

Gendarmes, Policemen, Functionaries and the Jews - New Findings on the Behavior of Hungarian Authorities During the Holocaust

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The subject of this paper is the Holocaust and the events of 1944 in Hungary, but before I discuss these subjects, let me say a few words about the rise of political anti-Semitism in Hungary between the two world wars.¹

The appearance of political anti-Semitism in Hungary can be dated to the 1870s and 1880s. Yet, at that time, the liberal government was still very much in favor of the assimilation of the Jews, who were playing a significant role in the modernization of the country.

The counter-revolutionary regime, which followed the revolutions of 1918-1919, created an antidemocratic, conservative form of government that raised anti-Semitism to the level of official policy. The two revolutions and the traumatic loss of two thirds of the territory of Hungary at the end of World War I, were closely connected in the consciousness of society. Exploiting this, counter-revolutionary propaganda made the revolutions responsible for the disastrous peace treaty signed at Trianon in 1920. From there, it was but a small step to connect liberalism, the democratic civil movements, and the Communist Soviet Republic to the Jews. According to this theory, the Jews "had made" the revolutions and were therefore responsible for Trianon and for all the social and economic troubles of the mutilated country. Despite this anti-Semitic propaganda, many Jews were not to be persuaded, until World War II, that whereas before 1918 it had been "good" to be Jewish in the Monarchy, after 1918 it was "bad" to be a Jew in Hungary, as Ezra Mendelsohn has said.

The impoverished country, squeezed within the borders defined at Trianon, had nearly as many professionals and civil servants looking for jobs as in the earlier, larger country. In addition to those fleeing to the truncated territory from other parts of Hungary with a university degree, a considerable proportion of the children of middle-class families, fugitive from the lost territories, entered the universities. One attempt at solving this "overproduction" of professionals was Law XXV. of 1920, the first anti-Semitic piece of legislation in Europe, which limited the proportion of young people allowed to enter the universities according to the proportion of various "races or nationalities" within the nation as a whole.² For the first time, "The Israelites /were/ regarded as a separate nationality". The nearly half a million Jews made up 6 % of the total population of Hungary, which was below 10 million.

Between 1920 and 1938 no more discriminatory acts were passed in the Hungarian Parliament. This may be explained by the selective anti-Semitism of Regent Miklós Horthy and the leading politicians of the period, who distinguished between assimilated (Magyarized) Jews and immigrants especially from "Galicia".

After the Anschluss of Austria in 1938, however, in a speech made at Győr on March 5, 1938, Prime Minister Miklós Darányi, besides proclaiming a program of rearmament, declared that there was a Jewish question in Hungary, and that it was to be settled in a lawful way. In Hungary, the first step toward a "racial" discrimination among Hungarian citizens was the so-called first Jewish Law of 1938.³ It stipulated that the proportion of Jews in the chamber of the press, in the chamber of the theater and film, in the chambers of lawyers, engineers and medical doctors as well as in the professional jobs of certain companies should not go beyond twenty percent. In the following year, two other laws, relevant to our subject, were passed by the Hungarian legislation. The National Defense Law of Two 1939 gave the government special powers "in times of war or in times of the danger of war threatening the

country".⁴ After March 19, 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary, the new pro-Nazi government of Döme Sztójay referred to various articles of this latter law when issuing its decrees.

Béla Imrédy, who, after the resignation of Darányi, had, as Prime Minister, pushed the first Jewish Law through Parliament submitted, to the house of representatives on Christmas Eve 1938, a bill on "limiting the social and economic expansion of Jews".⁵ According to this second Jewish Law, passed in 1939, "a person is to be regarded as Jewish, if he or she, or at least one of the parents, or at least two of the grandparents were members of the Israelite denomination before the coming into force of the present Law". The relatively high ratio granted to Jews in the professions, listed in the first Jewish Law, was now lowered to six percent.

The primary aim of the government with these two Jewish Laws was probably to mollify the anti-Semitic passions of the "Christian nationalist" middle- and lower-middle classes in Hungary. There was no pressure from Nazi Germany in that respect. Let us add that the Hungarian Nazis, the so-called Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi and his followers, were demanding a "numerus nullus", that is, a Hungary without Jews.

