

# "Shylock is whetting his blade"

Fear of the Jews in Hungary during World War II

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In the summer of 1943 László Németh, the distinguished Hungarian writer appraised the possibilities of the war in a speech made before his fellow thinkers and writers, and soon to be published in print as well. As he said, he had been watching the war "with deep pessimism from the first moment" because he thought whether the Germans, the English or the Russians were going to win it, it would be a great trial for Hungarians. In August 1943, Németh saw that the Germans could not win, and that this would have the following consequences: "...there is a peace here, with them [i. e. the Jews - L. K.] as its prompters and even as its appointed redeemers... the revengeful Jewry, without self-criticism, must have grown extremely strong during the last four or five years as opposed to the shy respecters of culture, and he must be deaf to knife whetting who fails to hear that it is the heart that Shylock wants..."<sup>1</sup> His fellow writer, Gyula Gombos spoke even more explicitly when refusing a bourgeois democratic or a socialist-leftist development for the same reason: one could not expect anything concrete from either but the "wild revenge of the Jews."<sup>2</sup>

Had a Jewish refugee from Poland heard or read these speeches, he would probably have started to wonder what these Hungarian writers were afraid of since the Jews had "hardly" been molested in the Carpathian Basin so far. Arrow-Cross and other extreme right-wing members in the House of Representatives showered reproaches upon the government of Miklós Kállay even in the winter of 1943 particularly because of the "fruitlessness" of its Jewish policy. According to Count Miklós Serényi<sup>3</sup>, the Jews were still able to exploit Hungarian peasants

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<sup>1</sup> László Németh spoke during the lectures and discussions of the summer camp of *Magyar Élet* at Balatonszárszó. Budapest 1943, 49.

<sup>2</sup> Gy. Gombos, *Magyar út* [The Magyar way] quoted in Gy. Juhász, *Uralkodó eszmék Magyarországon 1939-1944*. Budapest 1983, 306.

<sup>3</sup> Count Serényi was one of the best friends of vitéz László Endre. Endre was sub-prefect in Pest County, the largest in Hungary between 1938 and 1944, and became one of the

on a million and a half acres, one could hardly see an open shop-window in Budapest at Yom Kippur, and industry was still "firmly held by Jewish hands".<sup>4</sup>

In trying to answer the question of what "people" thought of the Jews during World War II, a few fundamental characteristics of the Hungarian Holocaust need to be considered. With respect to the number of dead Jews "only", the Hungarian Holocaust might appear "average." The Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices murdered about 550,000 of the 825,000 Jews who lived within the borders of Hungary as redrawn by 1941.<sup>5</sup> However, on March 19 1944, the day that German troops occupied Hungary, more than 90% of those Jews were still alive. Hungary was the only ally of the Nazis during World War II that tried to settle the Jewish question in a constitutional way, by legislation.<sup>6</sup> The so-called Jewish Acts between 1938 and 1942 and a series of executive orders connected to them excluded the Jews from civic equality. Their economic, entrepreneurial, and employment possibilities were restricted, the latter especially for professionals. Marriage between Jews and Gentiles was prohibited, and extramarital sexual relationships between them qualified as race defilement (*Rassenschande*).<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 1941, more than 18 thousand Jews of allegedly irregular citizenship were handed over to Nazi murderers at Kőrösmező; In January 1942, more than 700 Jews (and thousands of Serbs) were massacred at Újvidék (Novi Sad). Apart from these cases, however, the only Jewish lives in immediate danger were those of the Jews conscripted for unarmed forced military labour. Approximately one and a half million acres of land owned by Jews were expropriated, but the factories, banks and even real estate of the Jews were not touched. As a police report on the morale of the population pointed out in the autumn of 1941, "The Jews admit that there are no other countries in Europe where they could live so comfortably."<sup>8</sup> Despite the repeated demands of the Germans, the cabinet of Kállay (9 March 1942 to 22 March 1944) would not force the Jews to wear the yellow star of David,

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most zealous collaborator of Eichmann as under-secretary in the Ministry of the Interior from the spring of 1944.

<sup>4</sup> *Képviseelőházi Napló* [Journals of the House of Representatives] (henceforth: KN) 1939–1944–Vol. XIX, 52. (14 December 1943).

<sup>5</sup> Between 1938 and 1941, parts of historical *Felvidék* [Northern Hungary], Subcarpathia, Northern Transylvania and parts of *Délvidék* [Southern Hungary], lost after World War I, were re-annexed with the assistance of Hitler and Mussolini.

<sup>6</sup> This was pointed out by Géza Benkő, MP of the governing party in a criticism of the radical proposals (demanding ghettos, yellow stars, and deportation) of the extreme right. KN–1939–1944–Vol. XVI, 427. (2 December 1942).

