. According to Koltay there were about 35,000 denunciations against Jews and Leftists. Lévai, *Fekete könyv*, 106. According to the Germans themselves, “in no other country did they encounter such a large number of denunciations as in Hungary.” See Samuel Stern, “‘A Race with Time’: A Statement” in *Hungarian Jewish Studies*, vol. 3, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1973), 12.
 41. For a listing of the commanders of the various gendarmerie districts and of their headquarters, see Braham, *Politics*, 433.
 42. One of these conferences was held in Munkács on April 12, 1944, in preparation for the anti-Jewish drive in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary. The conferences held in Szatmárnémeti and Marosvásárhely on April 26 and 28, respectively, dealt with the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews of Northern Transylvania. The anti-Jewish drive in southern Hungary was the subject of the conference held in Szeged on June 10, while that relating to Dunántul (Transdanubia) was held in Siófok on June 22. The concentration and deportation of the Jews in the cities surrounding the capital were worked out at a conference held in Budapest on June 28.

Chapter 4

1. The document (3363-PS) is reproduced in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 97–101.
2. For more details on the Neolog congregations, see chapter 1.
3. Among those attending were Ernő Bóda and Ernő Pető, the deputy chairmen; Ernő Munkácsi, the secretary general of the community; and Béla Fábián, the head of the community’s Veterans’ Committee.

4. As originally organized the Council consisted of: Stern, president; Ernő Bóda, Ernő Pető, and Károly Wilhelm, representing the Neolog community of Pest; Samu Csobádi, representing the Neolog community of Buda; Samu Kahán-Frankl and Fülöp Freudiger, representing the Orthodox community; and Nison Kahán, representing the Zionists. Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt?*, 17.
5. Alexander Leitner, *Die Tragödie der Juden in Nagyvárad* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Archives, File JM/2686), 12.
6. The meeting was of a formal nature, with Ernő Bóda taking shorthand notes. For text of the minutes in English translation, see Braham, *Politics*, 465–68.
7. For details see pp. 92–95.
8. For examples of appeals issued by the Council members and ecclesiastical leaders, see Braham, *Politics*, 462–65.
9. See, for example, the April 6, 1944, issue of *A Magyar Zsidók Lapja*. For the English version, see Braham, *Politics*, 473–74.
10. For details on this and the other departments of the Budapest Jewish Council, see *ibid.*, 469–73.
11. Decree No. 1.520/1944.M.E., Concerning the Representation and Self-Government of the Jews. For text see *Budapesti Közlöny* (Gazette of Budapest), No. 20, April 22, 1944, pp. 1–2.
12. Decree No. 176.774/1944. VII.b.B.M. of the Ministry of the Interior, *ibid.*, No. 108, May 13, 1944, p. 3. The newly appointed members were Samu Stern, Ernő Pető, Károly Wilhelm, Béla Berend, Samu Kahán-Frankl, Fülöp Freudiger, Sándor Török, József Nagy, and János Gábor.
13. For details on Berend, including his personal background, his dealings with rightists even before the occupation, his rationalizations and explanations, and his postwar trials, see Braham, *Politics*, 480–89.
14. For more details on these associations, see *ibid.*, 1196–98.
15. The other members were György Auer, András Sebestyén, Sándor Antal, Pál Rózsa, Mihály Kádár, Elemér Tamás, Endre Somló, and Sándor Balassa.
16. Decree No. 191.449/1944.VII.b.M.E. signed by Minister of the Interior Jaross. *Budapesti Közlöny*, No. 169, July 28, 1944, 12.
17. Stöckler summarized his opposition to the “triumvirate” in his condemnatory statement of May 14, 1946, to the Budapest police, which was considering the possibility of bringing the Council members to trial. For his statement, see People’s Tribunal, Budapest, File NB.2600/1946, pp. 111–14, Archives of the City of Budapest.
18. Munkácsi withdrew from the Council for reasons of health; Kahán-Frankl went into hiding; a few decided to join the so-called Kasztner group (see pp. 209–13).
19. For some details, see Braham, *Politics*, 911–12. For Freudiger’s account see his “Five Months,” in *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 237–94.
20. In addition to Stern, the Council included Stöckler, Berend, István Földes, Ottó Komoly, József Nagy, Miklós Szegő, and Lajos Vas as members. Though not

- a formal member of the Council, Miksa Domonkos emerged during the *Nyilas* era as one of the most courageous and effective Jewish leaders.
21. Stöckler remained an active, though highly controversial, leader even after the liberation. He became the head of the National Association of Hungarian Jews (MAZOT) as well as of the Jewish Community of Pest and the Central Board of Hungarian Jews. It was under his leadership that the Jewish community and its institutions were reorganized and placed under the control of the new People's Democratic regime of Hungary. He was arrested by the secret police in January 1953 at the height of the antisemitic campaign in the Soviet bloc. On his controversial role during the postwar period, see Eugene Duschinsky, "Hungary," in *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, Peter Meyer, ed. (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1953), 373–489.
 22. See chapter 1.
 23. In a highly sensational court case involving some leaders of the *Judenrat* in Bedzin, Poland, Chief Justice I. Olshan of the Supreme Court of Israel declared on May 22, 1964, that "no matter how the *Judenrat* acted, it served the Nazis. . . . Even those who served the interests of the Jewish communities assisted the Nazis. . . ." *New York Times*, May 23, 1964.
 24. It was at the Wannsee Conference that the details relating to the implementation of the Final Solution program were worked out. For details on the conference, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 264–66.
 25. For details on the *Einsatzgruppen*, see *ibid.*, 242–56.
 26. See chapter 2.
 27. See, for example, the January 28, 1958, statement of Samuel Springmann, a former member of the Hungarian Zionist movement, available at Yad Vashem, Archives File 500/41–1; see also Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1967), 304–5.
 28. *Der Kastner Bericht*, 37.
 29. The vast correspondence between the Budapest Vaadah and Istanbul can be found in the archives of Beit Lohamei Hagetaot, the Israel State Archives in Jerusalem, and in the archives of Moreshet, Israel. See also Alex Weissberg, *Advocate for the Dead: The Story of Joel Brand* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958), 30–31; and Andre Biss, *A Million Jews to Save* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), 74–75.
 30. *Der Kastner Bericht*, 26.
 31. Yad Vashem Archives, M-20/93. For some details on the so-called Europa Plan, see Braham, *Politics*, 1074–76, and *passim*.
 32. Yad Vashem Archives, M-20/93. Also quoted in Raul Hilberg, ed. *Documents of Destruction* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 192).
 33. Aryeh L. Kubovy, "The Silence of Pope Pius XII and the Beginnings of the 'Jewish Document,'" *Yad Vashem Studies* 6 (1967): 13.
 34. *Der Kastner Bericht*, 82.
 35. Moreshet, Israel Archives, D.I.735, as cited in Y. Gutman and Efraim Zuroff,

- eds., *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977), 442.
36. For details, see Vrba's *I Cannot Forgive* (New York: Grove Press, 1964); Lanik's *Oswiecim: hrobka styroch milionov ludi* (Auschwitz, tomb of four million people) (Kosice: Vydalo Poverenictve SNR, 1946), and *Co Dante nevidel* (What Dante did not see) (Bratislava: Osveta—SV SPB, 1964).
 37. The Vrba-Wetzler Report can be found at the Yad Vashem Archives under No. M-20/149. For their Hungarian version, see Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt?*, 88–110. At Nuremberg they were submitted in evidence as document No. NG-2061.
 38. Eric Kulka, "Five Escapes From Auschwitz," in *They Fought Back*, Yuri Suhl, ed. (New York: Crown, 1967), 206–7.
 39. For further details on the background and flight of Rosin and Mordowicz, see Kulka, "Five Escapes," 207–11.
 40. A Yiddish version of the protocols was prepared by Rabbi Weissmandel for use by the Orthodox leaders, including Freudiger. See *ibid.*, 207.
 41. Vrba, *I Cannot Forgive*, 250; Oscar Neumann, *Im Schatten des Todes* (Tel Aviv: Olamenu, 1956), 178–82. In his interview in Jerusalem in 1964, Krasznaynsky stated that a copy of the report "was handed over to Dr. Kasztner" (*Weiter wurde ein Protokoll dem Dr. Kasztner überreicht*). Oral History Division, Catalog No. 3, 1970, 117, and No. 398 (protocol in German), 5–6.
 42. Samu (Sámuel) Stern, "'A Race with Time,'" in *Hungarian Jewish Studies*, vol. 3, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1973), 56.
 43. *Der Kasztner Bericht*, 21, 26, 37.
 44. Ministries Case, Court IV, Case XI, session of March 19, 1948, transcript p. 3622. Kasztner appears to be boasting a bit in his identification: the de jure head of the Hungarian Zionist Association in 1942–45 was Ottó Komoly.
 45. Ministries Case, pp. 3651–52.
 46. In his deposition of April 19, 1946, prepared for the Hungarian authorities considering the indictment of the wartime leaders of Hungarian Jewry for collaboration, Lt. Col. László Ferenczy, who was in charge of the ghettoization and deportation drive, claimed that the top leaders, above all Ernő Pető, failed to take advantage of their contacts with the Horthys to save the provincial Jews. For the full text of his deposition in English translation, see *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry*, 310–14.
 47. Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (New York: Julian Messner, 1961), 59–60. For Kasztner's complete testimony of February 18, 1954, see District Court, Jerusalem, Criminal Case 124/53, at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York (Film 221 M, Roll 2, p. 9. In Hebrew.) See also Braham, *Politics*, 1104–12.
 48. When Kasztner was asked by Shmuel Tamir, Grunwald's defense counsel, whether he knew at the time he was in Kolozsvár "the true significance of the deportation to Auschwitz," he answered laconically, "I knew." Hecht, *Perfidy*, 112.
 49. *Ibid.*, 117–18.