Finally, in 1941, the legislation passed the third Jewish Law, which is known in Hungarian history as the racist ("race-protecting") law.⁶

One could go on listing the laws (and decrees) issued against citizens of Hungary described as Jews. Yet, for all their discriminatory quality, these acts did not mean cramming people into cattle-cars and deporting them. According to the documents so far discovered, the German-type "settlement" of the Jewish question in Hungary was raised between the Third Reich and Hungary for the first time in 1942.⁷ It is true, however, recent researches indicate that Nazi Germany put considerable pressure on Hungary as early as during the summer and fall of 1940, to adopt some race-protection laws, in return for territorial expansion. The government of Miklós Kállay (1942-1944) as well as Horthy himself flatly refused the German demands.

Until the spring of 1944 the position of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews can be described as relatively safe - this despite the fact that the Jewish Laws made their lives difficult. Jewish men were forced to serve as laborers in the armed forces. Tens of thousands of these men died on the Russian front along with Hungarian soldiers; and more than 18.000 Jews, qualified as aliens were deported to Kamenets-Podolsky in the Ukraine, in the summer of 1941, where they were massacred by the German SS, Hungarian soldiers, and Ukrainian militia. During the War, approximately 15-20.000 Jews from abroad found refuge in Hungary. During 1942 and 1943, these Jews - as we know from the depositions of a number of Polish and Slovak refugees - were amazed by the nearly undisturbed life of the Jews in Hungary. They were particularly impressed by the fact that the traffic near the synagogues on Yom Kippur was directed by white gloved policemen in dress uniform.

In March 1944, Hungary had the largest Jewish community, around 800 thousand people including converts. This was the largest grouping of Jews anywhere in German-controlled Europe. Still, hardly ten days after the German occupation, Edmund Veesenmayer, the plenipotentiary representative of the Reich, summed up favorably the results of the harmonious cooperation between the German and the Hungarian authorities. He reported home that, "considering the conditions here, this development /i.e. promulgation of the first anti-Jewish decrees/ can be said to be very fast".⁸

"March 19th. Very exciting day. ... our German brothers are allegedly coming. ... There was something in the air. People were sent home from the movies, but the soccer game was held".⁹ These are the words Lieutenant General Kálmán Shvoy wrote into his diary (in Szeged). In many places, the population believed that the Germans were just marching

through the country and at one place, in Kaposvár, Jewish housewives offered cake to the German soldiers.¹⁰

Directly after the German occupation, a number of gendarmerie posts sent the higher authorities reports to the effect that German soldiers were breaking into, and plundering, houses of Israelite families.¹¹ Although there was no open investigation in these cases, the German military headquarters were notified. They replied saying: "The case will not go unpunished; strict orders have been issued to German soldiers to refrain from taking any material objects, and anyone not returning these objects to where they have been taken from, will be severely punished". More than one persecuted person returning to Hungary from deportation after the war recalled that the German military had behaved decently toward the Jewish population, whereas the Gestapo had been very cruel.

Simultaneously with the armed troops of the Wehrmacht, two representatives of the RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt - the SS Security Main Office), namely Hermann Alois Krumei and Dieter von Wisliceny came to Budapest. A few days later the chief of Department IV. B/4, Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann arrived also to have the Endlösung, the final solution put into effect in Hungary. Indeed, during the first days of the occupation, the chief of RSHA, Ernst Kaltenbrunner visited Budapest in person, and talked with former ambassador to Berlin and presumptive Prime Minister Döme Sztójay regarding the details of the radical solution of the Jewish question.¹²

Eichmann's detachment of two or three hundred persons needed all the help and support of the Hungarian administrative, police and gendarmerie organizations, as well as active participation, in order to be able to execute the operation of "dejudization". Eichmann was satisfied with Horthy's appointing retired Gendarmerie Major, Arrow-Cross Member of Parliament and confidential agent of the Germans, László Bakay Under-Secretary of the Interior.¹³ Bakay was put in charge of the police and the gendarmerie. It was with even greater satisfaction that Eichmann received the appointment, as Under-Secretary of the Interior, of László Endre, sub-prefect of County Pest, who was a notorious anti-Semite. Endre was made responsible for the departments of administration and the so-called department of housing. In addition, on May 13th, the Minister of the Interior put Endre in charge of "cases in connection with the resettling of the Jews, not covered by the control of other departments". Thus, the units (approximately 20.000 men) of the ten gendarmerie districts and the officials of 44 counties as well as the police force of the towns of Hungary were all placed at the operation's disposal. The local administration executed the Jewish decrees down to the last dot.