<sup>7</sup> For the Hungarian Holocaust in detail, see R. L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary*. 2 vols. New York 1994. Revised and enlarged Hungarian edition: Budapest 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Report on the morale of the population no. 41/8–1941 (concerning the period from 11 September to 10 October) from the police headquarters at Nagyvárad to the Public Security Department of the Ministry of the Interior. (Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives] (henceforth: OL)–K149–Belügyminisztérium rezervált iratok. [Ministry of the Interior – reserved documents]–651. f.–2–1941–7–6000).

then move them to ghettos and deport them. The "Jew protecting" policy of the Kállay cabinet has several explanations: it was feared that if they deported the Jews, the Hungarian economy would collapse. In the wake of Stalingrad, the influence of conservative, moderate anti-Semites had increased, who were looking primarily to Mussolini. As long as Rome refused to surrender its Jews, Budapest (and Bucharest) had something to refer to.<sup>9</sup>

Who feared the Jews' revenge in Hungary, and when and why? In order to be able to answer these questions with an at least approximate precision, we have studied journals of parliamentary debates, police and gendarmerie reports on the morale of the population in addition to newspapers, which were published under the conditions of a functioning, though restricted, parliamentary system, and limited by prior military censorship.

According to one of the oldest anti-Semitic topos, the God of the Jews, as well as the Jews themselves are revengeful. According to anti-Semites, the Jews live by the principle of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Leviticus 24:20) while the forgiving God of Christians teaches, "ye resist no evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Mt 5:39). *Új Magyarság*, the daily paper of László Baky's<sup>10</sup> national socialist party quoted deputy Reich press chief Sündermann with deep approval saying that Germany regarded itself as being at war with the Jews of the world, whose every act barely hides Jewish "faces distorted by Old Testament hatred."<sup>11</sup> One of the authors of *Magyarság*, the paper of Arrow-Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi, held forth thus: "Jews embody hatred on earth, they are prototypes of inhumanity. How could it be otherwise, when their national religion itself prescribes as a commandment the humiliation, hatred, and indeed, the elimination of non-Jews." Following a brief historical survey, the writer continues: "We can feel no pity for the Jewish people, since the complete elimination of the twenty million Jews of the world could only partially compensate for the horrible evil deeds they have committed against mankind as a whole."<sup>12</sup>

The figure of the criminal, bloodthirsty Jew appears in medieval anti-Jewish writings as well. Jews, the murderers of Christ were regarded as satanic creatures, capable of all kinds of other crimes. A number of the elements of anti-Jewish Christian teaching were successfully built into their anti-Semitic propaganda by the Nazis and their Hungarian comrades. The Jewish *bioterrorist*, infecting the Aryan race, spreading diseases like syphilis, the *moral terrorist*, causing moral destruction and spreading prostitution, and the *cultural terrorist*, spoiling traditional arts and inventing *avant garde* and surrealism were joined after 1918 by the judeo-

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<sup>9</sup> Ch. Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office A Study of Referat D II. of Abteilung Deutschland 1940-1943*. New York-London 1978.

<sup>10</sup> László Baky, retired gendarme major, confidant of the Nazis, was one of the chief organizers of the deportation of the Jews as under-secretary of the Ministry of the Interior from 24 March 1944 onwards.

<sup>11</sup> *Új Magyarság*, 10 October 1943, 4.

<sup>12</sup> L. L.[evatic], *Szálnalom nélkül* [Without pity]. *Magyarság*, April 18, 1944, 5.

bolshevist *revolutionary terrorist*, spreading pacifism, stabbing the fighting army in the back. In the winter of 1942–1943, these Jews were complemented by the figure of the *military terrorist* Jew, initiating the world war, and generally responsible for the protraction of the hostilities and for the barbaric bombings that inflicted so much suffering on the civilian population.

The Hungarian press discussed the massacre at Katyn as proof of the vengefulness and inhumane cruelty of the Jews. Referring to sources in Berlin, *Új Magyarország* reported that the massacre at Katyn was executed by "Jewish kosher butchers" commissioned by Stalin and followed the blueprint provided by Soviet-Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg, their ultimate goal being the extermination of all European races.<sup>13</sup> Milotay reports the extermination of one and half million Polish civilians carried off to Siberia and of ten thousand Polish officers, prisoners of war, projecting a vision of "Siberian horrors, Europe thrown to mass death, mass extermination, massacre, and the depths of mass graves" – in the case of a Soviet victory. What Milotay writes about is darkness and cruelty inconceivable to the European mind, heart, and imagination, demonic and satanic depravity, a true apocalypse.<sup>14</sup> The perpetrators of the massacres at Katyn and elsewhere were Jews, the GPU units were commanded by Jews, and even 60% of the assigned executioners were Jews, another journalist wrote.<sup>15</sup>

In Hungary, the defeat in World War I, and the loss of two thirds of historical Hungary was all blamed by anti-Semites on the subversive activities of Jewish liberal bolsheviks. They remembered with fury and shuddering fear the Hungarian Soviet Republic proclaimed on 21 March 1919 and its Jewish leaders headed by Béla Kun.<sup>16</sup> The reign of terror of the "brigand Jews of the sewers" in 1919 turned Hungarians into "hunted animals" for four months, the journalists of the extreme right wrote frequently during 1942–1944.<sup>17</sup> It was precisely that, another Jewish-communist "reign of terror," that the anti-Semites of the political right was afraid of. And they really began to be afraid when, prisoners of their own propaganda, they slowly realised that the axis powers were not going to win the war. László Baký, Ferenc Szálasi and their comrades, i. e. the representatives of the Hungarian *extreme right*, trusted in the final victory of the Axis until as late as April 1945. The conservative, moderate anti-Semites, watching the military developments of the war more realistically, had started to be afraid of the Red Army and the revenge of Jews right after Stalingrad.

