

THE POLICY TOWARDS THE JEWS, ZIONISM, AND ISRAEL
OF THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, 1945 - 1953

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by

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George Garai:

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This thesis examines the relationship between the Communists and Jews, and Zionists in particular, in the peculiar conditions of Hungary. After their emancipation in the late 19th century, Jews were given two important roles to play: to develop certain capitalist functions and to boost the proportions of Hungarians against the various nationalities inhabiting the country. This helped them to gain materially and intensified their assimilation. The latter significantly reduced the attraction of Zionism, which identifies Jews as a nationality.

The strong Jewish participation in the short-lived 1919 Soviet Republic in Hungary enabled the subsequent antisemitic and anti-Communist regime to equate Jewish and Communist interests. The persecution of Jews during the Second World War decimated the community and to many proved the futility of assimilation, thus increasing willingness to embrace Zionism. The Communists, coming to power on the heels of the occupying Soviet army, were under predominantly Jewish leadership thus apparently proving the claims of the previous regime.

To distract attention from their leaders made the party pretend the non-existence of any particularly Jewish problem, or even the existence of Jews in Hungary.

This characterised the Communist attitude to Jews in the subject period, while attitude to Zionism and Israel followed the policy of the Soviet Union. When, in the early 1950s, Stalin identified his main enemies as the Zionists and the Jews (see Slansky trial and the Moscow doctors' plot) the Hungarian Communist leader, Rakos, played down embarrassing aspects like that Slansky's case challenged the reliability of Jewish Communists.

Stalin's death in 1953 cut short the increasing anti-Jewish campaign and the subsequent changes in Soviet policy lead to some liberalisation in Hungary too, including rehabilitation of victims of injustice, with the exception of Zionists.

The thesis concludes that because of the weak Zionist influence and the Communists' opposition to racial discrimination as a matter of principle, most Hungarian Jews found integration into the Communist system relatively easy.

PREFACE

The subject of this thesis has not been examined previously in detail. I have therefore drawn to a very large extent on documentary evidence which at the time of research was still unclassified and not catalogued in various archives in Britain and Israel. I am grateful for their permission to wade through that material.

In my research I had to draw largely on original documents and on the oral evidence of eye witnesses. I am extremely grateful to these witnesses who had subjected themselves to long hours of tape recorded interviews, after having travelled long distances in Israel to meet me. I am also appreciative of the staff of the Central Zionist Archives, in Jerusalem, for helping to find documents sometimes not even in the catalogue.

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INTRODUCTION

The Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrines, the basic ideology of the Communist movement as well as of the Communist parties have had constant links with the Jews. These existed at two levels. At the first one the formulators of these doctrines were concerned with what attitude to adopt towards the Jewish sector of society and worked out eventually a rigidly defined theory. At the second level many individual Jews, in some countries disproportionately too many, supported the Communist movement and participated in its leadership from early on.

The ideological interest in an attitude on the Jews was in recognition of several factors. In the second half of the 19th century, during the development of the Communist ideology, the Jews in all European countries were still living on the fringe of the society, largely unemancipated or just in the process of emancipation. Therefore they could be regarded as potential allies in an attempt to establish a social system based on equality and justice. But the very fact that through emancipation an increasing number of Jews were integrating into the capitalist sector of the society made such a simple attitude impossible. Furthermore, almost simultaneously with the development of the Communist ideology there appeared among Jews a movement attempting to find a national rather than a religious identity. This eventually emerged as political Zionism. Communist ideology was thus forced to determine its views and policies on the Jews, in other words, it had to express a view on Zionism.

Marx did not consider the Jewish people a nation. He regarded them as merely a caste, or a "chimerical nationality". To him Judaism was an evil in itself, an "anti-social" element from which the Jew himself must be purified before he became fully emancipated. In his essay, "A World Without Jews", Marx explained that such an emancipation would come about through the assimilation of the Jew in society.

Lenin, like Marx, refused to regard the Jewish people as a nation, and therefore opposed the demands for Jewish cultural autonomy. He maintained that through abolishing the discriminatory laws against Jews the whole Jewish question would be solved.¹

¹ In "The position of the Bund in the party" (Collected Works. Vol.1.VII., London, 1961, pp.99-101) he wrote: "...the idea of a Jewish 'nationality' is definitely reactionary....(it) runs counter to the interest of the Jews for it fosters among them, directly or indirectly, a spirit hostile to assimilation, the spirit of the 'ghetto'".

Stalin, who regarded the idea of a nation unconceivable without a common language and a common territory, categorically denied the Jews the right of nationhood. He described Zionism as "a reactionary and nationalist political movement.... Its aim is to organise a Jewish bourgeoisie state in Palestine and it endeavours to isolate the Jewish working masses from the general struggle of the proletariat."²

The Communist view, theoretically, is thus clear: the Jewish problem will be solved by establishing a Communist social system where neither religious nor racial discrimination exists and therefore Jews can integrate completely into society as a whole. Jewish separatism - as claimed by Zionism - is unacceptable. This theory however did not stand the test of realities when the Communists seized power in Russia in 1917. Faced with the problem of millions of Jews concentrated in certain parts of the country and with complicated specific economic, social and cultural issues, the Communists, for practical reasons, had to identify the Jews as a distinct nationality, one of the many in the Soviet Union. This recognition did not mean reconciliation with Zionism, on the contrary, anti-Zionist measures were taken by the Soviet regime from its earliest days.³

As for the second level of Communist-Jewish links, the personal involvement, several concepts offer explanations of this trend. Judaism, the doctrine of the Jewish religion, places great emphasis on equality, on the recognition of needs, and on the duty to help those in need. Thus, this religion, in principle, would make its followers receptive to social obligations.

Another concept is based on historic, economic and social factors. As Jews in all European countries suffered discrimination, they provided a potentially rich source of political movements which were striving for a society of equality in civic rights, in employment, education, and culture. Many non-conformist Jews were therefore drawn towards such movements, whether they wanted merely to liberalise the social system, whether they worked for deeper social reforms, or even for a revolutionary change in social conditions. Although by virtue of their newly acquired social position the emancipated Jews were best suited for the

² Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, English edition, London, 1942, p.289

³ For example, see Cang, p.34 and p.207.

middle-class Liberal political trends, where many indeed found their places, an unexpectedly large number embraced the more radical labour movements. Though most of them did not come from the working class, their impatience, accumulated over centuries of persecution and discrimination, made them responsive to passionate, radical ideas about changes necessary in society. It was partly such passion and partly the fact that they were by and large better educated than members of the working class that enabled them to take on leading positions both in the Social Democratic and later in the Communist movements.

A study of developments in Hungary provides an exceptionally good opportunity to follow the links between Communism, the Jews in general, and Zionism in particular. Certain specific historic conditions in 19th and 20th century Hungary throw a singularly strong light on the peculiar characteristics of this relationship.

About the period preceeding the end of the Second World War and the Communist party's subsequent entry into the political arena, as a legal entity, three aspects require particular attention:

- 1) The circumstances of the Jews' emancipation in Hungary, and the specific role assigned to them in the attempt to strengthen the Hungarian character of the country against the impact of national minorities. This led to an exceptionally deep assimilation of Jews and accounted for the little attraction Zionism held for them.
- 2) The fact that a short but violent Communist dictatorship took place in 1919. Jewish Communists played an important part in it; in many cases carried out the most unpopular tasks.
- 3) The regime between the two world wars promoted and encouraged antisemitism and anti-Communism. Discrimination against Jews became the law of the land. It created a climate in which Jews were allowed to be regarded as inferior, and brought about a deep tension between the Jewish and non-Jewish population. Antisemitism and anti-Communism were intertwined: Jewish participation in the 1919 Communist dictatorship was exploited to prove the predominantly Jewish character of Communism.

It was against such background that the Communist party took up a dominant role in Hungarian political life after the end of the Second World War. This Hungarian Communist party was unique. Although in the Communist parties of the other East European states Jews held prominent posts at high levels, only in the Hungarian party was the leader himself - and thus the Stalinist dictator - a Jew: Matyas Rakosi. Furthermore, he and three other Jews held all the key positions in the party. In a country, where open antisemitism had been rampant for more than two decades, and where the identification of Communism with Jews had been wide-spread, this created a situation which was bound to influence the political posture and tactics of the Communist party as a whole.

In the context of this study it was inevitable to identify certain individuals as Jews. This identification was based, whenever possible, on authentic sources. In their absence the criteria was common knowledge, treated with utmost caution. In questionable cases probable Jewishness was disregarded.

A considerable proportion of substantiating evidence was based on oral or written testimony of witnesses. It was felt necessary to record them as many were of an advanced age and their testimony had to be preserved as there was only little documentary evidence available. These witnesses' recollections might have been subjective or restricted and therefore, wherever possible, corroboration was sought either from documents or from other witnesses.

CHAPTER ONE: THE ROAD TO 1945

The Useful Jews

The nomadic Hungarian tribe detached itself about 3,000 years ago from the Ugric branch of the Finno-Ugric ethnic family, left its original home on the eastern bank of the Volga, where the river turns sharply southwards, and after a slow migration towards west, reached Central Europe, at the end of the ninth century; conquered the Slav kingdom of Moravia, and settled down in the valleys of the rivers Duna (Danube) and Tisza.

A hundred years later their first king, Istvan, accepted Christianity, and under his successors the kingdom of Hungary integrated into the structure of feudal, medieval Europe. Nothing remained of their Asian origin but their language. The Hungarian kingdom did not however confine itself to the area inhabited by the people who spoke that language, but expanded by conquest to the natural boundaries of the plain: the Carpathian mountains, the river Száva and the foothills of the Alps.

In the 16th century the Turkish empire occupied the large central section of the kingdom, Austria's Habsburg monarchy the northern and most western areas and only Transylvania remained under Hungarian rule. After the expulsion of the Turks, at the end of the 17th century, the whole area, including Transylvania, came under Habsburg reign.

Repeated Hungarian attempts to regain sovereignty culminated in the unsuccessful war of independence against Austria in 1848-49. In this war, the nationalistic aims were intermingled with attempts at social reforms, including the abolition of serfdom and the making of the legislature representative of a wider section of the population.

Austria's victory can be attributed to its military superiority, to Russia's armed intervention on its behalf, and not least to the Emperor's, Francis Joseph's success in securing support of the various national minorities - Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, and Roumanians - who were living on the territory of the former Hungarian kingdom. During the absolutist Austrian rule which followed, moderate Hungarian political elements were constantly seeking reconciliation with the Emperor, who, after military defeats at the hands of France in 1859, and Prussia in 1866, was at last prepared to make concessions to keep this troublesome dominion at peace.

An agreement, the Compromise, was reached in 1867.¹ Although it failed to satisfy those who had demanded complete independence from Austria,² it achieved two aims. It reinstated the kingdom of Hungary within its "historic" borders and legitimised Hungarian supremacy over the nationalities on its territory. This recognition of Hungary's existence also opened the door to a long overdue industrialisation and thus to progress from a feudal to a capitalist economic system. The Jewish population was to become fundamentally involved in both of these vital issues.

The first reliable information on the number of Jews in Hungary is from 1738.³ A census of the Jews, conducted for taxation purposes on the order of the Habsburg Emperor, Charles III, showed their number in the thirty counties included in the census as 11,621. In addition, there were about 1,200 in Transylvania and Temeskoz, and a further 650 in the counties excluded from the census. Their occupational distribution is notable in view of later developments. 45% of the heads of families counted in the census were engaged in commerce, 34.9% were craftsmen. Only one lawyer, twelve surgeons, and one clerk were listed.⁴

Large-scale immigration, mainly from Moravia-Bohemia and Poland, increased their number to 80,775 by 1787 (1.3% of the total population), and to 542,279 (4% of the population) by 1869, i.e two years after the Compromise.⁵ While previously most of them lived either near the

¹ It established the two-centred Dualist Austro-Hungarian Empire in which both countries had their own independent governments, responsible to their respective legislative institutions. They were linked by the person of the monarch, and by their common interests in foreign policy and defence. Common ministries were set up for foreign affairs and defence as well as for finance to provide the budgets of the previous two. Francis Joseph, who retained his title as Emperor of Austria, was crowned King of Hungary on June 8, 1867. (Molnar, 1967, Vol.II., pp.70-71).

² For the opinion, for instance, of Lajos Kossuth, one of the most radical leaders of the 1848-49 independence war, who went into exile after its defeat. see *ibid.*, p.72.

³ Marton, 1966, p.30. He assumes that Jews were already living in the area when the Hungarians conquered it and there is evidence of their presence during the subsequent centuries, detailed history before 1738: pp.5-30.

⁴ *ibid* pp.31-33

⁵ Katzburg, 1966, p.166.

borders through which they had entered, or on the large estates; the period between 1840 and 1869 witnessed their rapid urban development.⁶

Their treatment through the Middle Ages, in Hungary, was similar to other European countries. They were largely tolerated, occasionally persecuted, and in their activities restricted mostly to money lending.

Under Turkish occupation and in Transylvania they lived comfortably, but under Austrian rule they were frequently persecuted and expelled from towns. When the whole of Hungary came under Austrian reign, the Jews were living on the large estates, paying fixed annual fees, and rendering various services to their landlords for their protection. When ideas of the Enlightenment, including religious tolerance, reached Hungary from the West, in the late 18th century, they appeared closely correlated with the Hungarians' efforts to regain national independence.⁷ Consequently, the Jews, seeking equality, became sympathetic to the Hungarian national movement, and many, particularly in the then still separate Buda and Pest, actively supported the fight for the Hungarian sovereignty in the 1848-49 war. The leaders of the Hungarian liberation movement acknowledged their contribution when the independent Hungarian parliament, on July 28, 1849, in Article 29, declared their full emancipation.⁸ The victorious Austrians also took note of their conduct and imposed a one-million florins fine on the 19,000 strong Jewish community of Pest.⁹

Although the Emperor quashed the 1849 emancipation law together with all legislation passed by the Hungarian assembly during the war of independence, it was not unexpected that soon after the Compromise, the Hungarian parliament, in Article 17, 1867, emancipated the Jews, and further assured their rights in Article 13, 1896, by declaring the Jewish faith a "legally recognised religion", with a status equal to

⁶ The Jewish population of the capital, Budapest, for example, increased fourfold, from 10,000 in 1840, to 45,000 in 1869. *ibid*, p.139.

⁷ At the Hungarian legislative assembly (the Diet) in 1840, some deputies already demanded the full emancipation of the Jews, but eventually, in Article 29, only their freedom of domicile and pursuance of crafts and trade were permitted. Seifert, 1959, p.117.

⁸ Beer, 1954, p.873.

⁹ Werner.

that of the leading Catholic and Protestant churches.¹⁰ Such favourable treatment was not only due to the liberal leanings of the new regime's ruling elements, but also to their wish to win the support of the Jewish community, because in the reinstated kingdom of Hungary, the Hungarians themselves were in a minority.¹¹

To increase their proportion they turned to the most assimilation prone sectors - the town dwelling Germans and the Jews. The importance of the latter lay partly in their geographic position. In 1869, 43.7% of the 542,279 Jews lived along the borders among national minorities, and even in 1910, 35.7% were still there.¹² Thus, the Hungarians tried to utilise this vanguard for the assimilation of the nationalities. In spite of determined efforts on a country-wide basis, they were however only moderately successful. Nevertheless, the concessions to the Jews were not wasted as the proportion of Hungarians, largely by including the Jews, did indeed grow in that period.¹³

¹⁰ The new privileges of the Jewish communities included the compulsory taxation of members (with state aid in tax collection), the maintenance of theological and general educational institutions, and the right to a proportionate share in state subsidies. Duschinsky, p.380.

¹¹ In 1880 they comprised only 41.1% of the population, the rest were Germans, Slovaks, Roumanians, Carpatho-Ukrainians, Croats, Serbs, and others, most of whom lived in the border areas of the country. Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.182.

¹² Marton, 1966, p.40.

¹³ The proportion of Hungarians, by 1910, rose to 48.1%, including the 5% of Jews in the total population who were counted as Hungarians. The datum on the proportion of the Hungarians is from Molnar, 1966, Vol.II, p.182, and on the Jews from Katzburg, 1966, p.166.

The Jews were also useful in strengthening of the capitalist economic system, which developed with extreme intensity and rapidity in the little more than four decades between the Compromise in 1867 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.¹⁴

For personnel the Hungarians had again to call on the Germans and the Jews. The feudal frame of the Hungarian society disintegrated only slowly. Enclosed in its traditional form it lived for a long time more in a symbiosis than an organic unity with the capitalist sector which was growing up beside it rather than out of it. The characteristic elements of the bourgeoisie emerged neither from the old ruling classes, as in the west, nor from the peasantry, as in the Balkan and in Russia, but from outside sectors, or from among the new immigrants. While the magnates continued to live on the proceeds of their large estates, Jewish money lenders and traders were allowed to grow in a few decades into major bankers and industrialists.

The core of what were to become the Hungarian middle-class, consisted of the gentry, the impoverished former owners of medium sized estates, who, instead of seeking their new existence in the capitalist sector, sought influence through the State's administrative institutions. Half the staff in the ministries, three-quarters in the county administration, and a significant proportion of the judiciary and the army officers corps consisted of the gentry.¹⁵ The role of a bourgeois middle-class was offered to the German and Jewish merchants, small-time financiers and lessees.

The Jews embraced these opportunities enthusiastically.¹⁶

¹⁴ Details on this industrial growth in Molnár, 1967, Vol.II. pp.163-176.

¹⁵ Molnár 1967. Vol.II, p.185.

¹⁶ According to the 1910 census, 85% of the self-employed financiers and bankers; 42% of their salaried employees; 12.5% of the self-employed industrialists, and 21.8% of their employees; 54% of self-employed traders, and 62.1% of their employees were Jews. They also broke into land owning: 19.9% of properties of 1,000 holds or over, and 19% of those between 200 and 1,000 holds were in Jewish hands. They comprised 73% of the lessees in the first, and 62% in the second bracket. Macartney, 1962, p.191.

Such landmarks of Hungarian capitalism as the General Credit Bank, (the financial arm of the Austrian Rotschilids) as well as the Anglo-Hungarian and the Franco-Hungarian banks were founded and managed by Jews. The sugar industry was dominated by the Hatvani-Deutsch family, textile and textile dyeing by the Goldberg factory in a suburb of Budapest, and Hungary's largest heavy industrial enterprise was the Weiss works on the outskirts of the capital. Jews used their emancipation to obtain higher education, and soon played a large part in Hungary's academic life, its literature, arts, (pursuing usually the latest Western trends, rather than the traditional and conservative Hungarian ones), performing arts, music and journalism.¹⁷

Although the regime did not - for understandable reasons - encourage antisemitism, it nevertheless existed on a small scale, and more in the form of an anti-Jewish bias than outright aggressive antisemitism, mainly among the gentry, and the German bourgeoisie.¹⁸ After a ritual murder case in 1882, even though the defendants were acquitted, political antisemitism surfaced.¹⁹

¹⁷ The same 1910 census discloses that 26.2% of those in literature and arts; 42.4% of journalists, 45.2% of advocates, and 48.9% of doctors were Jews. *ibid.* p.191. They forced their way in politics too, although resistance there was much stronger. After having a few Jews in parliament from the turn of the century, Vilmos Vazsonyi became the first Jewish member of a government as Minister of Justice during the first World War.

¹⁸ Paul Ignotus recalls the case of a converted Jew, "gentleman farmer, and ex-member of parliament, titled and dandified, who could out-dual, out-ride, out-serenade all the Hungarian gentry of his circle." He married a dowerless girl of the ancient lesser nobility, the "belle of the county hall" and of gentry parties in Budapest. After their wedding she was still invited to the county balls, but they received a tactful warning that he had better plead public duties on those occasions. *op.cit.* pp.97-98.

¹⁹ An antisemitic party was formed in the following year and it won 17 seats in the 1884 general elections. Internal dissensions led to its break-up a year later. In the 1887 elections only eleven antisemites were elected, but they no longer constituted a separate parliamentary group. On the whole, by the end of the 1880s, antisemitism as an organised group disappeared from the parliamentary scene, but only to re-emerge a decade later when the Catholic Népárt (People's Party) became the main bearer of a clerical-conservative type of antisemitism.

The almost unlimited opportunities for integration into the Hungarian sector of the population turned the Jews towards assimilation. Although only relatively few made the ultimate step by converting to Christianity, before the First World War,²⁰ their number was greater than in other East European countries.²¹ Assimilation manifested itself in their acceptance of the Hungarian language.²² Religious services were conducted in Hebrew, but religious instruction in schools was given in Hungarian, even in Jewish schools. The Jewish character of the latter was apparent only in their observance of the Sabbath and other Jewish holy days, and in the composition of their teaching staff.²³

Many Jews changed their usually German surnames to Hungarian ones. Communal journals were published exclusively in Hungarian, and the largest, established in 1884, bore the title "Egyenlőség," i.e. equality, indicating the assimilationist aims of the Jewish community. Cultural societies conducted their activities in Hungarian, and the first literary society, founded in 1894, called itself Izraelita Magyar Irodalmi Társaság (Israelite Hungarian Literary Society). The overwhelming majority felt no need to embrace Jewish political nationalism, or even a Jewish culture more nationalistic than the established religious and cultural tradition.²⁴

²⁰ The 1910 census gives the number of Jews as 909,500, and of converts and children of mixed marriages as 50,000. Macartney, 1962, p.18.

²¹ Duschinsky, p.373.

²² Yiddish, the traditional language of East European Jews, was spoken only among those who lived in the north-east provinces, which were usually the first stages for Jewish immigrants from Galitzia and Poland. In other parts, and particularly in Budapest, not even orthodox Jews spoke it.

²⁴ This is the opinion of Duschinsky, a former orthodox rabbi of Budapest, p.379.

This strong assimilationist current accounted for the unpopularity of political Zionism. It emerged at the end of the 19th century and, while it gathered speed quickly in many countries, could not get a strong foothold in Hungary before the First World War.²⁵ In Poland, Russia, and the Baltic States, the persecuted, economically and spiritually oppressed Jews were inclined to emigrate in any case, and the Zionist could hope to persuade them to settle in Palestine rather than other countries. With such a motive absent, Zionism in Hungary could not win the aura of rescue, but develop merely as an ideological movement, with inherent limitations on its acceptance.²⁶ But even under such circumstances, Zionist organisations functioned in Hungary right from the beginning of the movement until the First World War.²⁷

Finally, Jewish participation in Hungary's labour movements needs examination for its close relevance to later developments. Under the conditions of the post-Compromise era the emancipated Jews, with many roads wide open to them, were searching for one which would lead them to a firm position in society, to a reliable identity.²⁸

²⁵ Theodor Herzl, its founder, himself realised that in the Hungary of that period, an extreme Jewish nationalist movement cannot be set up. He advised his Hungarian friends therefore that, if everything else fails, they should create a "red-white-green (the colours of the Hungarian flag) Zionism." Zehawy, 1952.

²⁶ 10% of all Jewish emigrants from Russia, Poland, and Roumania settled in Palestine, between 1900 and 1928, while immigration from Hungary in the same period was negligible. Ibid.

²⁷ Details in Pati, 1971, 523 - 524.

²⁸ The extremities of this search were evident in the case of a Jewish lawyer, Mordechai Buchsbaum. After having been sentenced to death for his part in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, he escaped to Czechoslovakia, joined the Zionist movement, and emigrated to Palestine in 1924. There he turned fanatically religious and ended his life as the head of Neturei Karta, an ultra-orthodox Jewish sect, who even today refuse to recognise Israel as a Jewish state. Orszàgunk, Vol.I, No.6.

Coming from outside the feudal society, initially they felt no attachment to its traditions and values. Simultaneously with their material progress, their uppermost section, the finance bourgeoisie, tried to assimilate to the magnates, the remaining crust of the feudal ruling class. The majority found its place in the ranks of the emerging bourgeois middle-class and intelligentsia. Others, however, whose detachment from the historic Hungarian values remained apparently the strongest, developed a critical attitude to both, and turned their sympathies to those movements which demanded improvements for the under privileged classes: to socialism, and later to Communism.

Such emotional motivations apart, their large proportion among the leaders of the labour movements can also be explained by the fact that although only a few Jews were themselves members of the under privileged classes,²⁹ they were deeply involved in industry, and therefore at a better vantage point to notice the conditions of the labourers than the remnants of the feudal ruling classes.

The organisation of labourers was initiated in Hungary by journeymen of the declining trade guilds, who had spent their traditional travelling years usually in Austria and Germany, and brought back the socialist ideas then prevalent in those countries. The small cultural and welfare societies of the labourers in Budapest were amalgamated into Hungary's first socialist organisation, the *Àltalános Munkàsegylet* (General Workers' Association) in 1868, by a carpenter, Janos Hrabje, who had received this assignment while working abroad, from the I. International.

Among its leaders were Antal Ihrlinger, a printer, and Zsigmond Politzer, editor of its weekly, *Testvèrisèg* (Brotherhood), both Jews.³⁰

²⁹ According to the 1920 census, Jews comprised 5.9% of the population, but only 0.1% of agricultural labourers, 0.2% of dwarf holders, 0.4% of miners, 2.5% of transport workers, and 7.3% of industrial workers. Macartney, 1956, Vol.I, p.19.

³⁰ A Magyar Forradalmi, pp.15 - 18.

The establishment of the first workers' party, the Nemválasztók Pártja (Non-Electors' Party) in 1878, was initiated by another Jew, Leo Frankel, who had previously participated in the Paris Commune, and worked closely with Marx in London.³¹ Its leaders included at least four Jews.³² This party and other labour groups merged in 1890 to form Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt (Social Democratic Party of Hungary), which came under a "preponderantly Jewish" intellectual leadership,³³ a characteristic retained in varying degrees until its end, 58 years later.

The Leftish opposition to the SZDP, from which many of the Communist party's first leaders eventually emerged, was also dominated by Jewish intellectuals.³⁴ Their spiritual mentor, Ervin Szabò (formerly Szontagh), regarded by many historians as, next to György (Georg) Lukács, the most influential theoretician of the Hungarian socialist movement, was the son of a middle-class Jewish family. The first Leftish rebel, Gyula Alpári, who was expelled from the SZDP in 1910, was a former rabbinical student.³⁵ Jewish were the chief ideologue, Gyula Hevesi and many prominent members of the "engineer socialists", a major opposition group to the SZDP during the First World War,³⁶ as well as the writers, Jozsef Lengyel and Jozsef Revai, the authors of the first truly revolutionary document which appeared during the war.³⁷

³¹ Ibid., p.18 and p.21.

³² Ihrlinger, Politzer, Dr.Zsigmond Csillag, and Jakab Kurschner. *ibid*, p.25

³³ Maccartney, 1956, Vol.I., p.12. The party changed its name to Szociáldemokrata Párt (Social Democratic Party) in 1939 and will be referred to hereafter by its customary abbreviation as SZDP.

³⁴ An informal group of socialist Leftists, formed already in 1903 to oppose the SZDP's recently enacted statutes included Béla Szántó, Jenő László, Béla Vágó, and László Rudas. Tökés, 1967, pp.13-15.

³⁵ Ibid., p.249.

³⁶ This group planned to bring about a revolution by concerted sabotage action of technicians and engineers, who, they claimed, were destined to become the main actors in social transformations. *Ibid*.pp.30-31.

³⁷ It was a leaflet published in November 1917, by the "Zimmerwald affiliated Hungarian Socialist Group." *Ibid.*, pp.33-35.

The first Hungarian Communist group was set up in Moscow on March 24, 1918, by liberated prisoners of war. Of its six leaders who were regarded by Hungarian party historians as the most outstanding ones, at least four were Jews: Bèla Kun, Tibor Szamuely, Ernő Pòr, and Jòzsef Rabinovics.³⁸

The leadership of the independent Hungarian Communist party, the Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja (the Party of Communists in Hungary),³⁹ founded in Budapest on November 24, 1918, was also predominantly Jewish.⁴⁰

The MKP entered the scene when Hungary - in the aftermath of a lost war - was engulfed in a revolutionary turmoil. When only Bolshevik Russia appeared to be willing to save the country's independence, the MKP was hoisted into power by the SZDP and became its tone-setting partner in the Hungarian Soviet Republic, proclaimed on March 21, 1919.⁴¹

³⁸ A Magyar Forradalmi..... p.110.

³⁹ The party changed its name repeatedly and for the sake of simplicity, will be referred to hereafter as MKP, the abbreviation of its most commonly known name: Magyar Kommunisták Pártja (Hungarian Communist Party).

⁴⁰ The chairman of its first central committee was Kun, and at least ten of its 15 members were Jews. The committee is listed in Magyar Forradalmi.....p.135. After the arrest of the whole central committee, a second one came into operation under the chairmanship of Szamuely. At least seven of its ten members were Jews. Four of the five members of the party newspaper's (Vörösis Ujság) editorial board were also Jews, including its head. Tokes, p.246.

⁴¹ Details on the rise and fall of the democratic revolution that preceded it from October 1918 can be found in Molnár, 1967, Vol.II, pp.284-316, and in Ignotus, pp.141.148.

In its 133 days, this Soviet Republic enforced a series of revolutionary measures, including the nationalisation of banks, industry, commerce, schools, as well as the expropriation of land holdings over 100 holds.⁴² Jews played a prominent part in its leadership, although estimates of their proportion among the rulers, when based on contemporary sources, must be treated with reservations.⁴³ But even the most restrained and cautious estimate presents an impressive picture. The first Revolutionary Governing Council, set up immediately on the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, had 30 members,⁴⁴ including at least 16 Jews; ten among the eleven Communists and others among the Social Democrats. Although the chairmanship and most of the Commissariats were held by Social Democrats, effective political power was undoubtedly in the hands of Béla Kun (nominally only People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs), the man closest to Lenin, on whose assistance this body's hopes were based.

⁴² The history of the Hungarian Soviet Republic has been the subject of innumerable studies. Hungarian Communist analyses varied according to the then prevailing political line. The role of Béla Kun, who fell victim to the Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union in 1939, was for instance minimised and distorted, while Mátyás Rákosi's exaggerated during the Stalinist era in Hungary, when the latter was the dictator of the country. Recent Hungarian Communist interpretations can be found in Molnár, 1967, pp.316-358 and in (A) Magyar Forradalmi, pp.170-198. For a more objective view, see Tókes.

⁴³ The German historian, Werner Sombart, for instance, stated that 161 of the 203 higher officials were Jews, but his assertion was based on nothing more reliable than an essay by an undergraduate in his seminar, (Vol.II, pp.299-300). Many of the other assumptions, like Árpád Szélpál's, that 31 of the 49 People's Commissars were Jews, originated from a collection of studies, published by the Right-wing Hungarian historian Gustáv Gratz in 1921, in the pogrom-oriented early period of the anti-semitic post-First World War Hungarian regime, when there was a tendency to exaggerate Jewish involvement in that Communist venture.

⁴⁴ They are listed in Molnár, 1967, Vol.II, pp.318-319.

To appreciate fully the weight of Jewish participation it must be noted that they held many of the key, most conspicuous revolutionary positions in political (as in the case of Kun) and economic fields, as well as in the security organs.⁴⁵ But neither their origin nor their numerical strength seemed to have moderated the Soviet Republic's policy towards the Jews. No evidence appears for Jewish capitalists being treated more leniently or hounded down with less revolutionary zeal than others. These Jewish leaders gave priority to Communist ideology and determination to preserve the "proletarian dictatorship" over their probable links with Jews simply because of a common origin. One would also be inclined to assume that to demonstrate complete alienation from their bourgeois middle-class background, some of them displayed even more ruthlessness towards Jews than Gentiles, and the Soviet Republic as a whole unscrupulously exploited antisemitism for political purposes and treated Zionism harshly.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The People's Commissar for Finance, and later the chairman of the Supreme Economic Council, thus the chief executor of nationalisations and expropriations, was Jenő Varga. Both the People's Commissar for the Interior (Jenő Landler) and his deputy (Béla Vágó) were Jews, so was Béla Szantó, first deputy Commissar, later Commissar for National Defence. Jenő László was the political commissar to the revolutionary court in Budapest, and Jews were also in charge of the institutions which were to provide his court with defendants: Ottó Korvin, head of the political police (claimed later to having been responsible for a great deal of needless killings and brutalities) and his deputy, Ferenc Stein. The person, who in the subsequent anti-Communist propaganda was, next to Kun, most closely associated with the atrocities of the Soviet Republic, was Tibor Szamuely, head of a special mobile squad, to suppress counter-revolutionary attempts in the provinces. Tókes, pp.158-159, p.252, p.254, p.258, and p.259.

⁴⁶ The government attributed an anti-Soviet uprising in June to priest-incited religious fervour and antisemitism. It tried to curtail this trend with its own anti-Jewish measures. Jewish refugees from Galitzia, who were engaged in small-scale commercial activities in Budapest during the war, appeared to be the easiest target for the antisemitism of the working class. The Jewish-led political police conducted a series of raids on them, shipped off a trainload to Poland, and guaranteed publicly that 2,000 will be returned to Galitzia (Tókes, p.195). As for its anti-Zionist measures, the executive of the Hungarian Zionist organisation was dissolved and its journal Zsidó Szemle (Jewish Review) closed down. (Patai, p.524).

No Use for Jews

The collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic opened a new chapter in the history of Hungary, as well as in the treatment and status of its Jewish population. It started with a period of what was to become known internationally as the White Terror. The new government's punitive measures against participants in the Soviet Republic were accompanied by a massive revenge campaign by so-called "officers' commando units" (tiszti kulonitmenyek) against Communists, Leftists, radicals, and, almost indiscriminately against Jews.⁴⁷ Within a few months this campaign claimed about five thousand victims,⁴⁸ including at least a thousand Jews.⁴⁹ It was in this climate of pogroms that the first legalised discrimination against Jews since the 1867 Compromise was introduced, restricting their proportion of university students to 6%.⁵⁰ This law represented a radical change in the status of Jews. By referring to them as a nationality - while previously they were regarded solely as a religious community - it introduced a hitherto unknown concept into the Hungarian constitutional law and governmental practice.

The new attitude to the Jews reflected the drastic changes in the composition of the Hungarian society. Defeat in the First World War led to the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the terms of the Trianon peace treaty of June 1920 left Hungary as a truncated, though independent country, one with an almost completely homogeneous population.⁵¹

⁴⁷ In the village of Diszel, for instance, they murdered all the Jews. Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.367.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.368.

⁴⁹ (The) Jews of Hungary, p.4

⁵⁰ A numerus clausus law (Law No.XXV) enacted by the Hungarian parliament in September 1920, based the admission to universities proportionately on the national composition of the country. Braham, 1960, p.6.

⁵¹ Hungary retained the constitutional form of a kingdom, but without a king from 1920 to 1944. It was ruled by a Regent, Miklos Horthy, an admiral in the former Austro-Hungarian Navy. He had been Commander-in-Chief of the National Army, assembled in French-occupied southern Hungary during the Soviet Republic, and was helped to power by the victorious Entente powers. The Hungarian parliament elected him Regent on March 1, 1920. (Molnar, 1967, p.372). The Trianon treaty reduced the country's territory from 325,411 sq. km. to 92,963 sq.km. and its population from 20,886,487 (as recorded in the 1910 census) to 7,615,117 (according to the 1920 census) (Macartney, 1967, p.206). It consisted only of that central section of the Dualist Hungary, which was inhabited overwhelmingly by Hungarians. The co-inhabiting nationalities were incorporated in the newly established Czechoslovakia, Roumania, and Yugoslavia. But more than three million Hungarian residents of the detached areas were also lost: 1,700,000 to Roumania, one million to Czechoslovakia, and 500,000 to Yugoslavia (Ignotus, p.154).

Thus the "patriotic" task which had been assigned to the Jews in the Dualist period, i.e. to boost the proportion of the Hungarians, was no longer required. On the contrary, the 473,355 Jews, comprising 5.9% of the population⁵² constituted the largest alien element. They had not only lost their usefulness for the Hungarian nationalistic endeavours, but appeared to be eminently suited for the role of scapegoats. The regime of Regent Miklos Horthy was a conservative one with authoritarian leanings. Its external and internal policy was determined by two factors: the desire to recover lost territories and the fear of Communism. The former helped to turn the country chauvinistic, and consequently unsympathetic to the Jews. The latter too inspired anti-Jewish feelings, partly justified by their strong involvement in the Soviet Republic, which the regime at large, and the extreme racialists in particular, did not fail to exaggerate.

The regime stopped the White Terror in the early 1920s, when it started seeking international respectability and the consolidation of Hungary's economy. The situation of the Jews, as a whole, became quite tolerable, though they remained restricted by law in obtaining university education, and were barred in practice from the civil service.

Blocked by its neighbours who had captured large chunks of "historic" Hungary with the support of the former Entente, the Horthy regime became drawn increasingly closer to the new power emerging on the European scene - to Nazi Germany. Its extreme nationalism, bordering on the concept of regarding Christian Hungarians racially superior to others, made the regime susceptible to the Nazi ideology too. In addition, Nazi influence appeared more directly through the ascending rightist groups, the Germanophile officer corps and particularly through the "Nyilaskeresztes Párt" (Arrow Cross Party), which was closest both ideologically and in its methods to the German National Socialists.

⁵² Katzburg, 1966, p.166

All these factors contributed to the adoption of a pronounced anti-Jewish policy, based on principles increasingly similar to those in Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Law of 1935.⁵³ Legalised discrimination against the Jews was accompanied from the time of Hungary's entry into the Second World War on the side of Germany in 1941, by the physical destruction of many of them. About 63,000 Jews, 8% of Hungary's total Jewish population, lost their lives even before the beginning of their systematic extermination under German occupation.⁵⁴ From July 1939 those unreliable for service in the armed forces could be conscripted into auxiliary labour battalions under military jurisdiction. This legal provision was applied to Jews and other "unreliable" elements, like trade union leaders and Communists. Many of those battalions became in fact punitive units as the result of the pro-German, wildly anti-semitic and anti-Communist sentiments of their officers. An estimated 42,000 Jews died in those battalions before Hungary's occupation by the Germans in March 1944.⁵⁵

⁵³ Between 1938 and 1943, the Hungarian parliament promulgated six explicitly anti-Jewish laws. The first (Act.No.XV of 1938) provided for the establishment of two professional chambers - for the press and the theatre - and limited the Jewish ratio in them to 20%. The second Act (No.IV of 1939) extended the definition of "Jew" beyond the confessional status by introducing the religion of parents and grandparents as the criterion of Jewish "race". It reduced the Jewish ratio in the mentioned professional chambers to 6%, authorised the expropriation of Jewish-owned farms, excluded Jews from the upper house of parliament. Act.No.XV of 1941 prohibited marriage and extra-marital relations between Jews and non-Jews. Act VIII of 1942 deprived the Jewish religion of its "accepted legal" status. Act No.XIV of 1942 excluded Jews from the para-military Levente youth organisation and from the armed services, and finally Act.No.XV of 1942 stipulated the expropriation of all Jewish-owned farms and forest lands. Braham; 1960, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁴ Katzburg, 1966, p.162.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.161

Lives were lost also in other ways. In July 1941, the Hungarian government deported about 20,000 Jewish refugees from Poland to German occupied Galitzia, and within a month between 14 - 16,000 of them were massacred at Kamenets-Podolsk by German SS units, Ukranian militiamen, and Hungarian troops.⁵⁶ After their invasion of Yugoslavia, the Germans allowed Hungary to re-occupy some of the territories it had lost to Yugoslavia in the Trianon peace treaty. In January 1942, a Hungarian army detachment, under the pretext of a raid against "partisans", killed in and around the town of Ujvidek (Novi Sad) 3,309 civilians, including over 700 Jews.⁵⁷

Soon after that incident however, Regent Horthy replaced the pro-German Prime Minister, Bardossy, with Miklos Kallay, who, from early 1943 made secret approaches to the Western Allies for a separate armistice agreement. These attempts were accompanied by a more lenient attitude towards the Jews, which continued until March 19, 1944, when Germany, to prevent Hungary's withdrawal from the war, occupied the country.

The consequences of the Horthy regime's anti-Jewish measures seriously affected Hungarian Communist party's post-war policy on the Jews. To understand the conditions in which this policy was implemented, three factors must be examined: the Jewish population's response to those measures; the extent of, and the contributing elements to the popular support for them; and the strength and composition of its opponents.

Jewish attitude to Zionism, the opposite pole to assimilation - offers itself as a useful slide rule to measure the first factor. The atrocities committed during the White Terror made only a slight dent on the Hungarian Jewry's assimilationist convictions.⁵⁸ During the

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.161

⁵⁷ Levai, 1948, p.25.

⁵⁸ Although several thousands registered as prospective emigrants, when a Palestine office opened in Hungary in 1919, by 1921 only 103 did in fact leave for Palestine (Patai, p.524). Jewish emigration from Hungary between 1920 and 1930 amounted to 29,000, but only 1% chose Palestine for their destination. (Katzburg, 1966, p.167, Notes 7, 8).

subsequent period of consolidation. Jewish resistance to Zionism increased. It was mainly under the influence of the established Jewish communal organisations, dominated by assimilationists, that the legalisation of a politically tinged Zionist organisation was delayed until 1927, and had to be preceded by a half-measure: by the establishment first, a year earlier of a purely charitable pro-Palestine Association.⁵⁹ Even by the mid 1930s, when the Horthy regime's first flirtation with Nazi Germany was increasingly evident, both the numbers of Zionists in Hungary, and of Hungarian immigrants in Palestine, were extremely low.⁶⁰ New blood was infused into the Zionist movement however from 1939, with the reannexation of some of the territories lost in the Trianon peace treaty, where Zionism had gained a stronger foothold than in Hungary.⁶¹

On the other hand, experienced officials, particularly from Transylvania moved to Budapest and assisted in the expansion of the Zionist organisation,⁶² but two further factors also contributed to their success. With a large influx of Jewish refugees from Slovakia and Poland, they were at last able to apply one of the major attractions to Zionism: its rescue and relief functions. Secondly, the Kally government, seeking a separate armistice agreement, took advantage of the Zionists' links with the Western Allies, particularly with Britain.⁶³ This role somewhat

⁵⁹ Patai, p.524. Simon Hevesi, chief rabbi of the Neolog (the largest religious) community in Budapest, declared publicly in 1925 that "there is no ground for, nor inclination to, Zionism among Hungarian Jews. This is the historically formed opinion of Hungarian Jewry, and there is no reason to depart from it." (Kutas, p.387).