The administrative system in Hungary after March 19, 1944, was the same as the one restored in August 1919 on the basis of the laws on administration adopted in 1887. Although there were several attempts at reforming the administration, especially following the revolutions in 1918-1919, no real reorganization took place. Act Thirty of 1929 "On the organization of public administration", although reflecting the effort of the government to centralize and to professionalize the system, did not basically reduce the jurisdiction of local autonomies.¹⁴ Counties and towns with full municipal rights (törvényhatósági jogú városok) were formally headed by Lord Lieutenants (főispán), nominated by the Minister of the Interior and appointed by the Regent, whose powers of supervision and control covered all local administrative organs. The law reduced the proportion of the biggest tax payers, the so-called virilists from 50% to 40% in the municipal assemblies. The proportion of eligible members was also reduced to forty percent. The rest, 20 percent, was now to be made up of permanent members, representatives of special interests, religions, professions (i.e. the chief of police, the director of finances, the president of the university, etc.), as well as of civil servants. According to the Act, the government had the right to dissolve the municipal assembly in the case of behavior jeopardizing the interests of the state, of permanent disablement, and of a

critical economic situation. However, real control in the everyday life of the counties was in the hands of the sub-prefects (alispán) elected by the municipal assemblies. In the subordinate districts (járás) control was in the hands of chief constables (főszolgabíró), who were subordinate to the sub-prefect. In the county towns and the cities with full municipal rights, control was in the hands of the mayor. The latter was elected by the municipal assemblies. The gradual restriction of local jurisdictions became complete with Law Twenty-two of 1942, which gave the Minister of Interior the right to appoint the office holders previously filled by elections.¹⁵ Indeed, Article 8 of the same law stated, that, although these offices "are usually to be filled by national competition," "the advertisement of the vacancy can be waived if the authority entitled to fill the office deems it unnecessary in the interest of public service. Competition can also be omitted if the interest of public service demands the speedy filling of the administrative position". After March 19, 1944, massive dismissals and/or transfers of public servants were legitimized with reference to that law. The heads of local administrations relied on the police force in towns, and on the gendarmerie in rural areas. The organization of the gendarmerie did not follow the country boundaries, but followed the lines of the military structure. In other words, it was modeled after the military districts.

Unlike the police, which was controlled by the Ministry of the Interior, the gendarmerie was under the dual control of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. The gendarmerie functioned as an organized military body of law and order. The men and their officers received very harsh military training, which included emphasis on unconditional loyalty to the Regent. As an organization of public safety, the gendarmerie was subordinated to the Minister of the Interior. At the same time, its highest military commander was the superintendent of the gendarmerie, responsible for controlling training as well as military order and discipline.

After the German occupation on March 19, 1944, it took German-plenipotentiary Edmund Veessenmayer, Regent Horthy, and the leaders of the right-wing parties three days to agree on the composition of the new government. The government of Döme Sztójay, included, in addition to pro-German ministers, some members of the Party of Hungarian Renewal (Magyar Megújulás Pártja). On March 22, the Prime Minister, referring to his talks with Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Chief of RSHA, informed the first session of the council of ministers on the problems to be solved in connection with the Jewish question. The second session of the council of ministers (March 29, 1944) was already discussing the "Jewish decrees" by the dozen.¹⁶ Although the Minister of Justice observed that government decrees needed the approval of Regent Horthy, Prime Minister Sztójay put him at ease saying, "His Excellency the Regent had given the government free hand with regard to all the Jewish decrees, and did not wish to influence the (ministers) in that respect".

The decrees discussed by the council of ministers deprived Hungarian citizens, described as Jews, of their possessions, of their most elementary rights, and of the conditions of existence. The decrees tried to establish a semblance of legitimacy by referring to Law Two on National Defense of 1939. The decrees of the government were accepted as lawful by most local organs of administration and public safety. Indeed, specialists of the local authorities executed without hitch even such decrees that were marked confidential; were never published, and lacked reference to a law. These decrees referred to such things as the census of Jews and the collection camps for Jews in Kárpátalja (Northeast Hungary), Észak-Erdély (Northern Transylvania) and the Délvidék (Southern Hungary).¹⁷