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<sup>13</sup> *Új Magyarország*, 16 April 1943, 2.

<sup>14</sup> I. Milotay, "Katyn," *Új Magyarország*, 2 May 1943, 1.

<sup>15</sup> I. vitéz Csicsery-Rónay, "A leálcázott kommunizmus," [Communism in disguise] *Új Magyaróság*, 20 August 1943, 3.

<sup>16</sup> "...it took the horrors of the bolshevist terror for hatred to flare up in us against them [i. e. the Jews – L. K.], along with the feeling of mortal danger," wrote István Milotay in his article entitled "Gyűlölettel vagy gyűlölet nélkül?" [With or without hatred?] *Új Magyaróság*, 13 September 1942, 1. See also L. Marschalkó, *Kik árulták el 1918-ban Magyarországot*. [Who betrayed Hungary in 1918] Budapest 1944. Reprinted: Budapest 2000.

<sup>17</sup> I. Milotay, "Közös cél, közös sors, közös harc," [Common goal, common destiny, common struggle] *Új Magyaróság*, 1 February 1942, 2.

The war was regarded both in Budapest and in Berlin as a Jewish war, a world war started by Jews and waged for Jewish interests. Zoltán Bosnyák, one of the most eminent Hungarian anti-Semites declared in the spring of 1943, "...there can be no doubt that the Jews of the whole world, filled with unrestrained hatred and insatiable vengefulness, wanted this war. United in one tight spiritual unit, all the Jews in the world, from the ghettos in the Ukraine to the City of London and the Wallstreet [*sic!*] in New York, wanted retribution and satisfaction at any price" – only because Germany and Italy had dared to defy their aspirations to world hegemony, said Bosnyák.<sup>18</sup>

Following Goebbels, right-wing journalists in Hungary also claimed that bolshevism exposed a people of nearly 200 million to Jewish terror.<sup>19</sup> Since the officer corps of the Red Army had been judaized, they claimed, that army was nothing but "the obedient and willing instrument of Jewish world imperialism."<sup>20</sup> The expressions "bolshevist sceptre," "red terror" gained acceptance in official usage. Calling upon the inhabitants of his town to cultivate unploughed lands, or to contribute to charities, the mayor of Mohács often mentioned the struggle against the "red, bolshevist sceptre."<sup>21</sup> Róbert Haála, a member of Parliament watched with understanding what he said was the rumour-mongering, subversive machinations of the Jews disrupting the unity of the nation because, as he said, "...the war is waged to eliminate the Jews from Europe, therefore, they are defending themselves."<sup>22</sup>

A great number of gendarmes also held that the Jews, all of them, were enemies, worse than the bloodiest minded communists. One gendarme sub-lieutenant reported to his superiors already in the summer of 1941: "The truth is that Jews are the enemies of the system developing at present – all Jews, without exception, whether they are poor, rich, merchants, landowners, religious or converts, etc." He also made concrete proposals: Jewish men between 18 and 50 ought to be interned, their radios, firearms confiscated.<sup>23</sup>

The author of a confidential report delivered to deputy chief commissioner of the police József Sombor-Schweinitzer was of the opinion that with the anti-Jewish acts and decrees passed and issued so far "we have excited [the Jews] against ourselves," but "no significant or final measures have been taken."<sup>24</sup> "Let us not stop at halfway," demanded György Oláh, a member of Parliament; if we take

<sup>18</sup> Z. Bosnyák, "A zsidókérdés jövője," [The future of the Jewish question] *Nemzetőr*, 7 May 1943, 1, 3.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ambrus, "Dobjátok el az Istent, testvéreké!" [Drop God, little brothers!] *Nemzetőr*, 5 March 1943, 1.

<sup>20</sup> (no author given) "Zsidók a Szovjetunió hadseregében és flottájában," [Jews in the Army and the Navy of the Soviet Union], *Magyarság*, February 13, 1944, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Baranya Megyei Levéltár – Pécs – Mohácsi polgármesteri i. – 2759/1943 and 3475/1943 [Baranya County Archives – Pécs – papers of the mayor of Mohács].

<sup>22</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XVIII, 575. (3 December 1943).

<sup>23</sup> Report No. 201/1941. of the mixed station at Törökszentmiklós to the detective subdepartment HQ, VI. Gendarmerie District, July 2, 1941 (OL-K149-651. f. 11/33).