50. Interestingly, in his report on the activities of the Vaadah, Kasztner is basically silent about the report. The same is true of the memoirs of the former Jewish Council leaders. One of the most consistent critics of the Hungarian Jewish leaders in general and of Kasztner in particular has been Vrba. He feels that they betrayed the whole purpose of his mission by their failure to inform and warn Hungarian Jewry of the mortal danger awaiting them. He gave vent to his anger not only in his book—*I Cannot Forgive*—but also in many of his speeches, testimonies, and articles. See, for example, “Footnote to Auschwitz Report,” *Jewish Currents* (New York), March 1966, pp. 22–26; and Dick Chapman, “He Can Never Forgive,” *Sunday Sun* (Toronto), April 3, 1983, p. 46.
51. Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt?*, 111.
52. During the middle of June, for example, Rabbi Fábián HersHKovits, who had studied in Rome, was busy with his associates, translating the report into Italian, “in order to transmit a copy to the nuncio and the Pope”—as if the latter did not know German! Taped interview with HersHKovits, Tel Aviv, October 9, 1972.
53. Krausz claims that he had received the material only the day before from József Reisner, a Jewish employee of the Turkish Legation in Budapest. Interview by author, Jerusalem, October 16, 1972.
54. In his capacity as first secretary, Mantello worked closely with Consul General I. H. Castellanos, providing a large number of El Salvador “nationality certificates” for persecuted Jews in Hungary. For details, see Jenő Lévai, *Zsidósors Európában* (Jewish fate in Europe) (Budapest: Magyar Téka, 1948).
55. Randolph L. Braham, “What Did They Know and When?” in *The Holocaust as Historical Experience*, Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich, eds. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981), 109–31. See also Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler’s “Final Solution”* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980); and Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982).
56. For some details on the controversy revolving around the “silence” of the Jewish leaders, see Braham, *Politics*, 834–40.
57. Braham, *Destruction*, xv.
58. Miklós Szinai and László Szücs, comps. and eds., *The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy* (Budapest: Corvina, 1965), 248–57.
59. *Der Kastner Bericht*, 302.
60. László Karsai and Judit Molnár, eds., *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per* (The Endre-Baky-Jaross trial) (Budapest: Csépfalvi, 1994), 509.
61. *Ibid.*, 49.
62. *Vádirat*, 1:317.
63. Sándor Szenes, “. . . akkor már minden egyházfő asztalán ott volt az ‘Auschwtzi Jegyzőkönyv’ . . .”) (“. . . at that time the Auschwitz Protocols were already on the desk of every church head . . .”), *Valóság* (Reality) (Budapest) 26, no. 10 (October 1983): 75–90. Szenes’s four interviewees were Rev. József Éliás, the head of the Good Shepherd Mission; Mrs. László Küllői-Rhorer, née Mária Székely, Reverend Éliás’s secretary; Rev. András Zakar, Jusztnián Cardinal

Serédi's secretary; and Sándor Török, noted writer and a former member of the Jewish Council of Budapest.

64. According to Szenes, the translation was completed by Mrs. László Küllői-Rhorer, Rev. Éliás's secretary, on May 10 or 11. This writer interviewed Mrs. Küllői-Rhorer in Budapest on April 14, 1984, confirming the information conveyed by Szenes.
65. Disclosures by Rev. Éliás, who confirms that he, like several other lay and religious leaders of the Christian churches, was familiar with the reality of Auschwitz before the German occupation of Hungary. According to Éliás, Cardinal Serédi's copy was handed over by József Cavallier, the head of the Holy Cross Society; Bishop Ravasz was supplied by Rev. Albert Bereczky; Bishop Raffay was given his copy by Rev. Lajos Kemény, Éliás's associate at the mission; Komoly was supplied by Géza Kárpáty, one of Éliás's trusted friends; and Mrs. István Horthy—Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai—was given her copy by Sándor Török. Éliás claims that, according to Soós, Horthy and the other top leaders of the state did not have to be informed "because, from the Regent down to the majority of the ministers, they were already familiar with Auschwitz and its role" (Szenes, ". . . akkor már minden . . .," 77).

Chapter 5

1. For a partial listing of those arrested in the various categories, see Braham, *Politics*, 510–14.
2. A notable exception was Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, a leading figure of the Hungarian Parliament's Lower House, who drew a revolver on his captors and was himself wounded. His was the only civilian blood spilled in Hungary on the day of the occupation.
3. See Braham, *Destruction*, Docs. 246, 247, 251.
4. For details on the background of this campaign, see Braham, *Politics*, 515–20.
5. *Ibid.*, 520–23. For references to the anti-Jewish decrees, see *ibid.*, 1371–84.
6. Decree No. 1.240/1944.M.E. See *ibid.*, 523–28.
7. Decree No. 1.540/1944.M.E. The exemption of the widows and orphans of those who had fallen in World War II was later interpreted to include only those whose husbands or fathers were certified by the minister of defense as killed in action.
8. See chapter 4.
9. For some details, see Braham, *Politics*, 528–45.
10. Decree No. 10.800/1944.M.E.
11. According to official press reports, the book destruction ceremony that took place in Budapest on June 16, 1944, involved the destruction of the works of 120 Hungarian and 130 foreign authors of Jewish background. Witnessed by Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa and Kurt Brunhoff, the press attaché of the German Legation in Budapest, the festivity included the destruction of 447,627 books, the equivalent of twenty-two fully loaded freight cars.
12. See appendix 4 in Braham, *Politics*, 1385–87.
13. For some details on the institute, see *ibid.*, 534–37.

14. See chapter 4.
15. On March 20, Gerhardt Feine, the economic and legal expert in the German Legation and Veesenmayer's second in command, instructed Béla Csizik, the state secretary in the Ministry of Finance, to have the Hungarian authorities immediately limit bank withdrawals to one thousand pengő per day per person and seal all deposit boxes. An instruction to this effect went out to all banks that same evening.
16. Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 249. For some details on this rivalry, see Braham, *Politics*, 553–56.
17. Decree no. 6138/1944.VI. res. B.M. signed by Gendarmerie Col. Gyula Király. For text see *Vádirat*, 1:120–21.
18. Decree no. 1.600/1944. M.E. “Concerning the Declaration and Sequestration of the Wealth of the Jews.” For text see *ibid.*, 1:164.
19. The management of confiscated Jewish enterprises was normally assigned to Christian applicants who had good rightist, i.e., anti-Jewish, credentials, and influential friends in the local governmental or political organization. The managers were formally appointed by “The Royal Hungarian Government Commissioner Appointed for the Solution of Questions Relating to the Jews’ Material and Property Rights,” and their appointments were normally published in the “Official Part” of *Budapesti Közlöny* (Gazette of Budapest), the country’s official gazette.
20. While the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania were being deported, the Jews in the Trianon parts of Hungary tended to rationalize their survival, arguing, among other things: “If the authorities intended to kill us, why would they pass decrees?”
21. Decree No. 108.510/1944.K.M.
22. For details on this controversial topic, see chapter 10.
23. These were the families of Ferenc Chorin, Ferenc Mauthner, Baron Móric Kornfeld, and Baron Jenő Weiss. For further details on these families and on the Weiss-Manfréd Works, see Braham, *Politics*, 556–60.
24. See chapter 3.
25. Decree No. 1.970/1935.M.E.
26. Although the families reportedly managed to take along a large quantity of valuables, they were not successful in obtaining all the cash promised by the SS. The Chorin group received \$170,000 en route to or upon arrival in Portugal, the Heinrich group obtained \$30,000 in Switzerland, and 250,000 German Marks were placed at the disposal of Baron Alfonz Weiss in a Vienna bank. The remainder of the \$400,000 was to be paid in several installments, but “circumstances” prevented the SS from making further payments. For further details on the transaction and on the fate of the families involved, see Braham, *Politics*, 556–66.
27. For some biographical details on Ferenczy, including the treacherous role he played during the second half of 1944, see chapter 8. See also Braham, *Politics*, 436–37.
28. Zöldi, who had escaped to Germany earlier in the year to avoid punishment for

his role in the Délvidék massacres (see chapter 2), returned as a member of the *Waffen-SS* and served as Eichmann's liaison in the Hungarian deJewification unit.

29. Braham, *Politics*, 573–75. For the original version, see *Vádirat*, 1:124–27.
30. Braham, *Politics*, 575–78.
31. Order No. 6136/1944.VII.res. dated April 4, 1944. *Ibid.*, 578–79.
32. For a sample of a mayoral order addressed to a local Jewish community (Nyiregyháza), see *ibid.*, 579.
33. See chapter 4.
34. See *Vádirat*, 1:106–7.
35. Decree No. 1.440/1944.M.E. Under the decree the following counties with heavy concentrations of Jews were identified as military operational areas: Bereg, Máramaros, Ugocsa, and Ung in Carpatho-Ruthenia, and Beszterce-Naszód, Csík, Háromszék, Kolozs, Maros-Torda, Szolnok-Doboka, and Udvarhely in Northern Transylvania.
36. Probably realizing the implications of his appointment, Tomcsányi resigned shortly thereafter; his place was taken by Lt. Gen. András Vincze.
37. For details on the gendarmerie districts, see chapter 3.
38. Wilhelm Höttl, *The Secret Front* (New York: Praeger, 1954), 42.
39. Decree No. 1.610/1944. M.E. The objective of the decree was camouflaged under the title “Concerning the Regulation of Certain Questions Relating to the Jews’ Apartments and Living Places.”
40. For the minutes of the Council of Ministers meeting on this issue, see *Vádirat*, 1:241–44.

Chapter 6

1. According to one report, the Jews of some districts in Veszprém County were relocated even earlier than this. This was reportedly the case, for example, in the Enying District of the county, where the Jews allegedly were transferred to Veszprém by the end of March. Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 96.
2. Among these were those of Bártháza, Berezska Roztoka, Ilosva, Irsava, Nagyrakoc, Opava, Szolyva, and Tárkány. For more details on these and all subsequent Jewish communities referred to in this text, consult Braham, *Politics*, 591–92. For references to some of these communities, consult Braham, *Bibliography*.
3. For the date of each transport and the number of Jews in it, see appendix 6 in Braham, *Politics*, 1403–5. The data provided in this appendix are occasionally at variance with those included in the many memorial works dealing with the individual communities destroyed during the Holocaust. The differences pertain both to the dates and number of transports and the number of Jews in the various transports.
4. Among these were those of Alsó-Pasztej, Csicsér, Mircs, Nagybereszna, Porosztó, Szerednye, Turjaporoskő, and Ungdorocz. The ghetto was under the command of Lt. Col. Sándor Pálffy; the Jewish Council was headed by a Dr. László.