The semblance of legal continuity prevailed for the local administrations because Regent Horthy had remained in his place. Indeed, the dismissals and appointments of ministers and under-secretaries carried his signature. Nor had the Parliament been officially dissolved. Thus Horthy was playing an active role in setting up the new government at a time when the

Gestapo was arresting and deporting to German concentration camps, members of the Hungarian parliament, including Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, the long-time former Minister of the Interior. And yet, on April 14, Veessenmayer emphatically demanded that Sztójay dismiss all the lord lieutenants and the sub-prefects.¹⁸ Within less than a month, all but two of the lord lieutenants were removed by Horthy at the recommendation of Minister of the Interior Andor Jaross.¹⁹ Most of these offices were filled with members of Béla Imrédy's far-right Party of Hungarian Renewal of which Minister of the Interior Andor Jaross was also a leading member. Political reliability was the most important criterion. The case of the Lord Lieutenant of Szeged is characteristic. Sándor Tukats had, until his removal, executed all decrees concerning Jews without the slightest hesitation. As early as April 29, Saturday, that is on the day following the promulgation of the ghetto-decree, Tukats called upon the Mayor of Szeged demanding that he take the necessary steps.²⁰ Still, Tukats was considered unreliable because he was a member of the less radically rightist Party of Hungarian Life (Magyar Élet Pártja). His place was taken by Aladár Magyary-Kossa, who was not from Szeged, but whom Minister of the Interior Jaross trusted. Magyary-Kossa was also member of the Party of Hungarian Renewal. (Incidentally, no doubt as a result of some power play, Tukats became the Lord Lieutenant of Szeged again in September.)

On May 10, Veessenmayer was able to report to Foreign Minister Ribbentrop that "the cleansing of the Hungarian administration in the countryside is proceeding in a satisfactory manner".²¹ According to the documents, "cleansing" included the chief constables at the head of the districts as well as the lord lieutenants, but the sub-prefects, who actually controlled the counties, and the mayors in the towns were hardly touched until the end of June, following the completion of the Jewish deportations. There were very few such administrators as József Pálffy, mayor of Szeged, who voluntarily resigned from his office, or more precisely, retired from public life until his official retirement on May 31.²² His place was taken by Deputy-Mayor Béla Tóth on March 22, after Pálffy had tendered his resignation. Tóth strictly executed all the decrees concerning the Jews. Indeed, sometimes he put into practice measures that went beyond the governmental decrees. For example, on June 10, on the day the two under-secretaries of the Ministry of the Interior paid a visit to Szeged, and possibly because of that visit, Deputy-Mayor Tóth gave instructions by telephone to the managers of the Szeged Central Gas and Electric Co. ordering that they immediately cut off electricity and gas.²³ The cuts included street lightings within the main Jewish ghetto.

The reason that sub-prefects and mayors were not removed was probably that most of the local leaders, including the more humanely inclined, proved during the first weeks that they reconized as legitimate the new government and its decrees restricting the rights of the Jewish citizens.

The chief constables, at the head of districts, played at least as important a role in this affair as did the mayors in the towns. Indeed, their relationship with the local population in small villages of a few thousand inhabitants was probably more direct and intimate than that of the mayors who administered towns with tens of thousands of people. Jaross and his colleagues needed reliable chief constables for the smooth and quick "dejudeization" of the country. At the same time, according to laws concerning administrative matters, these offices had to be held by persons with adequate training and qualifications. The Minister if the Interior satisfied both criteria, one must admit, in a rather shrewd manner. When leafing through the pages of the spring and early summer 1944 numbers of the official Monitor (Hivatalos Közlöny), it becomes clear that Interior Minister Jaross appointed the new chief constables always "in the interest of public service", that is, with refernce to Law Twenty-two of 1942. However, these appointments were not promotions for district administrators (szolgabíró) or deputy clerks (aljegyző), but simply transfers. The principle behind it was probably that the

specialists should come from as far as possible, so that previously established local, friendly connections should not survive, and that nothing should cause the officials to try to delay the execution of the discriminatory decrees. The administrators should be unable to help their friends. This assumption is supported by the fact that the same principle can be seen to have been operating on lower levels, in the appointments of district administrators, deputy clerks, and engineers. There are examples of individuals being transferred from the northwestern parts of the country to southern Hungary and vice versa. I repeat: these were transfers and not promotions. At the same time, it is surprising to see that while in some counties nearly all the chief constables were replaced, in other places there were no transfers at all. To sum it up, the leaders of the local administrations under the Ministry of the Interior came up to the expectations of their superiors.