<sup>24</sup> OL-K149-651. f.-12-3.

away the lands of the Jews, its "logical consequence" can only be locking them up in ghettos. The Jew, divested of his property, Oláh argued, "is fearfully dangerous." The publican without his liquor licence, the tobacconist without a tobacco market, the timber merchant, the cement merchant and the paraffin merchant stripped of their concessions are now being joined by impoverished Jewish proletarian elements, Jewish landowners, tenants.<sup>25</sup> More than one million Jews in Hungary today are an enemy within, declared Ákos Eitner MP. Once the government "has thrown down the gauntlet to the Jews..., they ought to expect that the Jews accept that challenge, and inveterate hatred and vengefulness are among the racial qualities of the Jews," argued Eitner.<sup>26</sup>

It was not only lower rank gendarme or police officers that bombarded their superiors with proposals concerning the Jews. Arrow-Cross member of Parliament Gábor Vajna, who would be Szálasi's Minister of the Interior after 15 October 1944, demanded in the House of Representatives in the spring of 1942 the suppression of the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions co-operating with it as one of "the urgent measures to be taken towards the solution of the Jewish question."<sup>27</sup> Vajna submitted his proposal with reference to battle-worn, valiant soldiers, to "the public mood of the whole of Christian Hungary," emphasizing that upon learning of "all those horrors and crimes that the Jewry of the world have committed against the nations and peoples of Europe," Hungarians unanimously demand a solution to the Jewish question. Vajna proposed decreeing the mandatory wearing of the yellow patch, compulsory earlocks for Jewish men,<sup>28</sup> the marking of Jewish businesses, restrictions on the travelling of Jews, and sending them to labour camps in the Ukraine.

His fellow member of Parliament, Károly Maróthy remarked regretfully a few months later that "we do not dare to collect [the Jews] in ghettos" despite the fact that "it was they themselves that declared war on us," despite the fact that they listen to Moscow and London on the radio, commit acts of sabotage, indeed, some Jews would like to see the streets paved with Hungarian skulls.<sup>29</sup> According to the morale report of the Ministry of Defence and Propaganda (*Nemzetvédelmi és Propaganda Minisztérium*, henceforth: NPM) industrial workers all over the country were convinced that the Jewish managers of the factories were sabotaging, "even under the strictest control," by, for example, employing their workers only part-time under the pretext of a shortage of raw materials.<sup>30</sup>

The fear of Jews was increased by the news of Jewish partisans. One journalist wrote of Tito's partisans, known never to take prisoners, as escaped convicts, in-

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<sup>25</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XIII, 460. (10 June 1942).

<sup>26</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XVI, 329. (27 November 1942).

<sup>27</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XIII, 196. (29 April 1942).

<sup>28</sup> This proposal, according to the *Journals of the House of Representatives*, excited "considerable amusement" in the House.

<sup>29</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XIII, 321, 324, (2 June 1942).

<sup>30</sup> OL-K64-1943-41-664. Strictly confidential morale report of the NPM for 26 April to 1 May 1943.

ternational, bloodthirsty terrorists emphasizing that a number of "communist agitators of the Jewish race" were fighting among their ranks. They made Mosha (Moses) Pijadet one of Tito's deputies, claiming that his other lieutenant was originally called Fisher, and was, therefore, a Jew.<sup>31</sup> And it was regarded as a really horrifying example of Jewish inhumanity and moral depravity that Jewish girls also fought among the Jewish partisans on the Russian front behind the German lines, and, what is more, "they showed great self-sacrifice" in the process.<sup>32</sup> In the summer of 1943, the NPM was informed of 2,500 Russian parachutists dropped at Kőrösmező, accompanied by a great number of Jewish forced military labourers, who "intended to sneak into the country to start disruptive activities."<sup>33</sup>

The editors of right-wing newspapers were watching out for signs that could be interpreted as indicative of the vengefulness of Jews. A Jewish poet, according to *Új Magyarország*, encouraged his readers to take notes of the many cruel words and deeds they come up against, and add them to the others. The journalist believed that instead of working diligently, the Jews "were collecting documents for the revenge."<sup>34</sup>

The newspapers also published judicial decisions that punished Jews who behaved in a threatening way. Merchant Ede Fisher was sentenced to seven months imprisonment for saying, "All Christians will have been hanged before the last Jew is carried out of Hungary." Office-boy László Berkovics received two months for claiming that "Only the Soviet[Union] has order, there the roads are paved with Christian heads. In Palestine we shall do the same."<sup>35</sup>

Kaufmann demanded the sterilization of the German people, Varga, a Hungarian, wanted to send ten million German men to do forced labour for life in Siberia, Félix Langer would plunder the Germans and have their men work for years rebuilding the destroyed countries – the papers went on and on in that vein, reporting the alleged revengeful designs of Jews.<sup>36</sup> Editor-in-chief István Milotay tells in an editorial of his paper of regularly receiving anonymous letters trying to intimidate him, promising "merciless retribution, calling to account, and punishment" for him and his extreme right-wing comrades.<sup>37</sup>

Undaunted, Milotay continued his anti-Semitic incitement, but the number of those who were watching the developments on the military scene with growing anxiety was steadily increasing during 1943. The Ministry of the Interior regularly had the German and Slavic language broadcasts of the radios in Moscow

<sup>31</sup> V. Görgey, "Tito," *Új Magyarország*, 29 December 1943, 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Új Magyarország*, 16 May 1943, 4.

<sup>33</sup> OL-K64-1943-41-664. Strictly confidential morale report of the NPM for 26 July to 1 August 1943.

<sup>34</sup> *Új Magyaróság*, 20 May 1942, 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Új Magyaróság*, 13 May 1942, 2.

<sup>36</sup> F. Vajta, "Béketervek béke nélkül," [Peace plans without peace] *Új Magyaróság*, 18 May 1943, 1, and *Magyarország*, 18 June 1944, 9.