5. Among these were the Jews brought in from Ardod, Barabás, Bányú, Beregkővesd, Beregsurány, Bilke, Gelencs, Gulács, Harangláb, Kerecsény, Kislánya, Marosjánosi, Nagylánya, Tarpa, Tiszaadony, Tiszaszalka, Tiszavid, Vámosatya, and Vásárosnamény.
6. Among these were the Jews of Batarcs, Feketeardó, Halmi, Királyháza, Kökényes, Nagytarna, Terebes, Tiszaszászfalu, Tiszaújlak, Turc, and Ugo-csakomlós.
7. Among these were the Jewish communities in the districts of Alsóbiztra, Berezne, Felsőbiztra, Herincse, Kosolovó, Lisameő, Majdánka, Podoloc, and Vetele.
8. Among these were the Jewish communities of Bedőháza, Brusztura, Dombó, Gánya, Kalinfalva, Királymező, Kökényes, Körtvélyes, Nyeresháza, Oroszmokra, Taracköz, Tarackraszna, Visk, and Vulchovec.
9. The remainder were brought in from the mostly Romanian-inhabited villages in the neighboring Dragomérfalva, Aknasugatag, and Felsővisó districts, including those of Barcánfalva, Bárdfalva, Budfalva, Desenfalva, Farkasrév, Gyulafalva, Kracsfalva, Nánfalva, Szerbfalva, Szurdok, and Váncsfalva.
10. Among these were the Jews from the rural communities Alsóróna, Botiza, Felsőróna, Glod, Hosszúmező, Izakonyha, Izaszacsal, Jód, Karácsonyfalva, Nagybocksó, Remetefalva, Rónaszék, Rózália, Sajófalva, Szaplonca, and Szelistye.
11. Among these were the Jews of Bárcza, Kisida, Mindszent, Nagyida, Szepsi, Szikszó, Téhány, Tiszalök, and Torna.
12. Among these were the Jews of Apagy, Báj, Balkány, Balsa, Biri, Bököny, Büdszentmihály, Buj, Csobaj, Demecser, Encsencs, Gáva, Gelse, Geszteréd, Ibrány, Kállósejnyén, Kemece, Kenézlő, Kiskálló, Kotaj, Levelek, Máriapócs, Nagyhalász, Nagyálló, Napkor, Nyíracád, Nyíradony, Nyírbátor, Nyírbeltek, Nyírbogát, Nyírbogdány, Nyírgelse, Nyírlugas, Nyírmihálydi, Nyírtura, Oros, Paszab, Pazony, Piricse, Pócspetri, Polgár, Prügy, Rakamaz, Ramocsaháza, Sényő, Szakoly, Székely, Tét, Timár, Tiszaadony, Tiszadada, Tiszadob, Tiszaeszlár, Tiszaladány, Tiszalök, Tiszapolgár, Tiszarád, Tiszatardos, Újfehértó, Vasmegyer, and Vencsellő.
13. Among these were the Jews of Alsóresznice, Borkút, Bustyaháza, Csenger, Fehérgyarmat, Felsőapsa, Hodász, Kisbocksó, Kökényes, Körösmező, Lonka, Nagybocksó, Nagykirva, Nitz, Rahó, Szeklence, Taracköz, Terebesfehérpatak, and Tiszabogdány.
14. The remainder were brought in from the neighboring communities including Ajak, Anarcs, Dombrád, Gyulaháza, Jéke, Mándok, Nyírkárász, Nyírtas, Patroha, Szabolcsbaka, and Tornyospálca.
15. Braham, *Politics*, 604–5.
16. For some details on Bishop Ravasz's involvement, see László Karsai and Judit Molnár, eds., *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per* (The Endre-Baky-Jaross trial) (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1994), 341–45. See also Braham, *Politics*, 606–7.
17. Yad Vashem Archives 015/21–1. For its English version, see Braham, *Politics*, 607–10.

18. For the text of the summons issued by the Council on April 24, calling on the recipient to appear at the detention center at Rökk Szilárd Street the following day, see Braham, *Politics*, 611.
19. Statement of Elizabeth Eppler dated February 27, 1946, available at the YIVO-Institute for Jewish Research, New York (Protocol 3647, File 768).
20. For Stern's position, see Braham, *Politics*, 612. See also the statement by Imre Reiner, dated October 5, 1960. The latter was used by the prosecution in the Eichmann Trial and identified as Doc. No. 347 of the Israel Police, Bureau 06.
21. An example of an exceptional case is that of Géza Dach, a Budapest lawyer, whose summons was supposed to have been delivered by his own nephew. Statement by Elizabeth Eppler.
22. See chapter 5.
23. For details consult Randolph L. Braham, *Genocide and Retribution* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1983), 18–21.
24. For a sample, see the text of the announcement issued by László Gyapay in Nagyvárad. Braham, *Politics*, 629.
25. For details on the resistance movements and on the attitudes and reactions of the Christian church leaders, see chapter 10.
26. These figures do not include the Jews of Máramaros County and of some districts in the neighboring counties that were geographically part of Northern Transylvania but administratively part of Gendarmerie District VIII. As such these Jews fell victim to the drive conducted in Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary.
27. For details on the composition of the Jewish Councils and on the German and Hungarian elements involved in the anti-Jewish drive in Northern Transylvania, see Braham, *Politics*, 626–52.
28. Among the Jews first assembled in Szamosújvár were those of the villages of Aranyasztmiklós, Bód, Buza, Coptelke, Dengeleg, Derzse, Devecser, Feketelak, Iklód, Kecsed, Kékes, Kérő, Lozsárd, Mányik, Mátéfalva, Naszoly, Ördögösfüzes, Pujon, Szamoskend, Szentmárton, Szék, Szentgotthárd, and Veresegyháza.
29. For details, see chapter 10.
30. Among these were the Jews of Kraszna, Szilágysomlyó, Tasnád, and Zilah.
31. Among these were those brought in from the neighboring communities, including Apa, Aranyosmeggyes, Avasfelsőfalu, Avaslekence, Avasújváros, Batiz, Beltek, Bikszád, Erdőd, Huta, Kács, Nagykároly, Sarkod, Szamoskrassó, Szatmárhegy, Szinerváralja, Terep, and Vámfalu.
32. Among the Jewish communities concentrated in the yard were those of Élesd, Érmihályfalva, Margitta, and Székelyhid.
33. *Új Magyarország* (New Magyarodom), May 15, 1944.

Chapter 7

1. See table 4.
2. For some details see Braham, *Politics*, 396–97.

3. The recommendation was forwarded by Gen. Imre Ruskiczay-Rüdiger, the deputy minister of defense. See *ibid.*, 664.
4. *Vádirat*, 1:136.
5. Braham, *Politics*, 664.
6. *Ibid.*, 666–68.
7. *Ibid.*, 667–69.
8. About the middle of June, 1944, Hezinger was replaced by Theodor Horst Grell. For some details on the treatment of Jews of foreign citizenship, see *ibid.*, chapter 27.
9. The horrors of the entrainment and deportation have been described in detail in a great number of memoirs and testimonies since the war. Consult Braham, *Bibliography* for more information.
10. See Braham, *Destruction*, Docs. 267–79.
11. *Ibid.*, Docs. 164, 166.
12. *Ibid.*, Docs. 168, 169.
13. *Ibid.*, Docs. 176, 177, 181, 185.
14. For further details, see Braham, *Politics*, 679–80.
15. *Magyarság* (Magyardom), Budapest, May 13 and 16, 1944.
16. Braham, *Politics*, 683.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Ferenczy Report of May 29, 1944. Used in the Eichmann Trial as Doc. 1319 of Bureau 06 of the Israel Police.
19. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 165. The actual number of Jews entrained for deportation from Zone III was closer to fifty-two thousand. See table 1.
20. Among these were the Jews of Ferencháza, Gyömöre, Mosonmagyaróvár, and Tét.
21. For details, see Braham, *Politics*, 692. The Strasshof transports will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
22. Among these were the Jews of Ács, Baracska, Biatorbágy, Bicske, Ercsi, Esztergom, Galánta, Guta, Kajászó, Kolta, Martonvásárhely, Oroszlány, Perbete, Pusztazámor, Soskút, Szár, Tárnok, Tata, Tatabánya, and Vereb.
23. The others were brought in from such neighboring rural communities as Csata, Lekér, Mikula, Nagysalló, Oroszka, Párkány, Saró, Verebély, and Zseliz.
24. The remainder were brought in from the neighboring communities in Fejér County, including Dunapentele, Kápolnásnyék, Mór, and Polgárdi.
25. Included among these were the Jewish communities of Alsópetény, Dejtár, Endrefalva, Felsőpetény, Hugyag, Ipolynyék, Ipolyszög, Kisgyarmat, Ludány, Mohora, Nagylóc, Nógrádbercel, Nógrádmagyar, and Szécsény.
26. Among these were the Jewish communities of Csány, Ecsed, and Hort.
27. Among the largest of the Jewish communities that were concentrated in Miskolc prior to their deportation were those of Abaújszántó, Bánréve, Diósgyőr, Edelény, Encs, Gönc, Hejőcsaba, Hidasnémeti, Mád, Mezőcsát, Mezőkeresztes, Mezőkövesd, Monok, Ózd, Putnok, Sajószentpéter, Szerencs, Szikszó, Tállya, Tiszaeszlár, Tiszaluc, and Vilmány.