In July, 1944, one of the mayors (Bertalan Bécsy from Makó) proudly declared in the editorial of the local paper that "we who are now standing at the head of public life in this county (i.e. Counties Csanád-Arad-Torontál) and this town, have been faithful servants for decades of the nationalistically oriented right-wing idea, of the originally pure counter-revolutionary Szeged ideology".²⁴ Thus it was not a coincidence that "everyone here has remained at his post despite the political changes".

None of the top leaders of the ten gendarmerie districts was removed. Yet not all the commanders of the gendarmerie districts executed the anti-Jewish orders with the same zeal. The commander of Gendarmerie District Ten was, one could say, lucky enough not being forced to execute "ghettoization".²⁵ This was because Ukrainian refugees were wandering across his territory at that time. Therefore, the commander of Gendarmerie District Nine was put in charge of controlling the collection of Jews from all over Northern Transylvania.²⁶ Although having been heard to criticize the Germans, and having shown "sympathy for the fate of the persecuted Jews", - as was said at a people's court trial after the war by a number of witnesses, the commander of Gendarmerie District Five remained at his post.²⁷ On the other hand, the commander of District Four personally proposed to the Minister of the Interior that "the zone along the southern border be deJudeized with special dispatch".²⁸ The same commander recommended the relief and/or transfer of three gendarmerie officers "because they cannot be expected to execute the measures against the Jews with the dedication and zealous initiative now required of officers of the gendarmerie". Dozens of survivors recalled after the war instances of the brutality of the gendarmes. An extreme example of this was that, in the days before the deportation, Jewish women were stripped and submitted to bodily search (per inspectionem vaginae) in search of hidden valuables by midwives and doctors, often in the presence of men who were not medical personnel.²⁹ Indeed, in some instances, the gendarmes themselves performed such a search. The testimonies about gendarmes smuggling food into the ghettos, or about gendarmerie officers undertaking anything against all the savagery are few and far between.³⁰

The police headquarters regularly conducted so-called "yellow-star"-raids. It was not at all exceptional when a mother of four was arrested by the police and fined 1.000 Pengős, a huge sum at that time, for not wearing the star in the required manner.³¹ She was actually wearing a shawl on her head because of the rain, and the end of the shawl covered the star.

The director of a hospital ruled that Jewish doctors did not have to wear the star on their white gowns, but the sub-prefect overruled him and ordered that the yellow stars be worn even in the operating rooms.³²

The so-called ghetto decree was issued on Friday, April 28, 1944.³³ In the regions that I have researched all the local officials took the first steps between April 29 and May 5 to designate the places for the Jews to live. Although the decree used a moderating clause, saying that "the first magistrate of the municipality may so order," nobody had the slightest doubt that

the text was to be meant in the imperative. The ghettos in smaller towns were installed without any problems. Indeed, in some places the orders of the sub-prefect were carried out five days before the official deadline. In towns with full municipal rights it was more difficult to organize the separation of Jews from non-Jews. In nearly every town a number of officials were appointed by the mayors to run Jewish affairs. The mayor of Kecskemét collected several ghetto orders in preparation for his own proclamation on the subject.³⁴ In Szeged both the new and the old lord lieutenants called meetings to discuss which part of the town would be the most suitable for setting up a ghetto. In both towns it was decided that "considerations of convenience" should be ignored. The ghetto order of Kecskemét allowed approximately eighteen square feet (two square meters) per person;³⁵ the one in Szeged originally decided it to be 55 square feet (six square meters) for a person³⁶ only to reduce it later to twenty square feet (two point two square meters).³⁷ Unlike in Szeged, where a single ghetto was built, Kecskemét had four places assigned as living quarters for Jews.³⁸ In that city most of the Jews were to be housed in the barracks along the two sides of the cemetery in the outskirts of the town. When this plan fell through, the municipal leaders found the storerooms of the Copper-sulfate factory suitable. The president of the Kecskemét Jewish Council wrote to the mayor in desperation³⁹ that "the quartering of masses in the storehouses of the Copper-sulfate factory is disastrous... one of the rooms is a big empty hall with a small door and with windows that cannot be opened. The dirt floor is covered with sand and is full of mouse and rat holes. There is no possibility for washing."