<sup>37</sup> I. Milotay, "Fenygetnek," [They threaten] *Új Magyaróság*, 31 October 1943, 1.

and Kuybishev monitored, and their contents summed up and reported. Newscasters in Moscow noticed as early as in January, 1943 that Prime Minister Kállay, earlier introducing anti-Jewish measures by the dozen, had completely stopped paying attention to the Jews. According to a commentary from Moscow, "Hungarian government circles can see that Hitler's boat is sinking, and are trying to save their skins."<sup>38</sup> Antal Pándi, one of the Arrow-Cross members of Parliament said it to the face of the government supporters in the House, "...we know that you had one opinion before Stalingrad, and had a different opinion after Stalingrad."<sup>39</sup>

Before the winter of 1942–1943, the Jews were verbally abused, but they were not feared. In September 1942, a military specialist discussed the "death throes of the Red Army at Stalingrad."<sup>40</sup> The landing of the British and American forces in North Africa (7 November 1942), and the fall of Mussolini (25 July 1943) created a great stir in Hungary. The confidential morale report of the NPM in May 1943, based on a national survey and collection of data emphasized that since the defeat of Rommel's army in Africa the behaviour of Jews has become "gloating and offensive."<sup>41</sup>

Jews were exerting fatal, destructive influence on Hungarian public opinion as well, the Arrow-Cross claimed. Vajna asked indignantly in the House of Representatives, "How could militarist propaganda be made in this country when at least a hundred thousand radios bellow London and Moscow and at least one and a half million Jews and Jewish hirelings spread the news of Moscow and London every day?"<sup>42</sup> Jewish propaganda was successful if the comments of Ferenc Rajniss (member of Parliament of the right-wing *Magyar Megújulás Pártja* [Party of Magyar Renewal]) are to be trusted, "Nor can we afford to have some people in the internal destruction look upon Soviet Russia, armed to the teeth, like hypnotised chickens, and spread destruction at home saying there is nothing to do, Hungary is unable to defend herself."<sup>43</sup> The morale report of the NPM for July 1943 says that the conspicuous wealth of the Jews, the advantages they enjoyed in terms of housing, the salary of the physicians on forced military labour, and the good time the Jews enlisted for military forced labour were having in general "... is not so much generating passions as rather reflects a feeling of resignation" because people relate the "good time" of the Jews to the development of the war.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> OL-K149-651.f.-10/21-BM Központi Rádióállomás jelentései [reports of Central Radio Station, Ministry of Internal Affairs], 5/1943. (5 January).

<sup>39</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XIX, 77. (15 December 1943).

<sup>40</sup> V. Görgey, "A legnagyobb győzelem," [The greatest victory] *Új Magyarország*, 24 September 1942, 1.

<sup>41</sup> OL-K64-Külügyminisztérium rezervált politikai i. [reserved political papers of the Foreign Ministry]-1943-41-664. Morale report of NPM, 10-16 May 1943.

<sup>42</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XVII, 164. (24 November 1943).

<sup>43</sup> KN-1939-1944-XVIII.vol.- 270. (26 November 1943).

<sup>44</sup> OL-K64-1943-41-664- Confidential morale report of the NPM for 5 to 11 July 1943.



The frightened people, fearing, among other things, the revenge of the Jews started manoeuvring for positions, tried cautiously to render services, or at least to indicate that they had not meant whatever they had been doing or saying in the previous years. According to the morale report of the NPM for May 1943, many people all over the country thought that the estates of Jews were given to "state employees, military officers and administrators with connections because in the case of changes they would return the estates of their own will to the original owners."<sup>45</sup> The morale report of the NPM for July 1943 established again that "manoeuvring phenomena" could be observed among the public.<sup>46</sup> In November 1943, Milotay wrote about a society "living in blind carelessness, self-confidence, or *anonymous anxiety*," sharply criticizing those who could take good times only. These people in the old days had outdone everyone in anti-Semitism, glorifying Hitlerism and Fascism, but then "they started, first silently then with growing speed, slipping away, and turning against, first secretly, later more and more openly, everything they had noisily be swearing upon and pledging their word to when there were victories only, and belonging there meant success and advantages."<sup>47</sup> The businesses of Jews had been claimed and obtained by citizens, peasants living "in blind carelessness, self-confidence." During the research commissioned by the Yad Vashem Archives I have been conducting with my colleagues<sup>48</sup> in the provincial archives of Hungary we have found masses of papers that prove that as long as it could be done "legally," assisted by the authority of the state, common people claimed the businesses, lands, etc. of their Jewish neighbours without inhibitions. However, due to the developments of the military situation, more and more people started living in what Milotay called "anonymous anxiety," trying to oblige the "other" side as well.

Zoltán Szitnyai wrote with a contemptuous jeer about a friend of his, whose political coat was always cut according to the latest fashion. When the Maginot line seemed unbreakable, he was humming French songs, then started to abuse the decadent Gallic spirit and glorify the German genius imbued with natural force. Now he has turned his coat again, is worried about the fate of the country, renewing his connections with leftist persons, old friends, whispering with them in hidden corners of cafés. According to Szitnyai, his friend would be on the march for ever, always under victorious standards, contemptuous of those who remain true to themselves.<sup>49</sup> Róbert Haála, member of Parliament, was also of the opinion that fear, manoeuvring for position, turning coats were spreading all over the place. Many people were able to whine and fear only, in high society bets were being made about the outcome of the war, and "a great game of ma-

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<sup>45</sup> OL-K64-1943-41-664- Confidential morale report of the NPM for 17 to 23 May 1943.