28. Among these were the Jews brought in from Cered, Etes, Somoskőújfalu, Zagyvapálfalva, Zagyvarekas and other neighboring rural communities.
29. Ferenczy report of June 12, 1944.
30. For some details on these ghettos and on the rural Jewish communities concentrated within them, see Braham, *Politics*, 714–16.
31. The others were brought in from the neighboring rural communities of Abony, Cegléd, Jászkarajenő, Kiskőrös, Kiskunfélegyháza, Nagykőrös, Soltvadkert, and Törtel.
32. The others were brought in from the neighboring communities, including Apátfalva, Csanádpalota, Csongrád, Dunapataj, Okécske, Földeák, Halas, Hódmezővásárhely, Horgos, Kalocsa, Kecel, Kiskundorozsma, Kistelek, Kiszombor, Magyarcsanád, Makó, Mindszent, Pitvaros, Szentes, Szőreg, and Újkécske.
33. The others were from the neighboring communities, including Dévaványa, Gyoma, Karcag, Kisújszállás, Kőrösladány, Kunhegyes, Kunmadaras, Mezőtúr, Szarvas, Szeghalom, Szentimre, Túrkeve, and Vésztő.
34. Among these were the Jews of Bánhegyes, Battonya, Békés, Endrőd, Gyula, Mezőkovácsháza, Orosháza, Szarvas, and Tótkomlós.
35. These included the Jews of Balmazújváros, Hajdúböszörmény, Hajdúdorog, Hajdúhadház, Hajdúnánás, Hajdúsámson, Hajdúszoboszló, Téglás, and Vámospércs.
36. Among the major ghettos and entrainment centers in this area were Barcs, Horgos, and Nagykanizsa.
37. Among the Jewish communities transferred to Szeged were those of Ada, Mohol, Szenttamás, Törökkanizsa, and Zenta.
38. József Rosenfeld, “Emlékezés a bajai gettóra” (Reminiscences about the ghetto of Baja) in *Évkönyv 1973–74* (Yearbook 1973–74) (Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőlete, 1974), 146–54. Without providing any sources, Lévai claims that of the 20,787 Jews “laid on ice” in Strasshof under the Kasztner-Eichmann deal, 5,640 came from Baja (see Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 264). For more up-to-date accounting, see Judit Molnár, *Zsidósors 1944-ben az V. (szegedi) csendőrkörületben* (Jewish fate in 1944 in Gendarmerie District V [Szeged]) (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1995), especially 60–72.
39. See chapter 10.
40. Jenő Lévai, *Eichmann in Hungary* (Budapest: Pannonia, 1961), 195–96.
41. See, among other sources, Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 184.
42. When the *Scharführer* responsible for the take-over of the transport from Győr at Kassa noticed that the train’s number was not on his ledger, he called Eichmann for instructions. Motivated by a concern for efficiency rather than moral obligation, Eichmann apparently decided that as long as the transport was already at the Slovakian border it might as well continue on to Auschwitz. *Der Kastner Bericht*, 121.
43. For further details, see Braham, *Politics*, 733–37. See also Judit Molnár, *Zsidósors 1944-ben az V.*, 149–51.
44. For some details on these ghettos, including those of Bonyhád, Keszthely,

- Körmend, Kőszeg, Mohács, Nagyatád, Sárbogárd, and Veszprém, see Braham, *Politics*, 755–64.
45. Among these were the Jews of Ajka, Ajkarendek, Bódé, Csékut, Csögle, Dabrony, Devecser, Doba, Halimba, Iszkáz, Kerta, Kiscsösz, Kislód, Kiskamond, Kispirit, Marcaltó, Nagylásny, Nagypirit, Nemesszalók, Öcs, Padrag, Pápateszér, Pusztamiske, Somlójenő, Somlósőzlős, Somlóvásárhely, Somlóvecse, Tósok, Tüskevár, Ugod, and Zirc.
 46. István Hiller and Alajos Németh, *A háború és a felszabadulás krónikája. Sopron, 1941–1945* (Chronicle of the war and liberation, Sopron, 1941–1945). (Reprinted in *Soproni Szemle*; Sopron review, 1978–79).
 47. According to one source, the number was 4,200. See series of three articles by János Kulcsár in *Vas Népe* (The people of Vas) as reproduced in *Newyorki Figyelő* (New York Observer), December 22, 1983; January 11, 1984; and February 2, 1984.
 48. The remainder were brought in from the neighboring communities in the Körmend, Kőszeg, Szentgotthárd, Szombathely, and Vasvár districts in Vas County.
 49. The others were brought in from the neighboring communities in Zala County, including Balatonfüred, Keszthely, Lenti, Lesencetomaj, Sümeg, Tapolca, Túrje, Zalabér, Zalalövő, and Zalaszentgrót.
 50. See chapter 8.
 51. For details on some of these Jewish communities, see Braham, *Politics*, 776–77.
 52. For details on the relocation schemes instituted in Budapest and its environs, see chapter 8.
 53. Aside from the special deportation train Eichmann was able to smuggle out of Hungary on July 19 (see chapter 8), Hungarian Jews continued to be deported to Auschwitz in small batches practically up to the time the death installations were destroyed in the fall. See the Auschwitz arrival logs in *Hefte von Auschwitz* (Auschwitz: Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu, 1964), Nos. 7 and 8. See also Sari Reuveni, *Mishlochim me'yuhadim verakarot me'charot me'Hungaria le'Auschwitz be'shanah 1944* (Special transports and Late Trains From Hungary to Auschwitz in 1944), *Yalkut Moreshet*, Israel, May 1985, 123–34.

Chapter 8

1. See p. 66.
2. See chapter 6.
3. Without providing any clarification, the antisemitic press stressed that the Jews, who represented about 20 percent of the population, occupied 47,978 rooms in 21,250 apartments, while the rest of the population had only 70,197 rooms in 32,224 apartments.
4. The appeals were handled by Zsigmond Székely-Molnár, a high-ranking official of the Ministry of the Interior and a close confidant of Endre. His closest associates in this endeavor were Károly Kiss, the municipal attorney, and István Puskás, head of the housing department in the Ministry of the Interior. In addition to the hundreds of buildings that had originally been identified as yellow-star

houses but later reclassified as non-Jewish, the authorities periodically ordered that additional buildings be cleared of Jews, either at the request of influential Hungarians or on instructions from the Germans.

5. Decree No. 147.501/1944.-IX.
6. For further details on the provisions of the decree, see Braham, *Politics*, 853–54.
7. This provision was subsequently amended, allowing the Jews to go out between 11:00A.M. and 5:00P.M. Ibid., 855–57.
8. At the Council of Ministers meeting of August 2, 1944, Andor Jaross, the minister of the interior, estimated the number of Jews in Budapest at 280,000, of whom 170,000 were identified as living in the yellow-star houses and the others “illegally” in Christian buildings. *Vádirat*, 3:329.
9. Miklós Szinai and László Szücs, eds., *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* (The confidential papers of Miklós Horthy) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1963), 450.
10. Braham, *Politics*, 862.
11. For details on the reaction of the free and neutral world to the extermination of Hungarian Jewry, see chapter 11.
12. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 180.
13. For Endre’s statement and written report, see Braham, *Politics*, 864–69.
14. Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 221.
15. Braham, *Politics*, 874.
16. These offers constituted the basis of the so-called Horthy-offer, which the Western Allies allegedly were reluctant to accept. For details, see *ibid.*, 1263–68.
17. For the text of the note, which summarizes the Hungarian position on the various international offers, see *ibid.*, 875–77.
18. For details, see *ibid.*, 878–80.
19. *Vádirat*, 3:63–64.
20. See chapter 7.
21. See chapter 5.
22. Braham, *Politics*, 884.
23. For details on the background and structure of the camp, see *ibid.*, 890–92.
24. See chapter 3.
25. Because of his benevolent attitude toward the inmates and especially because of his role in trying to outwit Eichmann in July 1944, Yad Vashem has recognized Vasdényei as a Righteous Among the Nations, bestowing upon him all the honors associated with that designation.
26. For a log of the daily arrivals in Auschwitz and for periodic statements on the number of inmates in the camp in 1944, see Danuta Czech, “Kalendarium der Ereignisse in Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau,” in *Hefte von Auschwitz* (Oswiecim: Panstwowe Muzeum w Oswiecimiu, 1964), 7:90–103 and 8:47–103. While the entries in volume 7 list the arrival of transports during the first half of 1944, those in volume 8 cover the arrivals during the second half of the year. This latter volume demonstrates that smaller transports arrived in Auschwitz from Hungary even in September and October, 1944.
27. The Germans originally anticipated that the deportations from Budapest would take place around the middle or the end of July. This was intended to be carried

- out in “a large-scale one-day operation,” with the direct involvement not only of the police and gendarmerie, but also of the local mailmen and chimney sweepers. See the reports of Eberhard von Thadden, the specialist on Jewish affairs in the *Inland II* section of the German Foreign Office, dated May 25 and 26, 1944. For Thadden’s reports, see Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 166.
28. Freudiger managed to escape with the aid of Dieter Wisliceny, with whom he had been on reasonably good terms since shortly after the occupation thanks to the intermediation of Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel of Bratislava. The Romanian passports used by the Freudiger group aroused great controversy after the war. According to some of his critics, the passports were designed for the repatriation of Romanian nationals in Hungary. Freudiger claimed that a number of the passports were provided specifically for his use by his personal friends and relatives in Bucharest. For further details, see chapter 4. See also Freudiger’s “Five Months,” in *The Tragedy of the Jews of Hungary*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 237–96.
 29. Among those arrested were Ernő Pető, Sámuel Stern, and Károly Wilhelm. The latter two were freed the following day after the resolute intervention of Horthy, but Pető was roughed up and kept in custody until August 21.
 30. Braham, *Destruction*, Docs. 208–10.
 31. See chapter 9.
 32. See his “Gettó elött—gettó alatt” (Before the ghetto—after the ghetto), *Új Élet* (New life) (Budapest), January 22, 30; February 6, 13, 20; March 6; April 17, 1947. See also his deposition of July 10, 1946, in *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry*, pp. 321–26.
 33. The note was signed by Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Rotta, Minister of Sweden Carl Ivan Danielsson, representative of Portugal Carlos de Liz-Teixeira Branquinho, representative of Spain Angel Sanz-Briz, and representative of Switzerland Antoine J. Kilchmann. For excerpts from the note, see Braham, *Politics*, 915.
 34. For details, see chapter 11.
 35. These were Lajos Kabók, the Social Democratic member of the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament, and Sándor Karácsonyi, the head of the Iron Workers. Both were killed by the *Nyilas* in the autumn of 1944.
 36. For details, see Braham, *Politics*, 906–10.
 37. Among those who pushed for the replacement of the Sztójay government, deploring its disastrous policies, was Count István Bethlen. The governmental reorganization involved the removal of Baky, Endre, and Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa and the appointment of trusted supporters of Horthy and Lakatos such as Béla Horváth, Baron Péter Schell, and Endre Hlatky. Jurcsek and Reményi-Schneller were retained to pacify the Germans. The appointment of Lakatos was soon followed by the replacement of the ultra-rightist municipal and county prefects as well.
 38. In a statement addressed to Hennyey, Stöckler declared that “after a long time,

this has been the first benevolent gesture of the Hungarian government toward the Jews, who know how to appreciate it.” Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 284.