On the other hand, in the town of Baja, Mayor Bernhart assigned houses for the local Jews but did not set up a closed ghetto.⁴⁰ Nor were the Christian inhabitants of the area forced to move out. In Hódmezővásárhely, Deputy-Mayor Beretzk called the first ghetto meeting only on May 31, at which no decision was made regarding ghettoization.⁴¹ All along, the Hódmezővásárhely officials claimed to be waiting for advisers from the capital, and therefore did not do anything in terms of setting up a ghetto. As Beretzk said at the meeting on May 31, "we do not think of using force against anyone". Within his own jurisdiction, Beretzk played for time. On June 15, however, a detachment of fifty gendarmes was ordered to Hódmezővásárhely in order to round up the Jews, to bring them to the collection camp (or in other words concentration center) in Szeged, and then to deport them.⁴² Jews from the area were deported at the end of June mostly to Auschwitz and a minority to forced labor in Austria.

On May 2, a few days after the publication of the ghetto decree, the Interior Minister's order excluding Jews from public baths came into force.⁴³ Sub-prefects and mayors were receiving this and dozens of other orders concerning the Jews, and most of them did their best to carry them out to the letter and as soon as possible even if the demands were unrealistic. By early May there was no Jew left to be banished from the public baths.

On May 5 the sub-prefect of Csongrád County issued his order, to the district chief constables and the mayors of the county towns on the exclusion of Jews from the public baths.⁴⁴ One of the chief constables replied to sub-prefect that although there were no public baths within his jurisdiction, in the summer the Jews be also forbidden to use the public beaches along the Tisza River.⁴⁵ The operators of the sports swimming pool in Szentes (also in Csongrád County) requested, on May 13, the complete exclusion of Jews.⁴⁶ The leaseholder of the local hot baths and swimming pool was willing to let Jews have "a hot shower". The mayor made his final decision on June 14 and allowed the Jews to use the steam baths on Wednesdays according to the above conditions. When he made this decision he already knew that two days later the nearly four hundred inmates of the Szentes ghetto would be taken to the collection camp in Szeged, to be deported from there.

The management of the Szeged Turkish baths, in anticipation of the decree of the Minister of the Interior, made it known through the local press that Jews were not to be admitted in the steam baths.⁴⁷ After the decree was published, the manager declared that the Jews were banned from the baths.⁴⁸ He also asked the municipal authorities that, although "the decree made it possible for the owner of the baths to appoint a suitable day and time when the excluded Jews could use the facilities,... this should not be allowed because the Jews might infest the premises with parasites and thus could spread diseases".

While collection camps were being organized, and then freight trains crowded with humans were being sent off to Auschwitz, the humane Deputy Foreign Minister, Mihály Jungerth-Arnóthy more than once addressed the meetings of the council of ministers, informing the members of the government on the mistreatment of the Jews.⁴⁹ In addition to the fact that "the deportation of the Hungarian Jews was often carried out within forms that were cruel and objectionable with respect to humanitarian considerations", Jungerth-Arnóthy argued, foreign newspapers carried news about "Jews being gassed and burnt in Poland". To Jungerth-Arnóthy's complaints Under-secretary of the Interior László Endre replied, among other things, that "the atmosphere and order of the ghettos was usually calm and satisfactory. There were hardly any suicides, and those occurred mostly in the pre-deportation camps".⁵⁰ Interior Minister Jaross also held unambiguous views on the Jewish question: "We are not really interested in where the Jews are going. The welfare of the country demands that the Jews be removed fast".⁵¹ And indeed, in the spirit of this comment, orders, instructions and decrees kept arriving to the heads of local and municipal administration.

Between May 14 and July 9, 1944, that is during less than two months, 434.351 persons were deported from Hungary on 147 trains.⁵²

The reaction of the population was rather mixed. Some were sympathetic, and tried to help the Jews. On the other hand, the decree on the utilization of synagogues, as well as the great number of private requests for apartments, business premises and other movable property formerly belonging to Jews would seem to suggest that very few expected the deportees to return.