⁶⁰ In 1937 the Zionist groups had a total membership of 4,800 among a Jewish population of 444,567. (The Zionist membership figure appears in Patai, p.525; and that of the Jewish population in Katzburg, p.166, 1966). Between 1932 and 1939, 1,212 Hungarian Jews settled in Palestine. This figure appears in a chart in the Institute of Jewish Affairs archives, London 80(182), based on the Statistical Handbooks of Jewish Palestine, Department of Statistics, Jewish Agency for Palestine Jerusalem, 1947.

⁶¹ The Axis powers (Germany and Italy) in the first "Vienna decision" November 1939, awarded to Hungary the southern, mainly Hungarian populated part of Slovakia, and in the "second Vienna decision" in August 1940, the northern sector of Transylvania.

⁶² During the war its membership was an estimated 20 - 30,000. Interview with Galor.

⁶³ Details of the rescue and relief operations as well as on their contacts with the government, are in Patai, p.525.

enhanced the Zionists' prestige among Hungarian Jewry, although their influence in the communal organisations remained small.⁶⁴

The extent of popular support for the Horthy regime's anti-Jewish policy and for antisemitism in general, was indicated by the results of the last pre-war general elections in 1939. The government (with two anti-Jewish laws already under its belt) and the various ultra-Right wing parties captured almost 90% of the parliamentary seats.⁶⁵

Their support came from practically all sections of the population. In the ruling classes from those who were soundly established, but imbued with the racial superiority of the Hungarians; from the drifters, former army officers, small-time financiers, merchants, civil servants, who were hoping to obtain financially rewarding posts in Jewish enterprises or positions denied to Jews in the process which was generally described then as a "changing of the guard." People in the lower income brackets, retailers, craftsmen, white-collar workers, industrial and agricultural labourers, were impressed by the ultra-Right's socialist phraseology which demanded the redistribution of wealth, though mainly at the expense of the Jews. It thus could be concluded that a very large proportion, probably the majority, of the Hungarians, favoured the Jews' deprivation of many of their rights. Their physical destruction was then not yet an issue.

In the centre over the Jewish issue, stood most of the agricultural small holders, traditionally ignorant of all the "machinations" of the town dwellers; a section of the civil servants, who tried to carry out the anti-Jewish legislation with some humane consideration, the heads of the Christian churches, whose concern was limited to the fate of converted Jews, and a mainly aristocratic, conservatively Hungarian section of the government party, which wanted priority for the resistance of German influence and disliked the rowdiness and socialist demagoguery of the ultra-Right.

⁶⁴ The executive council of the "Pesti Izraelita Hitkozseg" (The Israelite Congregation of Pest), the largest communal body, included only one representative of the Zionist organisation until March 1944. (Munkacs).

⁶⁵ Of the 260 mandates, the government gained 179, the ultra-Right 49. (Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.424). Support for the government should not be attributed however exclusively to sympathies with its anti-Jewish measures. It also reflected recognition of its class policy as well as its orientation towards Germany, which shortly before the elections, fulfilled part of the irredentist claims by returning to Hungary a section of Slovakia which had been disannexed in the Trianon peace treaty.

Outright opposition to the anti-Jewish measures could be found (apart from the Jewish communal organisations of course) only on the Left side of the political pallet. Progressive intellectuals, writers, artists, actors, musicians, raised their voices publicly. So did the Leftist opposition parties in parliament and outside it. The "Fuggetlen Kisgazda Part" (Independent Smallholders' Party) in its 1943 programme demanded the abolition of the anti-Jewish laws, and one of its deputies introduced a resolution to this effect in parliament.⁶⁶ A more permanent and much earlier opponent was the SZDP. The party's official organ "Népszava" (The People's Voice) was banned for thirty days in December 1938 after it had objected to the proposed second anti-Jewish law, and had condemned antisemitism.⁶⁷ The SZDP's objections were based on the principles of socialism, which rejected racial discrimination.

The MKP, another subscriber to those principles, followed a more complex policy on the question of anti-Jewish discrimination. The Horthy regime, in line with one of its two basic political tenets, the fear of communism, kept the MKP banned throughout the inter-war period, and Communists engaged in underground activities, when caught, were punished harshly. The regime's propoganda claim that Communism was a "Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy" found some substance in the continually high proportion of Jews among the leaders of the illegal MKP.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Braham, 1969, p.8.

⁶⁷ (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.356,

⁶⁸ Details on the prominent part played in the illegal MKP by Jewish Communists like Kun, Landler, B.Szanto, Lukacs, N.Orosz, Erno Gero, Alpari, Imre Komor, Rakosi, Vas, Z.Szanto, Sandor Lowy, and Revai in (A) Magyar Forradalmi, pp.212-257. Sandor Furst and Imre Sallai, members of the central committee who were executed in Budapest in 1932 (ibid, p.285), as well as Zoltan Schonherz, secretary of the committee and executed in Budapest in 1942 (ibid, p.371-373) were also Jews. Among the 21 Communist martyrs, regarded as outstanding figures by the currently accepted party history, at least ten were Jews. (Ibid, p.436).

The MKP's response to the Horthy regime's anti-Jewish measures might have been influenced by two factors: by the policy of the Soviet government, which during the war, played down the Jewish question to avoid appearing as the protector of Jews,⁶⁹ and by an attempt to counterbalance the impact of the official Hungarian propaganda, which equated Communist and Jewish goals. The only reference in a party document to the persecution of Jews, was in one of the twelve points of a programme issued in 1943. It demanded "equality before the law regardless of race, origin, and religion. This includes the abolition of the barbaric anti-Jewish laws."⁷⁰ It should be noted however, that even this belated demand had tactical motives, because the programme was part of a call for a Popular Front-like cooperation between the MKP and the opposition parties who had by then openly condemned the anti-Jewish measures.

The official party propaganda, aiming at a wider section of the ordinary population, was cautious and evasive on the Jewish question. Rakosi, for instance, broadcasting in Hungarian from the Soviet Union⁷¹ ignored completely the fact that about a quarter of the victims in the Ujvidek massacre⁷² were Jews, and described the incident as a "blood-bath among those whom the government and the local potentates did not like."⁷³

⁶⁹ A post-war American analysis states that "in official releases and reports dealing with German atrocities in the occupied areas, the Soviets usually omitted all reference to the extermination of Jews. Massacres of Jews were usually described simply as atrocities against 'Soviet citizens'; the very fact that the Nazis issued orders to exterminate the entire Jewish population..... was concealed from the world for many months." (US House of Representatives, etc. p.15)

⁷⁰ Magyarország etc. p.XXXVIII.

⁷¹ Rakosi, serving a life sentence in Hungary, was allowed to go to the Soviet Union in October 1940, in a deal.

⁷² See page 25.

⁷³ Rákosi, p.36

Other examples were his comments on a 12-nations treaty on the punishment for anti-Jewish acts at the end of 1942, when he emphasised that "the days of reckoning were coming closer for all the villainy of which the murder of the Jews was only a part."⁷⁴

Tactical considerations seem to be evident in a lecture which Rakosi delivered to Hungarian prisoners of war in the Soviet Union in 1943. From his long list of the Horthy regime's sins, its anti-Jewish policy was missing, and, while referring to the labour battalions as "mobile scaffolds", he avoided mentioning that most of those executed were Jews.⁷⁵

The MKP's attitude to Zionism was dogmatically hostile. Even Hashomer Hatzair, the ultra-left Zionist movement was considered "reactionary and fascist", although the party had contacts with it on a personal level, primarily to convert its members to Communism proper.⁷⁶ Neither the regime's view that the movement was a Communist one,⁷⁷ nor the assistance given by its members to the illegal party⁷⁸ could convince the MKP leaders that an ideological reconciliation with this Zionist Lect or merely their acceptance as comrades was justified. On an official level, Hasomer Hatzair could achieve neither, not even when their collaboration with the MKP intensified during the German occupation of Hungary in 1944.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.94.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp.163-196.

⁷⁶ Interview with Yaari. A recent, scholarly analysis of this movement can be found in Margalit, 1971.

⁷⁷ Jozsef Sombor-Schweinitzer, a leader of the political police, described its members in a 1937 lecture as "atheists and followers of the Communist ideals almost without exception." He added: "Everything proves that this organisation is in the reins of the Bolshevik conspiracy. "Az Ut", July 12, 1945

⁷⁸ During the war they participated in the underground Communist work in Transylvania. In southern Hungary, Communists trained and used separate Hashomer Hatzair units for sabotage acts. In Budapest, the movement collected money and food for imprisoned Communists (Beszamolo a magyarorszagi Hashomer Hacair munkajarol, 1945-1947, Budapest 1947. Mimeo. In: The Central Archives for the).

The Massacred Jews

After Germany occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, the restrictions on the Jews' rights were replaced by an attempt at their systematic extermination. It must be noted that this attempt, though instigated and supervised by the German occupiers,⁷⁹ was made with the active participation of Hungarian authorities. The occupation did not break Hungary's constitutional continuity. Horthy remained Regent, and, at least formally, it was he who replaced the "double-faced" Kallay government with a staunchly pro-German one. This, under the premiership of Dome Sztojay, the Hungarian Ambassador to Berlin, included a number of notorious antisemites, in positions vital to the execution of anti-Jewish measures.⁸⁰

An avalanche of decrees, issued by the government or its various agencies, barred Jews from intellectual occupations, clerical work, confiscated their properties, radio sets, disconnected their telephones, restricted their food supplies, and compelled them to wear a yellow badge.⁸¹ But these were only the visible outer forms of a policy of extermination.

⁷⁹ Hitler's power of attorney for Dr. Edmund Veessenmayer, the new Plenipotentiary of the Greater German Reich in Hungary, included instructions to the German Security Police force, which entered the country along with the regular troops to "perform tasks of the SS and police concerning Hungary, and especially political duties in connection with the Jewish problem." See text in Trials of War Criminals etc. Vol. XIII. pp. 336-337.

⁸⁰ Both Andor Jaross, the Minister of the Interior, and his two under-secretaries of state, Laszlo Endre and Laszlo Baky, were members of the ultra-Right movements, and known antisemites. In fact Jaross offered the post to Endre, Deputy Sheriff of Pest county on the grounds that he was a "recognised expert on Jewish matters". Seifert, 1959, p. 125.

⁸¹ The texts of the various anti-Jewish decrees issued during this period can be found in the following collections: Janos Bartoffy, etc, 1944.

In April the Hungarian gendarmerie started transferring Jews in the provinces from their homes to local ghettos, and later assembly centres on the outskirts of larger towns. Between May 15 and the end of June, 400,000 Jews from the provinces were deported to concentration camps in Germany and German-occupied territories, mainly to Auschwitz and the other camps in that compound.⁸² Although the Jewish population of Budapest was moved in June to 2,681 specially assigned "star houses", a fourteenth part of space for a fifth of the city's population,⁸³ Horthy for various reasons, prevented their deportation scheduled for July 5.⁸⁴

The massacre of the Jews in the capital started only after the Germans, on October 15 removed Horthy and put into power Ferenc Szalasi, leader of the "Nyilaskeresztes Part" (Arrow Cross Party), the most ardent Nazi-type party in Hungary.⁸⁵

⁸² European Jewry Ten Years After the War, p.61. The total Jewish population of Hungary (including converts to Christianity, who were considered Jews under the terms of the anti-Jewish laws) at the time of the German occupation was 761,989. 530,554 lived in the provinces and 231,435 in Budapest. Sushinsky, p.387.

⁸³ Levai, 1948, p.182.

⁸⁴ Duschinsky, p.389. Horthy's reasons included protests from abroad by Pope Pius XII, King Gustav V of Sweden, the then American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull; President Roosevelt, the president of the International Red Cross, also from certain heads of Hungarian Christian churches. (Braham, 1960, p.10). One must also take into account that by then Horthy was again actively seeking a separate armistice with the Allies and could have also suspected a putsch attempt by Baky and the gendarmerie who were converging on Budapest, ostensibly to carry out the deportation of the Jews.

⁸⁵ Six days after Roumania's capitulation (on August 24), Horthy dismissed Premier Sztojay, and appointed a new government under General Geza Lakatos. While the Soviet Army, enforced by Roumanian troops was posed for attack on Hungary's border, on September 28, Horthy secretly dispatched a delegation to the Soviet Union, which on October 11, signed an armistice agreement in Moscow. On October 15, Horthy without preparations for any resistance, announced the agreement over the radio. Within a few hours, German troops and armed "nyilas" units occupied all key military and communication positions. The Germans forced Horthy to withdraw his proclamation, and appoint Szalasi as Prime Minister.

The Szalasi regime withdrew the remaining Jewish labour battalions, comprising about 15,000, to the western border of Hungary where they were taken under German military command. Those who survived the hard winter were driven in March 1945 to Austrian concentration camps. In November about 100,000 Jews were forced to march from Budapest to Austrian camps, and about 25,000 perished on the way. With the Soviet Army's ring closing around the capital, about 50,000 of the remaining Jews were transferred into an enclosed ghetto in Budapest and about 20,000 remained in houses protected by foreign powers. During their reign, armed "nyilas" units murdered about 10-15,000 Jews in the capital, shooting many of them on the streets, or into the river Duna (Danube). The Soviet Army entered Hungary on October 6, took Budapest on February 13, 1945, and completed the occupation of the country by April 4.⁸⁶

The docility of the Hungarian Jews in the face of this great catastrophe and the lack of resistance during the deportations have baffled many individuals.⁸⁷ A decisive factor might have been the attitude of the community's conservative leadership, which, by overestimating the effectiveness of legitimate methods, was unable to give guidance more suitable to the conditions of such extraordinary emergency. This element dominated the "Zsidó Tanács" (Jewish Council), the only organisation to exist after the occupation, which the German and Hungarian authorities used primarily only for the transmission of their orders to the Jewish community.⁸⁸

Under such circumstances it was the Zionists who stepped into the forefront to carry out rescue attempts. They were ideologically equipped to sidestep legitimate procedures in emergency situations, and had previous experience in rescue and relief operations from their activities among the Jewish refugees from Poland and Slovakia. One attempt, led by Dr. Rudolph (Rezso) Kasztner and Joel Brand, was to negotiate an exchange deal with the German and Hungarian authorities. It failed however, and its only tangible result was the transfer, via the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp to Switzerland of 1,684 persons, Zionist leaders, and their families in June 1944.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Estimates on the number of Szalasi regime's Jewish victims vary. Descriptions of this period, including the figures quoted above, in Levai, 1948, p.375 and p.381; G.Seifert, 1970, pp.35-38; Braham, 1963, Vol.II, pp.907-921. For a general history of the same period see: Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, pp.473-477.

⁸⁷ For a concise summary of some contributing factors, see Braham, 1960, p.14.

⁸⁸ For the composition of the Jewish Council, see Levai, 1948, p.82 and 167.

⁸⁹ For Brand's own account, see Weissberg; for a recent but coloured account, see Masters. Kasztner's rescue attempt is recorded in Rotkirchen 1968 and 1970.

The Hungarian Zionists' post-war demand for a larger share in communal leadership on account of their active role in rescue operations under German occupation could not have been justified by the Kaztner venture which benefited only a handful of Zionists and was perhaps even harmful to the Jewish population by defusing other attempts with the hope of an eventual exchange. Their demand could be based however on another, more fruitful operation in which the Zionists did indeed play the vital part. It was an attempt to obtain for Jews protective privileges on the pretext that they were foreign citizens by virtue of the fact that they had been accepted as emigrants to Palestine.

Soon after the German occupation, Miklos Krausz, head of the Palestine Office in Budapest, took refuge in the Swiss Legation which represented British interests in Hungary and was therefore holding entry certificates to Palestine issued by the British Government. Krausz persuaded Charles Lutz, the consul in charge of the foreign interests section, to set up an emigration department of the Swiss Legation's foreign interests section and issue the certificates. The Legation, which had instructions from the British Government to offer protection to all certificate holders, subsequently issued about 20,000 certificates containing some 50,000 names.

On Lutz's approach, the German and Hungarian authorities granted exit permission for 7,800 certificate holders, and agreed that until transport could be arranged they should be concentrated in houses under Swiss protection. The Legation provided individuals with letters stating that they were included in a "collective passport" for emigration to Palestine. Holders of such letters were in principle exempted from forced labour and deportation. The Swedish, Spanish, and Portuguese consulates also registered and placed under their protection a few thousand Jews on the same pretext, who were similarly moved into selected protected houses over which the International Red Cross was granted extra-territoriality. Zionist leaders joined Krausz in the Swiss emigration department and forged tens of thousands of those letters of protection (Schutz-passes).

Altogether an estimated 100,000 genuine or forged documents were issued. Although "nyilas" units frequently disregarded such letters and murdered their holders, the number of Jews who were saved in Budapest by this device has been estimated by various sources as

between 33,000 and 70,000.⁹⁰

During the Szalasi regime Left-wing Zionist youth organisations also made other rescue attempts. They found refuge for Jews in factories, in the homes of sympathisers or members of the SZDP, and the illegal MKP, and in underground "bunkers". Dressed in stolen "nyilas" uniforms and equipped with forged documents they formed patrols which rescued Jews from houses surrounded by "nyilas" units for evacuation, from district headquarters of the "nyilas" party, from the hands of genuine "nyilas" patrols in the streets and in one instance from a military prison.⁹¹

Hashomer Hatzair, the most Left-wing among those youth movements strengthened its contact with the MKP, and particularly during the Szalasi regime, intensively collaborated with it. The party's attitude to the massacre of the Jews was diverse. The section working underground in Hungary showed human passion while that based in Moscow manifested its continued detachment by emphasising the place of the Jewish question in a wider political context.⁹²

⁹⁰ Lutz's recollections can be found in a report on an interview which was conducted with him after his departure from Budapest, in Istanbul, and received by the Jewish Agency aliya department in Jerusalem on May 16, 1945. (Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, S 5/757). Other sources for this account were an interview with M.Salamon; M.Reitlinger; Ben Shalom; 1970; Braham, 1963.

⁹¹ See minutes of an interview with Jozsef Mayer in Budapest on June 29, 1946 (Moreshet Archive, Givat Haviva, Israel, File No.:7142); Ben-Shalom, 1970, pp.189-190; (A) Hasomer Hacair etc, p.23.

⁹² The MKP's illegal journal, published in Budapest, declared in December 1944 that "it was the duty of the Hungarian people to prevent the Hitlerite massacre. It is the duty of every class conscious proletarian, of everybody who is Hungarian at heart, to assist the hounded Jews." (Az) Illegalis etc, p.121. A commentary on Radio Kossuth, which broadcasted in Hungarian from the Soviet Union stated: "They want to stupify the Hungarians with the humbug of Jew hunting. They want to intoxicate the masses with the sanguinary air of Jew killing, so that they should not realise what is happening to them." Quoted in Andics, p.XXXIV.

A leader of Hashomer Hatzair, who was hiding for ten days in late 1944, with a prominent Communist, recalled that although they had talked about the place of Jewry and of Zionism in a future Hungary, he formed the impression that the party was not seriously interested in that problem.⁹³ The MKP, which in the last months of the war was itself actively engaged in armed resistance and sabotage actions, accepted from Hashomer Hatzair weapons, food, forged documents, personnel for its fighting units, and information of German troop movements for transmission to the Soviet Army.⁹⁴

Of the 137 prisoners whom a Hashomer Hatzair unit in "nyilas" uniforms rescued from a military prison, with the help of a forged order on December 26, 1944, 97 were Communists.⁹⁵ Communists in turn, provided Zionists, primarily Hashomer Hatzair members, with hiding places in factories and in the homes of Christian labourers. Also some Communists, who had infiltrated the "Nyilaskeresztes Part" (Arrow Cross Party) helped Hashomer Hatzair members to obtain party uniforms, the daily passwords, and official stationery.⁹⁶

⁹³ Interview with Meir.

⁹⁴ Details in interview with Meir; minutes of interview with J.Mayer; R.Ben-Shalom; Memoirs of Hashomer Hatzair, etc.

⁹⁵ (A) Hasomer Hacair etc. p.23. The same publication (on p.21) lists the following Communists who were saved by Hashomer Hatzair: Gyorgy Non, Jozsef Kobol, Karoly Kiss, Lajos Drahos. (All were members of the MKP central committee at one time or another, after 1945). Gyorgy Markos (a leading economist); Tibor Deri and Ivan Boldizsar (writers). Gyorgy Non stated publicly later that "Megyeriek (the Hungarocised name used by Mayer, alias Meir - G.G) rescued more than 100 political and Jewish detainees under the most difficult circumstances. They supplied the MKP's partisan unit in Kobanya (a suburb of Budapest -G.G) with food. They provided forged identity papers for many persecuted, including a number of my Communist comrades and myself." His statement was published in "Hasomer Hacair", a mimeographed circular of the movement, in October 1947 in Budapest. Among unclassified material in the Central Archives etc.

⁹⁶ Interview with Meir; minutes of interview with Mayer; Ben-Shalom; Memoirs of Hashomer Hatzair. etc.

It must be emphasised that the Communist-Zionist contacts were only at a personal level and not between the organisations, and that those were limited to matters concerning mutual assistance.

* * *

By the end of the war Hungary was in ruins, physically as well as morally. The country's material losses - including both the damages caused by military operations and the value of equipment and material removed by the retreating German army - amounted to 22,000 million Pengo (Hungary's currency until August 1946) at its pre-war 1938 rate. This equalled five times Hungary's national income in that year.⁹⁷ Moral devastation was no less enormous. The political system which had led Hungary into a war that promised rich rewards but was unable to extricate it when fortunes changed, and thus prevent the subsequent huge losses in material and human lives - was utterly discredited.

Many of the rulers (politicians, civil servants from various levels of the administration, army officers, managers of industry and commerce) deserted the country with the retreating German army, leaving crewless the passengers, of a ship which had lost direction.

In Hungary, unlike Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, German rule was not enforced from outside, but through the country's existing constitutional institutions, and to a large extent with their cooperation. This reduced credibility in the capability even of the Horthy regime's former parliamentary opposition to set up an effective alternative political order. The anti-Jewish measures too, had a demoralising effect on the population. They conditioned them to the notion that neither private property nor positions, achieved by the normal processes of a society, were sacrosanct.

Relief that the war was over was mixed with anxiety about the possible consequences of Soviet occupation. Anti-Russian and anti-Soviet feelings were strong for various reasons. The Hungarians had been indoctrinated to see their country as the last bastion of Western civilisation against the primitive inferior Asian masses. The almond-eyed soldiers in Soviet Army uniform reminded many Hungarians of their

⁹⁷ Korom, p.461.

history lessons about their country's 13th century invasion by Khan Batu's Mongol hordes. Apprehensions were further enforced by the accepted historical interpretation that the 1848-49 independence war against Austria was crushed only because of Russia's military intervention. But the major source of alarm was the realisation that the occupying power was the incarnation of what for 25 years the Hungarians were taught to regard as the Devil itself: Bolshevism. The horror stories about appalling poverty, famine, police terror, mass murders, and utterly uncivilised living conditions, which Horthy regime's propaganda organs about the Soviet Union had blarred out, filled most Hungarians with fear, while their first hand experience about Communist rule during the 1919 Soviet Republic in Hungary, together with the exaggerations superimposed on the realities by the Horthy regime, were no less terrifying.

Guilt feelings over the war time atrocities committed by Hungarian troops while in occupation of Soviet territories, and over the cruel persecution of Jews, whom the population by and large identified with Communists, now inevitably returning to power, were also casting the long shadows of a forthcoming bloody revenge. In the Hungarians, except for the small core of Communists and Marxist sympathisers, the overwhelming feeling was that of despair.

To the Jewish survivors, the Soviet Army appeared of course in a different light. It was unquestionably their saviour, which had cut short the process of their extermination. They felt a momentarily almost unqualified gratitude to the Soviet Union, only slightly coloured by some apprehensions about the possible effects of Communist rule on their economic and social position. Towards the Hungarians, their primary feeling was disillusionment. The long cherished notion of assimilation receded at the sight of the corpses strewed along the marching routes to Austrian concentration camps, and on the streets of Budapest. The majority was facing the future without any definite idea about its position in Hungarian society.

In this climate of general disorientation, two forces had stringently defined programmes for reconstruction: the Communists and the Zionists. Under the specific conditions of Hungary at the end of the war these two movements shared several characteristics. Both were firmly anchored to an idea and an ideology which, they believed, was exclusively capable of charting the path for future developments in their respective fields

of interests. The Communists saw in the devastation of Hungary, and the Zionists in the destruction of its Jewish population, cast-iron proof of the previous system's inability to preserve either the lives or the wealth of Hungary's citizens. Both were convinced that masses of Hungarians on one hand, and the overwhelming majority of the surviving Jews on the other, had learned the historic lesson: they would recognise the tragedy that had befallen them as the bankruptcy of a social order, and would consequently put their trust in the movements which knew the pass-word for revival.

They also shared another characteristic - the strong support of outside forces. The Communists could rely on the assistance of the occupying power, the Soviet Union, and the Zionists on a financially strong world-wide movement which was influential in two of the victorious Allied powers: in the United States of America and in Britain. In fact, as among Hungarian political movements only the Communists had organic links with any of the victorious countries, in the Jewish community, the Zionists alone enjoyed close connections with Jewish organisations in the Western Alliance.

In their objectives however, Communists and Zionists could not have been further apart. The Communists mapped up society as a conglomeration of social classes, each defined by its members' relationship to the means of production. The Zionists regarded a certain section of society - the Jews - as a nation, regardless of its members' social class classification.

Thus, while the Communists denied the existence of any separate Jewish question, and claimed that discrimination against Jews, a product of class struggle, will cease with the disappearance of class struggle itself, the Zionists wanted to remove the Jews from their hostile environment to an independent Jewish nation state.

Consequently, when these two forces were released from their seclusion into the open political arena of post-war Hungary, they were set immediately on a collision course. The MKP's disregard of Communist ideology, for the sake of expanding and stabilising the influence of the Soviet Union as a state, postponed this inevitable clash for several years. It was a period in which the MKP used and exploited the Jewish question and the Zionist movement for tactical reasons.

CHAPTER TWO: SEARCHING FOR A NEW SOCIETY - COMMUNISTS LOSE FIRST
ROUND IN POWER STRUGGLE

A Facade of Democracy

The political order which the Soviet Union intended to establish in Hungary reflected Stalin's general concept that in the occupied zone influence should be exerted through the local Communist parties from behind the facade of a broadly based democratic structure designed to dispel the suspicions of his war-time allies, America and Britain. In Hungary, where unlike Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, popular support for anti-German resistance had been negligible and the unpleasant memories of the 1919 Soviet Republic were still vivid, the Communists had to adopt a particularly velvet handed method.

Thus, the MKP leaders, having returned from exile on the heels of the Soviet army started forcefully to resuscitate the democratic opposition parties of the Horthy regime's parliament.¹ With the assistance of the Soviet army, they rounded up and transported members of those parties to Debrecen, the largest town in liberated eastern Hungary, for the convocation of a Provisional National Assembly, on December 21, 1944, and the promulgation of a Provisional Government a day later.

The composition of both clearly indicated the disproportionately great power which the Communists intended to hold in these institutions. In spite of its numerical weakness the MKP constituted the largest single block in the Assembly and occupied one quarter of the government portfolios.²

¹ This bitterly disappointed many veteran Communists of 1919 vintage who had expected an immediate return to proletarian dictatorship. The conflict over this issue prevailed for many months. Veiled admission of the resistance by veterans to the leaders' attempts both to by-pass the Communist dictatorship and to establish a mass party instead of one comprising only the hard-core elite of the working class can be found in Szabo, pp.25-26, p.31,p.33.

² Among the 230 deputies in the Assembly, 71 represented the MKP, 55 the FKGP, 16 the "Nemzeti Paraszt Part" (National Peasant Party, NPP), 12 the "Polgari Demokrata Part" (Citizens' Democratic Party PDP), 19 the trade unions (many of those were also Communists) and 19 had no party affiliation. (Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.486). In the government the MKP held three portfolios, the FKGP and the SZDP two each, the NPP one. The Premiership and three ministries were in the hands of non-party deputies. ((A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.428.

The facade-like character of this arrangement revealed itself in the number and prominence of the government posts which were given to such close collaborators of Regent Horthy who, in the final phase of the war, established contacts with the Soviet Union.³ The Communist grip on power appeared in their hold on the police, and specifically on its political section, the State Security Division (Allamvedelmi Osztaly, AVO), which came exclusively under their command. By manipulation they also created situations in which the MKP could claim credit for particularly popular measures.⁴

The toleration of democratic methods, which was an integral part of this "facade policy" gradually emerged as endangering the implicit Communist domination of this national coalition. As soon as the parties realised that they had been permitted a considerable freedom of movement, they launched vigorous campaigns to strengthen themselves by enlarging their public support. They had to observe certain rules of the game: the presence and influence of the Soviet Union could not be questioned, the MKP had to be accepted as a ruling partner, and a return to the pre-war social order could not be openly advocated.

³ The Premier was General Bela Dalnoki Miklos, former commander of the First Hungarian Army, which surrendered to the Soviet Union after Regent Horthy's abortive attempt to extricate Hungary from the German alliance on October 15, 1944. General Janos Voros, former Chief of the General Staff, who also surrendered, became Minister of Defence. General Gabor Faragho, leader of the delegation which signed an armistice agreement in Moscow on October 11, 1944, on behalf of Horthy was appointed Minister of Public Supply, and Count Geza Teleki, a member of that delegation Minister of Education. Ibid, p.428.

⁴ Two examples of this tactic were the following: 1) the MKP secured itself the Ministry of Agriculture which carried out a long overdue and unavoidable redistribution of land, a step which was expected to win the party peasant support. 2) The Soviet authorities did not assist in the provision of food for the capital's starving population until a Communist was appointed government commissioner of food supply. His quick success was meant to impress the population both with the efficiency and the enthusiasm of the MKP and its indispensability in securing the full cooperation of the occupiers.

But even within these limitations the parties were able to present distinct political alternatives to a population which was permitted to make a free choice. Occasionally the Communists could by pressure entice their partners into closer collaboration,⁵ but basically they had to face the genie which the Stalinist concept had released from its bottle: they were forced to compete with their opponents for public support. The attitude of the government and its party components to the surviving Jewish population of Hungary must be viewed in the context of this increasingly bitter struggle for popularity.⁶

There are no completely reliable data available on the number and social position of the post-war Jewish communities. In the absence of any official census, estimates can only be based on surveys which were made in 1946 - before the start of emigration on any considerable scale - by the statistical department of the World Jewish Congress Hungarian section, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee office in Hungary; both might be slightly incomplete because of the exclusion of those Jews who had no contact with Jewish communal institutions. Their number however could not be significant because the overwhelming majority of Hungarian Jews had to make use of the social benefits provided by the AJDC or other communal welfare organisations.

⁵ Two successive SZDP Ministers of Justice were, for instance, removed from the government in the summer of 1945, after they had proposed to curtail the power of the Communist-controlled police. Their successor was a Left-Wing Social Democrat. Communist agitation blamed General Faragho, the Minister of Public Supply for the acute food shortage, and he was eventually replaced also by a Left-wing Social Democrat.

⁶ From the vast amount of publications on the general history of this period the following might be recommended: 1) From the recollections of contemporary non-Communist politicians - F. Nagy; I. Kovacs; 2) From scholarly studies published outside Hungary - Seton-Watson 1950; Vali; Zinner 1962; 3) From Hungarian Communist interpretations - J. Molnar 1955; Molnar 1967; (A) Magyar Forradalmi etc.

Furthermore, telling comparisons with the pre-war conditions are also difficult because the last official census of 1941, included the population of the territories reannexed in the two "Vienna decisions", while Hungary in 1945 was again reduced to its size defined in the 1920 Trianon peace treaty. Comparing post-war statistics to the 1930 census, the last one held within the Trianon borders, one would overlook changes that might have occurred between then and the end of the Second World War.

Allowing thus for slight inaccuracies, the following picture appears: the ratio of Jews in the population of Hungary was reduced from 5.1% in 1930 to 1.6% in 1946. This represented a reduction in the number of Jews by 300,943, from 444,567 to 143,624,⁷ but not all of it was due necessarily to persecution, as it could have reflected both the small emigration of the 1930s and the natural decrease which occurred among Hungarian Jews in that decade.⁸

Another estimate, prepared jointly by all the national communal organisations in 1946, placed Hungarian Jewry's total loss as the consequence of persecution and extermination attempts roundly at 295,000.⁹ These two figures are convincingly close.

To assess however the effects of the Horthy regime's anti-Jewish policy in full, the whole area under its jurisdiction, including those who returned to it by the Axis powers, should be considered. The 1941 census accounted for 725,007 Jews on that larger territory. At the end of the war 96,000 lived in the zones reannexed to the neighbouring countries. Thus the total number of Jews in this enlarged area was 239,624, representing a loss of 485,383 persons.¹⁰ From a computation of the 1941 census figures to the 1945 territory of Hungary, it appears that the percentage of diminution was 56.7 (36.8 in Budapest and 73.6 in the provinces).¹¹

⁷The 1930 census figures are from Katzburg 1966, p.166; the 1946 figures from I. Beneschofsky, 1966, p.241, which were based on Zsigmond P. Pach: "A magyarorszagi zsidóság statisztikájának szembetuno jelensegei." In: Maradek zsidóság, Budapest 1946, and A Zsidó Világkongresszus Magyarorszagi Képviselete Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei, Budapest, 1947, No.1.Mimec.

⁸ From 1937 the number of live births was considerably smaller than the number of deaths. In 1939 for instance, the proportion of live births was 40% smaller than that of deaths. Beneschofsky 1966, p.242.

⁹ Memorandum, etc.

¹⁰ Duschinsky, p.397.

¹¹"Jewish population in Hungary", p.46.

Changes in the Jewish population's age structure and sex distribution point to a serious impediment in its potential for regeneration. There were only 7,712 children under the age of 14, or roughly one child to every 20 adults, whereas there were 27,256 Jews over 60 years of age, or every fifth member of the community. The proportion of children and young people - under the age of 20 - dropped from 21.5% in 1941 to 14.5% in 1946, while of those in the 41 - 60 age group, grew from 30.2% to 33.6%. Although the percentage of the normally most productive population group - between the ages of 41 and 60 - also increased (from 30.2% to 33.0%), and consequently retained its relative importance, the changes which occurred in the whole age structure nevertheless indicated that the Jewish population of Hungary had "grown older".

In Budapest, where $\frac{2}{3}$ of the surviving Jews resided, half of the Jewish population was 46 years old or over, and almost one quarter (23.2%) 60 years old or over, i.e., largely incapable of raising a family. Distribution by sexes showed a preponderance of females over males, mainly because the destruction of the Jewish males began years before the deportations, during their service in the forced labour battalions. On a national average, there were 1,370 Jewish men, while in Budapest the proportion was even worse, (1,565 per 1,000). In the capital women constituted 61.2 and men 38.8% of the Jewish population, while in the provinces, the males were slightly in the majority (52.2 against 47.8%).

This difference in proportions emanated from the fact that deportations from the capital, during the Szalasi regime, affected both sexes equally, while many men, who were in labour battalions at the time of the deportations from the provinces, returned there after the war. The relatively large number of war invalids also affected the regeneration potential of the community.

Under such conditions the desirable number of marriages could of course not take place. For the earning capacity of Hungarian Jews data only from Budapest are available. There, almost half (46.9%) of the population required aid. Of the 51,299 able-bodied persons (comprising 53.1% of the Jewish population in the capital) only approximately 20,000 were gainfully employed at the time of the surveys. Most of the others, having no income, depended largely on welfare aid provided by Jewish organisations, together with those who were physically unfit for gainful employment.

In 1945 in Budapest, 41.5% of the Jews received meals from welfare kitchens or food subsidy; 36.3% monetary assistance, 14.5% clothing, 8.8% were hospitalised, and 10.4% received other medical help. In the provinces, where such detailed data were not available, an estimated 80% of the Jews needed assistance in some form.¹²

Hungarian Jewry's material losses cannot be reliably assessed. The damage to communal properties, through military operations, as well as politically motivated desecration and ordinary looting, was devastating.¹³ Losses suffered by individuals are inestimable. The total value of property owned by Jews before the enactment of the first anti-Jewish law was between 1.2 and 1.6 thousand million dollars at its 1938 rate.¹⁴ Most of this vanished as the result of confiscation, and expropriations;¹⁵ the looting of homes which the Jews had to leave, and because many Gentiles failed to return valuables which the Jews had deposited with them for safe-keeping. In spite of such a severe handicap, most Jews started energetically to carve out for themselves a livelihood, assisting in the process also the reconstruction of Hungary's ravaged economy.¹⁶ They pursued mainly their traditional occupations, i.e industry, commerce, transport (as employees both in the manual and non-manual categories), finance, and the liberal professions.¹⁷

¹² These data were collated from: Jewish population....p.46; Duschinsky, p.397; Benoschofsky 1966, p.242; and Memorandum etc.

¹³ The average damage to communal properties was 46.6% and to their interior 90%. Benoschofsky, 1966, p.243.

¹⁴ Memorandum etc.

¹⁵ The blocked goods and fixtures of Jewish-owned stores, for instance, were sold off in the Autumn of 1944, and the stocks and equipment of Jewish-owned factories were taken by the Germans, Benoschofsky, 1966, p.243.

¹⁶ An American observer reported from Budapest on November 25, 1945 to the New York Times: "That commerce is alive is largely due to the Jews... It is impossible not to admire their courage, energy, and patriotism as they clear a little space among the ruins and begin over again." Duschinsky, p.403.

¹⁷ A table on the distribution of Budapest Jews by Industry and occupation in 1945 is in Duschinsky, p.400.

The mentality of the surviving Jews, their attitude to society at large, and to the Hungarian society - their immediate environment - in particular, as well as to the political ideals offering them a wide range of alternatives on their future was different in each individual case. But a contemporary psychologist's description probably applied to most of them, at least in the earliest period. He found them "characterised by rigidity following their shattering experience. Their constricting chest cannot as yet inhale the strong air of freedom and they do not even have tears for mourning. This psychological state has in some of them developed into an outright sickness; they feel strangers to themselves and the world seems strange to them. It is as if their bodies, feelings, and thoughts had changed, as if they had lost their personalities."¹⁸

Jewry's relationship with the Hungarian society was understandably uneasy. Leaders of the major national communal organisations attributed the difficulties of reintegration among others a) to a feeling that they cannot live among those who were responsible for the murder of their relatives; b) to a lack of confidence in the nation as a whole, which denied them the most elementary human rights, though they had served it enthusiastically since their emancipation; c) to a bitterness that, on their return from the camps they faced an almost universal hostility, instead of the anticipated compassion and even repentance; and finally to misgivings that during the long transitional period while the democratic system will be trying to wipe antisemitism off the population's mentality, set-backs might occur. "Hungarian Jews", they stated "do not want to become victims of a struggle fought between political factors and dare not risk once more their bare lives left to them after so many hardships and sufferings."¹⁹

In 1948, from a distance of a few years, a non-Jewish sociologist divided the Jews into three main categories on their relationship to Hungarian society. The first, a small minority, consisted of those

¹⁸ This description was published in an essay by I. Kulcsar in Budapest in 1946, and quoted by Benoschofsky, 1966, p.240.

¹⁹ Memorandum, etc.

who could live in Hungary unproblematically, either because they survived persecution without physical or mental wounds, or because they had actively fought against the previous political order, and therefore regarded the post-war system as the achievement of their goals.

His second category comprised the anti-assimilationists, who were either Zionists or simply wanted to emigrate to a country where the social system seemed to offer them the utmost personal safety. The maladjusted assimilationists, making up the third, and largest category, faced two dilemmas: one of identity, and another of political affiliation. They were torn between a disinclination to identify with the Hungarians, their former persecutors, and a fear of letting themselves be regarded Jewish, because it was that very label which had caused their persecution.

Politically, those who were drawn towards Communism for its opposition to racial discrimination and narrow minded nationalism, were often also weary of its anti-capitalist contents. On the other hand, sympathies for conservative bourgeois liberalism, which offered the safeguarding of personal property, were overshadowed by suspicions that in the particular context of Hungarian politics that movement contained a degree of antisemitism.²⁰

Zionism, which was then the only well organised, purposeful and dynamic Jewish movement in Hungary, regarded this disoriented, uprooted and confused majority as its natural target for recruitment. Zionist leaders were convinced that the tragic consequences of the Nazi persecution had destroyed Hungarian Jewry's traditional faith in assimilation. All that remained to be done was to turn this rejection by intensive persuasion into a positive acceptance of the Zionist ideal, namely that the security of the Jews can only be assured within the borders of an independent nation state, which must be set up in their original homeland, Palestine.