39. *Vádirat*, 3:545.
40. The statement was suggested by Chief Rabbi Ferenc Hevesi and adopted at the meeting chaired by Rabbi Zsigmond Groszmann. For its original text, see *ibid.*, 3:266–68. For its English version, see Braham, *Politics*, 496.
41. See chapter 1.
42. Those converted to Protestantism were organized within and helped by “The Good Shepherd Mission,” headed by Rev. József Éliás. The needs of those converted to Catholicism were served by “The Holy Cross Society,” headed by Rev. József Cavallier. For further details, see Braham, *Politics*, 1196–98.
43. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 190.
44. Jenő Lévai, *Szürke könyv magyar zsidók megmentéséről* (Gray book on the rescuing of Hungarian Jews) (Budapest: Officina, n.d.), 52–53.
45. For some details, see Braham, *Politics*, 484, 899.
46. *Ibid.*, 896–97.
47. For details, see *ibid.*, 900–906.
48. Within the Ministry, the technical processing of the applications was the immediate responsibility of László Szilágyi, a ministerial counselor.
49. The question was raised by Antal Kunder, the minister of trade and communication, at the Council of Ministers meeting of July 12. The Germanophile minister’s proposal probably was designed not so much to protect the exempted Jews as to undercut the regent’s antideportation decision.
50. The technical aspects of the exemptions were handled in the office of Counselor István Balla.
51. *Vádirat*, 3:490–91.
52. For details on the exchange of notes and the entire exemption system, see Braham, *Politics*, 900–906.
53. The Szálasi government revised the exemption system on October 23. The recertification of exemption status was the responsibility of Gábor Vajna, the *Nyilas* minister of the interior, and was completed on November 15. A total of only 501 postreview certificates were issued; of the many thousands of “Horthy-exempted-Jews,” only seventy managed to obtain the new exemption certificates.
54. The request for this recruitment originated with the Council of Ministers and was communicated to the Budapest authorities by the Ministry of Defense. Within the Jewish Council, the recruitment of the laborers was the responsibility of the Council’s Veterans’ Committee. They were to receive the same compensation for their labor as those in the labor service units.
55. Braham, *Politics*, 909–10.
56. For details on the various exemption categories and for the procedures and personnel involved in the mobilization for labor scheme, see *ibid.*, 921–29.
57. The bombing of Kassa by the Germans using Soviet aircraft markings provided Hungary with the excuse to join the Reich in the war against the Soviet Union on June 27, 1941.

58. *Vádirat*, 3:563. By that time, the Parliament had been transformed into a docile instrumentality of the regime, inasmuch as the political parties had been dissolved on August 24.
59. *Ibid.*, 3:499.
60. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 217.
61. *Ibid.*, Doc. 218.
62. According to Grell, the Jews were to be concentrated in camps near Alsónémedi, Dunaharaszti, Gálpusztá, Maglód, Tura, and Üllő. See *ibid.*, Doc. 219.
63. *Ibid.*, Doc. 224.
64. The future of Transylvania, particularly Northern Transylvania, was partially the reason for the Hungarians' attack on Romanian-held Southern Transylvania early in September. It was in the course of this military operation that Hungarian troops, acting in collusion with local fascists, massacred 126 Jews in the town of Sármás. For further details, see Braham, *Politics*, 928–29.

Chapter 9

1. For details on this quixotic position of the regent, see Braham, *Politics*, 943–44.
2. Gábor Kemény was protected by Kurt Haller, Veessenmayer's deputy; Emil Kovarcz, who had just been appointed by Szálasi to head all *Nyilas* forces, was hidden by the SS in Buda; Károly Ney and Imre Bolhoy, the leaders of the ultra-rightist veterans' association Comradely League of the Eastern Front (KABSz) were protected by Otto Winkelmann; and Szálasi himself enjoyed the protection of SS-*Obergruppenführer* Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, the commander of the SS forces slated to defend Budapest.
3. Jenő Lévai, ed., *Eichmann in Hungary. Documents* (Budapest: Pannonia, 1961), 146.
4. Gen. János Vörös, the chief of the General Staff, reported that the Red Army was already near Szeged and Debrecen and that it could reach the capital in two days' time.
5. Braham, *Politics*, 950.
6. For further details on Horthy's maneuvers, see Zvi Erez, "The Jews of Budapest and the Plans of Admiral Horthy, August–October 1944," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, Aharon Weiss, ed. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1984), 14:177–203. On the Arrow Cross coup, see Braham, *Politics*, 947–52.
7. Braham, *Politics*, 955–56.
8. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 227.
9. *Ibid.*, Docs. 230, 231, 234, 238.
10. See Veessenmayer's report of October 23 addressed to the German Foreign Office. The request for "only" twenty-five thousand Jews was designed to elicit prompt approval and was to be followed up by requests for additional installments of twenty-five thousand Jews until the Final Solution was achieved. Braham, *Destruction*, Docs. 232, 233, 237, 239.
11. Decree 975/M. 42–1944. The companies were scheduled to be handed over to the Germans between October 27 and November 11. For text of the decree and a list of the labor service companies involved, see Elek Karsai, comp.,

- “Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön . . .” *Dokumentumok a munkaszolgálat történetéhez Magyarországon* (“They stood unarmed on the mine fields . . .” Documentation on the labor service system in Hungary) (Budapest: A Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselője, 1962), 2:651–57. See also Braham, *Politics*, appendix 2.
12. Among those privy to the decision to send the Jews abroad were Count Miklós Serényi, the head of the Dejewification Division of the Arrow Cross Party; István Kelecsényi, Serényi’s successor; and Kurt Rettmann, the head of the Dejewification Section of Budapest and Environs, the party unit directly involved in the anti-Jewish drive in Budapest. Braham, *Politics*, 964.
 13. For some details, see chapter 10.
 14. See, for example, the reports of Nándor Batizfalvy, the KEOKH police officer who had played a leading role in the deportation and subsequent slaughter of thousands of “alien” Jews in 1941, and that of *SS-Obergruppenführer* Hans Jüttner, in Braham, *Politics*, 965–68.
 15. The Hungarian commission in charge of the transfers was headed by Lt. Col. László Bartha. The transfers usually took place between 7 and 9 A.M. The minutes merely recorded the number of Jews involved. As was the case during the deportations, no attempt was made to identify the Jews by name or even to give a breakdown by sex or age.
 16. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 245. See also Éva Teleki, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon* (*Nyilas rule in Hungary*) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1974), 147–48.
 17. For some additional details on the death marches to Hegyeshalom, see Braham, *Politics*, 963–69.
 18. See chapter 8.
 19. Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 241.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 322–23.
 22. For further details on the “international ghetto,” see Braham, *Politics*, 971–76.
 23. *Ibid.*, 979–80. For the complete text in Hungarian, see Jenő Lévai, *A pesti gettó csodálatos megmenekülésének hiteles története* (*The authentic history of the miraculous survival of the ghetto of Budapest*) (Budapest: Officina, 1946), 53–57.
 24. See chapter 10.
 25. Rev. Sztéhló became associated with rescue work in May 1944 following his appointment to the Good Shepherd Mission by Bishop Sándor Raffay, the head of the Evangelical Church. After the *Nyilas* coup, his primary responsibility for the mission was the protection of the Jewish children under its care. He carried out his tasks with great courage and skill. After the war, he was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations.
 26. The number of Jews who died in Budapest in 1944–45—many as a result of the excesses of the *Nyilas*—came close to seventeen thousand.
 27. For further details on the organization and structure of the ghetto administration and of its various social, health, and religious-educational activities, see Braham, *Politics*, 976–1004.

28. For the English-language version of his decree of December 23, see *ibid.*, 995–97.
29. On December 24, the *Nyilas* brought into the ghetto nineteen Swedish citizens, including Asta Nielson, King Gustav’s cousin, and a Miss Bauer, the Swedish minister’s secretary.
30. Some of the most horrible atrocities were committed by a gang led by Father András Kun, a vitriolically antisemitic Catholic priest, who was executed after the war as a war criminal.
31. The permits were to be issued by Kurt Rettmann, the main district leader of the “Hungarist” Movement of the Arrow Cross Party; Lt. Col. Imre Nidosi, the leader of the party organization in District VII; and István Lőcsey, the ministerial counselor in charge of Jewish affairs, the Jewish leaders’ official contact man.
32. A long-standing member of the Arrow Cross Party, Szalai had been won over by the Jewish leadership toward the end of the war. He performed a number of valuable services for the Jews, including possibly the saving of the ghetto. In recognition of his merits, the postwar People’s Tribunal exonerated him despite his *Nyilas* past.
33. For Szalai’s statement before a People’s Tribunal about how he had saved the ghetto, see Braham, *Politics*, 1006–7.

Chapter 10

1. See chapter 4.
2. For some details on the murder of close to eighteen thousand “alien” Jews near Kamenets-Podolsk, and the massacre of some one thousand Jews in and around Újvidék, see chapter 2.
3. The Hungarian Jews, masses and leaders alike, were obviously unaware of the regent’s commitment to Hitler a few days earlier to supply Germany with hundreds of thousands of “Jewish workers for war-related projects.” See chapter 3.
4. Excerpt from the response by Samu Stern, the head of the Jewish Council of Budapest. For further details, see Braham, *Politics*, 701.
5. For details on this strategy, consult Yisrael Gutman, “The Concept of Labor in Judenrat Policy,” in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 151–80.
6. Braham, *Politics*, 699–700. The memorandum also detailed the horrors associated with the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews from Zones I and II.
7. Through his controversial dealings with Dieter Wisliceny, Freudiger managed to save approximately eighty, mostly Orthodox, prominent Jews—rabbis and communal leaders—from the ghettos of Debrecen, Kassa, Nagyvárad, Nyíregyháza, Pápa, Sopron, and Székesfehérvár just before their scheduled deportation. Early in August he, his family, and some friends also escaped with the aid of Wisliceny. See chapter 4.
8. Almost all of the cards read: “Arrived safely. I am well.”
9. See his “Five Months,” in *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry: Essays and*

Documents, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 259, 265.