Regent Horthy had the deportations stopped on July 6, 1944 only,⁵³ as a result of foreign pressure in particular by King Gustav of Sweden, President Roosevelt, and Pope Pius XII.⁵⁴ His decision was also motivated by the success of Operation Overlord in Normandy and the successful summer offensive of the Red Army. Besides, he may have been afraid that if the Jews were to be deported from Budapest as well, the Allies would carpet-bomb Budapest. In spite of this, the collection camps in the country were all emptied by the German and Hungarian authorities by July 9, 1944.

It would seem that the documents unearthed so far confirm the result of Raul Hilberg's analysis,⁵⁵ namely that not unlike the administrative personnel in Germany or the Netherlands, the majority of the officials in Hungary went about solving the "Jewish question" with initiative, flexibility, and often even with enthusiasm. Some officials waited for orders from above, others acted on their own initiative. In addition to decrees officially issued, oral instructions received over the telephone or at meetings, wanting even the semblance of legality, were immediately executed. As Deputy Mayor of Szeged, Béla Tóth said on May 13, 1944: "In the case of the Jews, rather than worrying about the letter of the decrees, we are considering their spirit and their aim, and we adjust the method of execution to this spirit and these aims".⁵⁶

There were very few administrative heads like Deputy Mayor Pál Beretzk of Hódmezővásárhely, who dared to alleviate the condition of the Jews within the possibilities offered by the national decrees. His actions are proof that it was possible to make

compassionate gestures, and to slow down, within very narrow limits, the speed of the Final Solution.

¹ For a detailed analysis of the period with special regard to the Holocaust, see Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary*. I-II. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), and *The Holocaust in Hungary Fifty Years Later*. Eds. by R. L. Braham and A. Pók, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

² For the text of Law XXV/1920, see *Magyar Törvénytár, 1920* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1921), pp.145-146.

³ For the text of Law XV/1938 (the first Jewish Law), see *Magyar Törvénytár, 1938* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1939) pp. 132-144.

⁴ For the text of Law II/1939, see *Magyar Törvénytár, 1939* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1940), pp. 6-128.

⁵ For the text of Law IV/1939 (the second Jewish Law), see *Magyar Törvénytár, 1939* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1940), pp. 129-148.

⁶ For the text of Law XV/1941 (the third Jewish Law), see *Magyar Törvénytár, 1941* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1942), pp. 56-66.

⁷ For Hungarian-German diplomatic relations, see R. L. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry. A Documentary Account* Vols. I-II (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1963), *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról 1933-1944* [Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary. German diplomatic papers from Hungary 1933-1944] (henceforth: Wilhelmstrasse). Edited by György Ránki, Ervin Pamlényi, Loránt Tilkovszky, Gyula Juhász (Budapest: Kossuth K., 1968), *Hitler hatvannyolc tárgyalása, 1939-1944. Hitler Adolf tárgyalásai kelet-európai államférfiakkal* [Hitler's sixty-eight talks, 1939-1944 Adolf Hitler's talks with East European statesmen]. Edited by György Ránki, Vols. I-II (Budapest: Magvető K. 1983).

⁸ *Wilhelmstrasse*, p. 807.

⁹ *Shvoy Kálmán titkos naplója és emlékirata, 1918-1945* [Kálmán Shvoy's secret diary and memoirs, 1918-1945]. Edited by Mihály Perneki (Budapest: Kossuth K., 1983), pp. 275-276.

¹⁰ Magyar Zsidó Múzeum és Levéltár (MZSML)[Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives], Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság (DEGOB)[National Committee for Looking after Deportees], protocol 3543.

¹¹ Bács-Kiskun Megyei Levéltár (BKML)[Bács-Kiskun County Archives], papers of the Chief Constable of the District of Kalocsa, 2029/1944, 2140/1944.

¹² For Kaltenbrunner's visit in Hungary, see e. g. *Az Endre-Baky-Jaross per* (henceforth:EBJ) [The Endre-Baky-Jaross Trial], edited and notes by László Karsai and Judit Molnár. (Budapest: Cserépfalvi K., 1994), pp. 179-180, 196-197.

¹³ For the appointments of László Baky and László Endre, see *Magyarország tiszti cím- és névtára, 1944*. [Catalogue of the names and addresses of Hungarian officers, 1944]. (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Állami Nyomda, 1944), Supplement, p. 17.

¹⁴ For the text of Law XXX/1929, see *Magyar Törvénytár, 1929*. (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1930), pp. 333-407.