Following the tactical advice of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, they wanted to "conquer the congregations" first, and conduct their massive re-education campaign from advantageous commanding posts in the Jewish communal organisations.

²⁰ Bibo, pp.323 - 327.

Three major organisations were their primary targets. The Israelite Congregation of Pest (Pesti Izraelita Hitkozseg), which embraced the majority of the Jews in the capital who followed a liberal (so called "Neolog") interpretation of religious observance, and controlled a network of synagogues, schools, cultural and welfare institutions. The second was the Central Board of Israelites in Hungary (Magyar Izraelitak Orszagos Irodaja), a nation-wide umbrella organisation of all the Neolog congregations in the country, and the third was the Central Bureau of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (Ortodox Zsidok Orszagos Irodaja), much smaller than the others both in membership and financial resources. Before 1945 the Hungarian Zionist Organisation (Magyar Cionista Szovetseg) was nominally represented in their leaderships, but had only a negligible influence over their policies.

The Zionists' claim to a much larger and decisive role in those organisations was based partly on an honest conviction that their's was the only realistic concept for the preservation of Jewish identity, and partly on the leading role which they had played in the rescue attempts during the Nazi occupation of Hungary. Already during the siege of Budapest, while hiding together in a building protected by the Swiss Legation, the Zionist leaders worked out detailed plans for the take-over of these three organisations. They selected both the personnel for leading executive posts, and the key portfolios through which they hoped to exert maximum influence over the educational activities of the largest, the Pest Congregation.²¹

Working as a closely-knit, disciplined, purposeful unit, and taking advantage of the non-Zionist council members' distrust of their leaders, because of their impotence during the German occupation, Zionists achieved an almost complete change in the leadership of the Pest Congregation. They captured one of the two vice-presidencies for Dr. Albert Geyer, the president of the Hungarian Zionist Organisation, placed many prominent Zionist leaders (Dr. Bela Denes, Arkos Dukesz, Miklos Krausz, Dr. Siegfried Roth, and Dr. Sandor Ungar) openly on to the council and others too achieved election while concealing their Zionist beliefs. Altogether Zionists occupied half of the places on the council.²²

²¹ Interview with Galor.

²² Report by Dr. A. Geyer to the Jewish Agency of Palestine, September 21, 1945. Central Zionist Archives, S 5/757.

The presidency went to Lajor Stockler, who had not been associated with the pre-war leadership. He rose to national office only during the German occupation, when he was appointed a member of the Jewish council. Although the German and Hungarian authorities used this body to carry out their instructions, Stockler appeared less tarnished a collaborator than his colleagues. He was not a Zionist, but seemed to be then willing to accept them as partners in leadership.²³ Dr. Geyer described him as "a reliable comrade in all our (Zionist) undertakings".²⁴

The Zionists also managed to take charge of those three key portfolios in the Congregation's central office which they were aiming at. Dr. Fabian Herskovits, a vice-president of the Zionist Organisation, was appointed rabbi in Budapest's largest synagogue (in Dohany Street) with the result that "Zionist sermons were delivered weekly to a large audience, and prayers for Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) and for the Jewish people (a Zionist expression, which emphasised the national rather than the religious identity of the Jews - G.G) were recited".²⁵

Another prominent Zionist, Dr. Endre Gellert, became inspector of the Congregation's schools, and Dr. Herskovits chairman of its cultural committee.²⁶ The take-over was also successful in the provinces. In the three largest towns (Debrecen, Szeged, and Miskolc). the presidents of the Zionist societies were also heads of the local Neolog congregations.²⁷ In the Orthodox sector, the vice-presidency of the Central Bureau and three executive offices were held by Zionists,²⁸ and they also occupied half of the council seats.²⁹

²³ Interview with Galor.

²⁴ His report of September 21, 1945. Central Zionist Archives, S 5/757.

²⁵ Report by the Hungarian Zionist Organisation to the Jewish Agency, May 23, 1946. Central Zionist Archives, S 757.

²⁶ For the Zionist contents of the Congregation's educational and cultural activities see (A) Pesti Izraelit...

²⁷ Dr. A. Geyer's report to the Jewish Agency, May 7, 1946. Central Zionist Archives, S 5/757.

²⁸ Hungarian Zionist Organisation report, May 23, 1946. Central Zionist Archives, S 5/757.

²⁹ Duschinsky, p. 406.

Under the specific conditions of the immediate post-war Hungary, the paramount importance of a fourth communal organisation emerged. This was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, commonly known as the "Joint". In Hungary it worked under the name of the National Jewish Aid Committee (Orszagos Zsido Segito Bizottsag). This huge international relief organisation was the major source of funds both for the reconstruction of communal institutions, and the rehabilitation of individual Jews. "Joint" aid to Hungary in 1945 amounted to \$3,837,102.72 and in 1946 to \$9,499,503.72.³⁰ Zionists regarded it vital that those funds should be used not only for the reconstruction of communal life in Hungary, but also for maintenance of institutions which propagate Zionism and prepare Jews for emigration to Palestine.

As the European director of the "Joint", Joseph Schwartz, was a Zionist,³¹ the Hungarian Zionists could obtain decision-making positions in the organisation though Dr. Frigyes Gorog, himself, the president of the committee in Hungary was not a Zionist. At the beginning, two of the "Joint" central committee's four members, and four on the eleven-strong advisory committee were Zionists.³² After a leadership reconstruction, one of the three presidium members was ex officio the president of the Hungarian Zionist Organisation, four of the eleven executive committee members were Zionists, and also many important departments were headed by Zionists.³³

Thus this post-war Jewish community became radically different from the pre-war one. The large-scale inclusion of Zionists loosened the previous assimilationists' hold on the communal organisations which were turning gradually into battlefields for the two diametrically opposed ideologies. The Zionists' hand was strengthened by the fact that the

³⁰ Deposition by Herbert Katzki, assistant vice-chairman of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Inc., July 6, 1971.

³¹ Interview with A. Rosinger.

³² Report from the Jewish Agency representative in Geneva to the head office in Jerusalem. Undated but the listing of events ends in June 1945. Central Zionist Archives, S 6/4562.

³³ Hungarian Zionist Organisation report to Jewish Agency, May 23, 1946. Central Zionist Archives, S 5/757.

community could no longer exist in a self-contained, self-supporting form, isolated more or less from the Jewish communities abroad. The devastating material losses forced the community to rely heavily on financial aid from foreign Jewish organisations which were, by and large, more sympathetic to Zionism than the pre-war official leadership of Hungarian Jewry had been.

Also, mainly under Zionist pressure, the community established links with international Jewish organisations outside the field of relief work - first of all with the World Zionist Organisation and its central body, the Jewish Agency, and with the World Jewish Congress³⁴ - thus bringing itself into the main line of the international Jewish movements, and thereby subjecting itself to their various influences.

It was against this internal background that communal organisations and individuals set out to seek both reinstatement to the social status which the anti-Jewish legislations had deprived them of, and recompensation for their material losses. It was an uphill struggle, full of obstacles, created by particular political conditions of post-war Hungary.

Rehabilitation: The Effects of Grass-Roots Resistance

A serious moral dilemma that emerged from the Second World War - at least for the nations involved in it - was how to face up to the decimated Jewish population. It was a grim problem, which reached over the front lines of the former enemies and affected both Gentiles and Jews. It concerned various nations to various degrees. Some were haunted by the consequences of their inaction, others by the dreadful results of their activities. Hungary, of course, belonged to the latter.

The Hungarians should have had a bad conscience, and should have felt deeply in debt to their Jewish fellow citizens - as some of them indeed did. But political factors overshadowed the moral nature of their dilemma. The Jewish question emerged at two levels. At the first, a stand was required in principle, on antisemitism, and on the Jews' right to reintegration. At the second level, sanctions were needed to facilitate this reintegration both in terms of social rehabilitation and material compensation.

³⁴ The Hungarian section of the WJC was inaugurated in March 1946. JTA, March 6, 1946.

The new regime had no difficulties in meeting the problem at its first level, that of principle. Three of the four parties in the coalition government - the MKP, the FKGP, and the SZDP - had previously declared their opposition to racialism and particularly antisemitism,³⁵ although the views of the fourth, the NPP, and of the non-party ministers, the former collaborators of Horthy, were less clear. Nevertheless it would have been implausible for members of this democratic government not to condemn antisemitism at least as a principle. Thus, soon after its appointment the government abolished all anti-Jewish legislation, declared that Hungarian Jews had equal rights as citizens, and the Provisional Assembly called for antisemitism to be outlawed.³⁶ The government also was committed under the terms of its armistice agreement with the Allies (signed in Moscow on January 20, 1945) to "repeal all discriminatory legislation and disabilities arising from that."³⁷ Some local authorities abolished anti-Jewish legislation on their own initiative, even before the existence of the new central government, or applied the relevant section of the armistice agreement without waiting for instructions to do so.³⁸

But when it was trying to meet the problem at its second level, i.e. restoring to Jews their properties and ensuring their re-entry into their previous occupations and social positions, the government came face to face with the incumbent's reluctance to yield. Even the sparse documentation available indicates a determined unwillingness to return properties unconditionally to their lawful Jewish owners. The Hungarian deputy town commander in Mako, for instance, allocated to Jews returning to their home town, only one-room and kitchen apartments, regardless of the size of their previous properties, and permitted them to regain their businesses only as managers.³⁹

³⁵ See p.28

³⁶ Jewish Chronicle, January 5, 1945.

³⁷ Memorandum, etc.

³⁸ Karsai, 1970, Vol.I, pp.142-143 and Vol.II, p.196.

³⁹ Karsai, 1970, Vol.I, p.48.

In Tolna County, they received a one-time loan from the fund that contained the revenue from the sale of their confiscated assets, in other words, from their own money,⁴⁰ while the local authority in Kispest, a suburb of the capital, rejected the Jewish community's request that deserted Jewish flats should only be allocated to Jews.⁴¹

This attitude revealed itself more indirectly in the notion that Jews should not be entitled to privileges on account of their sufferings. Thus they applied unsuccessfully in Mako for a four-months exemption from communal labour, on the grounds that under the previous regime they "took their share of communal labour far beyond their proportions and strength" and in "cruel and humiliating" circumstances. In vain too, asked Jews in Oroshaza, for exemption for former members of the forced labour battalions.⁴² In a more subtle form it appeared in the cloak of a democratic insistence on equality, as in an instruction by the Deputy Sheriff (alispán) of Hajdu County. When cancelling the anti-Jewish laws, he found it necessary to emphasise that this meant not only that "regulations discriminating against Hungarian citizens, because of origin and race are void", but also that "neither authorities, institutions or private persons shall make or be allowed to make any distinction between them."⁴³

The Jews' request to form their own institutions for the handling of their rehabilitation was in one case politely rejected on the grounds that they could join that of the four existing political parties which best suits their interests; and in another, they were rudely warned that they "should not be a state within the state. There is no need for a Jewish council. The Jews must not exercise executive power. The Jews do not want to integrate into the new order."⁴⁴ There was evidence of genuine goodwill in the rehabilitation of the Jews and also of deeply felt humane passion that, on their return to their places of residence, "these unfortunates be received in circumstances befitting

⁴⁰ Ibid, Vol.II, p.273.

⁴¹ Ibid, Vol.II, p.155.

⁴² Ibid, Vol.I. pp.284-285 and 208-209.

⁴³ Ibid, Vol.I, p.143.

⁴⁴ Ibid, Vol.II, p.195 and P.133.

human beings."⁴⁵ But the general mood of rejecting personal responsibility for what had happened affected even some of the opponents of racial discrimination.⁴⁶

The political parties, locked in embittered battle for popular support, found it tactically impossible to disregard these grass-roots attitudes, even if some of their leaders felt them inconsistent with their democratic principles. Jewish communal leaders recognised this difficulty, and attributed it tacitly to the government's fears that "some energetic steps (to rehabilitate and recompensate the Jews properly - G.G) would only deepen the belief of the reactionary elements that the democratic system was solely for the Jews, and would only strengthen opposition to democracy among a large section of the population!"⁴⁷ On rare occasions, the government admitted to unspecified "political" difficulties in the recompensation of the Jews,⁴⁸ but the parties and their government chose to adopt the convenient pretext that no specific Jewish problem existed in Hungary at all. Even the word "Jew" was usually avoided, and substituted by less explicit references to them. Kis Ujsag, the official daily of the FKGP, strongly condemned the ignorance which the authorities in border towns had displayed towards former inmates returning from concentration camps in Austria. Although it was common knowledge that their overwhelming majority were Jews, the article referred to them as "deportees."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ For examples of these attitudes, see *Ibid*, Vol.I, p.575, p.331, p.435, p.22, Vol.II, pp.91-92, and for the quote p.460.

⁴⁶ A Bishop of the Reform Church, who had opposed the anti-Jewish laws, warned teachers in his district "to refrain from harping on the Jewish question in a Horthy regime - G.G) but felt obliged to point out that "the souls of the deep-rooted Hungarians had always felt as alien (to that regime) as the serious Christian spirituality" *ibid*, Vol.I, pp.205-207. The phrases "deep-rooted Hungarians" and "Christian spirituality" were remnants of the Horthy regime's terminology. The Bishop was, in effect, implying that real Hungarians and true Christians were not antisemitic.

⁴⁷ Memorandum etc.

⁴⁸ In a statement for instance by Eric Molnar, the Minister of Social Welfare. *Jewish Chronicle*, January 4, 1946.

⁴⁹ May 20, 1945.

Jozsef Darvas, a leader of the NFP, claimed that "the great majority of the Hungarian people reproved the atrocities which were committed against the Jews in their name," and warned that "talking about sufferings, the workers and the peasants can allude to centuries of sufferings and had their share of sacrifices as well, and not only since the anti-Jewish laws."⁵⁰

Even the SZDP adopted this particular method of vote catching, although its supporters, mainly the organised working class, technocrats, and artisans, were probably the least endangered by the Jews' attempts to recapture their former posts. Its general secretary, Arpad Szakasits, when writing in general about "hustlers and fleecers" remarked slyly: "It is sad that unjustified and disproportionate demands are not only being made by those detestable hustlers."⁵¹ The views that the Jews and the rest of the population had suffered equally, were hardly ever denounced by others than Jewish communal leaders. A rare example was Istvan Bibo, a leading thinker, politician and sociologist: "Neither captivity during the war, not internment, or police brutality are comparable to what happened to the Jews... Mentioning any of those under the same breath with the massacre of the Jews is nothing but frivolous or malicious," he wrote in a literary journal.⁵²

The government's politically motivated sensitivity to the population's unwillingness to part with property and privileges obtained at the expense of the persecuted Jews led to its insensitive handling of material reparation. Although the government issued a number of decrees to remedy the consequences of unlawful dispossessions, those did not take into account the specific conditions of the Jewish population. The right to reclaim properties was, for instance, limited to the owners, their consorts, ascendants and descendants.

⁵⁰ Szabad Nep, March 25, 1945.

⁵¹ Nepszava, May 6, 1945.

⁵² pp.250-251.

As the immediate Jewish families - the owners, their parents, and their children - usually lived in the same village or town, they were thus deported to the German extermination camps together too. But brothers, sisters, or other similarly related members of their family who might have survived in other parts of the country were excluded by law from reclaiming their deserted properties. Another disregard for specific Jewish conditions appeared in the intricate, complicated, and expensive legal procedures which the law demanded for repossessions. Jews could, for instance, regain their business premises, but only after reimbursing the incumbents within 60 days for all the necessary and useful investments which had been made in their absence. To most of the Jews, who returned from concentration camps or labour battalions without readily available liquid funds, the 60 days limit made repossession merely theoretical.

A similar attitude prevailed in the reallocation of flats in Budapest. After the Jews had been forcibly moved to the ghetto or to "protected houses" their flats were allocated to gentiles. On their return, the Jews could not unconditionally reclaim them because the accommodation conditions of the incumbents had to be considered. Where the flats were large, sharing was possible, though it could lead to such unpleasant situations that the Jewish owners had to live in close proximity with those who had, in many cases, plundered their personal effects. To single-room flats, the Jews could not return at all if the incumbents' own flats had been destroyed in military action. In the allocation of vacant flats, however, the Jews were not entitled to priority.

A striking example of the government's refusal to acknowledge the problems of the Jews as a special case, was its undertaking to provide material reparation for those who "suffered persecution or losses because of their socialist, anti-Fascist, or democratic attitudes." This, excluded the largest section of the formerly persecuted, the Jews, who had not suffered for any of those three reasons, but simply because of their origin.⁵³

⁵³ All these examples, and many more, can be found in Memorandum, Chapter III.

The political parties' preoccupation with the contest for popular support also affected their attitude to the Jews' search for their place in society. The parties recognised that they had to rely on the very same Hungarian population which had previously shown little or no sympathy for their democratic principles. The FKGP and the SZDP, which had parliamentary representation during the Horthy regime, received only a tiny share of the votes in the last pre-war general election.⁵⁴ The Communists' pre-war base was very narrow, partly because they had to work illegally, while the NPP, established only in 1939, was initially based on a small group of peasant-oriented intellectuals and writers. These parties preferred to assume that the human and material losses caused by the war, had convinced the Hungarians that they had been badly misguided by their former rulers, although the very limited resistance either to the Germans, or the Hungarian regime, hardly supported this assumption. Nevertheless, they were prepared to confine responsibility for the past to some politicians and the actual perpetrators of atrocities. The rest of the population they chose to regard as innocent victims of deception, and thus as eligible for active participation in the democratic process.

In the Jewish context, this meant that once the culprits were properly punished, the Jews were expected to have no objections to co-existence with the rest of the population. Consequently the regime regarded unjustified any efforts to opt out of this society, instead of assimilating to it.

Still, the coalition government tolerated the increasing Zionist activities, partly because it did not wish to refuse individuals their right to choose - within the boundaries of democratic principles - the ideology they preferred, and not least because it recognised that, so soon after the Nazi persecution, the international climate was unsuitable for an open clash with the Jews. Thus, while the Communists were unfeignedly hostile (their attitude will be discussed in detail later in this chapter), the other parties restricted themselves to expressing reservations about, and debating the merits of the Zionist ideology.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Of the 260 parliamentary seats, the FKGP gained 14 and the SZDP 5. Molnar, 1967, p.425.

⁵⁵ Gyorgy Parragi, a leading FKGP journalist, and one of the foremost advocates of a Western-style democracy, declared that "we are viewing the Zionist aspirations with understanding but with a certain amount of reservations." (Magyar Nemzet, September 16, 1945). Anna Kethly, one of the leading prominent Social Democrats, a member of the SZDP's central committee, felt fit to address a meeting of Ichud, the Social Democratic Zionist Party. IMHE (Ichud Mozgalom Heti Ertesitoje), Vol.I, No.19, September 27, 1945.

Administrative measures were only used infrequently and disguised,⁵⁶ and in one instance the government seemed to have yielded to Zionist lobbying by sending, in December 1945, a delegate to Palestine to establish educational and cultural links with its Jewish population.⁵⁷

The fundamental Zionist aim - the encouragement of Jewish emigration to Palestine - appeared to be a sensitive point. The official Hungarian view was ^{that} the government opposed all emigration until a peace treaty was concluded,⁵⁸ and the executive of the World Zionist Organisation singled out its rigid adherence to this policy when it stated in 1946; "The prohibition of the exit of immigrants in possession of certificates (entry certificates to Palestine, issued by the British Mandatory authority - G.G), which was applicable to all countries in the Soviet sphere of influence was particularly strict in Hungary."⁵⁹ Other accounts of the Hungarian government's attitude to Jewish emigration to Palestine are however at variance. A Jewish Agency emissary, who later became Israel's first Consul in Hungary, claimed that the government issued exit permission to everybody who was in the possession of an entry certificate,⁶⁰ while a former Hungarian Zionist official attributed the government's ban on Jewish emigration

⁵⁶ Permission, for instance, to publish as a pamphlet, a public lecture by Dr. Bela Denes, the chairman of Ichud, on the crisis of the Jewish intellectuals, was refused because of the lack of newprint. IMHE, Vol. II, No. 25, November 8, 1945.

⁵⁷ The plans included the exchange of scholars, university students, artists, and scientific research material; the establishment of a Chair in Hungarian at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and one in Hebrew at the University of Budapest. Central Zionist Archives, S/64562. Although the delegate, Dr. T. Scher, left for Palestine, none of the plans materialised.

⁵⁸ This was stated by a Hungarian Foreign Ministry spokesman. JTA, May 7, 1946.

⁵⁹ Reports of the Executives submitted to the 22nd Zionist Congress at Basle, December 1946, p. 176.

⁶⁰ Interview with Bentsur.

only to the presence of a British representative on the Allied Control Commission (the supervising body in Hungary before the peace treaty), whose government opposed unlimited Jewish immigration to Palestine. The Hungarian authorities, this official claimed, created no practical obstacles.⁶¹ For whatever reason however, the fact remained that, although an opinion poll showed that 64% of the Jews in Budapest wanted to emigrate,⁶² and the leaders of the national communal organisations estimated that 63,500 wanted to emigrate to Palestine,⁶³ between 1940 and the end of 1945 only 1,557 people emigrated to Palestine from Hungary.⁶⁴

But the Zionist argument that Jews can find security only within the borders of their own sovereign state was bound to penetrate increasingly deeper as Hungarian Jews were discovering their fellow citizens' indifference both to the tragedy which had befallen them, and to the punishment of those who had caused it. They noted that an exhibition showing the Nazi crimes against Jews had been visited mainly by Jews and had found "little echo in the general press."⁶⁵

Although the calling to account of the perpetrators of atrocities started as early as February 12, 1945, when two warrant officers and an officer were sentenced by the newly established Peoples' Tribuna, for the murder of Jews in labour battalions,⁶⁶ trials of war criminals on similar charges aroused little interest. When three former government members who had directed the mass deportation of Jews in 1944 were put on public trial in Budapest, the large auditorium was filled "overwhelmingly by Jewish intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie,"⁶⁷ indicating

⁶¹ Interview with Galor.

⁶² Vilag, March 23, 1946.

⁶³ Memorandum, etc.

⁶⁴ From a charter at the Institute of Jewish Affairs, London, 80(182), based on: Statistical Handbooks of Jewish Palestine; Department of Statistics, Jewish Agency for Palestine; Jerusalem, 1947. Figures for the year 1945 alone are not available.

⁶⁵ JTA, January 28, 1946.

⁶⁶ Jewish Chronicle, March 9, 1945.

⁶⁷ Szabad Nep, December 23, 1945.

to a non-Jewish observer that "a not inconsiderable sector of Hungarian society thinks that this is not a trial of these hangmen by the Hungarian people, but only by the Jews."⁶⁸

This attitude was part of a vicious circle. As many gentiles refused to return properties and personal effects, Jews often requested, and received, police help.⁶⁹ At the same time, searching for reliably anti-Nazi elements, the authorities encouraged Jews to join the police force and the judicating institutions. Consequently, the offenders as well as a much wider section of the population, became inclined to interpret the punitive measures as a Jewish vendetta, particularly as the legal proceedings, by the nature of the crimes, were to a large extent concerned with actions committed against Jews. Thus, not only did they feel disinterested in those measures, but developed a distinct hostility to the "bloodthirsty" Jews. The government parties with a sharp eye for grass-roots sentiments, hesitated to elaborate on the real significance of those political prosecutions, and as a result, the latent antisemitism of the population gathered strength.

Already in the summer of 1945, a number of people were arrested for distributing antisemitic cartoons and satirical poems,⁷⁰ while a letter writer to the FKGP daily Magyar Nemzet, who carefully kept himself anonymous, responding to an article in that paper, stated: "Are you not ashamed to write that this confounded race (the Jews - G.G) had suffered? Where did they suffer when they are coming home much fatter than they left.... Surely there are now more Jews in this country than before they were taken away for a holiday."⁷¹

Crude antisemitism was also injected in Hungary's first post-war general election campaign at national party leadership level. Some of the Peasant Party leaders echoed openly both the popular resentment of the alleged Jewish attempts to seek privileges on account of their sufferings, and the feelings that the Jews constituted an alien body

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Karsai, 1970, Vol.I, pp.405-406, Vol.II, p.297,

⁷⁰ Kis Ujsag, June 28, 1945.

⁷¹ September 6, 1945.

in Hungarian society.⁷²

Such pronounced submission to grass-roots feelings about the Jews appeared, at least at that high a level, only in the NPP. The other coalition parties confined themselves to the already mentioned more sophisticated methods, despite the desperate struggle for support. This applied to the Communist party too, although it was in the worst position in this respect. For it was the Communist party which, over the previous 25 years, had been branded the agent of an international Jewish conspiracy, and at the same time needed supporters more than any of its competitors who all had traditionally rooted, relatively wide bases among the population. These two characteristics influenced decisively the MKP's policy on the Jewish question in the immediate post-war period.

The MKP: A Party of Jews and Antisemites

The MKP, surfacing in late 1944 on to the Hungarian political scene after decades of underground work appeared to be fitting the description by the Horthy regime's propaganda machinery. Its leadership, from medium ranks upwards, included very many Jews. Of the four Communist leaders - Erno Gero, Jozsef Revai, Mihaly Farkas, and Imre Nagy - who returned to Hungary from Moscow with the advancing Soviet army and formed immediately a provisional central committee, only the last one was not Jewish.⁷³ Early in 1945 they were joined by Matyas Rakosi, also a Jew, whom Stalin had designated as head of the party. The central committee proper, which was then still in German-occupied Budapest, had fewer Jewish members.⁷⁴

⁷² Jozsef Darvas, at the party's first election rally in Budapest, declared: "There is a stratum here which demands for itself privileges on account of its past sufferings. If, by reason of suffering anybody had the right to recompensation, then it was the working people of Hungary. Just as we condemned in the past racial persecution, we do not recognise today racial privileges." (Magyar Nemzet, August 31, 1945). The party's leader, Peter Veres, told a provincial rally: "In the Peasant Party we have only Hungarians, we do not want any aliens: neither Swabians nor Jews." (From a leaflet - in this author's possession - published by the Hajduszoboszlo Jewish Association, October 20, 1945). In the Hungarian terminology, Swabians meant Hungarian citizens of German origin. Most of those, like the Jews, were town dwellers, engaged in the capitalist sector of the economy. During the heydays of Hitler, many of them became close collaborators of the Nazis.

⁷³ (A) Magyar Forradalmi, etc. p.426.

⁷⁴ None of its five members listed in (A) Magyar Forradalmi etc (p.426) were Jews, although various other sources mention three Jews: Laszlo Orban, Istvan Szirmai es Ferenc Donath. Sagvari (p.18.N 15) in fact confirms that the committee had eight members.

But, when after the liberation of the capital the two committees merged on February 23, 1945, Rakosi became the general-secretary with Gero, Farkas, and Revai taking up commanding posts in charge of economic developments, party organisation and propaganda respectively. The common characteristic which shaped them into such a powerful quartet was of course not their Jewish origin, but the fact that they had all worked either in the Soviet Communist Party, or the Comintern, or both, and were, therefore better known to and more trusted by Stalin than the leaders of the illegal party who lived in Hungary.

The higher proportion of Jews among the Communist refugees in the Soviet Union than the activists in Hungary reflected the different developments of the two sections. Jews figured remarkably high among the leaders of the 1919 Soviet Republic.⁷⁵ After its fall many escaped abroad and ended up eventually in Moscow. Most of them received training in CPSU schools or the party apparatus, were given Comintern assignments in Hungary or elsewhere, and became experienced and suitably disciplined professional party workers. The purges of the 1930s as well as age, took their toll, but at the end of the war, Stalin could still count on a number of them for appointment to leading posts in the MKP. As the majority of the 1919 leaders were Jewish, the majority of this small group remained so too.

In Hungary itself however during the inter-war period, the Communist party's two principal recruitment areas were the universities and the factories.⁷⁶ Jews were scarce in both. Their proportion of university students was restricted by law, while because of their social backgrounds, only a few Jews could be found among factory workers. Consequently the overwhelming majority of the home-bred Communist leaders were not Jews.

⁷⁵ See pp.20-21.

⁷⁶ Leaders like Laszlo Rajk and Karcly Kiss joined the party while they were university students. Others, like Janos Kadar, and Antal Apro came from the trade union movement.

The Jewish leaders of the illegal party, among them, Bela Furst, Imre Sallay, and Zoltan Schonherz who were executed, and Rakosi and Zoltan Vas who were sentenced for long prison terms, were without exception refugees who returned to Hungary from the Soviet Union on Comintern assignments.

Stalin's preference for Muscovites and the peculiar composition of that group were therefore the fundamental reasons why the post-war leadership of the MKP at its highest level was so strongly dominated by Jews. As the party was organized on the Stalinist principles, decision making was largely the prerogative of the general-secretary, in this case Rakosi and his immediate circle of collaborators. In other words, the real power in the MKP, and owing to the party's growing influence, subsequently in the whole country, rested with this quartet of Jewish Communists. It was a situation unparalleled in any other Soviet-occupied European state.

Although Jewish Communists held key positions in the Polish, Czechoslovak and Roumanian parties too, they shared effective power with their non-Jewish comrades. In Hungary alone were not only all the key officials Jews, but so also was the head of the party, who under the Stalinist terms, was its de facto ruler. This arrangement appeared to be exceptionally peculiar under the specific conditions of Hungary, where the Horthy regime, drawing on the evidence of the 1919 Soviet republic had brainwashed the population into a close identification of Communism with Jews. It might be assumed that Stalin simply disregarded this aspect when he chose the MKP leaders. His overriding considerations could probably have been loyalty to the Soviet Union, strict adherence to the Stalinist principles of party conduct, and a tactical attempt to put a relatively popular person into the driving seat. This latest should explain his selection of Rakosi as the general secretary.

Rakosi, the son of a village shopkeeper, joined the Hungarian section of the Russian Communist Party early in 1918, when he was a prisoner of war in Russia. He played only a secondary role in the Hungarian Soviet Republic, first as deputy People's Commissar of Commerce, and later as political commissar of an army division. His name was therefore not immediately associated with the atrocities which, the Horthy regime claimed, had been committed during the Soviet rule.

After the fall of the Republic, Rakosi escaped to Russia, worked for the Comintern, and in 1924 returned to Hungary to reorganise the Communist party. He was captured and sentenced to life imprisonment. In 1935, while he was still in gaol, he was again put on trial, this time for his involvement in the Soviet Republic. His trial evoked a world-wide protest against the anticipated death sentence, and Rakosi himself, following Dimitrov's example in the Reichstag trial of 1933, used courageously the public forum of a court room to advocate Communism. The international protest campaign elevated Rakosi's name from the underworld of anonymous Communist agents to international fame, while his court behaviour lent him the heroic aura of a fearless, death-defying idealist. The Soviet government accomplished his release in October, 1940, during the short honeymoon in exchange for some historic flags which the Russian army captured from Hungary in the 1849 war of independence.

His imprisonment in Hungary helped Rakosi to escape involvement in the Stalinist purges which claimed among their victims, Bela Kun, the leader of the Hungarian party. On his return to the Soviet Union, the thus unblemished Rakosi was first made the Hungarian party's representative in the Comintern, and after its dissolution, head of the party's section in Moscow. Rakosi, the only internationally known Hungarian Communist with a halo of martyrdom over his head, was a logical choice as the leader of such a popularity seeking type of Communist party which Stalin envisaged for Hungary. Stalin either ignored the probable disadvantages inherent in his Jewish origin, or regarded them outweighed by his exploitable qualities.

Although there is no supporting evidence for this theory, it is not inconceivable that Stalin selected Jews for the most sensitive and exposed party posts with a cunning deliberateness. He might have anticipated that in a country so thoroughly depraved by "anti-Bolshevism" as Hungary was, the introduction of Communist rule, however velvet-handed could arouse powerful popular resentment. If the Soviet Union's global interests did not then as yet permit the suppression of such resistance by force, then the hostility to the Communist ideals, given by the Hungarian population's strong antisemitism could be conveniently

transferred to their Jewish executors, thus saving the former by sacrificing the latter.⁷⁷

Apart from those four dominant figures, Jewish veterans occupied many places in the lower ranks of the party hierarchy too, and were among the MKP's delegates to national offices.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the ranks of such tested Jewish Communists were joined quickly by new recruits who found the MKP the most attractive among the available political alternatives. Their gravitation to the Communists could be traced to several personal and political reasons. Having been freed from the deadly embrace of Nazism, their first and spontaneous response excluded resentment of Communism as a principle.

⁷⁷ This process has indeed taken place, though not on Stalin's instructions. Since the defeat of the 1956 revolution - which was a backlash to Rakosi's Stalinist rule - Jews have been gradually eased out of positions of real power either in the party or the government. Although Jews are still prominent in the economic, educational, and cultural fields, they can no longer be found among the leaders of the army, the police, and their various armed auxiliary organisations. This indicates that the strong popular resentment aroused by the Jewish-dominated Rakosi regime, has in fact led to a drastic reduction in the numbers of Jews in sensitive and exposed positions. Consequently, Stalin's concept of using Jews for the risky experimental work, if it existed at all, was not unrealistic.

⁷⁸ One-third of the members whom the MKP's first national conference elected to its central committee were Jews. List of the CC in Sagvari (p.129, N 35). The Jewish members were Donath, Farkas, Gero, Nogradi, Peter, Rakosi, Revai, and Vas. Many led the building up of party organisations in Budapest, in the provinces and from the central office of the MKP. Moscow-trained Nogradi, for instance, was party organiser in the northern provinces (Nogradi, p.9). I.Szirmai worked in southern Hungary (Laszlo, p.126), the Budapest district committee included four Jews (Szabad Nep, May 1, 1945), L.Orban was head of the propaganda department in the central office (Szabad Nep, April 5, 1945), Among the national office holders was Zoltan Vas, one of Rakosi's co-defendants in his first trial, who was appointed government commissioner of food supply for Budapest, in February, and in May the mayor of the capital (A) Magyar Forradalmi etc, p.445 and p.462). The MKP's 26 delegates representing the Budapest district in the Provisional Assembly, included six Jews (Szabad Nep, April 1, 1945).

Unaware of the treatment which the Jews in the Soviet Union had suffered, they felt very little apprehension to the official ideology of that state whose army saved their lives. Their gratitude towards the Soviet Army turned into sympathy for the political and moral maxims of their liberators. From their limited knowledge of the Communist doctrines, the one which impressed them was the disregard for racial or ethnic origins. This abstract conclusion was reinforced by their day-to-day experiences. Noticing that most of the Hungarian party's leaders were Jews, they quite naturally deduced that the Communists obviously did not tolerate anti-Jewish discrimination.

Naive as it may seem now, in the light of later developments, in the emotional confusion and political turmoil of 1945, many Hungarian Jews - who were not already members of the SZDP - were drawn instinctively towards that party which was led and dominated by their bretheren.

The middle-class Jews' probable misgivings about the Communist party's anti-capitalist aims could easily be stored away then for two reasons. First, because until its rude awakening by a crushing defeat in the first general elections in November, the MKP tactfully glossed over its anti-capitalist policy in the belief that having mobilised the widest possible sector of the population for the reconstruction of the economy, it could then claim credit for its zeal and forceful leadership in electoral terms.⁷⁹ Secondly, because those parties which explicitly advocated the perpetuation of the capitalist system - primarily the strongest among them, the FKGP - became increasingly powerful magnets for conservative, right-wing political elements, and therefore to the Jews, suspect of possible antisemitic tendencies.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ The MKP's first national conference in May, 1945, demanded that the state should provide credit for industrial enterprises. It declared its support for those industrialists who "genuinely wanted to participate in the reconstruction of the country", and condemned calls for the expropriation of capitalists and the immediate introduction of the dictatorship of the proletariat as "endangering the national solidarity." (A) Magyar Forradalmi etc... pp.463-464.

⁸⁰ A leading communal official of that time recalled: "It was quite conceivable even for religious Jews to join the Communist party to help it gain power over the right-wing conspirators, the NPP, and the FKGP..... It was in the interest of the Jews that the MKP should gather strength in order to reduce the influence of the right-wing Christian parties." Interview with Galor.

One can however agree with Bibó that the majority of those Jews "did not become Communists. Even less could they follow the Communist party after its various anti-capitalist measures. But they were keeping in mind that a regime which reconstructs capitalism in Hungary, could also mean the return of counter-revolutionary antisemitic actions."⁸¹

Many Jews were attracted to the MKP by its iron-handed treatment of the most infamous war criminals. Although this was a one-sided posture, which will be dealt with later in this chapter, the average Jew accepted at face value the zeal which the Communist-led political police showed in hounding down Hungarian Nazis. He was also impressed with the party's forceful indignation over the general lack of interest in the war crimes trials,⁸² over the leniency of some of the sentences, and over the other political parties' failure to be as critical about those as the MKP was.⁸³ Besides such passive appreciation of the party's harshness, a considerable number of Jews were drawn to the MKP by the opportunity it offered for active participation in the punishment of Hungarian Nazis.⁸⁴

⁸¹ pp. 346-347

⁸² A good example - which must have impressed many Jews - was a front page article in Szabad Nep, December 23, 1945, on the disinterest in the public trial of three men who played a decisive part in the deportation of the Jews.

⁸³ See the MKP's outraged reaction to the light sentence on a noted pro-Nazi journalist, Zoltan Mesko. (Szabad Nep, May 19, 1945).

⁸⁴ Although the proportion of Jews among the state prosecutors and judges was negligible (there is no evidence that any of those involved in the major war crimes trials were Jews), many could be found in the political police. This author, for instance, on his return from a concentration camp in August 1945, found that more than a dozen of his former mates in a Jewish forced labour battalion (about 8% of the total) were political police officers.

It is impossible to establish the exact number of Jewish MKP members. Party members' religion was not officially recorded, and any internal party document estimating their number, if it existed at all, has not been available. Furthermore, unlike the CPSU and the Roumanian Communist party, the MKP had no special department dealing with Jews, and owing to their close integration with the general population, Jews did not constitute any separate Jewish-Communist organisation. Their proportion of professional party workers and functionaries at local level indicates however that Jews must have joined the MKP in large numbers and presumably in 1945, because many reached reasonably high ranks relatively early.⁸⁵

The pattern of their deployment was similar to that in other East European Communist parties. Jews tended to be concentrated in the security police (because they were reliably anti-Nazis); in institutions dealing with international relations (because few others whom the party trusted spoke foreign languages), and in the propaganda organisations (because of their urban traditions and often higher than average educational level).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ According to a not wholly reliable source, of the 310 functionaries who were expelled from the party during its first membership revision in 1949, 256 were Jews (Cohen, p.33). Of the ten medium ranking officials in the party's central office, who were commended in 1948 for their work, six were Jews (Szabad Nep, June 22, 1948); so were at least seven of the sub-department heads and deputy heads who were decorated in 1950 (Szabad Nep, December 10). From his own experience, this author recalls that, between 1945 and 1949, in the party committee for the eight district of Budapest, two of the four second secretaries known to him, were Jews; so were the heads of the propaganda, cultural, and mass movements departments and their deputies. Although his knowledge about the fifth, sixth, and seventh districts was more limited, he recalls a similar situation there too. It must be noted that there was a concentration of Jewish residents in all those districts. Their proportion of the local officials probably reflected the Jews' relatively high proportion of the party members.

⁸⁶ For a more detailed explanation of this development, see Lendvai, 1971, p.77.

In Hungary, the head of the Communist-controlled political (security) police, Gabor Peter, and his deputy Istvan Timar, as well as many of the key officers and the heads of the political sections of local police branches in the provinces were Jews.⁸⁷ The general police force was controlled by Endre Szebenyi, the under-secretary of the Ministry of the Interior,⁸⁸ and Geza Revesz was the Communist representative on the committee which supervised the purge of the army.

Jewish share in the Communist propaganda work was considerable. The editorial staff of the Szabad Nep, the MKP's official daily newspaper, included a very large number of Jews, both veterans like Revai (its chief editor) and Aladar Mod, and budding young journalists,⁸⁹ Many Communists, whom the party planted into leading positions in the pseudo-independent sectors of the communications media (like the Hungarian Radio, the official news agency, and "Szabadsag", an allegedly non-party daily newspaper) were also Jews. So were many of the newly appointed university teachers.

Such a conspicuous preponderance of Jews in the MKP occasionally led to misjudgement of Jewish influence. A former Zionist leader, for instance, attributed non-Communist government officials' frequently easy compliance with the Zionists' various requests to their assumption that Zionism was an internal Jewish matter. They probably believed that because the most important Communists were Jews, if they wanted to remain in the good books of the MKP, they should not antagonise the Zionists or, for that matter, any other Jews.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Andras Villanyi and Gyorgy Balaban, for instance, who were successively heads of the political police force's "economic section", dealing with black-marketeers and currency speculators.

⁸⁸ The MKP later acknowledged Szebenyi, together with Gabor Peter, and Laszlo Solyom (a non-Jew) as the founder of the "democratic police". (Szabad Nep, January 25, 1948). Ferenc Nagy, an FGKP leader, who was forced into exile by the Communists while Prime Minister of Hungary, described in his memoirs Szebenyi as a man who "breathed revenge not only against all Germans and Nazis; but against everyone who was not a Marxist", p.118.

⁸⁹ When, after having achieved hegemony, the MKP honoured its most useful propagandists, the list of decorated journalists included eight Jewish members of the Szabad Nep staff. Szabad Nep, March 14, 1948.

⁹⁰ Interview with Galor.