<sup>46</sup> OL-K64-1943-41-664- Confidential morale report of the NPM for 19 to 25 July 1943.

<sup>47</sup> I. Milotay, "Marxék színészei," [The actors of the Marxes'] *Új Magyarország*, 21 November 1943, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Judit Molnár, Zoltán Vági, Gábor Kádár, László Csósz, Zsuzsa Toronyi, Sándor Gáspár, Tamás Majsai.

<sup>49</sup> Z. Szitnyai, "Köponyeggondok," [Coat problems] *Új Magyarország*, 19 December 1943, 8.

noeuving for positions is going on because everyone would like to know where to step, to the left, to the right, or to the middle because the outcome of the war is doubtful," said Haála.<sup>50</sup>

The "evasive operations" of the German army were celebrated in vain by the right-wing press. The maps published every day in the papers clearly showed how the front was approaching the Carpathian Basin from the east. Those on the extreme right in Hungary were hoping until the Spring of 1944 that if the British and the Americans tried to open the second front, the invasion would be frustrated.<sup>51</sup> László Baký declared in February that the eastern front would be dwarfed in significance by the second front, and the decision would be made in the west, "...and we believe that Europe will be victorious."<sup>52</sup>

A perusal of the June numbers of *Magyarság* reveals that until 12 June it was firmly believed that the invaders would be repelled from the Atlantic Wall with a bloodied nose. It was only on June 14 that the correspondent of *Magyarság* reported from Berlin that "Germany wants to give her enemies the decisive battle in the heart of France."<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps this is where the answer lies as to why the Hungarian authorities were ghettoizing and deporting Jews in such an suprematic way, at times, indeed, enthusiastically in the spring of 1944. There were a number of possible reasons for the behaviour of the Hungarian authorities in 1944. Regent Miklós Horthy remained in place, appointing Döme Sztójay, his former ambassador to Berlin Prime Minister, thus giving real legitimacy to the new cabinet. The decade-long anti-Semitic propaganda, the "legal" deprivation of Jews of their rights and property had made officials, police and gendarme officers, as well as the population at large accustomed to viewing the Jews as enemies, second-class citizens. Hungarian civil servants, the members of the armed forces were well disciplined, and knew their duty. Now they were ordered to plunder and deport the Jews, and that is exactly what they did, they carried out their orders.

It was, to some extent at least, the successes of the invasion forces that forced Regent Horthy to stop the deportations on 6 July 1944, thereby temporarily saving the lives of approximately 250,000 Jews in Budapest. Horthy's decision had other motives as well: he was under serious pressure by his conservative friends and advisors, including former Prime Minister István Bethlen and others. At the end of June, he received telegrams from King Gustave V of Sweden, President Roosevelt, and Pope Pius XII. The leaders of the Hungarian churches, including

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<sup>50</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XVIII, 573-575. (3 December 1943).

<sup>51</sup> "...the year 1943, with its four, unexpected crises - the defeat at Stalingrad and the Don, the surrender of the Italians, that caused by the German evasive operations early in the autumn, and finally that intended by the terror bombings - have failed to stagger Europe," wrote the military expert of *Magyarság* with forced optimism. E. vitéz Zách, "Gondolatok az őszi csata mélyén," [Thoughts in the depths of the autumn battle] *Magyarság*, 21 December 1943, 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Magyarság*, 10 February 1944, 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Magyarság*, 14 June 1944, 1.

Calvinist bishop László Ravasz, also asked him to reconsider his Jewish policies. It is also possible that he believed that Under-Secretary of the Interior Baky was concentrating considerable gendarmerie forces around Budapest at the end of June 1944 not in order to deport the Jews of the capital but in preparation for a *coup d'état* against him. The Central Jewish Council was also diligently spreading the rumour that if the Jews were taken from the capital, the western Allies would carpet-bomb Budapest. Fearing for his power and the population of the capital, the Regent finally gave in to pressure, stopped the deportations, and even ordered the gendarmes to leave Budapest.<sup>54</sup>

The German occupation of Hungary, the stigmatization of the Jews with the yellow star, the organization of ghettos, collecting camps and then the deportations all contributed to the growing fear of the Jews. One of the reasons was the increasingly devastating bombing raids of the British and American air forces. Major cities and railway junctions had not been seriously bombed before the spring of 1944. The Hungarian press, however, regularly reported on the "terror raids" against German cities. This is what a German woman said to the military correspondent of *Új Magyarország* in May, 1943: "What goes on here has nothing to do with the war. The international Jews are exercising their sadistic instincts here. The English, the Americans, and their Negro pilots are merely blind instruments in the hands of that satanic race."<sup>55</sup>