10. Braham, *Politics*, 737–41.
11. For details on these activities, see *ibid.*, 1069–73.
12. For some details on the Europa Plan and on the halting of the deportations from Slovakia, see *ibid.*, 1074–76.
13. *Der Kastner Bericht*, 72–73.
14. The eagerness to acquire as large a share of Jewish wealth as possible was the primary reason why the SS tried desperately to keep the Hungarians in the dark about their negotiations with the Jewish leaders.
15. In preparing the list, Komoly and Szilágyi had to consider a number of factors. In particular, approximately half of the certificates had to be assigned to Jews still in the provinces, and account had to be taken of the Polish, Slovak, and other refugees, as well as of spiritual and lay leaders, scientists, artists, and Zionists who played an especially important role in the life of the Jewish communities.
16. Biss was a Transylvanian who became active in Vaadah affairs after Brand, his cousin, departed for his mission toward the middle of May.
17. For some further details on Grosz's background, see Braham, *Politics*, 1079–81.
18. This mission, according to several sources, was in fact initiated with the knowledge of Himmler, who reportedly was at that time already privy to the impending coup against Hitler. Himmler's involvement was acknowledged by Veessenmayer in his July 22, 1944, telegram to the Foreign Office, forwarded shortly after a discussion with Winkelmann, in which he asserted that the Brand-Gross mission was undertaken "as a result of a secret order of the *Reichsführer-SS*." Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 291.
19. Brand's "blood for trucks" mission, according to this scenario, was to camouflage Grosz's highly sensitive "diplomatic" mission. Since Grosz worked mostly with Brand while serving as courier for the Vaadah, he recommended that Klages select him for the cover mission, claiming that Brand was "the most important executive individual in the Vaadah."
20. According to Kasztner, those goods were two hundred tons of tea, eight hundred tons of coffee, two million cases of soap, an unspecified quantity of tungsten and other military-related materials, and ten thousand trucks. The latter, the Germans claimed, were to be used for civilian purposes or only along the eastern front. According to Eichmann, the Jews were to be allowed to leave Germany for any Allied-controlled part of the world except Palestine, since the Nazis had promised Amin el-Husseini, the Arab nationalist leader, not to permit them to go there.
21. Brand was supplied with a German passport bearing the name of Eugen Band. For its reproduction, see Braham, *Politics*, 1083.
22. Goldman tended toward the theory that the offer was not part of the Germans' psychological warfare, but a genuine offer, "put up by the Gestapo leaders (certainly Eichmann and possibly Himmler) with a view to obtaining foreign exchange for their own use when they would have to flee from a defeated and occupied Germany."

23. Brand made these statements in May 1964 in Frankfurt, West Germany, where he testified in the trial of Hermann Krumei and Otto Hunsche. *New York Times*, May 21, 1964. For further details on Brand's mission, see Braham, *Politics*, 1078–88, 1254–60.
24. Eichmann originally allowed only two hundred, but the bribing of a *Scharführer* made it possible to raise the figure. The selection was made on the basis of certain criteria worked out in Budapest with the cooperation of Zsigmond Léb, a member of the Kolozsvár Jewish Council, who was in the capital at the time. The list was partially altered and supplemented in Kolozsvár by the local Jewish leaders and by German and Hungarian officials who for a variety of reasons (especially bribes) wanted to save their favorite Jews. Changes to the list were also needed because many on the original list already had been deported. As a result many of the Jews who were finally selected did not meet any of the selection criteria originally agreed upon.
25. Those who could not be accommodated in the Columbus Street Camp were housed in two additional camps that were set up in the Arena Street and Bocskay Street synagogues.
26. See chapter 7.
27. The Vaadah committee established for this purpose consisted of Komoly, Shulem Offenbach, Hansi Brand, and Ernő Reichard, an engineer. The places were sold to Jews and converts who had managed to hide part of their valuables in spite of the confiscatory measures enacted by the Hungarians.
28. While in Linz, the passengers were treated to a hot bath. According to Lajos Marton, a leading figure of the Kolozsvár community, and other eyewitnesses, a few of the Jews who were aware of the realities of Auschwitz, including József Fischer, Kasztner's father-in-law, were reluctant or refused to take a bath.
29. Kasztner was arrested on July 18 and held incommunicado for about nine days. He was interrogated by László Ferenczy and his aide, Leó Lulay, who were interested in the details of his dealings with the SS. They also wished to convince him of their prior ignorance of Auschwitz and of their readiness to prevent further anti-Jewish operations by the Germans, whom they claimed bore full responsibility for the deportations. For further details on Ferenczy's search for an alibi, see chapter 8.
30. Instead of the promised 500, however, only 318 arrived, reportedly because Eichmann had sabotaged Himmler's orders. The entry was arranged by Mayer in cooperation with Heinrich Rothmund, the head of the Swiss Alien Police, on August 8. The criteria for selection of Jews to make up the first group were suggested to Fischer in a letter from Kasztner on August 3.
31. For some details on the tragedy of the remnant of Slovakian Jewry, see Braham, *Politics*, 1052–53.
32. The second group, consisting of 1,368 Jews and headed by Fischer, arrived in Switzerland on December 7 under the command of Krumei. For details on these transports, see *ibid.*, 1101–3.
33. The Nazis were eager to eradicate all traces of their extermination program, since the Soviet forces were about to liberate the camps.

34. He worked toward this end in his capacity as *Reichssonderkommissar für sämtliche Konzentrationslager* (Special Reich commissioner for all concentration camps), a position to which he was appointed on April 6, 1945. He traveled to the various camps still in German control in the company of Kasztner, who had a German passport that made no reference to his Jewish identity.
35. For further details on Kasztner's negotiations with the SS, see Braham, *Politics*, 1088–1103.
36. Two justices concurred with Justice Agranat, holding that Kasztner actually had tried to save as many Jews as possible and had risked his own life in so doing. One justice voted with the majority to reverse the lower court's decision but refused to exonerate Kasztner. The fifth one wrote a dissenting opinion. The justices unanimously upheld the lower court's finding that Kasztner had testified on behalf of Becher.
37. For further details, see Braham, *Politics*, 1104–12.
38. Krausz never explained why he had not used his excellent contacts with the Swiss authorities in Budapest to forward the report and related publications earlier.
39. Owned by Arthúr Weisz, who was also destined to play a leading role in its administration, the building, which was previously used for his wholesale glass business, soon came to be known as the "Glass House."
40. For further details on the "Horthy offer," see Braham, *Politics*, 875–77, 885–87, 1263–68.
41. For details on the functions of the Palestine Office and Krausz's personality and operations, see *ibid.*, 1113–18.
42. A former ultra-rightist, Mester adopted a more moderate position on the Jewish question and an increasingly anti-German stand during the summer of 1944. He provided some details about his wartime views and role during the summer of 1981, when he was interviewed by Péter Bokor. See "Egy naiv ember—bársonyszékben" (A naive man—in a velvet chair), *Valóság* (Reality) (Budapest), 10 (1981): 53–74.
43. Since legally the IRC could deal only with POW issues and foreign nationals, the technical means for overcoming the hurdle was cleverly devised by Born and Komoly. When the Spanish and Swiss authorities were persuaded to each accept five hundred children, the IRC was formally requested to take these now-"foreign" children under its protection and care for them until their departure.
44. At one time, Department A was in charge of thirty-five buildings, 550 employees, and five thousand to six thousand children. Its facilities also were used for the welfare of the approximately one thousand Jewish refugees (seven hundred to eight hundred Polish, seventy to eighty Yugoslav, and a few hundred Slovak) still in the country.
45. For further details on Komoly's activities, see Braham, *Politics*, 1118–22.
46. For an overview of this thesis, see Randolph L. Braham, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust in Hungary," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty Years Later*, Randolph L. Braham and Bela Vago, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 177–90.

47. The Council refused to get involved in any “illegal” activities. The appeal was prepared from various drafts through the cooperation of Sándor Braun, Lajos Gottesmann, Fülöp Grünwald, Jenő Grünwald, Fábíán Herskovits, Ernő Munkácsi, Béla Pásztor, and Sándor Somló. The Grünwald brothers, Herskovits, and Somló were arrested shortly after the distribution of some copies and were not released until the Sztójay government was replaced by that of Gen. Géza Lakatos.
48. According to one report, two thousand copies were mimeographed. There is no accurate information as to how many of them were actually distributed. For complete text and further details on the appeal, see Braham, *Politics*, 701–3.
49. Toward the end of September, there were approximately 120,000 labor service-men in the country, of whom around 26,000 were stationed in or near Budapest. The plans were reportedly worked out by György Gergely, an important middle-echelon official of the Jewish Council, and Count György Pallavicini Jr., a Legitimist leader who served on the executive committee of the resistance-oriented Hungarian Front. On September 30, Gen. Károly Lázár, the commander of the Palace Guard, was also drawn into the planning.
50. For some details, see Braham, *Politics*, 1134–35.
51. For details on the activities of the *Halutzim* see *ibid*, 1135–48. See also Asher Cohen, *The Halutz Resistance in Hungary, 1942–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); and Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. No. 1342–77.
52. For details on Hannah Szenes and the other parachutists, see Braham, *Politics*, 1130–34; and Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 1378–95.
53. Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 84.
54. For a fully documented assessment of the Hungarians’ responsibility for the Holocaust, see Bela Vago, “The Hungarians and the Destruction of the Hungarian Jews,” in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty Years Later*, 93–105. See also Braham, *Politics*, 1058–65.
55. Many among these were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.
56. The leaders of the Christian churches supported the First Anti-Jewish Law of 1938 without any qualifications. They had some reservations about the Second Anti-Jewish Law of 1939 because its racial provisions also affected the converts and even some Christian Magyars of Jewish origin. It was for the same reason that they opposed the Third Anti-Jewish Law of 1941. For some details, see chapter 1.
57. For some insights into the cardinal’s views, see “Serédi Jusztinián feljegyzései 1944 végén” (Jusztinian Serédi’s notes at the end of 1944), *Kritika* (Criticism) (Budapest), 8 (1983): 28–32.
58. Among those who were relatively active on behalf of the Jews, and especially the converts, were Baron Vilmos Apor, the bishop of Győr; Gyula Czapik, the bishop of Eger; József Grösz, the bishop of Kalocsa; Endre Hamvas, the bishop of Csanád; Sándor Kovács, the bishop of Szombathely; Lajos Shvoy, the bishop