Ominous identification of Jews with the MKP and naive exaggeration of probable Jewish influence could also be encountered.⁹¹ In fact however, specifically Jewish interests could never obtain the party's official support, unless they coincided with its tactical or strategic aims. At least three of the four most powerful Jewish Communists - Rakosi, Gero, and Revai - have never shown any affection to, or appreciation of specific Jewish problems.⁹²

Dismissing contemporary allegations that Communist rule in Hungary means Jewish rule, Bibo asserted that "Jews have now less power than ever before in recent times."⁹³ In the past, Bibo explained,

⁹¹ Dr. Fabian Herskovits, chief Rabbi at that time of the Dohany Street synagogue, the largest in Budapest, recalled two instances: 1) Dr. Ibranyi, a close associate of Cardinal Mindszenti, the Roman Catholic Primate of Hungary, during the early stages of the MKP's anti-church campaign, told him reproachingly: "You Jews say that we did not help you during the Nazi persecutions, although we did. But now, that you are in power, would you help us when we are persecuted?" 2) He was frequently approached by gentiles to help them get civil service jobs. When he claimed inability to do so, they usually said: "But could you not have a word with Mr. Rakosi?" indicating their belief that even a Jewish religious leader had easy access to the Jewish head of the atheist Communist party. Deposition by Dr. Herskovits, October 15, 1972.

⁹² This author's researches have not produced evidence for a similar attitude by the fourth, Farkas, but one could assume with almost certainty that his stand was not fundamentally different from the others. An emissary of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, who after the establishment of the State of Israel became its diplomatic representative in Hungary, recalled: "In Rakosi, Gero, and Revai, I could never find even the slightest trace of sympathy with Jewish problems." When negotiating in 1948 about Jewish emigration to Israel with Janos Kadar, then Minister of the Interior, Kadar told him: "You will have great difficulties with emigration because the Jewish members of the government, first of all Rakosi, are radically opposed to it. Their reason is obvious. They don't want to see posters appear one day telling that it was time for them too to emigrate." (Interview with Bentsur).

⁹³ p. 347.

"the Jewish sector of Hungarian capitalism was an organisation spread throughout the whole width of society.... This network could be utilised to help individual Jews if they had grievances or found themselves in difficulty because they were Jews. It was an organisation to amplify such cases with its massive strength and conduct its own actions in such a way that individual and communal Jewish interests were taken into account." He found it "more dubious" that Jewish Communists in positions of power constituted a similar network. Because of the MKP's discipline and structure "the various positions do not have their own individual support and balance, but depend on the powers asserting themselves both from the top and the bottom regions of the party. Therefore it depends on those powers and on the internal currents of the party how long an occupant can keep his position. Nobody could therefore regularly use the party for pursuing interests in other spheres without endangering his own position."⁹⁴

For Communist officials it was almost impossible to advance the specific interests of their fellow Jews because, as Bibó believed, the Jews' positions were more precarious under Communist rule than before. "While the previous, openly antisemitic regime needed legislation in order to dismiss Jews from economic posts or from the state administration, if the party leaders discover that for the sake of the party's further progress it was necessary that a certain number of posts should not be occupied by Jews, they could carry out those changes without any legislation, or even without uttering the word 'Jew'".⁹⁵

Not only was the MKP - in spite of its many Jewish officials - unwilling to concern itself favourably with specific Jewish interests, but, by the conditions of the Hungarian political life in 1945, it was in fact obliged to attract some of the most vigorously antisemitic elements of the population. Stalin's tactical "facade" policy compelled the Communists not only to tolerate, but actually to help to

⁹⁴ p.348 and p.350.

⁹⁵ pp.350-351.

create such a democratic political framework in which they were then prevented from seizing power immediately, but were forced instead into a popularity race with their national coalition partners. The MKP entered this race with a serious handicap because its main opponents were both better established organisationally and had deeper roots among the population.

The Independent Smallholders' Party, the FKGP,⁹⁶ was a mixed party. When set up after the First World War, it was based initially on peasants holding medium sized land. It stood for a moderate and gradual land reform and in the 1920s, with a substantial following, provided some opposition to the Horthy regime. In the 1930s, when its leadership was taken over by a conservative gentry, Tibor Eckhardt, it lost support, but after the outbreak of the Second World War, and another change in leaders, the party's constant defence of political democracy and its orientation to the Western powers in contrast to the regime's growing dependence on Germany, attracted liberal elements of the urban middle class and the intelligentsia.

The FKGP, firmly supporting private enterprise and opposing socialist principles, developed after the war into the most right-wing political bastion which was tolerated inside the ruling coalition. The FKGP could therefore count on a wide section of the population. It attracted many of the peasants (even those who acquired their holdings in the 1945 land distribution) of industrial and commercial entrepreneurs, of the urban petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. In other words, people who wanted to retain the political and economic elements of a bourgeois democracy, like the multi-party system and private property. In addition, the party also drew in such more right-wing elements from the middle and upper classes who recognised that only within the framework of the national coalition could they exert any political influence effectively and legitimately.

Another coalition partner, the National Peasant Party, the NPP⁹⁷

⁹⁶ The abbreviation of its name in Hungarian: Fuggetlen Kisgazda Part.

⁹⁷ Also the abbreviation of its name in Hungarian: Nemzeti Paraszt Part.

set up in 1939, was based on a group of radical intellectual experts on the peasant question, the so-called "village explorers". In spite of its ideology's racial overtones,⁹⁸ the Communists backed the NPP as a party which could detract peasant support from the FKGP. It was probably for this reason that they allowed the NPP to claim credit for the initiative on the long-overdue land distribution, though they redressed the balance by putting a Communist Minister of Agriculture in charge of it.⁹⁹ Thus when fighting for popular support, the MKP had no reason to impinge on the NPP's, in any case, relatively narrow base.

While the FKGP provided the Communists' strongest political opposition, the SZDP was their greatest competitor in the recruitment of members and sympathisers. During their 55 years of existence, the Social Democrats managed to entrench themselves firmly among the industrial labourers, (particularly the skilled ones), the technicians, clerical workers, employees in the distributive trades, and the artisans. Their stronghold was Budapest, where 48.8% of the industrial labourers were concentrated;¹⁰⁰ but the party also had branches in most of the industrial centres and mining districts. The Horthy regime tolerated the SZDP. The party was represented in parliament, it was allowed to maintain trade unions, party organisations, and press, but it was not permitted to work among the peasants, including the agricultural labourers.¹⁰¹ From the early 1930s, its membership was probably more radical than the leaders, but the latter's caution at least made possible the existence of a solid working-class organisation. After the war, the SZDP's influence grew rapidly among the artisans in the provinces, the urban liberal petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and foremost among the skilled workers in the largest industrial enterprises.¹⁰² The MKP had to watch as the

⁹⁸ The NPP's 1939 programme declared that it wanted to defend the Hungarian interests from the "middle classes of Swabian, Jewish, and Moravian origin." (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.341.

⁹⁹ For details and the MKP's motives see (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.437.

¹⁰⁰ Szabo, p.33.

¹⁰¹ Seton-Watson, 1950, p.39.

¹⁰² Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.488.

majority of the workers, particularly those with political experience, were joining the SZDP.¹⁰³

The Communist party itself entered the race for public support with a minute membership. In December 1944, its provisional central committee, working from the already liberated east Hungarian town of Debrecen, recorded only 3,058 members.¹⁰⁴ In Budapest, the citadel of the Hungarian proletariat, the MKP emerged from illegality in January 1945, with only 1,270 members, and in the following month, when the capital's industrial outer suburbs had also been liberated, its membership was still only 1,972.¹⁰⁵ But the Muscovite-dominated leadership, committed to launching the MKP in a popularity contest against the other political alternatives, was bound to boost membership almost indiscriminately. In January 1945, the provisional central committee (not yet including the leaders of the illegal party then still in the besieged capital) decided that the MKP must become a mass party,¹⁰⁶ and lifted previous restrictions on recruitment. The secretary of the southern district party committee defined the new policy clearly: "The restrictions, which we had applied against prospective members, must cease because they would force our sympathisers into other parties. People who were not Fascists and do not have to account for their past must be accepted. Our membership must be doubled. This is our slogan. It would be wrong to pursue our previous policy that only those with Marxist views should be accepted. Those who have moral bases for it, must be enrolled without any further delay."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ A Communist historian, recording this development, explained it by the drawing power of the SZDP's long history, by the fact that its leaders were better known than the Communists and because others believed the "demagogy" that, in contrast to the Communists' "subversive" activities, the SZDP will take a "more democratic" road to the liberation of the working class. Sagvari, p.10.

¹⁰⁴ Szabo, p.30.

¹⁰⁵ Sagvari, pp.92-93.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Szabo, p.31.

The central committee emphasised the vital importance of this new principle in its instructions to the district party organisations,¹⁰⁸ clearly aware, as a Communist historian recalled later that "the rivalry with the SZDP, furthermore the situation in which, as a result of the coalition system, the leading posts held by the individual parties often depended on the size of their membership, made it necessary for the MKP to accelerate the recruitment of members."¹⁰⁹

Forceful recruiting quickly bore fruits. By the time of its first national conference in May 1945, the MKP had 150,000 members in 1,500 branches,¹¹⁰ 3,000% up on its membership only five months earlier. One-third of them lived in Budapest and its immediate vicinity, and there were strong concentrations in the northern town of Miskolc and its industrial suburbs (31,335 members), and in the mining district around the town of Salgotarjan (10,500 members).¹¹¹ The composition of this newly recruited mass reflected the resources on which the MKP could draw.

Data on the occupational distribution of the membership are unavailable on a national level, but local figures nevertheless indicate the trend. Although many middle-class people and intellectuals joined the party,¹¹² it was the industrial workers who constituted the majority,

¹⁰⁸ A circular by its organisation department stated: "We can cope with the huge task before us only if we have a strong, sturdy, battle-hardened Bolshevik mass party which is able to organise and lead the fight of the working class, and the whole of the Hungarian people, for a free, independent, democratic Hungary.... We must become a political mass party. This means new tasks which we must solve with new methods." Szabo, p.41.

¹⁰⁹ Sagvari, p.135.

¹¹⁰ Szabo, p.49.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.50.

¹¹² In three counties for which data are available, defined as "others" they constituted less than 20% of the membership (4,608 out of 27,000). Of the 480 party officials in and around Budapest, registered by May 26, 31% were categorised as intellectuals, "others" and "of petty bourgeois occupations". Szabo, pp.51-52.

and in Budapest, the overwhelming majority of the members.¹¹³

It could be reasonably assumed that at least a proportion of those workers had previously sympathised with the ultra-right Arrow Cross (Nyilas) Party, whose members had committed despicable atrocities against Jews during the Szalasi era. This assumption is reasonable because the bulk of the solidly Marxist section of the working class was already in the SZDP before the war, and the majority of those previously unaffiliated, but with political experience (as the MKP itself admitted it, see N 103) joined the SZDP and not the MKP.¹¹⁴ Thus, those who were left to provide the masses for the new-style MKP were the less educated, less class-conscious elements and the "lumpenproletariat" who had previously chosen not the Marxist but a confused racialist-socialist ideology in their search for better living standards and a higher social status.

Their number was considerable. The ultra-right wing parties, including the largest, the Arrow Cross Party, had strong working class support in the 1930s. The results of the last pre-war general elections in 1939, indicate this clearly. The SZDP received only 112,000 votes, and lost six parliamentary mandates, while the ultra-right wing parties received 548,000 votes and, entering parliament for the first time, could immediately occupy 50 seats.¹¹⁵ Another convincing pointer to ultra-right wing influence among the working class was the Arrow Cross Party's sufficient strength to organise a miners' strike in October 1940. It started in the Salgotarjan area (where, incidentally, in 1945, the MKP membership campaign was very successful, see p.75) and spread quickly to other districts. Although the SZDP and the trade unions opposed the strike right from the beginning, it still lasted in some places until early November.

¹¹³ In the three counties already mentioned in N 112, 12,649 were industrial workers, and 10,311 agricultural labourers. 65% of the party officials in and around Budapest and 87% of the district committee members were industrial workers. Ibid.

¹¹⁴ There was also a flow of SZDP members to the MKP (Sagvari, p.103). They were probably either genuinely more radical than the leadership or were Communists who had infiltrated the SZDP to influence its policy and seek a legitimate and wider outlet for Communist ideas.

¹¹⁵ (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.337.

The leaders of the MKP must have known that the party had to attract those Arrow Crossist working class elements if it wanted to enlarge its membership. This consideration led to a policy on the former Nazis, which on the one hand, demanded the ruthless punishment of the most infamous ones, while on the other, preached leniency for the Arrow Cross small-fry (kisnyilasok). From the early summer of 1945, when the growing strength of the FKGP and the SZDP became increasingly evident, the MKP launched an intensive campaign to recruit these minor Nazis and their sympathisers. The first bait was thrown out by Rakosi himself,¹¹⁶ and, after lengthy reports on their sorry lot, in the internment camps,¹¹⁷ the party's official organ, the Szabad Nep, in an editorial, came to the conclusion that "the deceived masses need to be generously forgiven. Forgiveness for the deceived and retribution for the guilty: this is the essence of our policy."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ He told the party's national conference at the end of May: "It is intolerable that the People's Courts strike down only on the Arrow Cross small-fry, that those really responsible escape with insignificant punishments." (Szabad Nep, May 23, 1945). A few weeks later, Rakosi put this point more forcefully: "It is time for a drastic change. The cases of the misled little men, of the workers, must be viewed differently from those who were in responsible positions." (Szabad Nep, June 10, 1945).

¹¹⁷ A report (on June 9, 1945) on an internment camp said that "the majority were tattered proletarians without class consciousness, who had sold themselves for a mass of potage.... It will do them no harm to learn with the swat of hard constructive work to repent for the destruction of which they were the blind tools. Then, then for those who showed with their work that they genuinely wanted to remedy some of the damage they had caused, it must be made possible to work freely..." Another report on June 14, 1945 (under the title: "The big-shot Arrow Crossists eat, relax, and let themselves be served - the small ones work") quoted an "elderly illiterate woman" saying: "They deceived us, they promised us more, this is why we joined the party." (i.e. the Arrow Cross Party - G.G).

¹¹⁸ July 7, 1945.

Closer still to the date of the general elections, the paper credited the MKP with the relaxation of the electoral law.¹¹⁹ Under these new regulations only those were deprived of their voting rights who had been forcibly retired by "clearing committees,"¹²⁰ or received even more severe sentences. People under police surveillance only were permitted to vote.

As the MKP was trying to attract the former perpetrators of antisemitic atrocities, it did not want to antagonise the beneficiaries of the Horthy and Szalasi regimes' anti-Jewish measures. At no stage did the party criticise the grass-roots resistance to the proper material recompensation of the Jews and to their re-entry into their formal positions. The extent to which the party affected the government's insensitive treatment of recompensation, could not be established. The MKP, however, did initiate the public airing of resentment over the Jews' alleged demands of privileges on account of their sufferings. The Szabad Nep's first legally published issue on March 25, 1945, bluntly condemned this alleged Jewish attitude and even threatened those making such demands.¹²¹ Coming from the MKP, this could be interpreted as a policy at the least tolerated, if not actually sanctioned by the occupying power, the Soviet Union. Some subsequent manifestations of anti-Jewish

¹¹⁹ August 28, 1945.

¹²⁰ These committees, comprising representatives of the four coalition parties and the trade unions, were set up in the ministries, the army, and all the civil service institutions to investigate the pasts of their employees and sack or forcibly retire those with Nazi associations.

¹²¹ This article was written by Jozsef Darvas, a leader of the NPP, who was probably one of the Communists who had infiltrated that party. He declared that "nobody, not even on the excuse of past sufferings, as a certain section of Jewry would like to do, should be exempted from sharing the toils and sacrifices which are necessary for the building of a democratic Hungary," and added that such mistaken ideas must be urgently eliminated because "democratic Hungary will cast off those who do not want to comply. Not as Jews but as saboteurs of the democratic reconstruction."

feelings, by the public, by national leaders of the NPP and by the lower ranking officials of other parties (the FKGP, for instance) were roundly condemned by various party journals with the notable exception however of the Communist party.¹²² The MKP, publicly demonstrated very little interest in the fate of the Jews and when it did, it was to help to emphasise some other propaganda points.¹²³ References to Jews were usually unfavourable, like those to the Weiss and Chorin families (both were big industrialists) that "for 25 years (they) readily served the Hungarian reactionaries and for 4 years manufactured arms loyally for the Germans to execute Jews and non-Jews."¹²⁴

In this period the MKP was not yet interested in controlling the Jewish communal organisations, with the notable exception of the "Joint", which possessed large funds. Erik Molnar, the Communist Minister of Social Welfare, assigned two Jewish Communists to control the administration of "Joint" funds. Although the "Joint" had to put them on its own payroll, their sole duty was to maintain liaison between the "Joint" and the ministry. Moreover, the MKP succeeded in an attempt to procure a share from the "Joint" aid, which had been exclusively assigned to help Jews. Under pressure by Communist government ministers, the American leaders of the "Joint" eventually agreed that 5% of the funds given for Hungary could be used to assist non-Jewish institutions. The allocations were made by the Hungarian leaders of the "Joint" but on the advice of the Ministry of Social Welfare. The largest aid went to the MKP's "Rakosi Childrens Home", and considerable amounts to the Budapest police and to the Communist-controlled political police.¹²⁵

¹²² Leaders of the national Jewish communal organisations in their "Memorandum" listed a number of those anti-Jewish manifestations and referred to press response to them, but did not mention any from Szabad Nep. It is unlikely that those leaders would have deliberately omitted references to Szabad Nep at that time, as they were still seeking MKP support. This author's study of the MKP press of 1945 could also not produce evidence of such condemnation.

¹²³ Szabad Nep (May 18, 1945) reported that an MKP delegation went to Austria to find political detainees, Jewish women and members of forced labour battalions. It did not fail to point out that the delegation had found them in one camp under Soviet control, in very good, and in another, under American command, in very bad conditions.

¹²⁴ Szabad Nep, April 8, 1945.

¹²⁵ Deposition by Dr. F. Gorog, pp. 1-2.

Communist influence over the largest communal organisation, the Israelite Congregation of Pest (Pesti Izraelita Hitkozseg, PIH) was not exerted directly by the central committee, but through Jewish Communists, at this stage presumably on their own initiative. The most vocal among them was Dr. Laszlo Benedek, a physician. Early in 1945, he^{was} admitted to the PIH executive, and appointed director of its hospital. There he assembled a caucus of Jewish Communists, some of whom were to be assigned later to key positions, in other Jewish institutions, including the "Joint".¹²⁶ The Zionists, who were then making determined efforts to take over the PIH, regarded Benedek's appearance as Communist infiltration but did not object to it. The PIH leadership's two-fold aim was then to make itself as broadly representative of the political spectrum and as acceptable to the authorities as possible. As the MKP was an integral part of the political scene and shared power, its representation on the PIH executive was taken for granted. The particular choice of Benedek was influenced by his being a relative of Zoltan Vas, a prominent Communist leader and one of Rakosi's closest collaborators. He was thus viewed as a possibly useful communications channel to the highest echelons of the MKP.¹²⁷

The Communists' activities in the PIH were then largely confined to subtle demonstrations of their party's indispensability and its opposition to racialism.¹²⁸ Their weakness was indicated by the contents

¹²⁶ Interview with Galor.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ An example of the former: the Anglo-Jewish Association invited the presidents of the Neolog and the Orthodox communities and of the Zionist organisation to an international conference in London. Stockler, the president of the PIH, insisted that Benedek, whose position then did not justify it, should be in the delegation, because through his influence it was likelier to receive exit permits from the Soviet authorities. (Interview with Galor). An example for the latter: Endre Sos, a Communist, reported to a PIH council meeting that the MKP branch of Hajduszoboszlo had complained to the government about the antisemitic remarks of an NPP leader during an election rally (Magyar Nemzet, November 21, 1945). Sos obviously preferred referring to the MKP's complaint rather than to the four-page protest leaflet which the local Jewish council had issued about the same incident. See p.6 1N. 72

of the "Memorandum" which was prepared jointly by the leaders of the national communal organisations. While this document reveals Zionist inspiration,¹²⁹ its tone implies no Communist influence.¹³⁰ As it was prepared for presentation to the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry on Palestine (which the Soviet Union opposed) and eventually submitted to it by a delegation in Vienna with the obvious consent of the Soviet authorities (without that the delegates could not have travelled abroad), the strength of the Zionist and the lack of the Communist point of view reflects the apparently small Communist influence in the Jewish communal organisations.

The MKP's general indifference to Jewish communal affairs did not apply to Zionism. At its highest level the party publicly expressed a doctrinaire, bitterly hostile anti-Zionism. Initially a few prominent Communists sympathised and even maintained links with Hashomer Hatzair, the extreme-left Zionist movement,¹³¹ but the MKP's first official pronouncement on Zionism was an attack in the Szabad Nep. This came unexpectedly, following a Zionist youth march through the streets of Budapest as part of a Communist-organised Youth Day Parade.¹³² The paper accused

¹²⁹ It strongly emphasises, and probably exaggerates the number of those who wish to emigrate to Palestine and concludes that "all circles of Hungarian Jewry those who do not wish to go to Palestine, or even those who wish to remain in Hungary, solidarize themselves fully with that part of World Jewry which sticks to Palestine and wishes to establish an Independent Jewish National Home." Quoted verbatim from English text).

¹³⁰ The customary expression of gratitude to the Soviet Army is absent and in a wide selection of quotes from various party journals condemning manifestations of antisemitism, there is no reference to the MKP's official newspaper.

¹³¹ Watching the May Day parade, Gabor Peter, head of the political police was enthusiastic about the size and discipline of the Hashomer Hatzair contingent. He accepted them as comrades who had proved their loyalty to the labour movement during the war and did not deny their right to work freely. Another prominent Communist, Gyorgy Non, then general-secretary of the Communist youth movement, on his return from Moscow lectured in May, a Hashomer Hatzair leadership course on his impressions. Both Peter and Non however had personal reasons for such attitudes. A number of political police officers were then still Hashomer Hatzair members, including Jozsef Megyeri, one of Peter's close associates and Arie Morgenstern, his personal Russian interpreter. Gyorgy Non too was an old acquaintance of Megyeri with whom he had been in hiding during the Szalasi regime (Interview Meir).

¹³² A Hashomer Hatzair publication, a few days before the attack said that the Zionist marchers "sang Hebrew songs about freedom, about the oppression of the working class and about liberation.... It was the first time that Jewish youth marched in Budapest under the blue-and-white flag. (The Zionist colours - G.G). For this we must be grateful to the new democratic policy which creates the unity of youth not on the principles of the Hitler Jugend (the Nazi organisation - G.G.) but on those of MADISZ (the Hungarian Communist youth movement - G.G)" Az Ut, June, 14, 1945.

Zionists of "trying to finish the unfinished work of the Fascists by separating the Jews from the Hungarian nation. The reflections of Fascist trappings, and, here and there of Fascist mentality accompany this curious experiment."¹³³ This was followed a few days later by a veiled threat¹³⁴ and then by an equation of Zionism and Fascism:

"There is today only one form of Fascism which dares to appear openly, Jewish Fascism, Zionism. There are naive people who believe that - because Fascists had murdered Jews - everything Jewish is anti-Fascist. Exploiting this widely accepted mistake, Fascism, in Jewish cloak, has swung into attack in Hungary. We can see it in the declarations of certain chief rabbis (a reference to Dr. Herskovits, who was then chief rabbi of Budapest's largest synagogue - G.G), and in the Hitler-Jugend type marches of Zionist youth."¹³⁵

Such unconditional condemnation of Zionism reflected primarily the views of the highest party leadership, and particularly of Rakosi. He refused flatly to be engaged in any dialogue, not even about the ultra-left interpretation of Zionism,¹³⁶ and treated socialist Zionists with the same suspicion as other enemies.¹³⁷

¹³³ Szabad Nep, June 22, 1945

¹³⁴ Commenting on a public demand by a Zionist leader that "the Jews should be recognised as a nation," the MKP's official organ declared: "When the people of this country.... are working that the Hungarians should be recognised as a nation.... to Dr. Fabian Herskovits nothing is more important than the additional recognition of the Jews within an as yet unrecognised nation.... We must protest against attempts to divide the Hungarians - whichever side they come from." Szabad Nep, June 28, 1945.

¹³⁵ Szabad Nep, July 5, 1945. It appeared in a review of a play on a Jewish subject.

¹³⁶ Ferenc Jambor, a Hungarian-speaking Transylvanian-born Palestinian, who was then working in Budapest as an emissary to the Hashomer Hatzair head office, prepared a memorandum for Rakosi's attention in which he analysed the ideological relationship of Zionism and Communism. After the MKP's appropriate department refused to accept it, the document was submitted through private contacts, but Rakosi never responded to it. (Interview with Meir).

¹³⁷ At the end of 1945, Rakosi received a delegation of socialist Zionist leaders, representatives of Ichud, a Social Democratic type of Zionist party, and of Hashomer Hatzair. A few months after that inconclusive meeting, those same persons were called to the Soviet Army command, where they discovered that Rakosi had fully recorded their conversation on a wax disc. The record was played back to the delegation and they were questioned about its contents. (Interview with A. Rosinger).

In the lower ranks the Zionists found more willingness to argue and a less rigid rejection. Hashomer Hatzair leaders, who held discussions with unidentified but presumably lower ranking MKP representatives after the Szabad Nep attacks recalled that those "did not deny the progressive nature of the socialist Zionism, neither did they question the value and the importance of our work in Palestine or that of the Palestinian workers." They opposed Zionism because "it wanted to take out of Hungary the working class Jews, while the speculators, the blackmarketeers, in other words the unhealthy types would remain there."¹³⁸

Communist and Social Democrat speakers used similar arguments in a public debate with Zionists in the provincial town of Kaposvar. Furthermore they showed concern that "who would guarantee that the Jews would have a better life in Palestine than in Hungary, that the present Hungarian-Jewish conflict would not just be translated into an Arab-Jewish conflict?"¹³⁹ A Communist writer (ranking much lower than the author of anti-Zionist Szabad Nep theatre review), who was willing to address a Zionist meeting, told them that the MKP "was a great enemy of chauvinism, but not of folk nationalism, therefore neither of Zionism, which wanted to assemble Jewry in a true folk nationalism."¹⁴⁰ In practical work too, the party was more tolerant than its leaders on an ideological level. The Communist-controlled political police, for instance, overlooked the illegal activities of Palestinian Zionist emissaries who were maintaining a transport route to the West for Jewish emigrants from neighbouring Roumania through Hungary,¹⁴¹ while district committees in Budapest requested and received help from the socialist Zionist parties in the general election campaign.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Az Ut, Ju.y 12, 1945.

¹³⁹ Jelenunk, Jovonk, 1946. No closer date given, but contents indicate that it was probably published in July.

¹⁴⁰ IMHE, Vol.II, No. February 1946.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Y.Talmi.

¹⁴² Interview with Meir. During the campaign the Hashomer Hatzair journal "Az Ut", on August 30, 1945, wrote: "We regard it the natural duty not only of us, Marxist Zionists, but of the whole Hungarian Jewry to support the workers' parties"; while "IMHE", the journal of Ichud, declared on September 27, 1945: "We stand with all our strength behind the workers' parties." References to the "workers' parties" reflected the position that the MKP and the SZDP entered the Budapest municipal elections, which preceded the general elections, on a joint list.

* * *

The first phase in the post-war power struggle came to an end with the two elections in the Autumn of 1945. The first, on October 7, was held for municipal councils of Budapest and the suburbs in the surrounding industrial belt which later became parts of Greater Budapest. The second, on November 7, was a general parliamentary election. The MKP favoured this timing, because it believed that the party would win the Budapest local elections with a convincing majority and that would then decisively affect the result of the general election.¹⁴³

The results of the Budapest municipal elections contradicted sharply such optimistic predictions. Although the SZDP and the MKP entered the Budapest and suburban elections on a joint ticket (under the name of the Workers' United Front), they received only 42.8% of the votes in Budapest, where the FGKP obtained an absolute majority with 50.54%. In the suburbs of the industrial belt, the united ticket won 55.59% and the FGKP 42.18%.¹⁴⁴ The rest of the votes were divided between the NPP and the two small urban parties, the Civil Radical Party and the Civil Democratic Party. The United Front's victory in the industrial suburbs was due largely to the fact that the SZDP and the trade unions had long-standing bases in those areas, and that many of their veteran and best-known leaders worked in those suburbs.¹⁴⁵

The election results had several consequences. The SZDP immediately realised the weakness inherent in a union with the MKP and decided to enter the general election separately. The MKP recognised the fact that the FKGP had succeeded in recruiting most of the anti-left voters into a single party. Faced with a Communist defeat, the Soviet occupiers intervened. Marshal Voroshilov, the Soviet chairman of the Allied Control

¹⁴³ Sagvari, pp.156-157.

¹⁴⁴ Sagvari, pp.173-174.

¹⁴⁵ This was acknowledged even by a later Communist historian. Sagvari, p.174.

Commission in Hungary, forced on the FKGP an agreement that regardless of the general election result, a coalition government of the FKGP, the MKP, and the SZDP, and the NPP, will be formed.¹⁴⁶

The general election - which was more representative of public opinion than any previous one¹⁴⁷ affirmed the Soviet alarm. The MKP received only 17% of the votes; the SZDP fared slightly better with 17.4%; the NPP collected 7%, and the two small Budapest-based urban parties, a total of 1.6% of the votes. The majority (57%) supported the FKGP.¹⁴⁸ This was not only true for the country as a whole - including the predominantly agricultural areas - but also for the basically industrial and commercial centres.¹⁴⁹

Communist historians have attributed the MKP's defeat to a variety of reasons. The recently published official history of the Hungarian labour movements claimed that the MKP had overrated its own influence and had undervalued the strength of the right-wing. The party based its hopes on the success of its May Day parade, and on the initial success of the economic reconstruction, particularly on the unexpectedly quick progress of railway reconstruction.¹⁵⁰ An earlier assessment by a Communist historian blamed bad timing. The

¹⁴⁶ Seton-Watson, 1950, p.193.

¹⁴⁷ A wider section of the population was allowed to vote than in pre-war elections. 72.8% of the total population was entitled to vote and 89.9% of them exercised their rights. Compare this to the 1935 elections, when 27.9% of the population had voting rights, and 79.8% used them. Sagvari, pp.172-173.

¹⁴⁸ Sagvari, p.181

¹⁴⁹ The combined results of 24 commercial and industrial towns showed 54.4% for the FKGP, 25.4% for the SZDP, and only 14.3% - less than the national average - for the MKP. Sagvari, p.184.

¹⁵⁰ A Magyar Forradalmi, p.467.

elections were held when the masses have not yet had time to appreciate fully the MKP's achievements in economic reconstruction and in the changing of the social structure. Even the majority of those peasants who had benefited from the Communist-inspired land redistribution voted for the FKGP. Timing was also bad because, on the one hand, the "reactionary forces" had already been able to unite their ranks behind the FKGP. He also claimed that the MKP was then still lacking experience in conducting election campaigns.¹⁵¹

As for the contemporary Communist analysts, it must have been clear that the tactics which the MKP had been employing since its re-entry into the Hungarian political arena must have had serious faults.

¹⁵¹ J. Molnar. pp. 312-313.

¹ See p. 73.

² (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p. 469.

³ Magyar, pp. 200-201.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PRICE OF GREATER POWER - THE TOLERANCE OF ZIONISTS

The MKP Changes Tactics

The MKP's defeat in the general elections produced a fundamental - by then both possible and inevitable - change in Communist tactics. It was possible because by the end of 1945, with the Soviet Union firmly entrenched in the new political landscape of Europe, Stalin grew probably less wary of antagonising his former Western partners and more prepared to replace the "facade" policy with direct action in the contest for Communist hegemony. At the same time the Hungarian Communist leaders presumably realised that a tactical change was also inevitable because the election results had exposed two basic faults in their "facade" tactics.

One was the party's inability to rely exclusively on genuine popular support. The MKP's achievements were by no means negligible. While in December, 1944, it could account for only 3,058 members,¹ within less than a year it was able to muster 800,000 votes.² But even this represented only 17% of the electorate, although the MKP had carefully concealed its anti-capitalist facet.

While the bourgeois democratic forces were gathering confidence from their election victory and the MKP was compelled to reveal more and more of its anti-capitalist aims, the prospects for increased popular support seemed meagre. The other fault of the "facade" policy was the danger that the MKP would alienate both the genuinely revolutionary elements and its natural power base, the working class. The revolutionaries appeared to be increasingly opposed on local party branch level to the central committee's policy. They objected to the MKP's participation in the coalition government, to the concessions it had granted to bourgeois democratic parties, and demanded both armed anti-government action and the dismissal of the central committee.³

¹ See p. 74

² (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p. 469

³ Sagvari, pp. 200-201

The lack of working class support showed itself in a number of wildcat strikes in large factories.⁴ The central leadership disowned these strikes on the grounds that "they were helping the reactionary forces" by reducing productivity and thereby weakening the economy of the democratic state, but the local party officials frequently supported them.⁵

Under such circumstances the MKP embarked on a new, three-pronged tactic. To strengthen its position in the government, the party secured a firm hold on the levers of real power. Although in the new coalition government half of the 18 portfolios were held by the FKGP, the 4 in the Communist hands included the Ministry of the Interior (which they took over from the NPP), thus consolidating their control of the police. They retained the Ministry of Transport, which offered a good opportunity to demonstrate quickly and spectacularly their efficiency, zeal, and enthusiasm, through the continued reconstruction of bridges and the railway. As the other economic ministries were held by their coalition partners, the MKP, in December 1945, forced through the establishment of a Supreme Economic Council. This, under the leadership of the Communist Zoltan Vas, subsequently extended party control over the most important fields of economic policy-making and, as Communist historians pointed it out later, "gradually curtailed the influences of those economic ministries which were in the hands of right-wingers."⁶

The second prong of this tactic was to reduce political opposition. The party put into motion its so-called "salami tactics", which meant the slice-by-slice whittling away of its adversaries. The essence of this tactic was to compromise section by section the coalition parties, force them to eject the opponents of subservient collaboration with the Communists until they could be safely placed under the leadership of obedient stooges.

⁴ Ibid, p.201

⁵ Ibid, p.201, p.205.

⁶ Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.511.

The MKP's initial target was the strongest of its opponents, the FKGP. In March, 1946, the Communists persuaded the SZDP and the NPP to form with them and the Communist-dominated Trade Unions Council, a so-called "Left-Wing Bloc". This after having demonstrated its strength with an impressive mass rally in Budapest, served an ultimatum, on the FKGP, demanding the expulsion of 21 parliamentary deputies as the condition for maintaining the coalition. The FKGP leadership, aware of the Soviet Union's insistence on coalition government, surrendered. To the Communists, who probably regarded it as a test case, this exposed the FKGP's vulnerability to such methods. During 1946, the police, with the assistance of the Soviet occupation forces, collected evidence against several other FKGP deputies, incriminating them in various anti-government conspiracies and attacks on Soviet soldiers, thus preparing the ground for another carving up operation.⁷

The third prong of the new Communist tactic was the application of extra-parliamentary pressure, in other words, mob action. This served two purposes - on the one hand it frightened the MKP's coalition partners, and on the other helped to regain the loyalty of the wavering party militants, and of the workers who had been dissatisfied with the extent of Communist support for their wages demands. These mob actions, which the Communist terminology defined as "popular movements" (népmozgalom) were organized by local party branches on instructions from the highest leadership.⁸ They were conducted primarily against two targets: such enterprise managers, local administrators and civil servants who refused to comply with the Communists' demands, or were obstinate FKGP supporters,⁹ and against petty capitalists, mainly food suppliers, like bakers, millers, grocers, etc, who were either genuinely or allegedly blackmarketeers and speculators.

⁷ For Communist interpretations of this period, see Molnar, 1967, Vol.II. pp.517-537; (A) Magyar Forradalmi, pp.471-503. A concise summary of the application of this "salami tactics" by a Western historian can be found in Seton-Watson, 1950, pp.193-202.

⁸ Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.517.

⁹ For examples, see Molnar 1967, Vol.II, pp.518-519.

It was this aspect of the new Communist tactics, the use of mob action, which had the most immediate and the strongest effect on the MKP's relationship with the Jewish population, because a large proportion of the petty capitalists were Jews. At the end of 1945, more than 35% (18,013 out of 51,299) of the gainfully employed Jews in Budapest were engaged as "independents" in commerce and industry, and their proportion, including employees as well, amounted to almost 50%.¹⁰ Data on the provinces are not available, but it can be assumed that the proportions were largely similar. Although Communist agitation picked them out as class enemies, the incitement for mob action helped to release the participants' latent antisemitism. Two more factors contributed to the increased number of anti-Jewish atrocities committed in the general climate of Communist-initiated mob actions. One was the self-confidence gained by the right-wing elements from the FKGP's election victory,¹¹ the other the growing antisemitism of the peasants which manifested itself in a number of anti-Jewish atrocities in villages.¹²

¹⁰ A table on the distribution of Budapest Jews by industry and occupation in 1945, on which these proportionate figures are based, can be found in Duschinsky, p.400.

¹¹ Although a Szabad Nep story (June 16, 1946) that blood-libel rumours (i.e. allegations that Jews had murdered Christian children to use their blood in religious rituals) had been circulated by FKGP members and nuns, could have been politically-motivated exaggeration, the FKGP did in fact force through an amnesty for petty political offenders against the opposition of the MKP and the Soviet authorities (Nagy, p.252). Prisoners serving sentences under two years were freed and the sentences of those imprisoned for between two and five years were halved. A Franciscan friar who could not have been a Communist sympathiser, delivered an antisemitic sermon in Budapest (JTA, August 4, 1946), and it is unlikely that a teacher, on whose instigation his students painted antisemitic slogans on walls in Pecs (JTA, November 27, 1946) or another who disseminated blood-libel stories in Zalalovo (Vilag, June 7, 1946) were Communists. In fact some of the anti-Jewish atrocities were directed against the MKP too. In the industrial town of Ozd, for instance, it started with the beating up of the MKP secretary, continued with an attack on a Jewish police officer who was trying to calm down the mob, and ended in the looting of Jewish properties (Jewish Chronicle, May 3, 1946). In Nyirtas, the attack was initially against a joint MKP -SZDP meeting, it developed into an antisemitic demonstration and culminated in the stabbing of a Jewish Communist. (Szabad Nep, June 18, 1946).

¹² For an analysis of its possible reasons, see S.Gervai; "Parasztság és zsidóság," Uj Elet, June 5, 1946.

The series of antisemitic incidents started immediately after the general elections. In the mining town of Salgotarjan, on the announcement of the FKGP's victory, about 8,000 people staged a march demanding "Death to the Jews." In December, during a performance of George Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" in the National Theatre in Budapest, a fight broke out in the audience, after a remark by one of the play's characters that he would not tolerate Jews on Christian soil. In the same month workers at the Weiss works in Csepel demanded the immediate dismissal of Jewish employees.¹³ Manifestations of antisemitism and actual anti-Jewish atrocities occurred with increasing frequency in the first half of 1946, and occasionally until the end of the year.¹⁴

The Communist party's first - one would assume almost spontaneous - response to the anti-Jewish incidents was a swift, though tactfully unpublicised castigation of the offenders.¹⁵ But presumably after deeper consideration of the political factors involved, the party adopted a more ambiguous stand. Although Rakosi admitted publicly that anti-Jewish incidents had appeared in consequence of the Communist-incited "popular movements" and that the party had made a mistake by providing "undemocratic elements, criminals, semi-Fascists, gypsies, and others" with opportunities to interfere and cause such excesses,¹⁶ the MKP's chief ideologue, Revai, defined precisely the party's priorities: it must support those "popular movements" even if they lead to antisemitic incidents.¹⁷

¹³ These three incidents were referred to in "Memorandum etc".

¹⁴ Duschinsky (pp.418-420) lists 13 cases and in the first half of 1946, ten more incidents could be compiled from various other sources (Jewish Chronicle, May 3, 1946 and June 14, 1946; JTA March 26, 1946; Szabad Nep, April 2, 1946 and May 30, 1946; Kis Ujsag May 12, 1946 and June 13, 1946). These included dissemination of blood libel rumours, the expulsion of Jews from villages, the burning down of a synagogue, attack on Jewish residents and a number of lynchings in Budapest. In the second half, one each were reported in September and October (JTA September 13 and October 2), and four in November (Vilag, November 12, and 19, JTA, November 27).

¹⁵ The FKGP daily, the Kis Ujsag, reported on March 21, 1946, that the MKP had expelled one of its provincial parliamentary deputies and nine of his accomplices for having committed violence, including the beating up of Jews. The MKP's official organs, the Szabad Nep did not report this action.

¹⁶ Szabadsag, March 27, 1946.

¹⁷ Szabad Nep, March 31, 1946.

Pogroms: Who were Responsible

The wave of antisemitic manifestations and outright anti-Jewish atrocities culminated in two pogroms which claimed the deaths of four Jews and injured scores of others, in the summer of 1946. Hungarian Communist historians regard both equally as part of a series of "counter-revolutionary provocations", thus minimising the anti-Jewish nature of those incidents as well as placing the responsibility squarely on "anti-democratic" and "Fascist" forces.¹⁸ However, a closer study of the two pogroms reveals such differences which must have influenced the MKP's attitude. In the first, at Kunmadaras on May 21, 1946, the explicitly anti-Jewish nature of the mob action was beyond doubt and the MKP itself acknowledged it as such. In the second case, at Miskolc on July 31 and August 1, 1946, the authorities, above all the Communist-controlled Ministry of the Interior, tried to conceal the anti-Jewish nature of the atrocities.