¹⁵ For the text of Law XXII/1942, see *Magyar Törvénytár, 1942* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1943), pp. 171-177.

¹⁶ Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL)[Hungarian National Archives], minutes of the Council of Ministers, March 29, 1944.

¹⁷ For the text decrees, see *EBJ*, p. 608 and *Vádirat a nacizmus ellen. Dokumentumok a magyarországi zsidóüldözés történetéhez*, Vol. I (henceforth: Vádirat I.) [Indictment of Nazism. Documents of the history of the persecution of Jews in Hungary]. Edited by Ilona Benoschofsky and Elek Karsai, (Budapest: MIOK, 1958), pp. 124-127.

¹⁸ *Wilhelmstrasse*, p. 824.

¹⁹ *Wilhelmstrasse*, pp. 837, 845.

²⁰ Csongrád Megyei Levéltár (CSML)[Csongrád County Archives], papers of the Lord Lieutenant of Szeged, 386/1944.

²¹ *Wilhelmstrasse*, p. 845.

- ²² CSML, papers of the Mayor of Szeged, 22/1944 confidential
- ²³ CSML, papers of the Mayor of Szeged, 9090/1944.
- ²⁴ *Makói Újság*, July 2, 1944, pp. 1-2.
- ²⁵ Történeti Hivatal (TH) [Office of History], V-140.906/2, V-142.803/1.
- ²⁶ TH, V-140.906/1.
- ²⁷ Budapest Főváros Levéltára [Archives of Budapest], Nb. 725/1946.
- ²⁸ TH, V-146.147.
- ²⁹ Esztergomi Prímási Levéltár [Archives of the Esztergom Primate] papers of Serédy Jusztinián, S 12/a file III., MZSML, DEGOB, protocol 3550.
- ³⁰ MZSML, DEGOB, protocol 3550.
- ³¹ BKML, papers of the Chief Constables of the District of Kalocsa, 2277/1944.
- ³² MZSML, DEGOB, protocol 3551.
- ³³ For the text of the decree, see *Vádirat I*, pp. 244-250.
- ³⁴ BKML, Zsidók [Jews] 1944, papers kept separately.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ CSML, papers of the Lord Lieutenant of Szeged, 847/1944.
- ³⁷ CSML, papers of the Mayor of Szeged, 7776/1944.
- ³⁸ BKML, Zsidók 1944, papers kept separately.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ BKML, papers of the Mayor of Baja, 53/1944 confidential.
- ⁴¹ CSML-Hódmezővásárhely, papers of the Mayor of Hódmezővásárhely 8804/1944.
- ⁴² CSML-Hódmezővásárhely, papers of the Mayor of Hódmezővásárhely 11.856/1944, 12.690/1944.
- ⁴³ *Vádirat I*, pp. 285-286.
- ⁴⁴ CSML-Szentes, papers of the Chief Constables of the District of Mindszent, 1160/1944.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ CSML-Szentes, papers of the Mayor of Szentes, 1581/1944.
- ⁴⁷ *Szegedi Új Nemzedék*, April 28, 1944, p. 5.
- ⁴⁸ CSML, papers of the Mayor of Szeged, 9240/1944.
- ⁴⁹ MOL, minutes of the Council of Ministers, June 21, 1944.
- ⁵⁰ For the complete text of Endre's report, see *EBJ*, pp. 492-496.
- ⁵¹ MOL, minutes of the Council of Ministers, June 24, 1944.
- ⁵² Report to the Ministry of the Interior of Gendarme Lt. Colonel László Ferenczy, liaison officer of the Gendarmerie with the German Security Police on July 9, 1944. For all the reports of Ferenczy, see *EBJ*, pp. 497-522.
- ⁵³ *Wilhelmstrasse*, p. 873.
- ⁵⁴ *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen. Dokumentumok a magyarországi zsidóüldözés történetéhez*. [Indictment of Nazism. Documents of the history of the persecution of Jews in Hungary] vol. III. ed. by Elek Karsai (Budapest, MIOK, 1967), pp. 58-60, 70-74, 92-97.
- ⁵⁵ Raul Hilberg, "The Bureaucracy of Annihilation" in: *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews* ed. by François Furet (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), pp. 119-133.
- ⁵⁶ *(Vásárhelyi) Népújság*, May 13, 1944. p. 5.