- of Székesfehérvár; and Ferenc Virág, the bishop of Pécs. For some details on their activities, see Braham, *Politics*, passim.
59. For excerpts from these sermons, see *ibid.*, 1190–92. For a critical overview of the Christian church leaders' position during the Holocaust, see Sándor Szenes, "A múltat ne hagyjuk befejezetlenül tovább élni. Beszélgetés dr. Kis György esperes plébánossal" (Let us not allow the past to live further unended: A discussion with the rural dean Dr. György Kis). *Kritika* (Budapest) 1 (January 1983): 10–18.
 60. For further details on the attitudes and reactions of the Christian churches toward the persecution of the Jews, see Braham, *Politics*, 1170–1204. See also Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 1551–80, 1583–1620.
 61. Of Jewish origin, Reverend Éliás worked tirelessly and effectively as head of the mission, providing relief for many of the persecuted Jews. For details on his activities, see the following interviews conducted by Sándor Szenes: "... ne nyujtsanak hallgatásukkal segédkezet a gyilkos rendszernek ..." (... Do not aid the murderous system by your silence ...) in *Műhely* (Workshop) (Győr), 3 (June 1984): 21–36; "... akkor már minden egyházfő asztalán ott volt az Auschwitzi Jegyzőkönyv ..." (... At that time the Auschwitz protocols were already on the desk of every church head ...) in *Valóság* (Reality) (Budapest), 26, no. 10 (October 1983): 75–80.
 62. After the war, Rev. Gábor Sztehló was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations.
 63. For further details on the society and the mission, see Braham, *Politics*, 1196–98; and Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 1581–82, 1621–23.
 64. Among these were the Collegium Marianum, the Collegium Theresianum, the Lazarist Fathers (*Lázárista atyák*), the Sisters of Mercy (*Irgalmas nővérek*), the Sophianum Institute (*Sophianum intézet*), and the Scottish Mission (*Skót Misszió*).
 65. This was the case, for example, with Jane Haining, the Scottish matron of the "Girls' Home" supported by the Scottish Mission. She was deported to Auschwitz, where she died in the summer of 1944.
 66. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, 2:444.
 67. See his *A Ludovikától Sopronkőhidáig* (From the Ludovika to Sopronkőhida) (Budapest: Magvető, 1978), 665. See also Braham, *Politics*, 1124–28; and Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 1313–41.

Chapter 11

1. For details about these policies, see Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1968); David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust* (New York: Prometheus, 1985); Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982); and Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).
2. Braham, *Politics*, 1253–54.
3. On the Brand mission, see chapter 10.

4. For details, see Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, and David S. Wyman, "Why Auschwitz Was Never Bombed," *Commentary* 65, no. 5 (May 1978): 37–46.
5. See chapter 8.
6. Braham, *Destruction*, Docs. 324–26.
7. *Ibid.*, Doc. 370.
8. See chapter 10.
9. This anxiety was reflected, inter alia, in Robert Maurice A. Hankey's memorandum of July 20 addressed to A. W. G. Randall of the Foreign Office. Having learned of the Horthy offer from Sir Harold MacMichael, the official of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office cautioned Randall about "opening of the floodgates of Eastern Europe." Worried about "the masses of Eastern European Jews on their hands," Hankey suggested that it was vitally important "that camps should be established . . . somewhere in the Mediterranean area, but not Palestine and preferably not too near Palestine." Public Record Office, London, Fo.371/42810, p. 57.
10. *Department of State Bulletin*, Washington, D.C., vol. 11, no. 269, Aug. 20, 1944, p. 175.
11. On June 9, 1944, President Roosevelt identified the former army post at Oswego, New York, as a temporary haven for a maximum of 1,000 refugees. On August 4, 987 carefully screened refugees were actually given haven there—a rather unenviable record that also proved a negative example for the smaller Allies. Brazil, for example, expressed (September 6) its readiness to admit 500 children as long as it would have no "financial responsibilities in regard to transport and upkeep"; Ireland (September 8) indicated its willingness to include Hungarian Jewish children among the 500 children it had earlier agreed to admit; Australia was deterred by the "unpromising shipping position"; New Zealand "decided for the time being they were unable to help"; South Africa indicated that it already had "its hands full with war refugees and evacuees"; Southern Rhodesia reported that no additional refugees could be accommodated; Canada failed to reply. Public Records Office, London, Fo.371/42820, p. 94.
12. For further details, see Bela Vago, "The Horthy Offer. A Missed Opportunity for Rescuing Jews in 1944," in *Contemporary Views on the Holocaust*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983), 23–45. See also Braham, *Politics*, 1246–68.
13. See chapter 2.
14. Public Record Office, London, Fo.371/42809, pp. 58, 137–39.
15. See chapter 10.
16. In Switzerland there were a series of protests against the barbaric treatment of the Jews of Hungary. A protest rally was held by the Swiss Social Democratic Party on July 10. The Hungarians were also condemned by cantonal governmental organizations, the Caritas Association, and a number of ecclesiastical organs, including the Church Council of Zurich Canton.
17. A graduate of George Washington University, Lutz first served in Washington and Philadelphia. He was assigned to the Swiss Legation in Budapest late in 1941. In his capacity as head of the Foreign Interests Division of the

Legation, Lutz represented the interests of sixteen members of the Grand Alliance, including Britain and the United States. As the spokesman for British interests, Lutz also emerged after the German occupation of Hungary as the representative of “foreign” Jews, including British and American nationals as well as Hungarian and other Jews in possession of Palestine immigration documents. The range of Lutz’s activities on behalf of the persecuted may be gauged from his archives, which were deposited at Yad Vashem. See Bronia Klibanski. “Archives of the Swiss Consul General Charles Lutz,” in *Yad Vashem Studies* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1983), 15:357–66.

18. See chapter 10.
19. These passports can be found in Lutz’s archives at Yad Vashem. See Bronia Klibanski, “Archives.” See also chapter 10.
20. See chapter 10.
21. See chapter 9.
22. Wallenberg was then thirty-two years of age. His father died shortly before he was born, and he was brought up under the guidance of his grandfather, Gustav Oscar Wallenberg, the former Swedish minister to Japan and Turkey. He was educated in America and spent some time in Palestine, where, as a result of his contacts with Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution, he became conscious of the realities of the Third Reich and the plight and aspirations of the Jewish people. For detailed biographical accounts, including his exploits and disappearance, see Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 1471–1501.
23. A leading official of the Council, László Pető knew Wallenberg personally from an earlier encounter as students: they had spent a summer in the same student hostel at Thenon-les-Baines, France.
24. See chapter 9.
25. When the *Nyilas* raided some of the children’s homes under Asta Nilsson’s protection, they took her, along with the children and Mrs. Bauer, a secretary of the Swedish Legation, into the ghetto. The two Swedish women were soon released on Wallenberg’s intervention.
26. Szálasi demanded that the Swedish minister and his staff move to western Hungary also. When they refused, *Nyilas* units attacked the Swedish Legation on December 10.
27. For details, see Braham, *Politics*, 1233–41.
28. For details on Spain’s role in the rescue of Jews, see Haim Avni, *Sefarad veba’yehudim bi’yeme ha’shoah veba’emansipatsiah* (Spain and the Jews during the Holocaust and the emancipation) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1975).
29. Since the Tangier International Zone was under Spanish occupation during the war, the offer obviously reflected the position of the Spanish government.
30. Braham, *Destruction*, Docs. 356–360.
31. Jenő Lévai, *Fehér könyv: Külföldi akciók zsidók megmentésére* (White book: Foreign actions for the rescue of Jews) (Budapest: Officina, 1946), 143–44.
32. See Braham, *Politics*, 1241–44.
33. Carlos de Sampayo Garrido, the minister, waged a relentless struggle against the Hungarian ultra-rightists, who were resolved to deport his secretary, Mrs.

- Bischofsky, and her parents. Following the intervention of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Garrido left Hungary on June 5 together with Mrs. Bischofsky. Her parents, however, could not leave until October 29. For some additional details, see *ibid.*, 1244–46.
34. These matters were handled within the Legation by Gyula Gulden, who acted as consul general, and Dr. Ferenc Bartha, who headed the special emigration section in the Legation.
 35. Most of the Portuguese-protected Jews were relocated to a building at 5 Újpesti-rakpart that was under the administration of Sándor Bródy.
 36. Laurence Steinhardt, the U.S. ambassador in Ankara, approached the Turks on May 24, 1944, shortly after Joel Brand's arrival in Istanbul. Similar demarches were made in June, following the introduction of a resolution to this effect in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congressman Sol Bloom, the chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Relations.
 37. For a succinct overview, see Braham, *Politics*, 1212–25.
 38. *Ibid.*, 1219.
 39. One of Archbishop Roncalli's major contacts in Istanbul was Chaim Barlas, the head of the Jewish Agency's delegation in that city.
 40. Many of these were issued by Rózsai Vajkay, the head of the safe-conduct office in the Nunciature, whose own special exemption had been arranged through the intervention of the nuncio earlier in the year.
 41. Baranszky, who was recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1979, was also involved in rescuing Jews from the Óbuda Brickyards and the death marches by distributing Vatican protective passes. For further details on his activities, see Anthony Cardinale, "A Freedom Fighter for Many Seasons," *Buffalo News*, October 11, 1981.
 42. The latter's representative was Sándor György Újváry, a writer-journalist of Jewish background, who was introduced to the nuncio by János Tóth, the liaison between the Nunciature and the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
 43. The reasons for the suspension of the deportations evoked considerable controversy among scholars of the Holocaust. Some are convinced that it was due to the bribing of Wisliceny by Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, who also initiated the controversial "Europa Plan" for the rescuing of the remaining Jews of Europe; others assert that it was primarily motivated by a tactical move by the Germans, who were then under great pressure by Slovak leaders eager to see the new settlements of the Slovak Jews in Poland. In this scenario, to avoid embarrassment and assure the smooth continuity of the Final Solution in the other parts of Nazi-occupied Europe, the Germans decided temporarily to suspend the deportations from that country. On this issue, see Braham, *Politics*, 816–18, 1073–75.
 44. For further details see *ibid.*, 1048–53.
 45. Martin Luther, then head of the *Inland II* section of the German Foreign Office, in fact informed his superiors on August 17, 1942, that the Final Solution was to be started with the deportation of the Jews from the Transylvanian towns of Arad, Timișoara, and Turda.