The social environments of the pogroms were also unquestionably different. The first, at Kunmadaras, happened in a village where most of the participants were peasants. The second took place in the north-Hungarian industrial town of Miskolc where the mob consisted mostly of factory workers. A further important difference was that while at Kunmadaras the pogrom was associated with a protest against the punishment of a Hungarian Nazi, in Miskolc it was in direct consequence to Communist agitation against black-marketeers.

The MKP's attitude to the pogroms must be viewed in the context of its general policy at the time, i.e. the application of its "salami tactics", in other words, in its relevance to the Communist attempt to discredit political opponents. It must be taken into consideration also, how strongly, if at all, did the "popular movements" influence the developments at Kunmadaras. In the case of the Miskolc incident, the direct link was obvious.

¹⁸A recent history of the labour movements in Hungary lists the pogroms together with a demonstration on behalf of a war criminal, another against the two Socialist parties, and with the murder in Budapest of two Soviet Army officers. (A) Magyar Forradalmi, etc, pp.481-482.

A true reconstruction of the events at Kunmadaras is difficult for the very reason that the political parties related it to their political battle. Consequently, reports on the events and their backgrounds in the party presses and by politicians are contradictory, and by no means objective. From a collation of information from various sources,¹⁹ it appears however, that the immediate antecedent of the pogrom was a court case against a local schoolteacher, who had been a chief instructor in the Levente movement, a para-military youth organisation during the Horthy regime. The teacher was sentenced to a three years and eight months imprisonment in 1945 for "crimes against the people", but released immediately after his trial. The higher judicial authority ordered a re-trial to be held by the district court in a nearby town on May 20, 1946. Some 600 sympathisers, including the secretary of the local FKGP branch, who believed that the teacher was innocent, accompanied him to the court, where the principal prosecution witnesses were Communists from Kunmadaras.

On their return, in the evening, the teacher and most of his escorts assembled in a communal hall, a group brought in the prosecution witnesses who were then forced to withdraw their accusations. Another group went for the Jewish secretary of the local SZDP branch, whom they beat up on their way to the hall. A rumour about the disappearance of a child and its possible murder by Jews for ritual reasons was raised in the assembly. On the following day, May 21, which was a market day, the rumours about the child and accusations about the unjustified persecution of the teacher were spread in the crowd, which eventually attacked local Jews, murdering two of them, injured one seriously, and about 80 others slightly. Police enforcement, led by the head of the provincial police department's political division was brought in and about 100 people were arrested,

¹⁹ The following sources were used: Szabad Nep (official organ of the MKP); Kis Ujsag (Official organ of the FKGP); Nepszava (official organ of the SZDP); BBC "Daily Digest of World Broadcast" based on the monitoring of Radio Budapest; Jewish Chronicle; Szabadsag (nominally independent but Communist-sympathiser daily); Vilag (official organ of the Citizens' Democratic Party).

Party political considerations began to be exerted on the course of action at this stage. Using the absence abroad of the Social Democratic Minister of Justice, his Under-Secretary of State, Zoltan Pfeiffer, a leader of the FKGP and by Communist opinion, one of its most prominent right-wingers, took personally charge of the legal proceedings. On his orders, seven persons, accused of the murders, were brought to trial under martial law within three days in the county court. According to Pfeiffer, all of them were members of the Communist party.²⁰ The MKP recognised this political trap and Rakosi, who was a Minister without Portfolio in the coalition government demanded pointedly at the Cabinet meeting that "the person who organised (my emphasis - G.G) the events at Kunmadaras must be sentenced to death."²¹

On the government's instruction the hearing was adjourned and the trial transferred to Budapest after the Communist-controlled political police had produced two persons - both FKGP members - who were allegedly the inciters of the pogrom.

When the court hearing resumed in Budapest early in July, the number of defendants had already been increased from the original seven to fifty-nine, including the former school teacher, the local FKGP secretary and a third person, allegedly a former Nazi, all three of them accused of incitement. Of the 56 who were convicted, only these three received the death sentence, while the severest penalty for the actual murder was life imprisonment.²² The appeal court, at the end of the year, quashed all death sentences. The party secretary was jailed for two years and two months, the "Nazi" for life, and the teacher was freed. Although the president of the largest Jewish communal organisation claimed that "the cancellation of the death sentences placed the country's Jewry at the mercy of antisemitic mobs,"²³ and the left-wing press attacked the appeal court's decision,²⁴ the MKP itself, made no serious effort to enforce a more severe punishment, probably because by then the second pogrom, at Miskolc, placed the Communists into a delicate position.

²⁰ Duschinsky, p.425

²¹ Nepszava, May 25, 1946.

²² Vilag, July 26, 1946.

²³ JTA, December, 10, 1946,

²⁴ Jewish Chronicle, January 10, 1947.

The MKP could not be blamed directly for the Kunmadaras pogrom, on the contrary, the incident had some anti-Communist undertones. But the Communist-instigated "popular movements" influenced the events in at least two aspects. Before the introduction of the new post-election Communist tactic, the presence of the Soviet Army dampened potential inclinations for violence. Communist encouragement for mob actions could however be interpreted as having been sanctioned by the occupiers. In such a climate of apparently acceptable lawlessness, right-wing elements, who were obviously at work in Kunmadaras, might have felt reasonably safe to appeal for mass support for their causes and instigate direct and violent mob actions. The self-confidence which they had gained from the election victory of the FKGP could have been an additional contributing factor.

The second aspect concerns the attitude of the police. The local police force in Kunmadaras apparently hesitated to defy the demands of the mob and enforce law and order.²⁵ This could have been due either to their sympathies for the allegedly war-criminal teacher and for the anti-Jewish sentiments of the mob, or to their uncertainty on how to behave in face of mob pressure, in view of Communist-controlled higher police authorities' implicit support for the "popular movements," i.e. for mob actions in general. In these two respects thus, the MKP must be considered responsible for the turn of events at Kunmadaras.

The tenuousness of the MKP's links with the Kunmadaras incident are in contrast with its direct involvement in the Miskolc pogrom. This was closely associated with the party's anti-capitalist campaign, which was exploiting the economic hardships prevailing in the aftermath of the war. Hungary was then going through an almost unprecedentedly rapid inflation. The state was responsible for the financing of the country's

²⁵ On the eve of the pogrom, supporters of the schoolteacher managed to force a policeman to arrest the returning prosecution witnesses, to take them instead of the police station to a communal hall, where other supporters were assembled, and escort them to the stage, where they were subjected to attacks because of their accusations against the teacher. On the following day when the beating up of Jewish merchants started, the police disappeared from the scene. Kis Ujsag, May 26, 1946.

reconstruction, for the payment of compensation for war damages to the Soviet Union, as well as for the food supply of the population. Its prostrated administrative machinery was however unable to collect revenue properly.

Consequently, in the second half of 1945, state income covered only 5 - 7% of public expenditure, and the government was compelled to circulate a greater volume of banknotes.²⁶ The subsequent inflation reduced the value of the Hungarian currency so quickly that by the end of the inflationary period, in the summer of 1946, the equivalent value of one Pengo (the Hungarian currency unit) at its pre-war, 1938, rate was 1,400,000,000,000,000.²⁷ The largest burden of such a rapid inflation was carried by wage earners, as the devaluation of the currency went together with constant price rises.

In the second half of 1945, the volume of banknotes in circulation rose 37-fold, but the prices 85-fold. Although workers received eleven wage increases before February 1946, those were regularly cancelled out by further price rises.²⁸ Under such conditions, the conduct of commercial activities in the legal currency became largely replaced by dealings in gold and in Western "hard currencies" (sterling and U.S. dollar), and by direct bartering, particularly on the food market. This abnormal situation created a large black market traffic, primarily in food, and gave wide scope for speculators.

The Communists exploited the inflationary conditions in three ways. They blamed the selfishness and profiteering mentality of the private sector for economic chaos, suggesting that it was indicative of the bankruptcy of the capitalist system. Their argument was designed to prepare the climate for a recognition that greater governmental interference in the conduct of economic activities was necessary.

²⁶ Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.508

²⁷ Ibid, p.509.

²⁸ Ibid, p.510.

At the same time, to demonstrate that they alone had the ability to redirect Hungary's economy onto normal tracks, the MKP jumped to the forefront of those who demanded an end to inflation and the establishment of a sound currency. Early in May, 1946, the party announced its "plan for stabilisation" and set a deadline, August 1, for the introduction of a new currency. At a series of mass rallies in Budapest, in industrial and mining centres and various other parts of the country, Communist leaders explained their plan, attempting to give the impression that only the MKP, against the doubts and even the opposition of the other parties, was determined to "stabilise" the economy.²⁹

Their plan was admittedly based on strict price control, a heavier taxation of private enterprise (80% of rents, for instance, were to be expropriated by the state), and the reduction of the peasants' purchasing power, and an stringently limited currency circulation. Neither during their pre-stabilisation propoganda campaign, nor later, when claiming full credit for its success, did the MKP however acknowledge a further and vital contributing factor which in fact gave the party the opportunity to announce its plan in May 1946. It was an American commitment in the spring of that year to grant Hungary a \$10 m credit, and return her \$28 m worth of gold reserve which the retreating German and Hungarian Nazis had taken to Germany.³⁰ An additional, almost \$10 million was provided in 1946 by the "Joint", an American Jewish relief organisation.³¹

The third way in which the MKP utilised the adverse conditions created by the inflation, was the one with a direct bearing on the Miskolc pogrom. In the summer of 1946, immediately before the introduction of the new currency, the Communists conducted an increasingly intensive propoganda campaign against blackmarketeers, speculators, excessive profits, and by implication, against the political forces which supported the preservation of the capitalist economic system.

²⁹ For details of the MKP's "stabilisation plan" see Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, pp.523-524 and (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.483.

³⁰ Admission of this American contribution, though belittling its importance, can be found in (A) Magyar Forradalmi, pp.482-483.

³¹ See p.50

By the use of inflammatory language, they tried to match the desperation of the workers who had been most hardly hit by the inflation, and prevent any possible spontaneous protest which might have been directed against the MKP too, as it was part of the seemingly tame and impotent ruling coalition. It should be noted that this crescendo of campaign calls reached its highest note by open incitement for murder just before the Miskolc incident. Furthermore, it was exactly in Miskolc, only nine days before the pogrom, that Rakosi told an audience of 250,000: "We are of the opinion that he who speculates with the Forint (the name of the new currency - G.G) must be strung up on the gallows."³²

A few days later, thus even nearer to the pogrom, he repeated his demand that speculators must be hanged. Scorning the opponents of iron-fisted methods, who claimed that "in economic matters such violent regulations were usually unsuccessful" Rakosi declared: "It is our opinion nevertheless, that they should be tried."³³

It was against the background of the Communist leader's fiery demagogery that the events, leading to the murder of two Jews started rolling.³⁴ On July 30, steelworkers at Diosgyor, an industrial suburb of Miskolc, organised a demonstration. Sources are contradictory on the aims of it. The Ministry of the Interior's official statement said that they "set out for Miskolc to demand in a disciplined demonstration, the implementation of the government decrees on the punishment of the enemies of stabilisation." Another source³⁵ indicated however that the demonstration had a more specific designation. The leaflets which had been distributed in the factory calling for demonstrators to assemble at a given time, also declared: "Death to blackmarketeers of the Florian flour mill. On the instructions and intervention of Istvan Oszip (the Communist High Sheriff of the county - G.G) the Miskolc police has arrested the owners of the mill." Thus, while the official statement

³² Szabad Nep, July 23, 1946

³³ Szabad Nep, July 27, 1946.

³⁴ This reconstruction of the Miskolc pogrom was based on the following sources: the official statement by the Communist-controlled Ministry of the Interior (Nepszava, August 3, 1946); contemporary newspaper reports: Szabad Nep, Nepszava, Vilag; deposition by Ilona Spitz (Mrs. Freiburger), who was then in Miskolc and witnessed some of the events (Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, File:03/1044).

³⁵ Vilag, September 17, 1946.

disregarded the possibility of premeditation, on the basis of the second source, it could be assumed that at least some of the demonstrators set out deliberately to take action against those who eventually became the victims of the pogrom.

At this stage the composition of the demonstrators must be considered. There are indications that a large proportion of steel workers had been Nazis in the past, and were intolerant of Communist party methods. It has been claimed that more than 4000 of the factory's 10,000-strong labour force had been registered members of the Arrow Cross (nyilas) during the war,³⁶ and the MKP noted shortly before the pogrom that there had been a number of wildcat strikes at the steel works. The Communists attributed these to the workings of "fascist instigators,"³⁷ although they could have reflected a genuine dissatisfaction with the coalition government's efforts to improve the workers' living conditions. Both factors could have contributed to the demonstration becoming violent and obtaining an anti-Jewish slant.

The Communist party's involvement in the first march, on July 30, is unclear. According to a contemporary Communist account,³⁸ the secretary of the county committee had telephoned the factory to stop the march, but he was too late as the demonstrators were already on their way. However, a Communist historian later admitted that the factory's party branch had been "led astray by reactionary instigators."³⁹

A joint statement by the local branches of the four coalition parties declared that the "Diosgyor steel workers..... acted without any initiative from the parties" but the reliability of this statement is questionable, as it was made after the pogrom and thus could have been an attempt to disclaim responsibility for it.⁴⁰

The demonstrators' meeting with their victims appears to have been deliberately planned. The two Jewish mill owners were arrested on July 28 for misappropriation of their flour stock and were held at the Miskolc police headquarters. The Ministry's version failed to disclose how the detainees happened to appear on the march route. But the Szabad Nep account⁴¹ claimed that a non-Communist police officer,

³⁶ Spitz, p.19.

³⁷ Szabad Nep, June 26, 1946.

³⁸ Szabad Nep, August 2, 1946.

³⁹ Nogradi, p.92.

⁴⁰ Vilag, August 4, 1946.

⁴¹ August 2, 1946.

though knowing of the demonstration and its route, had still sent the two mill owners with a police escort to an internment camp in the vicinity of the steel factory. The recollections of a Jewish witness also indicate deliberate action. She claimed that the mill owners were being transferred to the Diosgyor steel work's police station, although there seemed to be no justification for it as the latter was both a lower authority and completely uninvolved with the detainees' alleged crime.⁴² The prisoners and the policeman were travelling by tram, which was blocked by the demonstrators.

According to the Ministry, they recognised the mill owners, pulled them off the car and took them on their march to the town centre. "They were demonstrating against the blackmarketeers but not a single antisemitic slogan could be heard," stated the Ministry. According to another account⁴³ the demonstrators were already then demanding "death to the Jews", and started beating the millers, immediately.

Sources are inconsistent about the circumstances of the murders. The Ministry's version claims that the victims were beaten up when the demonstration reached the centre of Miskolc, and one of them died of his injuries. According to Spitz⁴⁴ one of the millers, then already unconscious, was thrown on a truck, the other roped by his neck to the moving vehicle and dragged along the street until he suffocated. Both the Ministry and the Szabad Nep⁴⁵ said that Communist and Social Democratic party officials had tried to free the victims, but Spitz made no reference to that. All sources indicate however that the police made no effort to intervene. In Spitz's recollection⁴⁶ a police detachment captured the truck only after it had been abandoned by the crowd.

Within the next 24 hours the police made 16 arrests. According to the Ministry, some of those who were released returned to the Diosgyor

⁴²Spitz, p.18

⁴³Spitz, p.18.

⁴⁴ p.19.

⁴⁵ August 2, 1946.

⁴⁶ p.19

factory charging the police with the maltreatment of the detainees.

On August 1, the steel workers set out on a second march to Miskolc, this time to free the prisoners. Most sources agree that the MKP did not organise this demonstration. The official version even emphasised that it was arranged against the explicit protests of the Communist and SZDP branches, but the FKGP alleged that the factory's trade union committee, which consisted of both Communists and Social Democrats, approved of the workers' demand that the arrested persons must be released.⁴⁷ The Ministry claimed that the MKP and SZDP party stewards formed a cordon around the marchers which the crowd eventually swept away, but the SZDP later denied its own participation,⁴⁹ with a slight innuendo that the Communist stewards themselves might have taken part in the atrocities. The police on instructions from higher authorities, released all detainees,⁴⁹ in order "to avoid a clash with the workers" (Ministry's statement). The crowd, nevertheless attacked the police headquarters and captured a Jewish officer, who was head of its political division. In the official version, the Soviet Army officer, who was the leader of the Allied Control Commission, together with "disciplined workers" freed the police officer who died however of his injuries.

According to another recollection, the crowd captured several political police officers, but released them immediately with the exception of the Jewish one, whom they eventually killed while a Soviet Army unit was trying to free him.⁵⁰

The anti-Jewish nature of the Miskolc pogrom was never recognised. The Communists claim that it was a Fascist provocation, remained unchallenged by the other coalition parties who by then were already engaged in an increasingly intensive fight against the MKP's "salami tactics" and therefore probably disinclined to seek yet another battlefield. People involved with the pogrom were treated with remarkable leniency. Of the 35 persons arrested, 15 were almost immediately released and the others were never put on trial. The principal MKP officials were all promoted, and the whole affair glossed over.

⁴⁷ Kis Ujsag, August 6, 1946

⁴⁸ Nepszava, August 17, 1946.

⁴⁹ According to Spitz, the order came from Rakosi on the insistence of local Communist officials and in spite of the views of the Soviet leader of the Miskolc office of the Allied Control Commission who believed that a salvo in the air would disperse the crowd. pp.21-22

⁵⁰ Spitz, pp.22-23

Ideology Ignored

It was perhaps ironical that the Communist party, which had for a year skillfully skated on thin ice over its attitude to the Jews, showed its hand at the very moment when it was forced, by circumstances, to beat an almost immediate retreat. It was during the first wave of anti-Jewish atrocities in 1946, shortly before the Kinmadaras pogrom, when the MKP made its first official policy statement on the Jewish question and Zionism. This reflected the party's rigidly doctrinaire ideological stance. Overtaken however by the probably unexpected consequences of mob action, the MKP soon climbed down to a more restrained and rather confused posture.

The MKP's official policy on Jewry's place in society and its future in Hungary, was declared by Dr. Erik Molnar, a historian and then Minister of Social Welfare, on April 6, 1946. It took the form of a public lecture on the "Jewish question in Hungary" (Zsido Kerdes Magyarorszagon) in a series on topical and important issues by leading Communist theoreticians at what was called the MKP's "Political Academy". The lecture was planned well in advance and related to broader political issues rather than immediate tactical considerations. Molnar's analysis echoed the orthodox Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist views both on the origin and the solution of the Jewish question.

After having evoked Lenin's authority for the "labour movement's principled position"⁵¹ on this issue, Molnar proclaimed that "the Jews for millenia have always played a conspicuous part in the capitalist commercial life" and had been treated "from ancient times until our days with hatred." He concluded that "these two things, the Jews' capitalist activities and Jew-hatred were somehow interdependent. It is obvious that the roots of the Jewish question.... must be sought in the historic development of Hungary."⁵²

Molnar dismissed ostensible racial characteristics, and traced the Jews' historic role to the "peculiar geographical position of Palestine (then their national home), and the peculiar economic conditions inherent in that." Her lying on the crossroads of the period's most important commercial routes led to the development of the merchants as the ruling class of the Jewish society. Their commercial activities

⁵¹ All quotes are from that printed version of Molnar's lecture which appeared in the Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.I, No.5, May 1946. His quote from Lenin on p.326.

⁵² Ibid, pp.386-387

resulted in the dispersal of the Jews well before the destruction of their national state, and they acquired a large role already in the commodity producing structure of the Roman Empire. When that Empire vanished, it left behind for European feudalism the Jews as representatives of finance capital.⁵³

Thus, in feudal Hungary too, the Jews were engaged mainly in commercial and credit activities, initially in favourable circumstances. But with the appearance of a largely German urban bourgeoisie, a conflict developed between them and the Jews, which through a series of restrictive measures, led to the utmost degradation of the latter. The Jews, in Molnar's opinion, preserved however their mercantile mentality: "a calculating, rational thinking, a skill in exploiting commercial opportunities."⁵⁴ When, early in the 19th century, Hungary reached the threshold of bourgeois development, the wider opportunities for the accumulation of capital required a peculiar skill; that mercantile mentality which "in this colonial, feudal country was lacking in every sector of the population with the exception of the Jews."⁵⁵ Molnar, consequently, attributed it to the social conditions that the opportunities for the accumulation of capital opened up mainly for the Jews who utilised them with an increasing intensity during Hungary's capitalist development.

Molnar asserted that the Jews' subsequent social integration led to their caste-like position in the Hungarian society. Owing to their historic role in the semi-feudal Hungarian society, they represented most manifestly the power of capital. They played a prominent part in society, but only in the strictly confined zone of capitalist activities and certain intellectual professions.

Molnar located the roots of Hungary's Jewish problem in the fact that "the Jews lived their caste-like life in such an area of the society which was saturated with inflammatory social tension.

⁵³ Ibid, pp.328-329.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.329.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.329.

That, when transposed to an emotional sphere, considering also the effects of ignorance and the strength of traditions, manifested itself in antisemitism. Antisemitic propoganda can be dangerously effective only because the previously mentioned factors prevail. It works with distorted facts, but works with the *distortion of facts* (italics by Molnar - G.G). It incites artificial hatred, but incites hatred from a furnace of *existing emotions* (again Molnar's italics - G.G). Its basis was our semifeudal capitalist system, which, with its latifundia impoverished the masses of peasants, with its unlimited powers, exasperated the urban workers, and, at the times of crises, with its lack of bread, struck the intelligentia. Its aim was to divert the subsequent hatred."⁵⁶

Thus after analysing the motives of modern political antisemitism, Molnar drew the conclusion that it was "the most important ideological weapon of German Fascism in its attempt to achieve its imperialist aims. German Fascism, which wanted to enslave the Soviet Union and destroy the Soviet system, tried to compromise it with the demagogic slogan of 'Jewish Bolshevism'".⁵⁷ In Hungary the Horthy regime, "seeking broad support against the democratic forces, found it in those people whom it could provide with material advantages at the expense of the Jews. In other words: who were politically corruptable."⁵⁸ He condemned even stronger the antisemitism of the Arrow Cross regime by defining it as a "method of high treason". It was antisemitism, Molnar claimed, which prevented Hungary from extricating herself from the war in the last minute. "The Arrow Cross government enjoyed the support of that social sector which had been bought with material gains at the expense of the Jews."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.332.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.332.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.332.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.333.

Coming to the contemporary scene, Molnar declared that the current antisemites were still those very same materially interested elements as well "as all who want to divert attention from the subversive activities of semifeudal capitalists, from the sabotaging by plutocrats, from the reactionaries, who are the real causes of our difficulties."⁶⁰ Having thus placed responsibility for the contemporary antisemitism squarely on the "reactionary forces", Molnar touched only slightly and unobtrusively on the trend which was to culminate soon in the Miskolc pogrom. He warned against a simplification that capitalism equalled Jews, and therefore "you can aim at Jews safely because ultimately you will hit the capitalists."⁶¹

Finally, Molnar put forward two possible solutions of the Jewish problem. One was Zionism, which he dismissed as reactionary, because "by aiming at the restoration of Hungarian Jewry's vanished national identity it represented opposition to the course of Hungary's social development."⁶² His blanket denunciation of Zionism included the movement's left-wing too. "Linking Zionism with Socialism does not make in our country Zionism progressive: it makes the Zionists' Socialism reactionary. Our Socialist Zionists cling tenaciously to the Jewish religion, to this dissipating remnant of Jewish national identity.... What shall we think about their Socialist (Molnar's italics - G.G) reverence for a religion which developed under the effects of its followers' commercial (Molnar's emphasis - G.G) practices?"⁶³

The "progressive" solution, recommended by Molnar, leads the Jews to complete integration. The road to be followed is that of "democratic progress. Along this road the factors which have been feeding the antisemitic propoganda disappear, other contributors to its success as well as the forces which have been directing it vanish too."⁶⁴ Molnar predicted that "democracy's" educational work will replace anti-Jewish traditions with an objective assessment of the Jewish question. Its economic strength will put an end to the preponderance of Jews in the exploiting instruments of capitalism, and finally,

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.333.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.333.

⁶² Ibid, p.333.

⁶³ Ibid, p.333.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.334.

the traces of Jewry's national identity will disappear as "democracy's" social strength facilitates the absorption of Jewry by the masses of the Hungarian people.

Thus, concluded Molnar, "Antisemitism is today directed against democracy. The fight against antisemitism coincides with the fight for democracy. The Jewish question in Hungary will be conclusively solved by the victory of democracy."⁶⁵ It should be noted that in contemporary Communist terminology, "democracy" stood for Communist rule.

Molnar's rigidly doctrinaire analysis must have been meant as the MKP's official policy declaration on the Jewish issue, otherwise it would not have been included in the series of selected subjects for the "Party Academy." But between the planning and the delivery of Molnar's lecture, the party grew apparently cautious of its contents. While the Szabadsag, a pseudo-independent daily, (edited by a Muscovite Communist writer, Andor Gabor) reported all its major points,⁶⁶ including Molnar's alternatives for the solution of the Jewish problem, the MKP's official organ, the Szabad Nep on the same day⁶⁷ omitted his denunciation of Zionism.

As a reflection of the party's sensitivity to the upsurge in antisemitic manifestations, merely a few months later, after the Kunmadaras pogrom, Molnar stood corrected by a higher official in the MKP hierarchy, Marton Horvath, who, unlike Molnar, was a member of the central committee and a close associate of Jozsef Revai, the party's principal ideologue. In his essay in the Tarsadalmi Szemle⁶⁸ - which only two months earlier published Molnar's lecture - Horvath revealed a different attitude to Zionism.

In contrast to Molnar's outright denunciation of it, as "reactionary", Horvath avoided such a derogatory label altogether. He neither defined Zionism as representing interests contrary to those of "democracy", nor indicated that its followers should be treated as enemies of the social developments⁴ in Hungary. Horvath appreciated the

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.334.

⁶⁶ April 9, 1946.

⁶⁷ April 9, 1946.

⁶⁸ Vol.I, No. 7, July 1946. "Jewry and Assimilation" (Zsidóság és Asszimiláció)

reasons why so many Hungarian Jews had embraced Zionism. He described the Zionists as the better elements of Hungarian Jewry, and their attitude merely as the choice of the wrong track. On his own relationship to Zionism, Horvath confined it to concern that the Zionist Jews may be heading for another conflict by settling in Palestine.

Horvath viewed Zionism in the wider context of the Jews' possible assimilation in Hungary. He appreciated that "a considerable section of the remaining Hungarian Jewry, at least emotionally and in relation to its future, abandoned the possibility of any assimilation.... These people are trying to replace their feeling of identification with the Hungarians - which they had lost - with a Jewish national identity. This is why the Zionist movement has gathered strength among the Jewish petty bourgeoisie."⁶⁹

Horvath stated that "considering the experiences of the past few years we must appreciate that a politically insufficiently conscious section of Jewry entertains the ideas of Zionism and emigration. But it is our responsibility to explain to them that the reason for their relationship with the Hungarians taking such a tragic turn was not assimilation in general, but assimilation sought on the wrong level. Emigration to Palestine at its best means only that the Hungarian-Jewish differences will be exchanged for an Arab-Jewish conflict."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.499

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 499-500

In a rather patronising manner, Horvath warned that the Zionists want in fact to achieve what the Fascists wanted: the isolation of the Jews. Nevertheless, he declared: "in spite of their wrong track, the Zionists still represent the better elements of the maladjusted Jewry. They at least have so much communal spirit left that instead of the Hungarian they are prepared to take on a fictitious Jewish national identity."⁷¹ This he contrasted to those who were seeking emigration merely as an escape from the currently difficult life in Hungary, and a means for their own personal betterment.

Horvath's essay represented a fundamental change in the MKP's attitude to Zionism. The absence of its usual unconditional condemnation as a reactionary movement indicated a departure from the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideological principles.⁷² That it was Horvath and not Molnar who expressed official Communist policy became clear from the MKP's practical dealings with the Zionist activities.⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid, p.500

⁷² This change was noted by the Zionists too. "This essay is the more important because it turns against the previous official policy of the party, or rather.... represents a drastic change of the views laid down by Molnar," declared the official journal of the Hungarian Social Democratic Zionist section (Ichud). It added cautiously however: ".... and we would like to believe that the words of Marton Horvath will carry appropriate weight both in the party and in the assimilationist Jewish circles" (IMHE, July 18, 1946).

⁷³ Most Communist theoreticians accepted this new party line. Erik Molnar himself, when he addressed a trade union seminar at a Budapest university on the Jewish question, repeated all his earlier assertions, but not the denunciation of Zionism.

The most convincing evidence of the MKP's suppleness was the so-called "Arrow Cross train affair". After having taken vigorous initial steps, just about the time of Molnar's lecture in April 1946, the Communists left unexploited an opportunity to extremely embarrass, and probably fatally injure the Zionist cause, at least in Hungary, but possibly on a world-wide scale. Hungary was then one of the centres of a massive Zionist operation to transfer Jews from Eastern Europe to refugee camps in Western Europe for their eventual emigration to Palestine. To populate Palestine with Jews was a basic Zionist aim, and one of the most crucial points of conflict with the British government then ruling Palestine.

Britain restricted Jewish emigration to Palestine and the Zionists had been trying to circumvent those limitations by organising illegal Jewish emigration since the early 1930s. This operation bore the cover name of "Aliyah Bet" (Emigration Number Two, legal emigration being regarded as Number One), and the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the Hagana, (the armed Jewish self-defence force in Palestine) and almost all the political Zionist movements established jointly a separate department - the Mosad L'Aliyah Bet (the Office for Emigration Number Two, i.e. for illegal emigration) - to carry it out.⁷⁴

After the war Hungary served as a transit point for the transport of Jews mainly from Rumania, and to a smaller extent also from Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The Mosad dispatched agents to those countries immediately after the Second World War. In Hungary, they operated under the pretext of a Jewish relief institution "Ezra"⁷⁵ and organised

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For details on this operation see: Patai, Vol. II, pp. 531-533.

75 The Palestinian Jewish agents entered Hungary illegally. Jonah Rosenfeld (now living in Israel under the name of Yonah Rosen), who was the head of the Ezra office in Budapest, entered Hungary from Austria, in June 1945, posing as a returning deportee. Two Zionists, who were working in the border station office of DEGOB, the Jewish communal institution for the assistance of returning deportees, helped him reach Budapest, where he was supplied with the documents of a Hungarian Jew, Gyorgy Boros, who had died in a concentration camp. (Interview with Rosen). Another Mosad agent, Yehuda Talmi, also entered from Austria under similar circumstances, pretending to be a returning deportee of Transylvanian origin, who wished to stay in Budapest for a while. (Interview with Talmi).

the transport through Hungary of an estimated 50 - 60,000 Jews between the summer of 1945 and December 1946.⁷⁶ The illegal emigrants arrived in Budapest in groups of five to six hundred, and were accommodated in transit hostels until the agents in Hungary arranged their further journey. The main transport route was by train to Vienna, with supplementary routes to Yugoslavia and, in the latter part of this period, to Czechoslovakia too.

This mammoth-sized illegal operation was carried out with the quiet acquiescence of both the Hungarian and the Soviet authorities. The Hungarian political police, the AVH (an abbreviation of its name: Allamvedelmi Hatosag, State Security Authority) knew of the Mosad agents' presence, and kept itself informed on their backgrounds too.⁷⁷ They were also aware of the fact that the emigrants were travelling on forged documents.⁷⁸ According to Yonah Rosen, who was head of the operation in Budapest, the "Hungarians could not be bothered, and the Russians, demoralised by their war-time and post-war lootings, could be easily and cheaply bribed."⁷⁹ Willingness to help was however not

⁷⁶ Rosen, who was arrested in April 1946, claimed that about 25 - 30,000 Jews went through Hungary until then, while Talmi, who worked until his return to Palestine in December 1946, estimated the total at 50 - 60,000. Both emphasised that the figures were only estimates as no proper records were kept on the transports. (Interviews with Rosen and Talmi).

⁷⁷ One of the agents, Talmi, learned from the Zionists then working in the AVH, that the political police knew of his presence already four days after his illegal entry into Hungary. They were also aware of his real identity in spite of his having used several names. Although in Hungary he used the alias of Arie, and in Palestine, since his naturalisation was known as Talmi, the AVH knew his original name, Furedi, under which he was born in Transylvania. (Interview with Talmi).

⁷⁸ These documents showed them among others, as Greek or German repatriates. Although the Mosad agents warned them to refrain from speaking their native languages or Yiddish in public, they often did so, and were overheard by police officers who chose to ignore such obvious evidence of their falsified identities. (Interview with Talmi).

⁷⁹ During the winter months of 1945- 46, two trainloads of emigrants, each transport consisting of 200 persons, left Budapest for Vienna weekly at a time when war damage to rolling stocks was causing acute difficulties in the food supply of the capital. Rosen was convinced that one of his Hungarian assistants had assured this constant supply of trains through contacts with higher authorities, until he discovered that it had been arranged simply by bribing with bacon, alcohol, and cigarettes, the Soviet army sergeant who was in charge of train allocations in the central railway depot. Rosen also maintained that border crossing was always the easiest part of the operation because Soviet NCOs were willing to escort the transports across the borders at a low price. (Interview with Rosen).

always activated by greed. Some Hungarian and Soviet middle-rank officials, having taken pity on that mass of homeless and aimless Jews, assisted for humanitarian reasons, taking advantage of the lack of central directives by the Hungarian and Soviet authorities.⁸⁰

There might have been at least two reasons for the Communist controlled AVH's reluctance to stop this illegal operation. One was presumably the lack of Soviet instructions to do so. Another might have been their aversion for a confrontation with Jews so soon after the Nazi persecution, unless it could serve specific Communist interests. Such an opportunity however arose at the end of February 1946, when the AVH arrested four recently released Nazi internees who had converted to the Jewish religion in an attempt to escape to the West.

The publicity given to the incident reflected the authorities' extreme caution. The first press reports appeared only about a month after the arrests.⁸¹ One recorded merely their arrest and conversion, without reference to any Jewish accomplices. The other⁸² while naming the Jews involved, did not link the affair to the Zionists, and stated only that those "man sumugglers" wanted to use "under-world routes". A little later however, reporting further developments (that two of the Jews had been interned and a rabbi and two doctors of the Jewish hospital had been put under police surveillance) the Szabadsag⁸³ already noted that the Nazis' escape would have been arranged by Zionists.

⁸⁰ Interview with Agmon, who also recalled an example of Soviet inconsistency. In one case a Soviet commander authorised the use of a train, but another withdrew the engine and the emigrants spent four days in their waggons until alternative arrangements could be made.

⁸¹ Kis Ujsag, March 23, 1946.

⁸² Szabadsag, March 23, 1946.

⁸³ April 6, 1946.

Behind these deceptively brief press reports a major showdown with the Zionists was however taking shape. For at least one of the Jews involved was a locally recruited Ezra agent. Thus, although the AVH had known of the Ezra activities before, only now appeared a confrontation with Jews politically worthwhile, because it was to expose the Zionists as the saviours of Nazis. In a carefully planned swoop, the AVH struck on April 9, 1946.⁸⁴ In the morning, only ten minutes after a train-load of emigrants had left, the AVH raided Ezra's principal transit hostel in Budapest and detained the staff. Later that morning a detachment⁸⁵ stopped the train, arrested some of the emigrants and their escorts, but, after some delay, let the others leave Hungary. At noon, at the time of the regular daily meeting of agents (a fact which was probably known to them), the AVH raided the Ezra office, arrested Rosen, its head, but released the others. Altogether 38 persons were taken into custody. Although Rosen claimed that there had been no Nazis in that transport, most of the Hungarian press painted a different picture of the incident.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ This date should be noted, for it was on the same day that the Szabad Nep omitted from its report on Molnar's lecture his denunciation of Zionism. This implies that although the MKP had not then yet changed its public attitude on Zionism, it was at least uncertain about the course it should take.

⁸⁵ According to the Jewish Chronicle, May 3, 1946, it was led by Gabor Peter himself, the head of the AVH.

⁸⁶ Vilagossag, an SZDP paper (April 11, 1946, in its headline accused the Zionists of organising "an exodus of Arrow Crossists." The Nepszava, the official SZDP organ (April 11, 1946) accused the Zionist organisations of "making profit on emigration" and claimed that they had been urging Jews to emigrate only "to supply Palestine land owners and capitalists with cheap labour." A statement by MTI, the official Hungarian news agency, was quoted in Austrian newspapers on April 12, as saying that when the political police checked on a Zionist group of 232 persons, it found only a handful of Zionists among them. The rest were Arrow Crossists and Waffen SS "to whom the Zionist organisation promised emigration in return for money." (Jewish Chronicle, May 3, 1946). The Szabadsag (April 11, 1946) in a front page report, wrote: "For months there have been rumours in Budapest that certain organisations are carrying out a large-scale man smuggling through our Western border and that under the colour of Zionism - for good money naturally - are prepared to arrange the emigration of anybody....They were at the disposal not only of Arrow Crossists, but of any such 'elements' who wanted to disappear from Hungary in a hurry." This paper claimed that seventeen Arrow Crossists had been taken off the train.

Strikingly absent from this cacaphony was the voice of the MKP's official organ which devoted to this story merely a single column, two inches long, unostentatiously displayed report,⁸⁷ reflecting probably the party's uncertainty about the wisdom of a spectacular showdown with the Zionists. Subsequent developments confirmed this early foreboding. The Social Democratic press and the pro-Communist Szabadsag apparently took their cue from the Szabad Nep as the anti-Zionist outburst proved to be a one-day affair and no more propaganda capital was made of this incident. Neither has any official confirmation been given either of the number of Arrow Crossists taken off the train, or even that there had been any at all. The Jewish detainees were all released soon,⁸⁸ except Rosen, who, however was leniently treated.

No physical force was used and the AVH officer, who was in charge of his case, confined his interrogation largely to debates about the merits of Zionism. A lower ranking officer, who conducted most of the interrogation, called every day at the Zionist organisation's office to collect a food parcel which he handed to Rosen at night. Another officer, a former rabbinical student, conversed with him in Hebrew. Rosen's Zionist conviction - which he admitted freely - was disregarded in the charge, which eventually emerged as a purely criminal one: man smuggling. But such incriminating factors as his illegal presence in Hungary, his use of forged identity documents and the fact that during the raid on his office the AVH found three kilograms of gold and \$13,000 in notes were overlooked. Rosen was released after 38 days, on the condition that he must leave Hungary before his trial date, September 21.

⁸⁷ Szabad Nep, April 11, 1946.

⁸⁸ Very little detail is available on their treatment. Rosen recalled that all those arrested in the raids were shortly freed, (Interview with Rosen) while the Day, a Yiddish newspaper in New York reported on May 14, that according to a United Press dispatch from Budapest, "the five Palestinian halutzim who were arrested on April 9.... were set free on May 10." (Duschinsky, p.422). Rosen recalled too that some of the Polish Jewish train escorts had been badly beaten during their interrogation (Interview with Rosen). Some of the detainees were put on trial but cleared. "The court acknowledged that the aim of the arrested Zionists was to facilitate the emigration to Palestine of persons who no longer wished to remain in Hungary, and that they had not been aware that Nazis were aboard the emigration train." Rosen however believed (Interview with him) that some of them received short sentences.

The authorities' utmost unwillingness to punish him was even more evident when Rosen, ignoring that condition, remained in Hungary until December 1946, continually organising illegal emigration. Although his presence was known, as he met, for instance, the AVH officer in charge of his case several times during that period, no action was taken against him.⁸⁹

Rosen's lenient treatment and permission to continue the mass transport of illegal emigrants through Hungary resulted from a combination of factors, including a financial one. Among the approaches which Hungarian Zionist leaders made to Communist officials for the release of Rosen, the effectual one was by another Mosad agent, Yehuda Talmi, who took over charge of the operations in Hungary. Through Lajos Stockler, the president of the PIH, Talmi established contact with Zoltan Vas, a Jewish member of the MKP's central committee. Vas agreed to arrange Rosen's release for a payment of \$20,000.⁹⁰ Talmi assumed that Vas made this deal with the MKPs,^{consent} because during their negotiations, Vas delayed answers to certain questions by several days, presumably to consult in the meantime his party superiors.⁹¹ Their agreement, reached in May, also included the party's permission to continue the mass transport of illegal Jewish emigrants through Hungary. Vas' - or presumably the MKP's - protection, though costly, was effective.⁹²

⁸⁹ All these details were obtained from Rosen, but have not been corroborated from other sources.

⁹⁰ Vas initially agreed only to submit Talmi's request to the Soviet town commander, whose subsequent price \$40,000 was out of Talmi's reach. He then consented to Rosen's release for half that sum. (Interview with Talmi, and confirmed as second-hand information by Salamon, Rosinger and Rosen).

⁹¹ Interview with Talmi,

⁹² Three examples: (1) On Vas' request the hard currency which Talmi had received from the Mosad head office for his expenses had to be exchanged through the Hungarian National Bank, at the official rate and not on the black market. (2) Talmi's cashier was once arrested in a routine police raid outside the American Embassy with \$1,000 in her possession. On Vas' instruction she was released but the money confiscated. (3) Once when food parcels for the illegal emigrants were mistakenly delivered to Talmi's private address, the suspicious janitor reported it to the police which ordered a house search. After Talmi's telephone appeal to Vas, the search was immediately called off. (Interview with Talmi).