The figure of the barbaric, murderous Jew often appears in the Hungarian press in 1944. "We must indict the Jews for the increasing savagery of the war, for the bombing of the civil population, women, and children, for the destruction of hospitals... Why do they stain themselves with crimes that cry to heaven, with mass murder... It is they who drive hatred to fury, who demand the destruction of Europe..." wrote one extreme right-wing journalist.<sup>56</sup>

It was a view widely held among people that the British and American bombers spared the lives of Jews. The "pollsters" of the NPM reported in June, 1943, that "according to rumour-mongers," the war was lost. However, many people believed that "Hungary is not bombed because the Jews here are not treated as they are in other countries, and because there are many Jews in Hungary and in Budapest."<sup>57</sup> After the first seriously damaging air raid in the Spring of 1944, the military correspondent of *Magyarság* was obliged to point out not without some surprise that "On April 3 the fallacy was proved wrong that Budapest would be exempted from all kinds of terrorist attacks by the three hundred thousand people of an alien race [i. e. the Jews - L. K.] residing there."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Braham, *The Politics*, Ch. 25.

<sup>55</sup> V. vitéz Görgey, "Zaporozsje-Berlin-Ostende," *Új Magyarország*, 6 October 1943, 5.

<sup>56</sup> K. Koltai, "Vádirat a zsidóság ellen," [Indictment against the Jews] *Magyarság*, 16 April 1944, 17.

<sup>57</sup> OL-K64-1943-41-664. Confidential morale report of the NPM for 7 to 13 June 1943.

<sup>58</sup> E. Zách, "Schaffhausentől - Budapestig," [From Schaffhausen to Budapest] *Magyarság*, 5 April 1944, 1.

However, what the military expert understood and wrote did not convince the inhabitants of great cities. When it became widely known that the Jews in Budapest would be moved to ghettos, Under-Secretary of the Interior Endre hastened to set the minds of the population of the capital at rest: "We do not intend to collect the Jews into a closed Jewish quarter. Jews will be concentrated everywhere, i. e. in the vicinity of factory buildings, railway stations, etc. where hostile air raids can be expected."<sup>59</sup> Endre was probably aware that the Allies did not care who lived where. He probably had Jews moved into the neighbourhood of railway stations in Csepel because he wanted to have as many Jews as possible killed if war factories and railways were bombed.

The air raids provided the Arrow-Cross with a new opportunity to write articles about the satanic warfare of the Jews, a manifestation of their six-thousand-year old sadism.<sup>60</sup> A constantly recurring claim of these articles was that the terrorist bombers dropped satanic devices in the form of dolls, which, when picked up by innocent children, exploded in their hands.<sup>61</sup> After visiting a German camp for prisoners of war, Vince Görgey described his experiences among "Jewish, Indian, and Negro" pilots in an article.<sup>62</sup>

However, the fear of Jews, of the Red Army fighting for the Jews, and of Jewish-Negro-Indian terrorist bombers was not general. Tens of thousands were only too glad to grab the opportunity and eagerly jumped at the fortunes of the Jews collected in ghettos, collecting camps and then cattle-trucks. Housing departments were besieged, and the movables of the Jews, where possible, were stolen and carried away.<sup>63</sup> Hungarian writer Sándor Márai wrote with deep contempt and desperation in the spring of 1944: "Cold May. I shiver in the sun. Nothing to talk about with people. Like you cannot argue with a drunk or a lunatic: the Hungarian middle classes have gone mad and drunk from the Jewish question. The Russians are at Kőrösmező, the English and the Americans over Budapest, and this society, obsessed and foaming at the mouth, wants to talk about nothing but the Jews."<sup>64</sup>

To the genuine satisfaction of Eichmann, more than 437,000 people were deported from Hungary between 15 May and 6 July 1944, most of them to Auschwitz, as the result of the co-ordinated, orderly, at times definitely enthusiastic "work" of tens of thousands of gendarmes, policemen and railwaymen. In May 1944, Márai prayed in his diary for God to give the Jews enough strength to bear the persecution, torture and oppression. "And then, he continued, if they have survived the persecutions, give them strength not to lose their heads, not to be-

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<sup>59</sup> *Magyarság*, 16 April 1944, 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Magyarság*, 25 April 1944, 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Magyarság*, 9 May 1944, 5; 10 May, 4.

<sup>62</sup> V. vitéz Görgey, "Amerikai terrorbombázók társaságában, zsidó, indián és néger pilóták között," [In the company of American terrorist bombers, among Jewish, Indian, and Negro pilots] *Új Magyarság*, 22 April 1944, 5-6.

<sup>63</sup> Braham, *The Politics*, Ch. 19-21.