46. As revealed by Manfred von Killinger, the German minister in Bucharest, the scheme involved the payment of 200,000 lei (approximately \$1,336) per emigrant. Killinger emphasized that the scheme would enable the Romanian government not only to collect 16 billion lei (\$107 million), but also to get rid of a large number of Jews “in a comfortable manner.”
47. Toward the end of 1943, following the Red Army’s crossing of the Dnieper and advance toward the Bug, the camps were dissolved and the one-third of the deportees who had survived the ordeal were repatriated.
48. According to a December 28, 1944, report by G. Bertrand Jacobson, the HICEM-HIAS representative in Bucharest, approximately 1,500 Hungarian Jews had clandestinely crossed the Romanian border from the beginning of the mass deportations in Hungary to that date. Most of these lived in the capital and in Arad and Timișoara. In addition to these escapees, there were 11,200 other Hungarian-speaking Jews in Romania at that time. Of these, 3,200 were Jewish labor servicemen who had been deployed to the Bor copper mines, and who had been allowed to cross into Romania following their liberation by Tito’s forces in late summer–early fall 1944. The other 8,000 were labor servicemen who were liberated by Soviet-Romanian forces after August 23.
49. For further details see Braham, *Politics*, 1037–48. See also *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Chapter 12

1. *Zsidó Világkongresszus (Magyarországi Képvisellete) statisztikai osztályának közleményei* (Publications of the statistical department of the World Jewish Congress (Hungarian section), Budapest, 1947–49, mimeographed.
The same data were relied on by most authors dealing with the Holocaust in Hungary. See, for example, Lévai, *Zsidósors*, 464–69. See also Yehuda Don and George Magos, “The Demographic Development of Hungarian Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 45, no. 3–4 (Summer–Fall 1983): 189–216; and László Varga, “The Losses of Hungarian Jewry: A Contribution to the Statistical Overview,” in *Studies on the Holocaust in Hungary*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 256–65.
2. For a different accounting of the losses of Hungarian Jewry, providing much lower figures, see Tamás Stark, *Magyarország második világháborús embervesztése* (The human losses of Hungary during the Second World War) (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1989).
3. See table 32.2 in Braham, *Politics*, 1299.
4. See table 32.3, in *ibid*, 1301.
5. *Zsidó Világkongresszus*, no. 10, p. 7.
6. For some details on these subjects, see Braham, *Politics*, 1301–17.
7. For some details on Hungarian Nazis and ultra-rightists who escaped to the West, see Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 2335–41.

8. For some details on the extradition issue, see Jenő Lévai, "The War Crimes Trials Relating to Hungary," in *Hungarian Jewish Studies*, Randolph L. Braham, ed. (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1969), 2:263–65.
9. For some details on the Hungarian suspected war criminals, see Martin Himler, *Igy néztek ki a magyar nemzet sírásói* (This is what the gravediggers of the Hungarian nation looked like) (New York: St. Marks Printing, 1958).
10. The decree went into effect on February 5, 1945. Amended several times, it was formally enacted into law by the Provisional National Assembly on September 14, 1945, as Law No. VII of 1945. For text see *1945. évi országos törvénytár* (National code of laws for 1945) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1945), 33–52.
11. The presiding judges and their deputies were appointed by the minister of justice. The lay judges represented the five anti-Nazi political parties constituting the Hungarian National Independence Front—the Democratic Bourgeois Party, the Independent Smallholders' Party, the Hungarian Communist Party, the National Peasant Party, and the Social Democratic Party.
12. The people's courts, including NOT and the prosecution offices, were supplanted on January 1, 1952, by new organs of justice established under Law No. III of 1951 of the new pro-Soviet People's Democratic regime. For some details, see Braham, *Politics*, 1317–23. See also Lévai, "War Crimes Trials," 255–63.
13. See chapter 2.
14. See *Bárdossy László a népbíróság előtt* (László Bárdossy before the people's tribunal), with notes and introduction by Pál Fritz (Budapest: Maecenas, 1991); and *A Bárdossy per: A vád, a vallomások és az ítélet* (The Bárdossy trial: The indictment, the testimonies, and the verdict), Ferenc Abrahám and Endre Kussinszky, eds. (Budapest: Híradó Könyvtár, 1945). See also Elek Karsai, *Itél a nép* (The people judge) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1977), 17–71.
15. For some details on the trial, see *Az Imrédy per: A vád, a vallomások és az ítélet* (The Imrédy trial: The indictment, the testimonies, and the verdict), Ferenc Abrahám and Endre Kussinszky, eds. (Budapest: Híradó Könyvtár, 1945). See also Karsai, *Itél a nép*, pp. 72–119.
16. For the transcript of the trial with comments and notes, see *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per* (The Endre-Baky-Jaross trial), László Karsai and Judit Molnár, eds. (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1994). See also Karsai, *Itél a nép*, 185–215.
17. The Szálasi trial began on February 5, 1946. He and the leading members of his government, including Károly Beregfy, Sándor Csia, József Gera, Gábor Kemény, Jenő Szöllősi, and Gábor Vajna, were convicted and condemned to death on March 1. All were executed later that month. Two of his cabinet members, László Budinszky and Count Fidél Pálffy, were tried in December 1945 and executed early in March 1946. For some details, see *A Szálasi per* (The Szálasi trial), Elek Karsai and László Karsai, eds. (Budapest: Reform, 1988).
18. For some excerpts from the trial, see Karsai, *Itél a nép*, 140–84.
19. Lévai, "War Crimes Trials," 277. For sources relating to the war crimes trials held in Hungary, see Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 2022–315.

20. Lévai, "War Crimes Trials," 278. See also György Berend, *A népbíráskodás* (People's justice) (Szeged: The Author, 1948).
21. For the records of these and other war crimes trials held in Cluj and elsewhere in Romania, see RG-25.004M in the archives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.
22. These criminals were freed under the provisions of Decree No. 72 of March 23, 1950. For text see *Buletinul Oficial* (Official gazette), March 23, 1950. For the English translation of the judgment and details about the proceedings, see Randolph L. Braham, *Genocide and Retribution: The Holocaust in Hungarian-Ruled Northern Transylvania* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983).
23. Feketehalmy-Czeydner, Grassy, and Zöldi were originally tried in Budapest in 1943 during the administration of Prime Minister Miklós Kállay. Considering that Hungary was an ally of the Third Reich, the trial of high-ranking officers for murdering Jews and Serbs was an act of great political courage. The defendants were condemned to imprisonment ranging from eleven to fifteen years, but they fled the country and found refuge in Vienna as guests of the Gestapo. They returned to Hungary with the German occupation forces in March 1944 and played an active role in the liquidation of Hungarian Jewry. For details, see Braham, *Politics*, 218–22.
24. See *Ibid.*, 1324–25. See also Lévai, "War Crimes Trials," 288–89.
25. For sources relating to the French and Soviet trials, consult *Guide to Jewish History under Nazi Impact*, Jacob Robinson and Philip Friedman, comps. (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1960), 190–209 and 209–10, respectively.
26. For the transcript of the trial, see *Ministries Trial* (Court IV, Case XI), transcript pp. 2702–50, 3617–59, 7143–58, 13062–460, 26156–189. See also *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals Under Control Council Law No. 10* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949–53), 14: 825–31, 646–60, 812–17, 858–59. See also Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 2005–10.
27. For some details on the composition of the clemency board, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), 684–715.
28. See Braham, *Politics*, passim.
29. For some details on these trials, see Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 2000–2002.
30. For details on Capesius and other accused involved in the destruction of Hungarian Jews, see Bernd Naumann, *Auschwitz: A Report on the Proceedings Against Robert Karl Ludwig Mulka and Others Before the Court at Frankfurt* (New York: Praeger, 1966).
31. For details on Wagner's and Thadden's activities in connection with the Holocaust in Hungary, see Braham, *Politics*, passim.
32. For some additional details on the trials held in West Germany, see *ibid.*, 1325–28. See also Lévai, "War Crimes Trials," 285–88.
33. For details on their activities during the German occupation of Hungary, see Braham, *Politics*, passim. Winkelmann died in Bordersholm on September 24, 1977. Becher died in Bremen in early August 1995. See also Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 1943–45 and 2011–16.

34. Braham, *Politics*, 1328–29. See also Braham, *Bibliography*, Ref. 2003.
35. *New York Times*, March 11, 1972.
36. For Wisliceny's statement concerning his and the *Sonderkommando's* role in Hungary, see Braham, *Destruction*, Doc. 440. See also Braham, *Bibliography*, Ref. 2017.
37. For references to all aspects of Eichmann's activities and to his pursuit, capture, and trial, see *The Eichmann Case: A Source Book*, Randolph L. Braham, comp. and ed. (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1969). See also Braham, *Bibliography*, Refs. 1946–95.
38. See chapter 10.
39. Titled *Csendőrsors: Hernádnémetitől Floridáig* (Gendarme's fate: From Hernádnémeti to Florida), Szendi's book was published in 1990 by the Miskolc branch of the Hungarian Democratic Forum Party, post-Communist Hungary's dominant party at the time.
40. Finta escaped from Hungary in January 1945. He was eventually captured by the Americans, who kept him in a POW camp for eighteen months without learning of his background. Finta emigrated to Canada in 1951 and, having settled in Toronto and become a restaurateur, lived there until his indictment for war crimes. Finta was tried in absentia in Szeged early in 1948, and was condemned to a minimum of five years of forced labor. (Szeged, People's Court, Case No. 221/1947/10.)
41. For details on many ramifications of the case, see Randolph L. Braham, "Canada and the Perpetrators of the Holocaust: The Case of Regina v. Finta," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 293–317. For the Hungarian-language version, see "Kanada és a Holocaust bűnelkövetői: A Regina kontra Finta büntetőper," *Századok* (Centuries) (Budapest), 129, no. 6 (1995): 1331–54.

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