Such velvet-handed treatment of this mass transport of illegal emigrants through Hungary was only the most pronounced evidence of the Communist party's newly adopted pliancy to Zionism. In 1946, the MKP showed an unexpected tolerance for a whole range of Zionist activities: the Communist-controlled Ministry of the Interior allowed the MCSZ (the Hungarian Zionist Federation) to function freely although it had not been legally sanctioned.⁹³ Zionist groups held public and semi-public meetings unhindered, maintained training centres for prospective emigrants to Palestine in Budapest, and the provinces, and participated openly in the largest Jewish communal organisations.

The MKP changed its attitude to Zionism in disregard of its own ideology - obviously for tactical reasons. Because of its proximity to the increasingly frequent anti-Jewish atrocities - by its encouragement of the "popular movements", i.e. of mob action - the party must have found it unwise to antagonise Hungarian and world Jewry even more by showing hostility to the Zionists, particularly as at that stage of the political power struggle this was not of primary importance.

Another consideration was the regime's awareness of the influence which international Jewish organisations may have on the peace treaty negotiations which opened in Paris in August, 1946. Jewish organisations in the West were by then by and large pro-Zionist. Therefore the Hungarian regime wanted to use Hungarian Zionists to impress the parties involved in the peace negotiations with the democratic character of the new Hungarian society.

Zoltan Tildy, the president of the Hungarian Republic, when meeting a Zionist delegation, admitted frankly that "it was decisive for Hungary to win the sympathy of world Jewry and the Zionists," and asked his guests "to do their utmost that this sympathy should be forthcoming as completely as possible."⁹⁴ The Zionists were also under more direct

⁹³ This was pointed out by a spokesman for the Allied Control Commission, when suspending further publications of the MCSZ's weekly journal ten days after its first issue "pending classification of the legal status of the Zionist organisation, which has not received legal sanction from the Ministry of the Interior, although it is allowed to function freely". JTA, June 20, 1947).

⁹⁴ Uj Elet, April 4, 1946.

and stronger pressure to use their influence. They were being solicited to issue jointly with other Jewish organisations an appeal to Jewish institutions abroad asking favourable conditions for Hungary in the peace treaty.⁹⁵

It must have been with its propaganda advantages on their minds that in May two leading Communists, Rakosi and Rajk, declared to the correspondent of the JTA (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, an American pro-Zionist news service) that "the government was not opposed to the emigration of Jews from Hungary,"⁹⁶ though for domestic consumption they never gave that undertaking. The needs for Jewish and Zionist support increased as the government's assurance to the peace conference that it "was making every effort to apprehend and punish criminals, and had embarked upon a campaign to educate those sections of the population which were still infected by Nazi propaganda,"⁹⁷ sounded rather hollow after the Kunmadaras and Miskolc pogroms and the lenient treatment of those involved in them.

⁹⁵ This demand apparently caused a dilemma for the Zionists. Dr. Nathan of the Palestine Office in Hungary, asked the advice of the Jewish Agency for Palestine on June 14, 1946: "From the part of the memshala (the government) steps were taken to the effect that Jewry should assist in shalom (peace) affairs with a declaration towards abroad, great stress being laid on our participation. The question is rather difficult; for on one hand we do not want to be exposed abroad, on the other hand a negative standpoint might involve disagreeable reactions with regard to our situation here. For the time being we took a negative standpoint, and only in case our demands should be fully accomplished, we are willing to make a declaration. Also Rosh Hakehila (head of the community) inclines towards our standpoint. In every case let us know the opinion of our circles there, and whether you consider it opportune that - in return of eventual counter-services - we should amek (issue) a declaration or join such." (Central Zionist Archives, S6/4562).

⁹⁶ Duschinsky, p.422.

⁹⁷ Jewish Chronicle, September 13, 1946.

Finally, the prospects of financial gains - both directly for the MKP, and the whole country - must have influenced the Communist leaders' decision to adopt a softer line on Zionism. To end the mounting inflation and stabilise Hungary's economy was a major plank of the Communist programme. They intended to claim full credit for it in anticipation of the subsequent rise in their popularity. A solid hard currency reserve was fundamental for stabilisation, but the financial aid provided in currency and goods by the "Joint" could have been endangered by anti-Zionist measures.⁹⁸

In spite of such a relaxed relationship between the MKP and the Zionists, the Communist-controlled AVH maintained a close watch on all Zionist activities. It penetrated the MCSZ at its highest level,⁹⁹ and made it plain to other Zionist organisations that its discrete presence must be accepted.¹⁰⁰ The party also remained reticent about a political reconciliation. Although Horvath's essay reflected a departure from the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrine, and the party's practical dealings with Zionist affairs revealed an ignorance of its ideology, the MKP constantly refused to enter into a dialogue with Zionists or to establish with them as an organisation any contact.

⁹⁸ The Communists had at least one experience of this danger: the "Joint" branch in Budapest assisted in the transit through Hungary of illegal Jewish emigrants from neighbouring Romania. In the summer of 1946, Rajk, the Communist Minister of the Interior, told the "Joint" directorate that on the request of the Romanian authorities the Hungarian government will prevent the further entry of such emigrants, and will return to Romania those who were already in Hungary. The directorate retorted that in that case the "Joint" will immediately terminate its relief work in Hungary, and Rajk retreated. (Interview with Dr. Gorog).

⁹⁹ Bela Denes, a vice-president of the MCSZ after his arrest in 1949 was amazed that the AVH knew up to the most minute details the contents of discussions in the organisation's presidium which was attended only by five or six persons. (Denes, p.32).

¹⁰⁰ The chauffeur of the Palestine Office in Hungary (the local branch of the Jewish Agency for Palestine) was a former personal chauffeur of Gabor Peter, the head of the AVH. When the Palestine Office wanted to dismiss him an AVH officer informally indicated to them that it would be "most unwise". The man was consequently retained. (Interview with Meir).

The Communist-Zionist links were of two distinct characters. Where financial matters were concerned, the contacts were with individual Communist officials acting, presumably, with the party leaders' consent.¹⁰¹ Otherwise the contacts were based strictly on the previous personal relationship of the Zionist and Communist officials concerned. After the arrest of Yonah Rosen, in connection with the "Arrow Cross train affair", for instance, the secretary of the MCSZ was able to intervene at Dr. Endre Szebenyi, a Jewish Communist Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior, whose first wife had been her fellow teacher in the Jewish high school before the war. Szebenyi however sternly refused to see the president of the MCSZ on the same matter.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See dealings with Vas (N90) and Rajk (N98).

¹⁰² Interview with Rosinger and Salamon. Other examples for the strictly personal nature of such contacts: Dr. Bela Schwarcz, a high ranking Zionist official, who worked with Szebenyi in the same solicitor's office before the war, could acquire his cooperation to stop the repatriation of 400 illegal Jewish emigrants to Romania. (Interview with Schwarcz). When two Palestinian Zionist emissaries were captured by Soviet guards while trying to enter Hungary, Yosef Meir, who served in the AVH immediately after the war, through one of his former subordinates, could ascertain their release. (Interview with Meir).

CHAPTER FOUR: ZIONIST MOVEMENT DESTROYED IN COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER

Take-Over in Three Stages

The end of Hungary's diabolical inflation and the introduction of a new, sound currency in August, 1946, also signalled a new phase in MKP policy. The third party congress in September ditched an earlier decision that the Socialist transformation of Hungary was not an immediate aim. It declared instead the necessity of Socialist changes both in the political and economic fields. In early 1947 the MKP decided "to accelerate its fight against the bourgeoisie and bring it to a conclusion as soon as possible."¹ In other words, it launched itself into an attack for a swift and complete take-over of power. This was accomplished by the Spring of 1949 in three stages.

In the first stage the MKP turned its two non-Socialist coalition partners (the FKGP and the NPP) into obedient executors of Communist policies. The dismantling of the FKGP started with the political police claiming to have obtained from defendants in a conspiracy case, confessions implicating a number of FKGP parliamentary deputies, and demanding the suspension of their immunity. The party - under strong pressure - surrendered, but the next tightening of the screws came with a further claim that the party's general-secretary was also involved. He was eventually arrested, but the FKGP still resisted MKP demands for drastic changes in the economic structure through nationalisation and heavier taxes in the private sector.

This time the Communists indicated that the general-secretary had implicated the party leader, Ferenc Nagy, the Prime Minister. Nagy was forced to resign in May 1947 and sought refuge abroad. He was followed by other party leaders, while many parliamentary deputies joined other parties and the leadership of the FKGP was taken over by left-wingers prepared to collaborate with the MKP. In the meantime, the NPP was also forced to rid itself from a vice-president, Imre Kovacs, who was the most prominent opponent of cooperation with the Communists.

¹ Molnar, 1967, Vol.II, p.534.

This stage ended with a general election in August, 1947. This showed no significant change in public opposition to left-wing orientation. The anti-leftist vote was 55% as against 59% in the 1945 election. 40% was gained by parties outside the coalition and 15% by the mutilated FKGP whose complete subservience to the MKP was then not yet so obvious. Within the governing coalition however, the distribution of power changed radically. With 22% of the votes, the MKP not only became the strongest party; Communist influence was larger than reflected in the composition of the new government which remained under the Premiership of an FKGP deputy. As both the FKGP and the NPP were only represented by obedient stooges, the new government "accepted fully the programmes of the Communist party and proved that in the formulation of national policy, the Communist party's influence reached far beyond the proportion of its ministerial portfolios."²

In the second stage of the take-over, the, by then Communist-controlled government, changed the economic structure of Hungary fundamentally by nationalising first the banks and their industrial and commercial subsidiaries in the Autumn of 1947, and then in March 1948, all industrial enterprises with more than 100 employees, except those owned by foreigners. Politically in this stage the Communists eliminated the SZDP, the only independent force within the coalition, under the pretext of uniting the two workers' parties. They merged officially in June 1948, by forming the Hungarian Workers Party (Magyar Dolgozok Partja, MDP). Its leadership was firmly in Communist hands.³

In the third and final stage, the Communists disarmed their ideologically most influential adversary, the Catholic church. In the summer of 1948, all sectarian schools - most of them controlled by the Catholic church - were nationalised. This was followed by a virulent anti-Catholic propaganda campaign, culminating in the arrest in December 1948, of Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, the Primate of Hungary, on conspiracy charges.

²Sagvari, p.327.

³ Of the MDP Politbureau's 17 full and candidate members, 12 were Communists. The general-secretary was Rakosi, two of the three deputy general-secretaries were Communists. In the secretariat, Communists occupied seven of the eight places, and in the organising committee, nine of the thirteen. Szabad Nep, June 16, 1948.

In February 1949 the Communists merged the coalition parties, two of the small opposition parties and such mass movements as the trades union council into a Hungarian Independent Peoples' Front. In a general election in May, only a single list of candidates by this Front was entered. 71% of the newly elected deputies represented the renamed Communist party, the MDP, which also occupied 13 of the 18 portfolios in the Government. Communist hegemony has been achieved.

The MKP's Janus Policy

During this intensive power struggle, it was more the Soviet Union's foreign policy than the MKP's domestic interests which determined the party's attitude to the Zionists. Soviet support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine compelled the Communists to postpone the suppression of the Zionist movement. The MKP appeared instead, like the mythological god Janus, displaying two different faces simultaneously. With one it smiled encouragingly at the efforts to create a Jewish state, while with the other it looked morosely at Zionist activities in Hungary itself.

The smiling Janus gave practical assistance to Palestinian Jewry's armed struggle against the British forces and later against the attacking Arab armies, as well as propaganda support for that fight. The MKP allowed Hungary's active involvement in the supply of both arms and manpower for the Hagana, the Jewish defence force in Palestine. In 1948, when Czechoslovakia became the new Jewish state's sole arms supplier, the Communist-dominated government agreed that Hungary should be used as a transit station for the arms shipments on their way to Yugoslav ports. At least four only slightly concealed large transports were taken through Hungary by Palestinian Jewish agents.⁴

A Hagana representative, Haim Gury, who had been arrested in Budapest during a routine police raid, was immediately freed on the intervention of the AVH, when it was established that he had been escorting one of those arms transports.⁵ The Communist party was

⁴ Interview with Bentsur.

⁵ Interview with Meir.

also directly involved in financial help for the Hagana. The Hungarian Zionist organisations collected 20 million Forints for the Jewish defence force, but were uncertain how it could be transferred to Palestine. Zoltan Vas, a Jewish Politbureau member suggested that the Zionists should purchase Hungarian sugar for that amount which could then be delivered to Palestine outside the terms of the Hungro-Palestinian commercial agreement.⁶

The MKP supported the recruitment, training and transport of able-bodied young Jews for service in the Hagana. The Hashomer Hatzair, Zionist youth movement gave regular arms training to Hagana recruits, with the implicit consent, and sometimes under the supervision of the AVH.⁷

The Communist party assisted also in the quick transport of those recruits. Early in 1948, before the official establishment of the State of Israel, the Hagana recruited 1,500 young Jews in Hungary. The British authorities refused to issue them with entry permits to Palestine, which was officially the condition of them receiving visas from the Hungarian government. The Communists gave the Palestinian emissaries the clue to overcome this bureaucratic hurdle. Istvan Szirmai, a candidate member of the MKP's central committee and head of its organisation department, advised one of the emissaries that he should issue the entry permits on behalf of the Jewish Agency. Szirmai even provided him with the text of a permit form. These were then duly accepted by the Ministry of the Interior, and the recruits left Hungary legally.⁸

⁶ Interview with Bentsur, who was then one of the permanent Palestinian emissaries working in Hungary. He negotiated the deal with Vas and described it to this author as "a real help for the State of Israel, which was then suffering an acute foreign currency shortage. If Ben-Gurion (who was the head of the Jewish Agency and after the establishment of Israel its first Prime Minister - G.G) could have chosen between guns and sugar, he would have opted for the first. But there was no choice. The MKP's offer to deliver 20 million Forints worth of sugar was welcomed in Israel with the greatest imaginable joy."

⁷ Interview with Meir. He was an organiser of those training courses, and his closest assistant was an AVH officer. The AVH constantly surveyed the grounds where those apparently secret training sessions were held, but did not protest, not even when empty bullet shells were found.

⁸ Interview with Bentsur.

The MKP's public support for Jewish nationhood evolved slowly. The Hungarian Communists appeared to be uneasy in ignoring their objections to Zionism. In the summer of 1947, when the Soviet Union had already declared in the U.N., its support for a separate Jewish state in Palestine, the MKP was still denying that the "Zionists' anti-British struggle was a real freedom fight." The British, it claimed, had been trying to set Jews and Arabs against each other, and "the Zionists leadership had fallen in with that and Palestinian Jewry, willy-nilly, became the tools of British imperialism in the Middle-East." It asserted that "it was impossible to conduct a guerilla war when the majority of the population - the Arabs and the class conscious Jews - were not behind the 'partisans'". Palestinian Jewry, the MKP warned, must recognise that the enemy was neither Britain nor the United States, but imperialism, and to fight that, it must join forces with all the democratic elements in the area.⁹

At this stage the Hungarian Communists must have yet failed to recognise the main-spring of Soviet policy, namely that Britain's expulsion from Palestine, even if partly for the benefit of a Zionist dominated Jewish state, would weaken the "imperialist" hold on that strategically important area, and open it up for Soviet penetration. By the end of the year however, the MKP identified the real issue. Although it still maintained that "the real interest of the Palestinian peoples - both Jews and Arabs - demands the reconciliation of their conflict", it drew a distinction between the "progressive" Jewish and the "reactionary" Arab positions.¹⁰

Obviously the Communists' basic propaganda aim was to discredit Britain. To this end they accepted unscrupulously all relevant allegations, among others for instance, charges that the British Government

⁹ Szabad Nep, July 23, 1947.

¹⁰ Szabad Nep, December 14, 1947.

was associated with former Nazis and Fascists.¹¹ For the sake of contrast, in order to paint the Devil as black as possible, its victims, i.e. the Palestinian Jews, had to be shown affection and solidarity. Thus, their struggle was considered a "heroic self-defence,"¹² and they were constantly pictured as suffering from a perfidious British policy.¹³ But the MKP's vigorous propaganda for Palestinian Jewry was in one respect qualified and in another confused. Almost every expression of sympathy was accompanied by a repetition of a basic tenet of Soviet policy, namely that the real solution of the Jews' problem lay in their collaboration with the democratic elements among the Arabs.¹⁴

¹¹ Reporting on Britain's conduct during the transitional period - between the U.N. partition decision in December 1947, and the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948 - the Szabad Nep (February 4, 1948) described it as a "strange policy of non-intervention" which included military support for Fascist Arab gangs who comprised of Polish, Serbian and German Nazis, as well as of British Fascists of the Mosley movement. On May 25, 1948, the Szabad Nep claimed that the "Arab, Polish and even German Fascists who had attacked the new Jewish state have been using British military equipment and have been commanded by British officers."

¹² Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.III, No.4-5, April-May 1948, p.376.

¹³ An excellent example was the publication of a letter in the Szabad Nep on February 4, 1948. from a Hungarian resident of Haifa. He described how the British forces - though following apparently a policy of non-intervention - helped the "Fascist Arab gangs" and set up traps for Jewish civilians and members of the Hagana. In another article (April 13, 1948) the Szabad Nep reported that although Britain had declared a cease-fire in Palestine "Arab units were shooting at children in outer suburbs with British artillery equipment." Another report (Szabad Nep, May 1, 1948) said that "The British do not even try to preserve the appearance of neutrality. They have openly threatened the Jewish forces that if they do not stop their activities, the British army and air force, in cooperation with the Arabs, will attack Palestinian Jewry."

¹⁴ Szabad Nep, January 18, February 4, April 13, 1948.

The confusion emanated from the Zionist aspect of the Palestine issue. Their difficulty was how to reconcile Soviet support for the Palestinian Jews with Communist objections to Zionism itself. The result was a confused interpretation of Soviet motives. The MKP's theoretical journal first gave a clinically and cool political explanation: support for the creation of a Jewish state "represented no change in the Soviet Union's frequently repeated disapproval of Zionism." The Soviet delegates in the U.N General Assembly advocated the partition of Palestine only because under the circumstances there was "no other way to achieve the final goal: the liberation of the area from colonial rule."¹⁵ This analyst had no doubts about the reactionary nature of the Zionist movement and its unreliability from the point of possible democratic - i.e. Communist - developments. He described the "Zionist political leadership" as "constantly antidemocratic and aggressive."¹⁶

However, the MKP's wavering produced in a subsequent issue of the same journal a considerably modified interpretation both of the Soviet decision and of the Zionist movement. This article in fact, implied Soviet endorsement of the principal Zionist claim that Jews comprised a nation,¹⁷ and was optimistic about the prospects of the Zionists moving away from the "imperialists."¹⁸ But manifestations of the MKP's confusion over the Zionist aspect of the Palestine issue were confined to this journal's readership. In its propaganda for a wider public, the Communist party evaded this sensitive problem by simply not linking at all the Zionists with "anti-colonial fight" in Palestine.¹⁹

Soon after the establishment of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948, the MKP permitted itself increasingly more scepticism about its probable social developments and international affiliations. It already gave a slight

¹⁵ Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.III, No1. January 1948, p.59.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 61

¹⁷ "During the Second World War, none of the Western powers could ensure the defence of the Jewish people's most elementary rights, their rescue from the hands of the Fascist butchers. Therefore the Soviet delegate (in the U.N. General Assembly) considered the Jewish people's wish to live in their own state justified." Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.II, No.4-5, April-May, 1948, p.375.

¹⁸ "The Zionists' pro-British, and the Jewish Agency's pro-American elements have learned the lesson that no people can base its independence on the caprice of one or the other imperialist powers." Ibid, p.376.

¹⁹ None of the articles on Palestine in the Szabad Nep mentioned any Zionist involvement. All the references were made only to "Jews" between December 1947 and the end of May, 1948. References to Zionists on the borders of this period were critical. (See issues of July 23, 1947, and May 30, 1948).

hint of disbelief in Israel's willingness to remain dissociated from the Western powers only a few days after its official appearance among the nations.²⁰

After an interval of almost a year, the Szabad Nep again questioned the reliability of Israel's Zionist leaders,²¹ and these doubts intensified when the weakness of Israel's pro-Soviet left-wing became increasingly clear during the country's first election campaign.²² The elections on January 25, 1949, proved that in spite of Soviet help in the creation of the state, the majority of Israelis supported the moderately left-of-centre parties who preferred alliance with the Western powers. The MKP responded to this set-back with restraint, but obviously enjoyed elaborating on Israel's material and political difficulties.²³

It is worth noting that although the MKP discretely helped and publicly favoured the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, its leaders - unlike their counterparts in Poland and Bulgaria, for example,²⁴ did not express any personal support. Official approval of Palestinian Jewry's fight was assigned strictly to State functionaries.²⁵

Not even at the peak of the MKP's practical and propaganda support for the Jewish state (from mid-1947 to mid-1948) did the other side of the party's Janus face bear any similarly sympathetic expression towards the local activities of Zionists in Hungary. A prominent Jewish Communist lawyer (Dr.

²⁰ On May 23, 1948 the Szabad Nep remarked that Britain was concerned about the future of military bases in the Middle East "which were being threatened by Arab freedom fights and the independent Jewish State," but added slyly: "If the latter will indeed be independent."

²¹ May 30, 1948.

²² On January 11, 1949, the Szabad Nep still maintained that "Israel, fighting for survival undoubtedly represents the relatively most active anti-imperialist force in the Middle East" but added that her government "which consists of the very same Zionist politicians who had been obedient tools of British imperialism" was incapable of ensuring that "Israel would not become part of the reactionary Eastern Block planned by America."

²³ See Szabad Nep report (May 21, 1949) on unemployment, poverty and sharpening conflict between Jews and Arabs.

²⁴ JTA, December 4, 1946 and January 15, 1947.

²⁵ Satisfaction over the U.N's partition decision and assurance that Hungary would cooperate with the new Jewish state were expressed by the President of the Hungarian Republic (JTA, December 29, 1947 and January 23, 1948). The MCSZ's festive rally received a message welcoming the creation of the Jewish state from the Prime Minister. (Uj Elet, December 11, 1947).

Tibor Ferencz, head of the People's Prosecutor's Office) drew the line of distinction bluntly. After having asserted that "we do not disown our bretheren abroad, do not deny the cause of the Holy Land, of the Palestinian Jewish state," he declared that it "will not be permitted that certain Jewish groups (in the context of his article this referred obviously to the Zionists - G.G) should keep the so-called Jewish question permanently on the agenda by constantly deepening the Jewish problem." He did not yet deny the Zionists their right to follow their own ideals ("If they cannot integrate into our democracy.... they must go") but warned them that they "must get out of the way of the majority of Hungarian Jewry."²⁶

The scope for local expressions of solidarity with Israel was also restricted, particularly after the disappointing results of Israel's first general elections. After the U.N decision in 1947, and the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, Hungarian Jews were allowed to celebrate.²⁷ However, their enthusiastic welcome to Israel's first envoy on his arrival in Budapest in February 1949, was concealed from the public.²⁸ The envoy himself was put under pressure to avoid any other opportunity for a similar demonstration.²⁹

²⁶ Uj Elet, September 18, 1947.

²⁷ In December 1947, the president of the MCSZ was permitted to broadcast over the state-controlled radio (for the text of his speech see Uj Elet, December 4, 1947). For reports on the celebrations by religious congregations and other organisations see Uj Elet, December 4, 1947, May 20, 1948, and interview with Galor.

²⁸ According to a report in the Jewish Chronicle, (February 18, 1949), the envoy was greeted on his arrival at a Budapest railway station by thousands of Jews singing the Hatikvah (the Israeli national anthem - G.G). The Hungarian press did not report this reception, it simply recorded his arrival.

²⁹ The envoy, Ehud Avriel notified in advance the PIH that on the first Saturday after his arrival he intends to attend the usual Shabbat service in its largest synagogue. On the appointed day the synagogue was filled to capacity and the congregation's minister, Rabbi Dr.Herskovits, planned to welcome the envoy from the pulpit. But early that morning an official of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry warned Avriel that it was not the accepted practice of foreign envoys to let themselves celebrate publicly and subsequently Avriel cancelled his visit to the synagogue. Interview with Dr.Herskovits.

The MKP's attitude to the existence of the Zionist organisations remained unchanged in this period (1947-49). In spite of some tactical concessions, party leaders in private remained unwaveringly hostile to Zionist activities in Hungary. While the Communist-controlled police and the AVH were conveniently overlooking illegal Jewish emigration in 1947, and the party press was praising the "heroic" struggle of the Palestinian Jews, Rakosi made no secret of his determination to liquidate the Zionist organisations as soon as possible.³⁰ In the same year, another Communist official, Istvan Szirmai, in what was probably the only Zionist-Communist dialogue at any reasonable level, described Zionism as "a dangerous ideology based on disregard for realities" and predicted that in two years' time "nobody will consider himself a Jew in Hungary."³¹

The MKP's links with Zionist organisations showed however some modification of its attitude in the immediate post-war era. The party moved away from its obdurate rejection of any contacts with Zionist organisations on a higher level. The move was presumably based on the realisation that the party should exploit both the concessions which it had to give for tactical reasons, and also the favourable climate produced by Soviet support in the U.N for the creation of a Jewish state. In 1947, Mihaly Farkas, a Jewish member of the Politbureau, and one of the party's two deputy general-secretaries, called in the presidium of the MCSZ and asked them to line up their members behind the Communist party in the forthcoming general elections.³²

³⁰ Rakosi told Dr. Denes, a vice-president of the MCSZ in 1947, that the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship in Hungary will end the Zionist movement. "And then? I asked him, 'Either I will be thrown in prison, Comrade Denes, or you will,' he said smiling". Denes, p.34.

³¹ Interview with Yaari. Szirmai expressed his views in a private meeting with two ultra-left Palestinian Zionist emissaries, Ferenc Jambor and Arie Yaari. Szirmai's peculiar position in the MKP's relation with the Zionists should be noted. He was the only central committee official who maintained regular contact with Zionist leaders. Many of those believed that Szirmai was responsible in the MKP for Jewish affairs, though the existence of such a particular portfolio could not be established. His contact with Zionist leaders, primarily with Palestinian emissaries, emanated from the fact that Szirmai, who was born in Transylvania, was for a short while in his late teens a member of a left-wing Zionist movement in Cluj (Kolozsvar). (Interview with Dr. Y. Marton). Many of the Palestinian emissaries were also former Transylvanians who renewed their acquaintance with Szirmai, and turned to him frequently for advice and help.

³² Interview with Salamon.

This was a unique occasion, the only one when a top Communist (Farkas, together with Rakosi, Gero, and Revai, made up that powerful quartet which ruled the party during the Stalinist period) asked for Zionist assistance. It was also a peculiar request because Farkas offered nothing tangible in return. He reminded his visitors that the party had not yet obstructed Zionist efforts to organise the emigration of Jewish youth, but offered nothing more than its continued goodwill. Nevertheless, the Zionist leaders obliged and even the president of the MCSZ, who was a member of the religious section, told Zionists publicly that they should vote for the MKP.³³

The Communists departed from their previous stand also by becoming more receptive to approaches from the Marxist-Leninist wing of the Hungarian Zionist movement. Hashomer Hatzair, its youth section, acknowledged with relief, late in 1947, that after years of frustration "the party (the MKP - G.G) has lately eased its rigidity towards Zionism.... It appears that not all who had expressed opinions in the name of the party were indeed representing its views."³⁴ The proof of that allegedly less rigid attitude was very modest indeed. The Communist youth organisation had rejected Hashomer Hatzair's offer to join in its national campaign of reconstruction (by sending volunteers to build railway lines). Now it accepted a "working brigade" and agreed that the Zionists could join the "democratic youth" in celebrating the centenary of the 1848 Hungarian war of independence.³⁵ It was a similarly modest achievement, when Gyorgy Non, a member of the MKP central committee and head of the Communist youth organisation, gave a cautiously qualified appreciation of Hashomer Hatzair's war-time activities,³⁶ or when the MKP sent a friendly message to a public

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Beszamolo etc, p.31.

³⁵ Ibid, p.32

³⁶ Non was one of the illegal Communists who had contacts with Hashomer Hatzair members during Hungary's German occupation in 1944. On the 20th anniversary of Hashomer Hatzair, in an article for the movement's journal, he recalled how this contact had been established and described some aspects of Hashomer Hatzair's rescue work on behalf of political prisoners and Communist "partisans". But when coming to an evaluation of those activities, Non merely stated that "I can speak only with appreciation about that work", thus side-stepping carefully any reference to post-war Zionist activities. (Hashomer Hatzair, October 1947. Mimeographed journal, among unclassified material at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem).

meeting in memory of Szimcha Hunwald, a former leader of the movement, who was killed during Hungary's German occupation.³⁷ Prominent Communists' public cooperation with the Zionist ultra-left was limited to the cultural field.³⁸ The only significant collaboration was when the MKP - simultaneously with a similar request to the Zionist organisations in general - called for their help in the 1947 general elections campaign. Although Hashomer Hatzair assisted the Communist party in the 1945 elections too, this represented an improvement in their relationship. While previously the MKP initiated such cooperation only on Budapest district committee level, and only in those areas where there was a concentration of Jewish electors, this time the call came from Farkas, who devoted four hours to a discussion with leaders of the Marxist-Zionist wing, and provided them with specific propaganda material.³⁹

The Zionist organisations responded to the MKP's double-faced posture with a mixture of tactical concessions and some genuine sympathy for certain Communist policies. Attempts to consolidate Communist support for the Jewish state and to assure the party's continued tolerance of Zionist activities were presumably the motives when Zionist leaders exaggerated in public the importance of the Soviet Union, and gave undeserved credit to Hungarian authorities.⁴⁰

³⁷ Hasomer Hacair, January 1948.

³⁸ When the "Marxist-Zionist parties" (Hashomer Hatzair and Achdut Avoda) organised a cultural evening in Budapest's largest concert hall, the participants included Sandor Gergely, a Jewish Muscovite Communist, who was then president of the Writers' Society, and two Jewish Communist actresses. (Borochow Kor Tagertesitoje, May 1948. Mimeographed journal among unclassified material at The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem).

³⁹ This was a reprint of Gromyko's U.N speech in favour of a separate Jewish state. (Interview with Yaari).

⁴⁰ Dr. Szonyi, the Jewish Agency representative, told a press conference after the U.N partition decision that "what decided the fate of an independent Jewish state was that the Soviet Union supported the Jews on every issue." (Kis Ujsag, December 4, 1947). In his radio broadcast, Salamon, the president of the MCSZ said: "... I cannot miss this opportunity for expressing Hungarian Zionists gratitude and thanks to the government of the democratic Hungarian Republic which had always shown goodwill and the greatest understanding of our cause." (Uj Elet, December 4, 1947).

The opportunism of this attitude was strikingly evident at a later stage, in early 1949. Then, with the liquidation of Zionist organisations imminent, the MCSZ, presumably in a last attempt to prove its loyalty to the regime, signed jointly with other Jewish organisations an appeal to world Jewry to call off their protest against the prosecution of Cardinal Mindszenty.⁴¹

Genuine support for certain aspects of Communist policy was given even by moderately left-wing Zionists, when their views corresponded with the MKP's. They endorsed, for instance, the merger of the MKP and the SZDP, because they disliked the Palestine policy of the British Labour Party, which the Communist propaganda depicted as the ring leader of the "reactionary, right-wing" Social Democratic movement.⁴² Support for a much wider scale of Communist policies came from the "Marxist-Zionist" wing which backed the MKP at every stage of its climb to hegemony, and was at variance with it only on the party's attitude to the Jewish question and to Zionism.⁴³

It was on such ideological proximity that the ultra-left based its hope to save the Hungarian Zionist movement from extinction. When, in the second half of 1948, that side of the MKP's Janus face, which was turned towards local Zionists changed from moroseness to outright disgust, the ultra-left made an attempt to prolong the MCSZ's existence by taking control of it. But by then the MKP was no longer committed to tolerate organised Zionism.

⁴¹ A copy of this cable, which was sent to various Jewish organisations abroad is available in the Institute of Jewish Affairs Archive, London, File 80(182).

⁴² See Hedin, Vol.III. January 1947. (Central Zionist Archives). This journal was published by the Histadrut Dror-Habonim movement which were affiliated to the Social Democratic-type Ichud (Mapai) party.

⁴³ A Palestinian emissary to the ultra-left Zionist movement claimed that they had no ideological differences with Communism. In fact, they were Jewish Communists, but wanted to be allowed to build their Communist order in their own way. (Interview with Yaari).

The Liquidation of Zionist Organisations

Towards the end of 1948 conditions were ripe for the elimination of the Zionist organisations. Soviet involvement in the settlement of the Palestine issue, which had previously prevented the Hungarian Communists from striking the Zionists the lethal blow, ceased to carry such obligation. With half of his goal - British withdrawal - accomplished, Stalin probably accepted that the installation of a Soviet bridgehead in the newly born Jewish state was out of his reach. Israel's Zionist leaders - in spite of Stalin's godfatherly role - chose to retain their association with the Western powers, and this in itself would have justified a looser rein on the Communist parties' anti-Zionism. In addition, Moscow Jewry's enthusiastic reception to Israel's first diplomatic representative must have warned Stalin of the disruptive effect which Zionism and other foreign ideologies could have on the monolithic structure of the Soviet Union.

He chose to ward off this danger with two measures applied simultaneously. One was a steely reaffirmation of Communist ideology's pejorative assessment of Zionism, and the denunciation of Israel as the embodiment of that reactionary concept. Ilya Ehrenburg's article in Pravda, in September 1948, played the overture of this propaganda concert. At the same time, Stalin deprived the Soviet Jews of those cultural facilities (like schools, theatres, periodicals, publishing houses, etc), which they enjoyed as a nationality, but had allegedly misused for the development of sentiments contrary to the interest of the state.

The purge started in the autumn of 1948, with the murder of Mikhoels, a Yiddish actor, and continued with the arrest and eventual execution of many other prominent Jews.

Hungarian Communists - like their counterparts in other East European countries - took this turn in Soviet policy as the green light for their own attack on the Zionist organisations.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ This general anti-Zionist offensive by the East European Communist regimes was however uneven and produced some chilling anachronisms. A month after the Roumanian authorities had, for instance, closed down two Zionist fund-raising organisations (the Keren Hayesod and the Keren Kayemet) and had arrested their directors (JTA, November 4, 1948), the Polish government announced the legalisation of the very same organisations (JTA, November 28, 1948). In September 1949, months after the Zionist organisations in Roumania and Hungary had been disbanded, the representatives of the Czechoslovak and Polish Zionist federations were still attending a European Zionist Conference in Paris, where the Polish delegate announced officially that his government had lifted all restrictions on emigration to Israel. (JTA, September 18, 1949).

But they acted unlike the other parties, though consistent with their post-war policy on the Jews. A comparison with the Roumanian method elucidates the peculiarity of the Hungarian action. In Roumania, the dissolution of the Zionist organisations - an administrative act - was accompanied by a propaganda campaign against Zionism as an ideology. The Communist party declared its views openly in a resolution by its Politbureau. This defined Zionism as nationalist and therefore irreconcilable with Socialism. It also denounced Zionists as the agents of Anglo-American imperialism. The Roumanian party made also clear its views on the solution of the Jewish problem by citing the Soviet example.⁴⁵

Although it was the left-wing Jewish press that carried the bulk of this anti-Zionist agitation,⁴⁶ the party's official organ, the Scanteia also participated in the campaign.⁴⁷

In Hungary, by contrast, the party kept itself publicly completely dissociated from the actions taken against the Zionist organisations, it did not link those to an anti-Zionist propaganda campaign, and concealed this whole operation from the general public. Apart from sporadic criticism of the Israeli leadership,⁴⁸ the MDP gave no sign publicly of its objections to Zionism.⁴⁹ Its official organ, the Szabad Nep, did not even report the dissolution of the Zionist organisations, though other newspapers published brief communiques without comments.⁵⁰ The liquidation of the Zionist organisations was treated as an internal Jewish matter, and was carried out strictly within the confines of the Jewish community.

⁴⁵ JTA, December 4, 1948.

⁴⁶ JTA, December 12, 1948.

⁴⁷ It accused Zionists of trying to create "an atmosphere of instability and mistrust of the regime," Jewish Chronicle, March 11, 1949.

⁴⁸ Szabad Nep, July 13, 1948 and January 13, 1949.

⁴⁹ The party did not reveal, for example, that it had expelled Zionists during a membership revision in 1948. The long list which Farkas, a Politbureau member, presented of those categories that had to be purged, did not include the Zionists. (Szabad Nep, September 8, 1948). But a Communist communal leader later disclosed that "during the membership revision, the MDP expelled the Zionists, even if they claimed to be 'socialist Zionists' or 'Communist Zionists'" (Sos: "Oszlik a kod", Uj Elet, March 17, 1949).

⁵⁰ Nepszava and Magyar Nemzet, both on March 25, 1949.

Such handling indicates that on this particular issue, the Hungarian Communists must have preferred internal political considerations over external ones. Joining the anti-Zionist chorus would have demonstrated their loyalty to the Communist camp and to the leadership of the Soviet Union. It would have undoubtedly strengthened the efforts to impress the world with the unflinching unity of the Communist bloc, and project that as a most formidable force, in the line-up for the Cold War, which was then taking shape.

But the liquidation of the Zionist organisations - with or without the public involvement of the party - served its purpose in any case. It eliminated the disseminators of one of the ideologies which were endangering the monolithic position of Communism. As for ~~avoiding~~ an anti-Zionist propaganda campaign, this must have been considered disadvantageous in the specific context of Hungarian politics. One disadvantage would have been further damage to the Hungarian Communist international reputation, for the liquidation of the Zionist organisations coincided with the MDP's intensive campaign against the Catholic church and with the prosecution of Cardinal Mindszenti.

Drum-beating anti-Zionism would have certainly added outcries of antisemitism to the already prevailing protests against those actions. While Western objections to the anti-Catholic campaign had no serious consequences for Hungary's international relations, and Mindszenti's confession to "political crimes" had to some extent blurred the effectiveness of the international protest, the persecution of Zionists could have revived memories of the Communists' obscure association with the 1946 pogroms, and raise unpleasant echoes about a country which had not too long before been extremely deeply infected with antisemitism. Furthermore, it might have led to the cancellation of "Joint" aid which was then still a not negligible source of Hungary's hard currency income.⁵¹

⁵¹ "Joint" aid reached its peak in 1947 with \$10,898,388,38, but in 1948 it still amounted to \$8,463,875,94 and in 1949 to \$7,671,015,03. (Deposition by H.Katzki).

But the major disadvantage of the MDP's open involvement in the anti-Zionist measures would have been strictly domestic. Since 1945, the Communist party had persistently pretended that a Jewish problem did not exist in post-war Hungary. It departed from that policy only when its own interests made it unavoidable, as at the time of the anti-Jewish atrocities in 1946. The roots of this attitude have been explained in earlier chapters, and the reason for such a posture lost none of its validity by the end of 1948, when the leadership of the Communist party was still exclusively in Jewish hands. (All the four effective rulers of the party - Gero, Revai, Farkas, and the head of the MDP, Rakosi himself - were of Jewish origin). A public campaign against Hungarian Zionists, led by the Communist-controlled government would have belied the party's carefully sustained pretension. It would have also drawn attention to the Jews, which the party leaders were trying to avoid. A discrete but firm manipulation through the Jewish organisations appeared to be the acceptable solution.

The first indication that the Soviet signal had been received in Hungary was given shortly after Ehrenburg's article in Pravda. In early October 1948, Stockler, the president of the PIH, declared: "We must be fully aware that after the establishment of the independent Jewish state, that kind of Zionist work which had been carried out here, cannot continue to the same extent and under the same conditions. Only short-sighted people can believe that in this respect there must not be any change."⁵²

In the following month, the authorities started what seemed merely a routine administrative inspection. They examined the books of the Zionist organisations and their agricultural and industrial training centres, checked the licences of their clubs, the regularity of rent payments, but, ominously, showed an unusual interest in some irregularities (dealings in foreign currencies, financial links with the "Joint" etc.) which had been previously overlooked.⁵³

⁵² Uj Elet, October 7, 1948.

⁵³ Interview with Palgi.

These apparently innocent procedures however acquired a sinister overtone in the light of recent events in Roumania, where similar auditing of two fund-raising organisations marked the beginning of the anti-Zionist drive.⁵⁴

But the final attack did not unfold until a few months later with a front-page article in the *Uj Elet*, the journal of PIH, by Miksa Domonkos, its general-secretary.⁵⁵ Domonkos noted that the new state of Israel had already established its international links in accordance with diplomatic rules. This, he asserted, "had created a new situation for the position of movements and parties directed from abroad. While the authorities had been viewing their activities with understanding before the establishment of Israel, these movements have now completely lost their reason for existence. The consequence must be drawn." But the author did not stop at such a rational justification for the dissolution of the Zionist organisations. He blamed the Zionists' "irresponsible propaganda" for the mass hysteria over emigration, and accused them of trying to "discredit the governing methods of the Hungarian People's Republic."

If the Zionists regarded this attack as merely another manifestation of the assimilationist Jews' passionate anti-Zionism, they were soon to discover that it had the backing of the Communist authorities. According to a not wholly reliable source, the warning came personally from Rakosi,⁵⁶ but even if they did not receive that, an article in the *Uj Elet* by a Communist, Endre Sos (only one week after Domonkos' outburst) could help them to put the campaign into full perspective.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ JTA, November 4, 1948.

⁵⁵ February 3, 1949.