<sup>64</sup> S. Márai, *Napló 1943-1944*. [Diary 1943-1944] Budapest 1990, 156.

come hunters running amok. Give them strength to be strong enough to have human stature and patience. Because all that revenge begets is new passions."<sup>65</sup> Márai also knew very well that hundreds of thousands were being plundered and carried off to their deaths in the spring and summer of 1944 by the Hungarian authorities, the accomplices of the Nazis. The Jews would indeed have needed God's help to suffer all that peacefully, without wishing to retaliate. Ottó Komoly, one of the leaders of the Zionist resistance in Hungary wrote in his diary on September 9, 1944 that there was a meeting in the Ministry of the Interior, according to the information he had, at the Department of Public Safety, where those concerned discussed what was to be done if "the understandable and just despair of the Jewish masses" exploded. Miklós Mester, under-secretary of the Ministry of Education, one of Komoly's high ranking patrons went as far as to ask him what the Zionists thought could be done to avert the explosion of the "understandable despair" of the Jews.<sup>66</sup>

If Komoly was really well informed, it has to be assumed that those concerned in the Ministry of the Interior were very much afraid. They were mostly afraid that after Rumania changed sides (23 August 1944) the front would collapse and that the Red Army would be given a happy welcome in Budapest as their liberator by hundreds of thousands of Jews. We should remember that most Jewish men, at least most able-bodied men capable of bearing arms, were at this time doing forced military labour service either on the front or in the hinterland. It takes very desperate or very frightened people to expect women, children and old people to revolt. General Géza Lakatos, the new Prime Minister (29 August to 15 October 1944) openly admitted in the House that "The military advantage today is obviously with the other side."<sup>67</sup> The 7th detective sub-department of the VII. (Miskolc) Gendarmerie District near the eastern border reported at the end of September that a unit of twenty-one partisans had parachuted in their district, and Hungarian Jewish forced military labourers in a number of prisoners' camps were preparing to fight as partisans on the side of the Red Army. The report mentions seventeen Jewish forced military labourers by name.<sup>68</sup>

The news of the advancing Soviet troops late in the autumn of 1944, after the Arrow-Cross take-over on 15 October 1944, were full of words like blood, death, horror. And the red bandits, the Arrow-Cross press roared, were led by Jewish forced military labourers.<sup>69</sup> Róbert Haála called the Red Army "Asian hordes organized by Jews."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Márai, *Napló*, 160, (around May, 1944).

<sup>66</sup> For the passage in Ottó Komoly's diary in Hungarian, see M. Schmidt, *Kollaboráció vagy kooperáció? A Budapesti Zsidó Tanács [Collaboration or co-operation? The Budapest Jewish Council]* Budapest 1990, 193.

<sup>67</sup> KN-1939-1944-Vol. XIX, 260. (21 September 1944).

<sup>68</sup> Report no. 1734/B.1944 (25 September) of VII. (Miskolc) Gendarmerie District to the Gendarmerie Intelligence Centre (OL-K149-651.f.-11/53).

<sup>69</sup> *Nemzetőr*, 4 November 1944. "They rape even demented women," the newspaper wrote among others.

<sup>70</sup> Journals of the Arrow-Cross House of Representatives, Sopron, 12 January 1945, 141.

## Epilogue

In the words of the Hungarian poet Attila József, the activities of many people (politicians, policemen, gendarmes, those of the middle class, workers, and peasants) in Hungary during World War II were controlled by "cunning fear."<sup>71</sup> Most politicians knew that whatever was being done to the Jews, in however "legal" and "parliamentary" way, was against justice and the law. Not every Hungarian politician wished the Jews dead, though. Many would have been satisfied with having some (or all) of the wealth of the Jews confiscated, and their civic rights curtailed. Even more would have been glad to see them emigrate. The plundering and the death of the Jews were wished by a smaller group, but they, to quote another Hungarian poet, "killed willingly and with pleasure, not obeying orders."<sup>72</sup>

It would be legitimate to ask whether (one of) the reason(s) the Hungarian Jews were deported to their death was because they were feared. The anti-Semites were afraid of the Jews first of all because of their own anti-Semitic prejudices. They "knew" that the people of the Old Testament were cruel, despicable, and revengeful. But they also knew that the Hungarian Jews were treated cruelly, despicably, and unlawfully. The Nazi and, in its wake, the Hungarian war propaganda changed its tone and subject after Stalingrad. The propaganda of success was followed by the propaganda of fear. The struggle of life and death became a constant central motif. Either we win, or the Jewish bolsheviks will exterminate the Germans, the Hungarians, the press of the extreme right roared. The Hungarian national socialists and the Arrow-Cross, the most faithful collaborators of the Nazis, as we have indicated, were confident in the final victory of the Germans until the spring of 1945. The development of military events, the fear of Jews or of the Red Army never had any impact on the behaviour of civil servants, gendarmes, soldiers, or the people at large. Tens of thousands claimed and obtained the businesses, the lands of the Jews, plundered the movables the latter had left behind. And thousands of civil servants, gendarme and police officers, excepting very few decent individuals, organized the deportation of the Jews in 1944 in a highly orderly manner. Fear of the revenge of Jews was rather selective than general.

According to the Hungarian political thinker, István Bibó, humans are the only creatures who know they will die. Fear of death, of being killed by another human being is one of the oldest fears. Bibó says that the meaning and end of European social development is the humanization of power, the elimination of the dangers threatening the lives of people.<sup>73</sup> If we try to understand what happened to the Jews during World War II and why, it will be obvious that the Holocaust was, among other things, a failure of Judeo-Christian European civilisation.

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<sup>71</sup> A. József, "Hazám," [My homeland] (1937).

<sup>72</sup> M. Radnóti, "Töredék," [Fragment] (19 May 1944).

<sup>73</sup> I. Bibó, *Az európai társadalomfejlődés értelme*. [The meaning of European social development] Budapest 1986, 11–13.