⁵⁶ According to Bela Fabian, a strongly anti-Communist pre-war politician of Jewish origin, on February 7, 1949, Rakosi received representatives of the Jewish community and told them: "The government will shortly dissolve by a stroke of the pen all Zionist recruiting offices, schools, organisations, denominations, and nationalist underground movements. We shall no longer tolerate the Zionist machinations in Hungary. The Minister of the Interior, Kadar, will remove this illness of the Hungarian Jews by an operation." Fabian, p.33.

⁵⁷ February 10, 1949.

Sos gave Domonkos' subjective anti-Zionism "Socialist" (i.e Communist) back-bone by enlarging on it in two respects. While still not denouncing Zionism as an ideology, Sos criticised Israel for the lack of "Socialist" contents in its political composition,⁵⁸ and at the same time indicated the road that had been charted for Hungarian Jewry: loyalty to the Communist Hungarian regime.⁵⁹ Although Sos himself made no reference to the future of the Zionist organisations, the pot was kept boiling as the Uj Elet in the same issue, but in another article,⁶⁰ repeated the point raised by Domonkos a week earlier, and which was to become the basic non-ideological argument for the dissolution of the Zionist organisations, namely that "now that the new state exists, only internationally recognised diplomatic institutions have the right to conduct activities.... There is no sovereign state in the world which permits on its own soil activities conducted in the interest of another sovereign state by any means."

This pivotal argument was again emphasised a week later by Stockler, who took it one step further by implying that maintaining links with Israel was a matter concerning only the Hungarian state, and not its Jewish community.⁶¹ But Stockler too, refrained from expressing opposition to Zionism as an ideology. His objection to the Zionists, individually and collectively as an organisation, was based on an assertion that they represented only a minority view which they should stop forcing on the majority. He emphasised Hungarian Jewry's sympathy for a Jewish state, but warned that this should not be taken as identification with Zionism.

⁵⁸ "... we are strongly concerned about the predominance of Israeli nationalist tendencies and about the excessive influence of foreign plutocrats.... We regard it a mistake that, when starting its independent statehood, the Jewish state is not setting itself up with a Socialist structure on the road to progress.... The leaders of the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies had hoped, and still hope, that the workers of the State of Israel will not tolerate the preponderance of nationalism and their enslavement by foreign plutocrats. The Israeli workers did not get rid of national oppression and economic exploitation by only to tolerate now another kind of oppression and exploitation." Ibid.

⁵⁹"The Hungarian People's Democracy, which - in Matyas Rakosi's definition - fulfills the functions of a proletarian dictatorship, means the rule by the country's working majority. Well, those Jews who live from their work - that is, the overwhelming majority of Hungarian Jewry - belong to this majority of workers.... the triumphant Socialism will put an end to that great trial which the ruling feudal and capitalist classes had started against the Jews." Ibid.

⁶⁰ pp.3-4

⁶¹Uj Elet, February 17, 1949.

An unequivocal denunciation of Zionism as an ideology, and a clear declaration that the Communists party wished to close down the Zionist organisations were made only in the final stage of this campaign, and even then in a hypocritical and ambiguous manner. For it was hypocritical that Endre Sos' article, disclosing these previously concealed factors, was published in the Uj Elet,⁶² four days after the Zionist organisations had "voluntarily" disbanded, but a week before it was announced publicly. It remains open to speculation why the Communist party, at such a late stage and, in fact, after the task had already been accomplished, suddenly revealed its interest in the destruction of the Zionist organisation.

It is even more puzzling because the official announcement about the closure repeated only the arguments that had been previously emphasised,⁶³ and Zionism as a hostile ideology was not to be mentioned again either in the Jewish or the general Hungarian press - with very few exceptions - for several years.

The isolated nature of this admission indicates that the disclosure might not have been official party policy. It could be assumed that Jewish Communists in the PIH evoked the authority of the Communist ideology and of the Communist party in order to strengthen their position in favour of the Zionist organisations' elimination. The ambiguous manner in which Sos implicated the Hungarian party in this anti-Zionist attack supports this assumption.

⁶² March 17, 1949.

⁶³ The official announcement said: "The committee liquidating the affairs of the Hungarian Zionist Federation (the MCSZ - G.G) announces that the national executive committee at its meeting on March 13, 1949, passed the following resolution: 'As the State of Israel had been established and therefore the Federation's cardinal objective had been accomplished, also, as there is now normal diplomatic relationship between Hungary and Israel, the executive committee discontinued the functioning of the Hungarian Zionist Federation. The Hungarian Zionist Federation, its departments and local branches have, in accordance with the resolution above, ceased to function.'" The announcement added that "The Hungarian Palestine Office (the local branch of the Jewish Agency - G.G) in a letter to the Prime Minister on the 22nd of this month, made a similar announcement, notifying him that the presidium of the Palestine Committee at its meeting on the 13th of this month, had decided to discontinue the functioning of the Hungarian Palestine Office." (Uj Elet, March 24, 1949).

Sos could not rely on any direct anti-Zionist action or pronouncement by the Hungarian party, with the exception of the presumably indiscrete disclosure of a previously concealed fact, that during the 1948 membership revision, the party had expelled the Zionists. In all other respects Sos could only involve the Hungarian party by implication. He referred to measures which had been taken by the Polish and Roumanian parties with particular emphasis on the Roumanian Politbureau's resolution which denounced Zionist ideology. Sos then asserted that "people who have been following Polish and Roumanian events could see that they were not isolated incidents, but meant that the People's Democracies, on their way to Socialism, have declared Zionism incompatible with their principles."

His authority to invest the liquidation of the Zionist organisations with the blessing of the Hungarian party was no less dubious when he stated: "According to the Marxist-Leninist view and Stalinist teachings, Zionism is nationalism, and nationalism is irreconcilable with Socialism. The Hungarian Workers Party therefore (my emphasis - G.G) did not pass such resolution but - as it declares itself the party of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin - it has adopted this view." Although Sos was fundamentally right about the MDP's attitude, he provided no more than circumstantial evidence about the party's involvement. But had his evidence been stronger, it would have still been insignificant. Sos' article appeared only in the Jewish communal journal, and therefore, as far as the general public was concerned, his apparent indiscretion remained unnoticed. It did not even make a dent on the MDP's pretence of complete disconcern with the fate of the Zionist movement in Hungary.

While in the Soviet Union the anti-Zionist drive was only supposed to block the channel of ideological infiltration, in the East European countries, it also served a more practical purpose: it eliminated a movement which had been very effectively organising emigration. A drain on manpower was a serious problem in Hungary.

In the Second World War, the country lost more than 400,000 human lives,⁶⁴ and its difficulties were aggravated both by the departure of many people with the retreating German army, and by the Soviet Union's

⁶⁴ Korom, p.462.

unwillingness to return most of the prisoners of war. In the immediate post-war years, the authorities did not seriously obstruct either legal or illegal emigration,⁶⁵ but neither took place on any considerable scale, until the second half of 1948. Then, after the Communist take-over, numbers increased rapidly as people were trying to escape the effects of the social and economic changes. At that stage, the government introduced powerful measures to stop the flow, both to halt the drain on valuable manpower, and for political reasons. For by then, emigration acquired a political character, reflecting objections to the system, which the Communists were then establishing.⁶⁶

In December 1948, parliament passed a new law which declared actual as well as attempted illegal border crossing, and man smuggling, a criminal offence. The new regulations were applied immediately and severely: in the first month, the court at Szombathely, a Western border town, passed 200 sentences under the new law.⁶⁷ Trees in a 50-meter zone along the Western border were cut down, and watch towers were built; the police raided West-bound trains regularly, as attempted border crossing was also punishable.⁶⁸ The government emphasised the gravity of the situation by indicating that illegal emigrants might be charged with espionage.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ The official attitude was summed up by the World Union of Hungarians (a government-sponsored body): "The Hungarian authorities issue emigration passports in each case where the applicants are in possession of an entry permit to another country. Emigration propaganda is illegal, but there are no restrictions on individual attempts at emigration." (Uj Kelet, November 30, 1948).

⁶⁶ In contemporary Hungarian terminology, illegal emigrants were called dissidents.

⁶⁷ Magyar Nemzet, January 14, 1949.

⁶⁸ Magyar Nemzet, January 4, 1949.

⁶⁹ The Minister of the Interior, Janos Kadar, declared: "From now on, nobody can leave or enter without the permission of the Hungarian authorities.... We cannot watch idly, as imperialist spies stroll in and out of this country...." (Magyar Nemzet, January 21, 1949).

The liquidation of the Zionist organisations was hoped to plug most of this politically and economically damaging drainage, because the Zionists were singularly effective organisers of illegal emigration. Such emigration was usually carried out as an individual act, occasionally with the assistance of professional smugglers. Thus the circle of prospective illegal emigrants was confined to a relatively small number of unusually enterprising or wealthy individuals. The Zionist movement on the other hand, was geared to, and capable of, organising illegal emigration on a large scale. It had been maintaining several escape routes since the end of the war, and was widely and well organised, had sound financial backing and reception facilities at the other end of the journey. Its services were available to all Jews, regardless of their financial position. The destruction of this well-oiled machinery was obviously vital in order to close Hungary's borders effectively.

With the danger of dissolution mounting, the Zionist organisations wanted to ensure on the one hand the continuation of the movement in Hungary, and on the other that as many Jews as possible should - in Zionist terms - be rescued by emigration to Israel. The two were closely interlocked, because Zionists regarded settlement in Israel as their ultimate aim and believed that the longer their organisations could be kept functioning, the better their chances of arranging the emigration.

Many Zionists assumed that the Communists would tolerate the movement longer if it had a left-wing character.⁷⁰ Thus in the MCSZ elections in March 1948, the moderate and ultra-left wings took over control.⁷¹ Later that year, presumably under the impact of the MKP-SZDP merger, the ultra-left Marxist-Zionist wing tried to reduce the influence of the Social Democratic-type Ichud (Mapai) party and take over the

⁷⁰ Interview with Yaari.

⁷¹ The octogenarian, Moses Bisseliches, the new president, was not a left-winger, but as the "great old man" of the movement, he was considered the most suitable for the role of a front man who can command respect from the community as well as from the authorities. The executive posts, which had previously been held by representatives of all the Zionist parties, passed now into the hands of the left-wing. They provided all three vice-presidents, the general-secretary and the secretary (Borocho Kor, March 1948. Mimeographed circular, among unclassified material in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem).

leadership of the MCSZ. Their motive was probably not so much power lust than a conviction that if the movement could be seen as basically ultra-left, and consequently loyal to Communist ideals in general, it had a better chance of survival.⁷² Their attempt was first resisted by the MCSZ, which late in 1948 however changed its attitude,⁷³ and in February 1949, the ultra-left took control of it.⁷⁴ This was however a futile victory because by then the fate of the Zionist organisation had been sealed. Ironically it fell to this new ultra-left leadership to declare the "voluntary" dissolution of the MCSZ and all its affiliates, a month later in March 1949.

The other Zionist aim, the "rescue" by emigration to Israel of as many Jews as possible, had more success. The Hungarian government changed its favourable attitude on legal emigration to Israel late in 1948 or early 1949, by stopping the issue of passports.⁷⁵ Instead it entered into protracted negotiations with the Israeli government about its possible resumption on a limited scale. The Zionist leaders immediately stepped up the organisation of illegal transports.⁷⁶ After the liquidation of the MCSZ in March 1949, they set up a clandestine committee of representatives of all Zionist movements, to ensure its continuation.⁷⁷ Although exact data is not available on the numbers of those who were assisted by the Zionist organisations, the size of illegal emigration in 1949, and the number of Hungarian immigrants

⁷² This consideration emerged clearly from a statement which the Marxist-Zionist wing issued after the amalgamation of the MKP and the SZDP. It said: "... It has been proved several times that the majority of the Hungarian Zionists belong to the Marxist-Zionist camp. This must be expressed in the leadership of the MCSZ too... In the forthcoming (MCSZ) elections therefore, the Marxist-Zionist workers movement must win. This is not only in our interest. This is necessary for the whole future of Hungarian Zionism." (Marxista-Cionistak Partja, Korlevel / Circular by the Marxist-Zionist Party /, July 31, 1948. Among unclassified material in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem).

⁷³ Uj Elet, January 6, 1949.

⁷⁴ Interview with Dr.Schwarcz.

⁷⁵ According to one source (Denes, p.14) it happened in December, 1948. During the trial of Zionist leaders in June 1949, the same date was given (JTA, June 21, 1949). By the recollections of Israel's first permanent diplomatic representative in Hungary, legal emigration was stopped at the beginning of 1949, "when the Israeli government was already in a position to issue entry permits." (Interview with Bentsur).

⁷⁶ Denes, p.15.

⁷⁷ Interview with Dr.Schwarcz.

in Israel in that and the following year indicate the dimensions of that operation. An estimated 20,000 Jews left Hungary illegally in 1949,⁷⁸ and almost half of them emigrated to Israel, which indicates the Zionist influence and probably also Zionist assistance.⁷⁹

The Zionist escape service was certainly not short of takers as at the beginning of 1949, 40,000 Jews were registered for, and ready to emigrate to Israel.⁸⁰ That the clandestine committee was involved in most of the escapes can be deduced from the fact that illegal Jewish emigration grew quickly immediately after the liquidation of the Zionist organisations. The Israeli government's representative in Vienna reported in May, that 5,200 Hungarian Jews had arrived in Austria since the end of March, on an escape route through Czechoslovakia.⁸¹

In June, 40 - 50 Jews, mainly youth, escaped daily across the by then closely guarded Austro-Hungarian border,⁸² and a similar number to Czechoslovakia, where, by early August, they totalled 1,200.⁸³ According to a report by the Austrian delegate to a World Jewish Congress European executive meeting, 10,000 Hungarian Jews reached Vienna in July.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ This figure was given in an internal report by the World Jewish Congress on November 7, 1956. Institute of Jewish Affairs Archives, London, File 80(182).

⁷⁹ The number of Hungarian immigrants arriving in Israel in 1949, was 6,844, and in 1950, 2,302. (Reports of the Executives submitted to the 23rd Zionist Congress at Jerusalem, August, 1951; Published by the Executives of the Zionist Organisation and of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Jerusalem, 1951, p.246). Their total (9,146) represented by and large those who left Hungary in 1949 and proceeded to Israel either directly or after some delay in Western Europe.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.251.

⁸¹ JTA, May 12, 1949.

⁸² JTA, June, 1949.

⁸³ Jewish Chronicle, August 26, 1949.

⁸⁴ Jewish Chronicle, September 2, 1949.

Until early 1949, the Hungarian authorities by and large overlooked both the illegal emigration of Hungarian Jews and the transport through Hungary of Roumanian Jews. In 1949, first their attitude to emigrants in transit hardened,⁸⁵ and, after the closure of the MCSZ, they clamped down on illegal traffic. With the Austro-Hungarian border already sealed, the main escape route was through Czechoslovakia. Presumably at Hungarian request, the Czechoslovak authorities started preventing the flow of emigrants. Early in May, a group of refugees were returned to Hungary, and the Jewish congregation of Pozsony (Bratislava) - a town close both to the Czechoslovak-Hungarian and the Czechoslovak-Austrian borders - stated that, at the authorities' request, it would no longer assist illegal Hungarian emigrants in transit.⁸⁶

Reports from Vienna confirmed that the "Czechoslovak authorities had redoubled precautions against illegal border crossings," particularly by Hungarians.⁸⁷ Retributions became more severe through imprisonment, or return to Hungary, or both.⁸⁸ By the end of October 1949, the Czechoslovak escape route had also been effectively sealed off, and Zionist-organised illegal emigration on any considerable scale ceased. Thus, the liquidation of the Zionist organisations and of all their activities had been accomplished.

⁸⁵ Some of the legal emigrants from Czechoslovakia were transported by train through Hungary to Italian ports. They reported on arrival in Israel that "the Hungarian authorities did not allow them to open the doors of their waggons throughout the journey, and refused them access even to drinking water." Uj Kelet, March 29, 1949.

⁸⁶ Uj Kelet, May 11, 1949.

⁸⁷ JTA, June 19, 1949.

⁸⁸ In July, a Bratislava court sentenced 30 Hungarian Jews to six months imprisonment and ordered their deportation to Hungary on their release. (JTA, July 12, 1949). In the same month 15 others were arrested on Hungarian warrants and⁸⁵ apparently returned to Hungary. (Jewish Chronicle, August 26, 1949). In October, 21 Jews were arrested when crossing into Czechoslovakia, returned to Hungary, and sentenced to imprisonment. (Jewish Chronicle, October 7, 1949). In the same month, 1,200 mainly young emigrants were returned to Hungary (Uj Kelet, October 21, 1949).

The Re-Shaping of the Jewish Community

The destruction of the Zionist organisations meant the disappearance of the only movement that claimed that Jews were not just of the same religion, but that they constituted a nation. The Jewish community became again as it was before 1945: a group of Hungarian nationals of the same faith. With the only potential objectors, the Zionists, out of the way, the regime could feel free to apply to the Jewish community the same measures which it was then applying to all religious denominations, in order to make them compatible with a Communist-controlled society.

The ultimate aim was of course the removal of religious influences altogether, but the process was started cautiously with restricting religious organisations to the provision for their worshippers' spiritual needs, and banning all social activities which were traditionally associated with their activities. For tactical reasons, the Communists were prepared to make concessions. In return for a pledge that they would not advocate or encourage opposition to the regime, these organisations were allowed to retain some of their institutions which perpetuated their religious principles, like schools, seminaries, and publications.

It was on this basis that the government set out in the summer of 1948 to seal by agreement the regulations which were to rule the relationship between the state and the various denominations. Tactically the Communists started with an aggressive maximalist demand - the nationalisation of all denominational schools,⁸⁹ and conceded concessions from a position of power until the required agreements with the denominations were reached.⁹⁰

The reorganisation of the Jewish community too, started with the nationalisation of its schools. However, within the framework of this sweeping legislation, the government permitted an only gradual introduction of the new educational contents and methods both in the former and the remaining Jewish schools. First the government

⁸⁹ Parliament passed a law to this effect in June 1948.

⁹⁰ The Protestant churches were the first - in October 1948 - to sign agreements with the state. The Catholic church, the largest and the most influential was the last. Its episcopacy only started the negotiations in January 1949, after a vigorous Communist campaign against the Catholic church had culminated in the prosecution of the Primate, Cardinal Mindszenty. The agreement was signed in August 1950. (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.542.

took over the primary schools, but in the two largest ones in Budapest, which had belonged to the PIH, it allowed both the observance of the Shabbat and six hours of religious instructions weekly, as against two hours in other state schools.⁹¹ But the first concession was already withdrawn a few months later in November 1948,⁹² and the second sometime in 1949.⁹³ Compulsory teaching of religion in state schools was altogether abolished in September 1949.⁹⁴

Two secondary schools of the PIH - one for boys and the other for girls - and a third, where the language of tuition was Hebrew, were first left in the community's hands, but the latter was closed down even before the opening of the 1949 academic year.⁹⁵ The PIH, itself abolished in the other two, in May 1949, the curriculum that was still bearing the signs of Zionist influence (Hebrew was taught as a living language and Bible as the history of the Jewish people).

The Zionist chief inspector, Dr. Gellert, was replaced by the head of the congregation's religious education department, whose task was to maintain the schools on a strictly religious basis, and only for religiously observant pupils.⁹⁶ The teaching of Hebrew was prohibited and in December a decree ordered that religious instruction cannot be compulsory even in sectarian schools.⁹⁷ By then the number of pupils dropped to less than 150, because of "the (parents') reluctance to send children to religious schools."⁹⁸ Two technical

⁹¹ Uj Kelet, October 28, 1948.

⁹² See reference to it in a letter by Rabbi Dr. F. Herskovits to the Minister of Religion and Education on November 26, 1948. A copy of this letter is in this author's possession.

⁹³ This was indicated in a report to the World Jewish Congress by Dr. A. Geyer, former executive director of its Hungarian section in October 1950. A summary of his report is available in the Institute of Jewish Affairs, London, File 80(182).

⁹⁴ Duschinsky, p. 456.

⁹⁵ Uj Kelet, September 5, 1949.

⁹⁶ Interview with Galor.

⁹⁷ Duschinsky, p. 456.

⁹⁸ Dr. Geyer's report, October 1950, p. 4.

high schools of the PIH were exempted from nationalisation in July, 1948, and taken over by the state only on December 20, after new machinery, provided by ORT (an international Jewish organisation concerned with vocational training) had been installed.⁹⁹

The reshaping of the community was carried out in two further steps. First, in December 1948, the Government concluded an agreement with the National Executive Committee of the Jews in Hungary (the roof organisation of the Neolog congregations) and the Central Office of the Jewish Orthodox Community of Hungary. In this the government recognised that "in accordance with the laws in force, worship in temples, synagogues, homes and any other suitable buildings, as well as the teachings of the Bible and Talmudic and religious subjects in the Synagogues, schools, and homes come within the framework of free exercise of religion. So do the teaching of religious subjects in ecclesiastical journals and books, the propagation of religious tenets and of the Holy Scriptures, the holding of national conferences and meetings of religious and denominational nature, the establishment and maintenance of Talmud Torahs (courses in religious instruction outside schools - G.G) and Yeshivas (study courses on a higher level for Orthodox Jews - G.G), the training of rabbis and Talmud Torah teachers, and the continued performance of religious and charitable work...."¹⁰⁰ The government granted financial aid for the conduct of those activities, but this was to be reduced by 25% every five years. The exact size of this subsidy was not revealed, though Stockler indicated it in 1949, when saying that for the PIH's estimated budget of two million Forints, "we hope to receive 1,200,000 Forints from the American JDC" (the "Joint" -G.G)¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Interview with Galor.

¹⁰⁰ Benoschofsky, p.250.

¹⁰¹ Duschinsky, p.466. Another indication of the proportion of state subsidy to specifically Jewish causes was, that of the 14 million Forints capital of a Reconstruction Credit Corporation, which was to assist the redeployment of Jews in the country's new economic structure, the "Joint" was to provide almost 13 million and the Hungarian government only 600,000 Forints. Duschinsky, p.465.

The agreement's definition of the community's recognised activities enabled the government to expropriate the assets of such institutions as hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged, which had no direct relevance to the "free exercise of religion."¹⁰²

In the second step, by early 1951, control of all Jewish organisations (the Orthodox community, welfare institutions, including notably that which administered the distribution of "Joint" aid) was centralised in a national office and placed in the hands of its president, Stockler, whom the government presumably considered trustworthy.¹⁰³

The Jewish community in its new structure, was to be insulated from the largely bourgeois, probably anti-Communist and consequently undesirable influences of the international Jewish organisations. After the war, Hungarian Jewry established close links with three such major bodies: the World Zionist Organisation, the "Joint", and the World Jewish Congress. After the liquidation of the Zionist movement in Hungary, any further connections with the first were of course impossible. The community's links with the others depended on the Communist regime's interests in them.

The "Joint" was important to the government both as a source of hard currency and for the development of certain industrial and commercial enterprises fitting the new economic structure of the country.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ilona Beneschofsky, a historian who still lives in Hungary, justified it in an essay published in New York in 1966 as follows: "Some rebuilt institutions of the type, for example, of the great hospital of Budapest, were in accord with the proportion of Jews before the war. This is understandable, since the entire ruined country was being rebuilt, and this great rebuilding fervor also affected the Jews contemplating their communities. It was difficult for them to realise that the decimated Hungarian Jewry no longer needed as many institutions, nor the same type, as existed before the war. The beginning rate of the rebuilding was too fast; Jewry as a whole had to stop suddenly and in time had to give up some of the institutions...." Beneschofsky, p.248.

¹⁰³ Although Dr. Benedek, the director of the Jewish hospital, was the most prominent Communist in the PIH, the Israeli Consul in Hungary already in 1949 noted that "Stockler enjoys as much confidence in the Communist party as Benedek." See a letter by Dr. S.J. Roth, an executive officer of the World Jewish Congress, on September 16, 1949, reporting on his talks with the Consul. Institute of Jewish Affairs, London, File 80(182)

¹⁰⁴ "Joint" aid to Hungary between 1945 and 1953 totalled \$49,377,966.31. Although it declined constantly from its 1947 peak of \$10,898,388.38, it was still considerable: \$8,463,875.94 in 1948; \$7,671,015.03 in 1949; \$4,145,534.28 in 1950; \$2,754,783.11 in 1951, and \$2,107,766.13 in 1952. Deposition by H. Katzki.

As the government had been constantly scrutinising the distribution of "Joint" funds,¹⁰⁵ it must have been aware of the assistance which the organisation had given to the Zionist movement. But the overall advantages of "Joint" aid and the anticipation of its continuation, were responsible probably for the flattering treatment of "Joint" leaders, and also for the convenient oversight of at least one manifestation of the "Joint's" anti-Soviet attitude.¹⁰⁶ The MKP approved a change of emphasis in the "Joint's" policy from relief to reconstruction late in 1947,¹⁰⁷ partly in anticipation of a subsequent reduction in its aid to Zionist activities, but mainly because it was to help in the redeployment of at least the Jewish sector of petty bourgeoisie which was being uprooted by the changes in the country's economic structure. Its reconstruction policy did indeed involve the "Joint" substantially in the industrial retraining of Jews and in the establishment of productive and commercial cooperatives.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ See page 79.

¹⁰⁶ In February 1948, the Prime Minister awarded Dr. Joseph Schwartz, the European director of the "Joint", an order "which until now has been bestowed only upon Foreign Ministers." The Prime Minister, after having expressed thanks for past help, emphasised that "not all the wounds have yet been healed." (JTA, February 10, 1948). The award was also reported by the Szabad Nep (February 6, 1948). After the "Joint" announced that it would give cash grants to 204 Jews who had been "slave labourers in Soviet POW camps" (JTA, July 28, 1948), two Communist leaders, Rakosi and Vas, were still willing to express to the visiting vice-chairman of the "Joint's" European council, their "appreciation for Joint aid to needy Hungarian Jews since the liberation" (JTA, August 30, 1948).

¹⁰⁷ The approval of Vas, head of the Supreme Economic Council, was announced by a "Joint" representative in Budapest (JTA, December 23, 1947). Rakosi, when receiving the "Joint's" new director for Hungary, Israel Jacobson, expressed his appreciation of "Joint" activities, "especially since the committee had decided recently to lay emphasis on constructive measures for the economic rehabilitation of Hungarian Jewry." He also hoped that "cooperation between the Hungarian authorities and the JDC ("Joint") will increase." (JTA, January 11, 1948).

¹⁰⁸ For details see Duschinsky, pp.464-465.

Consequently the Communist regime did not object to the reshaped community's link with the "Joint", although on one occasion it gave, what could be interpreted as a signal that this relationship should be treated cautiously. In December, 1949, the AVH arrested Israel Jacobson, the American director of the "Joint" in Hungary and detained him for twelve days.¹⁰⁹ After having allegedly been accused by his interrogators of spying and maintaining contact with the American Legation, and of helping Jews to escape from the country, Jacobson was eventually expelled from Hungary.¹¹⁰ Although the Hungarian press reported his expulsion, it did not identify Jacobson with the "Joint".¹¹¹

It could thus be assumed that the regime intended this incident more as a warning to the "Joint" staff and the communal organisations collaborating with it than as the start of an anti-"Joint" campaign. It might be accepted as supporting evidence that the regime endorsed the appointment of another American, Charles Jordan, as Jacobson's successor, and permitted him to work in Hungary until May 1951. Only then was the distribution of "Joint" aid placed under the direct supervision of Stockler.

The predominance of the Communist regime's overall interests were reflected in the development of the community's relationship with the third major international organisation, the World Jewish Congress. Set up in 1937, the Congress consisted of national Jewish organisations from various countries, and had its own branches in those where the national bodies did not affiliate to it. In its desire to represent the widest possible section of World Jewry, it accommodated the adherents to a large variety of Jewish and general political ideas.¹¹² Organisations subscribing to Zionist or assimilationist views, to bourgeois conservative, liberal, socialist, or Communist polices were all accepted in order to make the Congress universally representative of Jewry.

¹⁰⁹ JTA, December 19, and December 29, 1949.

¹¹⁰ For Jacobson's own account of his detention, see JTA, December 30, 1949.

¹¹¹ The Szabad Nep (December 28, 1949) published a communique by the Ministry of the Interior, that I.G. Jacobson, an American citizen, who had earlier been arrested, has been expelled "for acts against the interests of the state."

¹¹² For detailed description of the WJC's aims, objects, and history, see: Unity in dispersion etc, and Garai, 1976.

It was probably this very determination to represent the interests of all Jews which made the Communists consider it vulnerable to infiltration. The Congress had a section in Hungary since 1946. Although its executive director, Dr. A. Gever, was a Zionist, the section's presidium and executive comprised members of other organisations as well, including the most prominent Communist on the Jewish communal scene, Dr. Benedek, and the president of the PIH, Stockler. Both took an active part in an attempt by East European delegates to commit the Congress to a pro-Communist policy at its second plenary assembly in Montreux in June 1948.¹¹³ Although the assembly refused to incorporate in its political declaration their proposal that Jews "cannot remain neutral in the struggle between the imperialist and the democratic forces,"¹¹⁴ they must have found certain remarks by Congress leaders, and the emphasis laid on Jewish interest in peace, encouraging enough to continue with their efforts.¹¹⁵

After unsuccessful behind-the-scene manoeuvres to secure greater influence in the running of the Congress,¹¹⁶ they apparently decided to

¹¹³ The tone was set by a Polish Communist, J. Mirski (JTA, June 29, 1948). For the speeches of Dr. Benedek and Stockler, see Uj Elet, July 1, 1948).

¹¹⁴ JTA, July 7, 1948.

¹¹⁵ Dr. Nahum Goldmann, the president of the Congress, stated that "the time had passed when English Jews, or certain groups of American Jews, could claim to be authorised to act as the natural protectors of the poor Eastern European Jews." (JTA, June 28, 1948), while A. L. Easterman, the Political Secretary, reporting on his recent visit to Eastern Europe, said that there "antisemitism has been made a punishable crime. Such legislation," he said, "was a real act of democracy." (JTA, July 2, 1949). The political resolution declared: "A primary condition for Jewish survival is the elimination of the forces of Fascist reaction which the democratic victory over the Axis Powers did not finally eradicate and which in many countries are again pursuing purposes designed to disturb the peace of the world. To this end the Jewish people seek to play their part in securing that the peaceful political and economic developments of mankind should not be prevented by a division of the world into conflicting spheres of interest..." (JTA, July 6, 1948).

¹¹⁶ The East European sections delayed taking up the places which the assembly had allotted on the executive to them, while they were bargaining for more Communist influence as a condition of their continued affiliation. The Bulgarian section, for instance, demanded the inclusion of a Communist member in the executive of the American branch. (Report on organisational matters to the WJC European executive meeting, 13 February 1949, p. 5. Documents of the European executive, Institute of Jewish Affairs archives, London). A. L. Easterman, Political Secretary of Congress, reported that Mirsky, a Polish Communist delegate had outlined to him the East Europeans' demands. Those included the placement of Communists in the Congress' Paris, London and Prague offices, and in charge of the organisational department. Easterman concluded: "It is clear that the method is piece-meal infiltration, first one member on the executive, then a department, then something else, until they gain control of the working apparatus... I think that we must now begin to take a firmer line. My impression is that our Eastern friends have no intention of quitting the Congress, and it seems to me that we would do well to follow the line pursued in the general political field, viz to show a strong front line and no nonsense." (Letter by Easterman to N. Barou, November 24, 1948. (Documents of the European Executive, Institute of Jewish Affairs Archives, London).

put the organisation to a final test by demanding its participation in a Communist-sponsored international peace conference in Paris in April 1949.¹¹⁷ After some deliberations, the Congress declined the invitation.¹¹⁸

This apparently convinced the Hungarian Communist regime that the reshaped Jewish community's links with the World Jewish Congress could no longer serve any political purpose. Stockler was presumably referring to Congress, when a few months later, he told a meeting of the PIH that "Hungarian Jewish organisations would continue to work with Jewish organisations abroad, but not with 'hostile groups who joined the enemy camp."¹¹⁹

In September the Hungarian section notified Congress that it had unanimously passed a resolution proposed by Stockler. This claimed that Congress was "becoming more and more alienated from the true representation of the interests of the Jewish masses, and its policy constitutes a serious menace for these masses." It described the Congress' absence from the Paris peace conference as a "grave and irreparable fault" and declared that they were "obliged to withdraw their confidence from the present leadership and to demand that it be replaced by a progressive-minded leadership...."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ The Volkstimme, a Communist-controlled Jewish newspaper in Lodz, Poland, stated bluntly on April 20, 1949, that participation in the Paris peace conference was "the final test of the political character of the World Jewish Congress executive. The World Jewish Congress should make it clear whether it is aligned with the powers of peace and progress or with the forces of war and reaction. A third and intermediate position cannot possibly exist. The justification for the existence of the World Jewish Congress depends on its attitude to this question. The World Jewish Congress is now at the crossroads and has to choose 'to be or not to be'". Documents of the European Executive, Institute of Jewish Affairs, London.

¹¹⁸ For the official explanation see Congress Digest, New York, Vol.IV, No.15, April 26, 1949. For an indication of the considerations behind the decision, see "Observations" by Mr.S.S.Silverman, MP on the proposals that the World Jewish Congress should attend the conference for peace in Paris. Institute of Jewish Affairs, Documents of the European Executive, London.

¹¹⁹ JTA, June 1949.

¹²⁰ The resolution (in English translation) and its covering letter available in the Institute of Jewish Affairs Archives, 80(182), London.

Although this resolution represented a de facto rejection of Congress authority, in Hungary alone among the East European countries, its local branch was allowed to exist. It was though - in the words of Dr.Geyer, its former executive director - "only an illusory existence."¹²¹ The section's staff was reduced to two, its large office exchanged for one room on the premises of the Central Board of Jews, its extensive collection of documents and books transferred to other Jewish institutions. Of its original executive, of five, only one member remained, Dr.Benedek; the others had either emigrated or withdrawn from public office. For similar reasons its formerly 15-strong presidium diminished by two-thirds. Stockler took virtual command of the section, which severed its contacts with the Congress.¹²²

Dr.Geyer attributed the section's continued existence to Stockler's "doubtless wish" to maintain it and that "the Communist authorities have not yet found any cause for its dissolution. Apparently both (i.e. Stockler and the authorities) want to prove that certain ties with Jewry abroad still exist, and perhaps they also consider that such ties may become useful in the future."¹²³

The preservation of the section as a harmless and useless unit was certainly in tune with Hungarian Communist policy to avoid open and visible clashes with Jewish organisations in order to conceal even the existence of Jews in the country. This was the same attitude that had manifested itself so eminently in the delicate way the Zionist movement was disbanded.

In its new form the Jewish community was thus confined strictly to religious activities; its chances for perpetuation were minimized by the drastic reduction of its school network and it was - with the exception of the "Joint" - isolated from Jewish organisations abroad. But Communist interference went beyond the mere imposition of rules for the existence of a religious organisation in an anti-religious state. Anachronistic as it may seem, the Communist party had a local branch in the building which housed the central offices of most of the

121 . Dr.A.Geyer's report, October 1950, p.5.

122 Ibid, p.5.

123 Ibid, p.5.

Jewish organisations from 1946, and by 1948 it was apparently important enough to justify the appointment of a full-time party secretary.¹²⁴

In the PIH as in other enterprises and institutions, the party exercised control through its local branch. According to uncorroborated evidence, Stockler, from 1948, had to obtain the party secretary's consent to all his decisions.¹²⁵

Communist interference appeared in other forms too. The PIH was not only expected to conform with the requirements of the state in general, it had to publicise the specifically Communist policies of government. The reshaped communal organisation was allowed to retain its weekly newspaper, the Uj Elet, but this was used for Communist propaganda frequently without any direct relevance to Jewish matters.¹²⁶

Communist domination also coloured the PIH's treatment of Israel. Zionism, as a topic, even as target of attacks, disappeared almost without trace from the Uj Elet, once the paper announced the dissolution of the Zionist organisations. A regular column, "News from Israel, the Jewish state," compiled by a Zionist, Dr. Gellert, was discontinued on June 9, 1949, and replaced by an unsigned column, "Israeli News", which appeared to be aiming at the discouragement of emigration by presenting Israel as an unattractive place to live in.¹²⁷

The emphasis was on unemployment, particularly among new immigrants; on food shortages; on rising prices, and on the growing criminal activities.¹²⁸ Direct criticism of Israeli politics or the country's political system were rare in this period.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Interview with Galor. The existence of this party branch was also mentioned by Duschinsky, p.456.

¹²⁵ Interview with Galor.

¹²⁶ Some examples: January 20, 1949: general appreciation of Lenin's importance on the anniversary of his death; April 28, 1949: a front page article on the national issues of the forthcoming parliamentary elections, and an appraisal that May Day had been declared the Festive Day of Work; May 5, 1949: under the title "Plan and Bread" recommendation of the Government's election programme; June 9, 1949: a long book review about a new collection of Rakosi's articles and speeches and a long essay on "The real Pushkin"; September 29, 1949: full texts of appeals by Rakosi and the Prime Minister, Dobi, for subscriptions to the first state bond.

¹²⁷ The first news item in this new column on June 17, 1949 reported price rises in Israel.

¹²⁸ See Uj Elet, June 23 and June 30, 1949.

¹²⁹ See Uj Elet, June 9 and August 11, 1949.

Thus, by the middle of 1949, a chapter in the history of Hungary and its Jewish population has closed. Though the multi-party system was nominally still in force,¹³⁰ Communist domination became complete. Hungary was ready for total integration into a Soviet-controlled bloc. Communist policies could be applied to the economic, cultural, and ideological fields. Stalinist methods could be introduced into the governing of the country and reinforced in the conduct of the Communist party. Hungary's Communist leaders faced two problems: they had opposition to their rule and had to ascertain Stalin's constant backing, for that was the source of their personal survival in power. Trying to solve both these problems was the motivation behind their actions.

For many Jewish individuals the chapter which had ended brought economic uprooting. Having just reintegrated into the Hungarian society after the disruptions of the inter-war persecution, yet again they were forced into searching for a place in a new social and economic order. For the Jews as a community, it also brought to an end the period of free choice over their future. The Zionist movement gathered strength in the post-war years for the very reason that it was offering an alternative to integration into the Hungarian society, and more than that, it was giving practical assistance to those who wanted to make use of it. The destruction of the Zionist organisations left the Jews no choice but to come to terms with the Hungarian regime whatever the conditions.

This appeared to be very similar to their pre-1945 situation. But there was in fact a fundamental difference. Before Hungary's involvement in the Second World War, Jews were discriminated against, but they were not prevented from leaving the country. However, when they left, that was an individual act. No other country encouraged them to do so, or offered them any help in transport and resettlement.

¹³⁰ The role which the Communists assigned to these political parties - then already amalgamated in a Hungarian Independent People's Front - was clearly defined by Rakosi at a meeting of the MDP central committee on March 5, 1949: "...This People's Front is in reality a stage in the partner parties' dying process." On April 2, 1949, Rakosi emphasised in the central committee that "the continued existence of the coalition parties is undesirable because they are providing permanent hiding place for the enemy." (A) Magyar Forradalmi, p.544.

Now, in 1949, there was no legitimate discrimination against Jews in Hungary. However, the Communist economic strictures could affect them adversely, could make their existence insecure, and consequently make them think again about emigration. But the circumstances were now exactly opposite to those of the pre-war era. This time it was the Hungarian authorities who obstructed emigration but there was a foreign country, Israel, committed by its Zionist ideology, to encouraging and assisting them.

Thus the Jews of Hungary found themselves yet again in a singularly peculiar position. They were the only section of the population which could rely on the moral and practical support of an organised force abroad. The Communists, who at last had succeeded in destroying the Zionist organisations in Hungary, were now faced with a situation where that very same Zionism, embodied in the internationally recognised State of Israel, could entrench itself through diplomatic representation. The danger of Zionism - that it presents Jews with an alternative to collaboration with the Communist regime - has aggravated. It could no longer be fought without creating conflict with a sovereign state and therefore subject to Hungarian, or rather Soviet foreign policy considerations. Therefore the new chapter that opened in 1949 brought the Communist-Zionist relationship in Hungary to an entirely different and much more delicate phase.

CHAPTER FIVE: ZIONISM, ISRAEL AND THE PARTY PURGES

Rakosi's Basic Aims.

The nature of Communist rule in Hungary - after the party achieved hegemony effectively by the second half of 1948 and formally by the results of the 1949 general elections - was influenced by two external factors: the conditions of the Cold War, and the Stalinist character of the Soviet leadership.

In the East European states, which Stalin had moulded into a bloc under firm and unchallengeable Soviet leadership, the Cold War conditions helped to generate an atmosphere both of a constant mortal danger to the Socialist achievements and of a permanent and intensive alertness to an imminent "imperialist" attack. In the economic field this climate justified the priority for a war-oriented industrial development, with an overwhelming emphasis on heavy industry, and in the political field for extensive, excessive security measures against various kinds of alleged enemy infiltrations.

The Stalinist character of the Soviet leadership meant the complete centralisation of decision-making in Moscow. During their struggle for complete power in their respective countries, the East European Communist parties were allowed to exercise some diversity to meet local political requirements. In September 1947, however, Stalin amalgamated six East European Communist parties (in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Roumania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria), together with the French, Italian, and Soviet parties, into the Information Bureau for Communist and Workers Parties (Cominform) to unify their policies in the common interest of the Soviet bloc. He showed his determination to crush any further diversionist tendencies by the expulsion of the Yugoslav party from this new body in June 1948.

The Stalinist leadership method also compelled the East European parties to duplicate the structure of the CPSU and adopt subsequently dictatorial rule by their respective leaders. As these parties were mere extensions of the Soviet party, their leaders' power depended ultimately on Stalin's disposition towards them, and led them to a constant search for Stalin's trust and favour.

In Hungary, the rule of the party - and because of its power, that of the whole country - rested with Matyas Rakosi, the head of the MDP. Rakosi, apparently, had two basic aims: to consolidate the Communist

hegemony in Hungary and ascertain his permanent command over the party against possible rivals, primarily by proving his unflagging loyalty to Stalin.¹ He tried to exploit both the conditions created by the Cold War and by the Stalinist character of the Soviet leadership in order to achieve his two basic aims. These attempts motivated Rakosi's conduct, strategy and tactics in the period following immediately the Communist take-over of power.

Show Trial - But Against Who?

In the second half of 1948 and the first few months of 1949, Rakosi appeared to be pursuing his aims separately. Eager to prove his loyalty to Stalin, he made the MDP and the Hungarian authorities jump to the forefront of the campaign against Tito and the Yugoslav communist party.² Rakosi was the first Communist leader to join

¹ Rakosi's insecurity can be traced to his problematic relationship with Stalin during the inter-war period. According to the unanimous account of several former Hungarian emigres in Moscow, after his return to Hungary in 1924, when he was captured by the police, Rakosi gave condemning evidence against some of his comrades, and on Stalin's orders the Comintern suspended his party membership. He was re-admitted only in 1935, when the Hungarian authorities put him on trial again, and Stalin wanted to distract Western attention from the Moscow purges by launching a worldwide campaign to save Rakosi from a death sentence. The same sources recalled also that Stalin had repeatedly made derogatory remarks about Rakosi, calling him, for example, a "British spy", presumably because before the first world war, Rakosi spent a year in London working for a bank. Szasz, p.158. Rakosi could also be uneasy about the presence among his closest associates, of Erno Gero, a former high-ranking Comintern official and colonel of the Soviet security police, who had been believed to have been Stalin's trusted emissary among the Hungarian Communists in Moscow. Gero, as a young man participated in the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, escaped abroad, after its fall, and was called to Moscow and given Comintern assignments in the 1930s. For a long period he was attached to the French Communist party as a Comintern instructor. During the Spanish civil war he was a representative of the Special Commission for Party purges, preparing cases against Communist political and military leaders engaged in the war. Paloczi-Horvath, pp.230-231.

² In the treatment of source material on the Hungarian-Yugoslav relations, the author followed the principle that had been accepted in his M.A thesis, "Hungary's Relations with Yugoslavia, 1948-1956" by the University of London, namely that the Hungarian anti-Tito campaign was pure fabrication. Therefore Yugoslav statements have been taken as true and the Hungarian versions critically.

Stalin in criticising Tito, even before the Yugoslav party's expulsion from the Cominform in June 1948.³ After the expulsion, in line with the Soviet Union and the other East European countries, Hungary introduced economic sanctions and launched a propaganda campaign against Yugoslavia, carried out a series of border infringements and harassed Yugoslav diplomats.⁴ But some of the Hungarian measures were singularly vicious, like the interference with an international flood control system, which could have caused heavy damage in Yugoslavia, had not the year been a dry one.⁵ Between 1948 and 1950, Hungary committed more border incidents than any of Yugoslavia's other neighbours and applied certain particularly effective methods, like the playing of searchlights, exclusively.⁶ Hungary was also prominent in the anti-Yugoslav propaganda. In the first week after the Yugoslav party's expulsion from the Cominform, copies of the resolution condemning the party, were stuffed into various floating containers and thrown into the rivers Duna (Danube) and Tisza, which flow from Hungary to Yugoslavia.⁷ Budapest Radio was third only to Moscow and Prague in the daily number of hours broadcast in the languages of the Yugoslav people, and the Szabad Nep even exceeded its Soviet and Czechoslovak counterparts in the published

³ The MKP central committee criticised the Yugoslav Communists already on April 8, 1948, and the second letter from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, criticising Tito's policy, when it reached Belgrade on April 16, had attached to it already comments on the Yugoslav case by Rakosi, in which he sided with Stalin on every point. Dedijer, p.358.

⁴ For details on economic sanctions see White Book, p.22, p.103, pp.291-292, p.315, and p.450. As a result trade links between the two countries ceased by 1950, although in 1947 Hungary was Yugoslavia's third chief trading partner after the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. Seton-Watson: The East European Revolution, Second Edition, 1952, p.258. On the harassment of diplomats see White Book, p.204 n, p.465, and for Hungarian references Szabad Nep, July 18, 1948, October 9, 1948, November 6 and 28, 1948.

⁵ Dedijer, p.404.

⁶ White Book, p.475.

⁷ Dedijer, p.399.

number of column-inches of anti-Yugoslav material in the first year after the Cominform expulsion.⁸

These steps which were to demonstrate to Stalin Rakosi's reliability were at this stage not yet connected with attempts to consolidate internally his rule over the party. After 1945, the highest leadership of the Hungarian party comprised two groups of veterans of distinctly different backgrounds. One consisted of the so-called "Muscovites" who had spent most of the inter-war period in the Soviet Union, working for the Soviet Communist party or the Comintern. Its dominating figure was Rakosi, Stalin's appointee as the general secretary of the Hungarian party, who was assisted by a small circle, including Gero, Farkas, and Revai. The leaders of the underground Communist party in Hungary composed the other group. Laszlo Rajk, a veteran of the illegal party's central Committee in 1944 was its most prominent member.⁹

There appeared to be a disharmony between the two groups from an early stage - partly on political but mainly on personal grounds.¹⁰ According to a "Muscovite" Rakosi and his closest associates despised the less experienced, homespun Communists and took pleasure in their "sense of inferiority".¹¹ Although Rajk did not oppose openly the party's

⁸ White Book, p.479.

⁹ For a recent detailed biography of Rajk, see Strassenreiter and Sipos, pp.141-182.

¹⁰ The political differences emanated from many of the former underground Communists' preference for the immediate introduction of the proletarian dictatorship in opposition to the MKP's official policy which in 1945 was to seek alliance with bourgeois democratic political parties. see p.39 N.1

¹¹ Nogradi, p.153

official policy, by his popularity among various sections of the members he appeared to Rakosi, as a possible rival.¹² There was also friction between Rajk, then Minister of the Interior, and Farkas, one of Rakosi's closest collaborators, who in 1947, declared that the Ministry of the Interior was "not in the hands of the party."¹³ Rakosi made his first move to eliminate potential rivals when he dismissed Rajk from that post and assigned him the far less powerful foreign affairs portfolio in August 1948.¹⁴

¹² His widow claims that Rajk became emotionally alienated from the Muscovite section at a very early stage when he recognised that "the Rakosi group was representing democracy only in words, but in practice it was increasingly making a mockery of it." (J.Rajk, p.984). Some Western historians believe that Rajk seems to have favoured a more revolutionary policy than that then pursued officially by the party (Brzezinski, 1967, p.92) and that his straight forwardness on the taking over of power contrasted Rakosi's more suave methods (Zinner, 1962, p.94). One of his contemporaries claims that Rajk's popularity was due to his close links with the country and the former underground Communist party. He was popular with the younger people and particularly with the most militant section of young intellectuals as well as with workers. The MKP itself recognised it when it often sent Rajk as a trouble shooter to prevent incipient strikes (Mod.1969, p.713). A former Communist victim of the purges which followed Rajk's execution believes that his popularity was enhanced because he retained his blind idealism and old enthusiasm which made him nearest to the simple, faithful Communist. Even after the take-over of power, Rajk lived modestly while other members of the Politbureau - following the Soviet system - received luxurious cars, sumptuous houses and villas, and could draw any amount from the National Bank (Paloczi-Horvath, 1959, p.200). An entirely different explanation of his popularity was given by F.Nagy, the former FKGP Prime Minister, who claimed that the antisemitic elements in the MKP favoured Rajk as an appreciation of his family's close association with the Arrow Cross movement. Two of Rajk's brothers were involved in that ultra-right movement before 1945. Nagy also claimed that those elements regarded Rajk as their leader rather than the Jewish Rakosi. (F.Nagy, p.190 and p.305).

¹³ Nogradi, p.192-193.

¹⁴ This was preceded in December 1947 by accusations against Rajk of "anti-party behaviour". Although the MKP secretariat rejected the charges, raised by Gabor Peter, head of the AVH which was then still under the jurisdiction of the Minister of the Interior, Rakosi proposed Rajk's transfer. The demotional character of this move was concealed even from prominent party members. When Rakosi told Dr.Heltai, the Communist head of the Foreign Ministry's political department of Rajk's appointment, he added by way of explanation: "The Foreign Ministry has been a kindergarten long enough. Now you will have an adult to lead you." This ironic reference was to the disinterested attitude of Rajk's predecessor, Dr.Erik Molnar, a Communist historian.(Szasz, 1971, p.28.)

Although Rajk remained a member of the Politbureau, his influence was further curtailed when, as Foreign Minister, he was under the personal control of a "Muscovite" and the administration of his ministry was given to an AVH officer.¹⁵

At this stage Rakosi appeared to have given priority to his first aim: the consolidation of Communist hegemony, by exploiting the conditions created by the Cold War. He was constantly fabricating opportunities to prove the existence of "imperialist" plots for the overthrow of the "Socialist" regime and with those to justify the tough, oppressive measures. His attempts to provide evidence of conspiracies between "imperialist" powers and certain sections of the Hungarian population were motivated by various reasons.

In January 1949, Cardinal Mindszenty, the Primate of Hungary, was tried on charges of conspiracy for the overthrow of the regime and for the re-establishment of an arch-conservative feudal-capitalist order. The trial "proved" that Mindszenty enjoyed the support of "imperialist" powers, particularly of America. His trial was primarily contrived to discredit the Catholic church, by far the strongest religious denomination, and break its resistance to collaboration with the Communist regime. The trial achieved such immediate and tangible results as the dissolution of parliament's strongest opposition party, the DPP, which followed a progressive Catholic policy, and the surrender of the Catholic church, which at last started negotiations with the government for an agreement shortly after Mindszenty's trial. On a broader scale however, the regime managed to frighten worshippers away from the Catholic church, and thus reduce its influence, by implying in Mindszenty's trial that the leadership of that church was in the hands of enemies of "imperialist agents".

Another facet of "imperialist" plotting was "unmasked" by the conviction in 1949, of executives of the Hungarian-American Oil Company (MAORT) on charges of sabotaging on American instructions, the country's oil production. Their trial, apart from presenting further evidence of "imperialist" infiltration, placed under a cloud of suspicion Western-oriented scientists, and led directly to the nationalisation of foreign-owned companies which had been left in private hands in general nationalisation of industry and commerce in the spring of 1948.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp.29-30.

The arrest of Hungarian Zionist leaders in April and May of 1949, marked the emergence of two new features in Rakosi's strategy. One was the first appearance of a tendency which from then on became characteristic of his policy. While previously Rakosi pursued his principal aims parallel to each other, his planned prosecution of the Zionists indicated an intention to use them in combination. The proposed punitive measures against the Zionists contradicted the Hungarian Communists' earlier attitude towards the Jews, which was based on the pretence that no Jewish problem existed in Hungary at all, and therefore the Communist party was justifiably unconcerned with any specific issue relating to them.

Rakosi's reasons for departing from his previous attitude, which was based on strictly domestic political considerations, could be traced to one of his principal aims: his determination to show Stalin his loyalty by adopting promptly what appeared to him as the Soviet ruler's primary political objective. Rakosi took his clue presumably from the anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli drive which started in the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1948, and became intensified early in 1949. Thus, in the prosecution of the Zionist leaders, Rakosi linked together the projection of an "imperialist" menace with his desire to demonstrate his trustworthiness as Stalin's collaborator. This new element in his strategy - the combined pursuance of his principal aims - should be noted in order to understand the development of the 1949 Hungarian purges.

The other new feature of Rakosi's strategy, as revealed in the arrest of the Zionist leaders, was his intention to escalate the exploitation of Cold War conditions. "Imperialist" interference was only a secondary element in the Mindszenty trial. The Cardinal and his co-defendants - including Prince Pal Eszterhazy, a member of once Hungary's richest land-owning aristocratic families and thus a prototype of the feudal and, in Communist terms, reactionary social order - were flaunted as the local enemies of a progressive ideology and social system. Their punishment was designed to frighten the Catholics, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population, as well as the remnants of the pre-1945 ruling classes and their collaborators. In the MAORT trial the "imperialist" danger was more pronounced, but only in a specific, relatively minor, economic aspect. The major objective appeared to vindicate the expropriation of foreign-owned companies.

Rakosi's original intention with the indictment of the Zionist leaders, was to directly implicate Israel and her Western allies, America and Britain, in espionage work in Hungary. In, what was planned to be a spectacular show trial, the "imperialists" would have been found guilty not only of implicitly supporting "reactionary" elements like Mindszenty, but of direct involvement in activities harmful to Hungary's security. The proposed dimensions of the trial indicated that it was aimed to effect a wider section of the population than just the Jews. It would have been superfluous to stage an elaborate show trial solely for the purpose of frightening the numerically small, and by then sufficiently regimented Jewish community.¹⁶ Rakosi's plan to convict, with blazing publicity, such relatively insignificant political figures as the Zionist leaders, appears to be rational only when viewed in the context of his overall strategy, which was to stage a show trial to demonstrate the depth of "imperialist" infiltration. His particular choice both of Zionists for the role of "imperialist agents" and of Israel as the intermediary, could be explained by his interpretation of Stalin's political priorities.

The arrest of the Zionist leaders started on May 12, 1949. The circumstances of their detention indicate that the authorities were not concerned with the capture of certain individuals against whom suspicion of criminal activities had arisen. The AVH's task appeared to have been to arrest, at random, a given number of the best-known and most prominent Zionist leaders for the purpose of making them play a predesignated role in a show trial.¹⁷

¹⁶ In 1949, Jews constituted approximately 1% of the population. On January 1, 1949, Hungary's population was 9,961,044 (Erdei, p.49). The last reasonably reliable data showed the number of Jews as 143,624 in 1946 (Katzburg, 1966, p.166) but this was probably reduced by emigration to just around 100,000 by 1949. By the time of the arrests, the Zionist organisations had been dissolved and effective steps had been taken to stop the illegal Jewish emigration organised by the Zionists. The activities of the Jewish communal organisations had also been sufficiently regularised in their agreement with the government, in December 1948.

¹⁷ Dr. Denes learned details about the arrests later in gaol from a fellow prisoner, a former AVH member, who had participated in the arrest of Zionist leaders. The AVH attachment was ordered to arrest a certain number of Zionist leaders, according to a list which gave their names in priority order. Their instruction was that if a person was not at home, they should arrest the next on the list. In Dr. Denes's case, the attachment could not find his home and was ready to proceed to the next person on the list - Dr. Geyer, a former president of the MCSZ - when a policeman on point duty showed them Denes's house and they arrested him. Dr. Geyer remained free. (Denes, p.64).

By May 19, leaders of all the Zionist political parties and some of their youth movements were under arrest.¹⁸ There were at least two pointers to the regime's intention to use them in an important political trial. One was that Rakosi and Gero supervised the procedures personally,¹⁹ and the other that the interrogations were conducted by the same high ranking and obviously very reliable AVH officers, who a little later played important parts in the preparations for the Rajk trial and the subsequent purges.²⁰ The purpose of their proposed trial was evident from the nature of their interrogation. Although the AVH accused them of economic offences, like the illegal possession of foreign currency and gold, and of involvement of illegal emigration, these charges were only treated as of secondary importance. The emphasis was on obtaining confessions that would implicate members of the Israeli diplomatic mission in espionage. One of the arrested Zionists, Dr. Bela Denes, was to confess in his trial that he had regularly submitted spy reports to Ehud Avriel, the Israeli Minister to Hungary, to Shmuel Bentsur, the Consul, and to Laszlo Breszlauer, a member of the mission staff.²¹

Another accused, Dr. Bela Schwarcz had to confess that he had collected military and political intelligence for Bentsur, who then passed it on to the Americans.²² A youth leader, Laszlo Fleischman (now an Israeli resident under the name of Arie Palgi), made a confession incriminating Bentsur as well as Jozsef Walter, the Israeli cultural attache.²³ All the arrested Zionist leaders made confessions implicating Israeli diplomats.²⁴

¹⁸ They were: Dr. Bela Denes, former chairman of the Ichud-Mapai party; Dr. Sandor Kertesz, former chairman of the Marxist-Zionist party; Dr. Bela Schwarcz and Aladar Felkai-Friedman of the General Zionists and Jenő Frenkl of the religious Zionist party, Mizrachi. The arrested youth leaders included Laszlo Fleischman of Hashomer Hatzair, the Marxist-Zionist youth movement and Magda (Miriam) Weisz of Habonim, the youth organisation of Ichud-Mapai.

¹⁹ Denes, p.40.

²⁰ The interrogations were supervised by Colonel Vladimir Farkas, who was the son of Mihaly Farkas, a Muscovite member of the Polibureau, and one of Rakosi's closest collaborators (Interview with Dr. Schwarcz).

²¹ Denes, p.40.

²² Interview with Dr. Schwarcz.

²³ Interview with Palgi.

²⁴ Bentsur, the Israeli Consul, purchased from an AVH officer the photocopies of those confessions. All of them contained allegations that the Israeli diplomats were involved in the organisation and conduct of a spy ring in Hungary. Interview with Bentsur.

The direction of the Zionists' interrogation changed suddenly on May 22 or 24.²⁵ The AVH officers ordered them to make new confessions exclusively about their involvement with the organisation of illegal Jewish emigration.²⁶ The interrogators appeared to be in an unusual hurry. They became less demanding about details, they were prepared to accept admissions mitigating the severity of the charges, and at least one detainee had the impression that "they wanted to get rid of us quickly." The AVH officers apparently wanted to conclude the Zionists' interrogation and transfer their case to the courts without delay.²⁷ The sudden shift in the accusations from spying for Israel to a non-political criminal offence - the smuggling of humans - and the AVH's attempt to finalise procedures quickly related to the fact that Rakosi had found more suitable victims for his show trial.

Dr. Tibor Szonyi, the head of the Hungarian Communist party's cadres department, who eventually became a co-defendant in the Rajk trial and was subsequently executed, was arrested around May 17.²⁸ Other prominent Communists who were to be associated with the accusations against Rajk were detained in the following few days,²⁹ and Rajk himself on May 30.³⁰ It must have been around that date then, that Rakosi scrapped his plan to use the Zionists and Israel for demonstrating the dangers of "imperialist" infiltration,³¹ and chose Rajk and Tito as his proofs.

²⁵ Dr. Denes stated that the change took place ten to twelve days after his arrest on May 12. Denes, p.42.

²⁶ Denes p.42.

²⁷ Denes, p.42. Interviews with Palgi and Dr. Schwarcz.

²⁸ Szasz p.11.

²⁹ Bela Szasz was arrested on May 24 (Szasz p.1). In the Rajk trial the prosecution referred to him as "an agent of British Intelligence." Rajk Iaszlo etc. p.10.

³⁰ Szabad Nep, September 25, 1949.

³¹ To Avriel, the Israeli envoy, who intervened on behalf of the arrested Zionists before their trial, Rakosi pretended that he had never envisaged any more serious charges than man smuggling. He claimed that his officials had pressed for a trial of much wider scale. (Interview with Bentsur).

He probably realised that the danger of "imperialist conspiracy" would look more impressive if it could be shown as having already reached the highest echelons of the state and party apparatus. If "imperialist" infiltration was that deep, then the drastic changes in Hungary's economic and social structure could be made against less resistance because opposition could be put down with more force.³²

The pattern of Rakosi's strategy should be noted here. In the case against the Zionists, Rakosi tried to be loyal to Stalin's apparent priority (anti-Zionism) while maintaining the atmosphere of constant danger of an "imperialist" attack. In the prosecution of Rajk, he was pursuing all three of his principal aims. By then Stalin was no longer satisfied with condemning Tito as an ideological heretic. He wanted to escalate the campaign against him by branding him outright as an "imperialist" agent. Rakosi, to ascertain Stalin's favour, took on himself to provide legal evidence for that charge. Thus, by selecting Rajk as the main defendant, he was attempting all three of his aims: he was striking down his potential rival for the leadership of the Hungarian party; when "proving" in court that Rajk, in collaboration with Tito was an "imperialist" agent, Rakosi was demonstrating simultaneously the depth of "imperialist" influence and his loyalty to Stalin.

³² Rakosi did indeed exploit the atmosphere of fear which developed around the Rajk trial. A campaign to enforce competitive labour conditions in factories started in the last weeks of the vicious propaganda drive which preceded the trial. (See Szabad Nep, September 6 and 22, 1949). The first compulsory state bond was launched immediately after the trial. (Szabad Nep, September 29, 1949). Teaching of religion in state schools was abolished a few weeks before the trial. (Duschinsky, p.456). The Communist party, trying to create a climate of mistrust among people, imposed on its members the duty "to seek and find the enemy's hand behind every mistake." (Szabad Nep, October 1, 1949), and Rakosi, himself, declared that "it would be a mistake to believe that with the unmasking of Rajk, we have completely liquidated all enemy organisations." (Szabad Nep, October 1, 1949).

The combination of the three aims proceeded in stages. First, the Szabad Nep branded the Yugoslav Communists a "gang of murderers, spies, and traitors,"³³ A few days later, it charged them with Trotskyism.³⁴ Soon after, when the MDP expelled Rajk and Szonyi, the foundations were laid for linking them to Tito, because they were described as "spies of foreign imperialist powers and Trotskyite agents."³⁵

Although the MDP central committee's resolution on the "Unmasking of the Trotskyite spy gang" did not mention Tito, its definition of Rajk's nationalism was conspicuously similar to the Cominform criticism of the Yugoslav Communists.³⁶ The net of incrimination was cast wide in order to compromise various ideologies, excluding as yet however Titoism.³⁷

But a feeble association was soon indicated by crediting the Cominform expulsion of Yugoslavia for the unmasking of the "Rajk gang".³⁸ Their trial in September 1949, established by apparently legal means, a close and organic link between Rajk and his co-defendants and the Yugoslav Communists. Admittedly, this was in fact the main purpose of the trial.³⁹

³³ June 4, 1949.

³⁴ June 9, 1949.

³⁵ Szabad Nep, June 16, 1949.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Commenting on the arrest of Rajk, Szonyi and their eighteen accomplices, the Szabad Nep (on June 19, 1949) declared: "Trotskyism, Fascism, Zionism, antisemitism: this was the family environment and the ideological gutter from which Rajk, Szonyi, Justus, and other traitors have come."

³⁸ "Unmasked mercenaries," Szabad Nep, June 29, 1949.

³⁹ In his closing address, the prosecutor declared: "It is true and right that the Hungarian People's court, in passing sentence on Laszlo Rajk and his gang of conspirators, should also pass sentence, in a political sense, on the traitors of Yugoslavia, on the criminal gang of Tito, Rankovic, Kardelj, and Djilas. The international significance of this trial lies in the fact that we are passing sentence also on the Yugoslav deserters and traitors of democracy and Socialism." (Laszlo, Rajk, etc, pp.264-265). Rakosi's efforts to prove legally that Tito was an imperialist agent were duly credited by Stalin when the Cominform resolution of November, 1949, on "The Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the Power of Murderers and Spies" stated that "the Beograd (Belgrade) clique.... made a flagrant deal with imperialist reaction and entered its service as the Budapest trial of Rajk-Brankov (one of Rajk's co-defendants, a former Yugoslav diplomat in Hungary - G.G) made perfectly clear." White Book, p.174.

In Rajk and the others in the dock with him, Rakosi found the ideal defendants for the show trial which he was so determined to stage. Their high party and government posts could justify a harsh political purge to "eliminate" fully the consequences of this deep infiltration. The fact that the principal defendants had all spent some time in Western countries before the war helped to make the "evidence" of their association with American, British, and French intelligence services more convincing. The Rajk trial "proved" in one blow Yugoslav involvement and direct "Western imperialist" participation in a conspiracy.⁴⁰

This being the case, the incrimination of Israel was no longer necessary, and therefore Zionism was hardly mentioned during the Rajk trial. However, when the proposed show trial was shifted from anti-Zionism, the ideological background against which it were to be staged had to be changed too. For at the end of May, just before Rajk's arrest, while the Zionist leaders were "confessing" to spying for Israel, the party propaganda was still harping on the dangers of "cosmopolitanism", the password for the anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli campaign in the Soviet Union,⁴¹

⁴⁰ For relevant passages from the defendants' confessions and the prosecution's allegations, see Laszlo Rajk etc.,... p.45, p.48, p.52, p.62, p.73, pp.74-75, pp.146-148, p.152, p.256, and p.269.

⁴¹ Zoltan Biro, a leading party theoretician (and brother of Rakosi) declared in the Szabad Nep on May 29, 1949, that cosmopolitanism "is still alive among Hungarian academics, writers, artists, 'stars' and intellectuals who, for the sake of high earnings or wrongly interpreted fame, are prepared to sell their inventions, works and talents to the Anglo-Saxon imperialists, the sworn enemies of the Hungarian people. These rootless, stateless gadabout people disseminate the ideas of capitalist bourgeois cosmopolitanism which claims that the value of patriotism, like of other commodities, can be measured in dollars. That section of the Zionist petty bourgeoisie which speculates about emigration instead of honest constructive work, belongs to this circle. Hungarian democracy is trying to turn these people into honest Hungarian patriots, but if they do not change, it will unmask them and put them before the tribunal of public opinion."

Soon however, during the preparations of the Rajk trial, another party theoretician already declared that although cosmopolitanism was indeed dangerous, "we must regard nationalism as the main peril."⁴² He asserted that "for imperialist agents the most important task is to preserve and cultivate nationalist feelings, a nationalist atmosphere; to turn the relationship with the Soviet Union into a superficial one and develop Titoism, a peculiar nationalism, which appears in the disguise of Communism."⁴³

Such a qualified definition of nationalism - geared apparently to meet the specific ideological requirements of the anti-Tito campaign - did not inevitably include Zionism as a principally hostile ideology and consequently did not commit the Hungarian Communist party to fighting it. In fact, in the propaganda campaign preceding Rajk's trial, Zionism appeared only as one of several anti-Socialist ideologies which the defendants had been associated with. In the trial itself, Zionism was mentioned only briefly.⁴⁴ An opportunity to bring it into the mainstream of the trial was left unexploited. Although Andras Szalai, one of the principal defendants was indeed a member of a Zionist group until 1936,⁴⁵ he was not questioned about this aspect of his past at all. This indicates that with the ideal defendants in the dock, Rakosi was no longer interested in showing the Zionist movement as evidence of imperialist infiltration.

⁴² Mod, 1949, p.528.

⁴³ Ibid, p.527.

⁴⁴ The presiding judge asked one of the defendants, Szonyi, if he had been a member of the Zionist movement. Szonyi replied: "My group (a group of Hungarian Communists who lived in Switzerland during the Second World War - G.G).... had Zionist members. As far as I know, Ferenc Vagi and Gyorgy Demeter were members of the Zionist movement. In this connection I know, and I have had personal experience in Switzerland to bear it out, that the Zionist movement generally cooperated very closely with the American secret service." Szabad Nep, September 20, 1949. A former Communist journalist, himself a Jew, who was then frequently contributing mainly on Middle East problems to Tarsadalmi Szemle, the party's theoretical journal, admitted later that he and his friends had not even paid attention to those few sentences about Zionism. Lendvai, 1971, p.308.

⁴⁵ Szalai was a member of Hanaga Shomer, an ultra-left Zionist youth group. He left because the group was concerned only with Jews and did not fight Fascism. (Interview with Yaari.)

His intention to avoid a greater implication of the Zionists was in line with previous Communist attitude, that the party should not be seen publicly concerned with matters relating specifically to Jews. Rakosi presumably had Stalin's at least implicit consent to do so. As the Soviet authorities were actively involved in the fabrication of the case against Rajk and his codefendants, the anti-Zionist aspect could not have been omitted without their approval.⁴⁶

At the time of the Rajk trial in 1949, Stalin was apparently still preoccupied with smashing the Yugoslav "rebels". The political and security implications of the Jewish question - which were to influence decisively the Czechoslovak political trials (of Slansky and others) three years later - had then not yet affected his foreign policy and strategy.⁴⁷ Consequently after a short detour, Rakosi could return to his policy of pretending the non-existence of Jews. The case against the detained Zionist leaders was concluded in accordance with this policy.

⁴⁶ Lieutenant-General Fedor Belkin, Commander in Chief of the South East European MVD (the Soviet security police - G.G) and several officers of that organisation, took part in the interrogation of the suspects, (Szasz, pp.102-111) and undoubtedly in the preparation of the charges.

⁴⁷ An analyst of this period puts the date of change in the Soviet strategy to the spring of 1951. According to him, the Soviet security advisers, working on the preparation of a conspiracy trial in Czechoslovakia, then began to change the ideological basis of its plot from "bourgeois nationalism" to "Zionism" and subsequently the name of Slansky began to appear in the depositions of the accused. (Lendvai, 1971, p.251). A report prepared for the Czechoslovak government in 1968 by a commission of inquiry on the Czechoslovak political trials between 1950 and 1954 confirms that the inclusion of Slansky among the suspects marked the shift towards an anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish purge, and that it was pressed by the Soviet advisers. (Pelikan, p.102). This report indirectly explains why in 1949 the anti-Zionist aspect could still be omitted from the Rajk case. (Ibid, p.49.

When the Zionists were speedily put on trial in Budapest on June 18, 1949, they were no longer accused of espionage on behalf of Israel.⁴⁸ They were charged with purely criminal offences: the organisation of illegal emigration and contravention of currency regulations.⁴⁹ This character of the case was underlined by the inclusion among the defendants of a non-Jewish professional smuggler.⁵⁰ Although the merits of Zionism and the defendants' membership of Zionist organisations were not mentioned, the trial nevertheless had some political overtones. The indictment declared that the accused had smuggled out young people to turn them into "imperialist cannon-fodder,"⁵¹ and the prosecutor claimed that their funds came from the same source which had supported Ferenc Nagy,⁵² and financed the "Voice of America" radio station. He also accused them of having contravened a 1948 law which "defended the Hungarian people against Anglo-Saxon propaganda." The only trace of their proposed trial's original concept, slipped in through the prosecutor's remark that the accused had maintained contact with foreign representatives which could have led to foreigners obtaining vital information about events in Hungary.⁵³ The defence also contained some political elements when it pointed out that some of the accused were Marxist Socialists, but wanted to fight for those ideals in Israel.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ The Zionist defendants were Dr. Denes, Dr. Kertesz, Magda Weisz, Dr. Schwarz, Laszlo Fleischman, Menyhert Feld, Aladar Felkai, and Miklos Frankfurter (Uj Kelet, June 20, 1949). The case of Jenő Frenkl, head of the religious Mizrachi movement was adjourned because the hearing took place on a Saturday, the Jewish Shabbath. (Jewish Chronicle, June 24, 1949). Frenkl was tried later and eventually acquitted. (JTA, June 30, 1949).

⁴⁹ Jewish Chronicle, June 24, 1949.

⁵⁰ He was Sandor Dienes (JTA, June 16, 1949).

⁵¹ Jewish Chronicle, June 24, 1949.

⁵² Ferenc Nagy, a former FKGP Prime Minister of Hungary, was forced into exile by the Communists in 1947, under a cloud of suspicion of having been an "imperialist agent".

⁵³ Uj Kelet, June 20, 1949.

⁵⁴ Jewish Chronicle, June 24, 1949.

That the regime still attached some political importance to the trial might be deduced from the fact that the prosecution was led by Dr. Gyula Alapi, the Chief State Prosecutor, who had earlier prosecuted Cardinal Mindszenty, and a few months later, Rajk and his co-defendants, though the relatively light sentences were commensurate with the purely criminal charges.⁵⁵

The publicity given to the case also reflected the party's reluctance to draw attention to Jews. The by then completely Communist controlled press concealed from the public the defendants' Zionist affiliations. The Nepszava - formerly the official daily of the SZDP, but in 1949 already the organ of the National Council of the Trade Unions (Szak-Szervezetek Országos Tanács, SzOT) reported merely that "Denes, after consultation with foreigners, decided to smuggle a number of young people out of the country."⁵⁶ The Szabad Nep, referred to the case even more inconspicuously. On its back page, among miscellaneous news items, without a separate heading and in particularly small print, it reported only that the defendants had been convicted on charges of smuggling humans.⁵⁷ Neither paper reported the verdict of the appeals court. Only the Uj Elet, the journal of PIH, the Jewish communal organisation, identified two of the defendants, Dr. Denes and Dr. Kertesz as Zionists.⁵⁸ This identification might have been designed to frighten Zionist sympathisers in the Jewish community, but there is also another possible explanation. The Uj Elet could have alternatively identified the defendants by their former posts in the PIH (both had been members of its board) but that would have incriminated the organisation itself.

⁵⁵ During the first part of his interrogation, when he was still ordered to confess to espionage activities by Israeli diplomats, the AVH officers told Dr. Denes that he will be sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. (Denes p.20). Eventually Dr. Denes was sentenced to three years; Dr. Kertesz and Weisz to 26 months each; Frankfurter to 32 months; Feld to 30 months; Felkai to 6 months; and the non-Jewish professional smuggler to 30 months imprisonment. Dr. Schwarcz and Fleischman were acquitted (Uj Kelet, June 20, 1949) as well as Frenkl at his subsequent separate trial (JTA, June 30, 1949). These three were interned until an appeals court confirmed their acquittal (JTA December 23, 1949). The same court also reduced Weisz's sentence to 18 months. (Ibid).

⁵⁶ June 22, 1949.

⁵⁷ June 22, 1949.

⁵⁸ This report was also published among miscellaneous news items without a separate heading. It stated: "Dr. Bela Denes, Dr. Sandor Kertesz, and their accomplices have been convicted for smuggling humans. Dr. Bela Denes president of the former Ichud Mapai Zionist section and Dr. Sandor Kertesz, president of the former Achdut Avoda Zionist section and their accomplices assisted in the smuggling abroad of several hundred people." (June 23, 1949).

Relations with Israel

Neither the liquidation of the Zionist organisations nor the preparations for the Zionist leaders' proposed show trial had any perceptibly adverse effect on the Hungarian regime's official attitude to Israel. According to Shmuel Bentsur, who as Consul, was then Israel's highest ranking diplomat stationed in Budapest permanently,⁵⁹ the Hungarian government showed great concern for a diplomatically correct posture. It regarded its punitive measures against the local Zionists as an internal affair.⁶⁰ Throughout this stormy period the Hungarians were negotiating with the Israeli government about the possibilities of Jewish emigration and did not even suspend their talks during the preparations of the planned anti-Israeli trial.⁶¹ The prospect of gaining financially from such an agreement was probably one of the main reasons for the continued negotiations.

The Israeli government was aware of the trials' original anti-Israel concept,⁶² and intervened on behalf of the detained Zionists directly with Rakosi.⁶³ But it regarded the trial in its eventual form as an isolated incident and not as the beginning of an anti-Israeli campaign by the Soviet Union and the East European regimes;⁶⁴ Although it was discretely involved in the preparation of the Zionists' defence,⁶⁵ in its public response to the trial, the Israeli government ignored its political aspects and emphasised the emotional ones.⁶⁶ The reason for

⁵⁹ The Israeli Minister, Ehud Avriel, was accredited both to Hungary and Czechoslovakia and resided in Prague.

⁶⁰ Interview with Bentsur.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See p.164, N.24

⁶³ See p.165, N.31

⁶⁴ Interview with Bentsur.

⁶⁵ One of the defendants received through his lawyer instructions from the Israeli diplomatic mission in Hungary on what he should admit in the trial. He assumed that the lack of contradictions between their confessions was due to similar contacts with defendants. (Interview with Palgi).

⁶⁶ See the reference to the trial by the Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharet, in the Israeli parliament, Uj Kelet, June 22, 1949.

doing so was presumably its eagerness not to jeopardise the success of the negotiations about Jewish emigration which appeared to be then the principal objective of its relations with the Hungarian regime.⁶⁷

The Israeli government was then generally concerned with the promotion of Jewish immigration to the new state. This was partly because the regime's Zionist character for Zionist ideology regarded settlement in the national home as the utmost manifestation of Jewish identification. Purely on ideological grounds, therefore, the government was bound to encourage and assist the emigration of Jews to Israel. But it was also deeply interested in Jewish immigration for strategic reasons. It wanted to increase the Jewish population of the country and thereby reinforce its Jewish character. Eastern Europe was the main source for Jewish immigrants. In spite of the devastating effects of Nazi persecution, the Jewish population of post-war Eastern Europe was still close to one million.⁶⁸ Although legal and illegal emigration had subsequently reduced this number by the time of Israel's establishment in 1948, Eastern Europe was still a large reservoir of prospective immigrants.

With the Communist regimes' increasingly tough restrictions on emigration in general, the new Israeli government made a great effort to secure the release of as many East European Jews as possible. It reached agreements with Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, and obtained the tacit approval of the Polish and Roumanian authorities. Between 1948 and 1951, a total of 258,315 immigrants arrived in Israel from those countries.⁶⁹ The agreement with Hungary reflected in Hungarian's

⁶⁷ Foreign Minister Sharet concluded his reference to the Budapest trial with a declaration that "the Jewish state has not relinquished its hopes for the continuation of aliya (Zionist term for Jewish immigration to the Jewish national home - G.G)" (Uj Kelet, June 22, 1949). A few days later, the Uj Kelet (on June 29, 1949) reported that "Israeli circles are convinced of Hungary's goodwill and believe that it is in the interest of Hungary to build up political and economic links with Israel. They hope that the inter-governmental negotiations for the settlement of aliya from Hungary will soon be favourably concluded."

⁶⁸ For individual figures in the individual countries, see Meyer 1953, p.66 (Czechoslovakia); p.241 (Poland); p.516 (Roumania); and p.573 (Bulgaria). Also Duschinsky, p.396 for Hungary.

⁶⁹ Reports of the Executive submitted to the 23rd Zionist Congress at Jerusalem, August 1951. Published by the Executives of the Zionist Organisation and of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Jerusalem 1951, p.246.

particularly strong resistance. Only a much smaller proportion of the Jewish population was permitted to leave Hungary than in the other European countries.⁷⁰

The agreement on Jewish emigration from Hungary to Israel was signed on November 30, 1949.⁷¹ It provided for the emigration of 3,100 people within an unspecified time. The emigrants were to be selected by the Hungarian authorities from three categories. The selection of 1,000 people was based on the principle of family reunification, i.e. the emigrants must have had parents, children, brothers or sisters already residing in Israel, provided that they did not leave Hungary illegally after January 1948. The agreement allowed for the emigration of 2,000 people over the age of 65. In the case of married couples, only the husband had to be in that age group. The third category consisted of 40 Zionist leaders and their families, but not more than a total of 100 people. They were to be recommended by the Jewish Agency, on a party basis. The Mapai, Mapam, Mizrachi and

⁷⁰ The agreement with Hungary provided for the emigration of 3,100 persons from an estimated Jewish population of 100,000, i.e. for about 3%. By comparison Czechoslovakia, permitted emigration for up to 20,000 persons from a Jewish population of 55,000. (Meyer, p.66 and p.147), i.e. almost 40%. With Bulgaria, the agreement was not on a governmental level. But of the 48,000 post-war Jewish population, by May 1949, 44,000 had departed; of those, 41,000 in 1948-49, (Meyer, p.620), apparently with the regime's consent. This group itself constituted almost 90% of the Jewish population. From Roumania the number of legal Jewish emigrants to Israel was 2,574 in 1948, 7,112 in 1949, and 48,213 in 1950 (Meyer, p.549). It is difficult to establish the proportion, but taking the number of Jews in Roumania in 1947 as 428,000 (ibid, p.516) the traffic in those three years affected almost 13% of the Jewish population. In Poland, after a mass exodus of more than 150,000 in 1945-46 (ibid, pp.255-256) the Jewish population was 90,000 in 1947 (ibid, p.257). 25,931, i.e. more than 25% were allowed to emigrate to Israel between September 1949 and December 1950 (ibid, p.313).

⁷¹ Details of the agreement were compiled from the following sources: Duschinsky, p.464; Jewish Chronicle, November 18, 1949; Uj Kelet April 24, 1950, and from an interview with Shmuel Bentsur, who as the Israeli Consul in Hungary conducted the negotiations.

General Zionist parties were allocated nine places each, the Revisionist party three, and WIZO, the Womens Zionist Organisation one. The agreement did not stipulate the professions and sex of the emigrants, nor in the first and third categories their ages. But as the final selection was left to the discretion of the Hungarian authorities, they could consider such factors when granting permissions. The emigrants were allowed to take 5,000 Forints worth of personal effects with them, but the assessment again was left to the Hungarian authorities.

The negotiations, the agreement itself, and its subsequent implementation were revealing about the Hungarian regime's attitude to Jewish emigration. The agreement was unique in the sense that it was the only inter-governmental treaty which an East European country signed with Israel on Jewish emigration. The arrangements with the others were based either on a verbal agreement between the Jewish Agency and the Communist-controlled local central Jewish organisation (as in Bulgaria), on a verbal agreement between the two governments (in Czechoslovakia), or on implicit consent of the regimes (in Poland and Roumania).

It can be assumed that it was the Hungarian government which insisted on such an internationally recognisable legally binding contract, presumably to settle this matter definitively and close the door to any more bargaining. The Israeli government was dissatisfied with the small number of exit permits but accepted the terms on the assumption that it was only the first of several similar agreements which would eventually enable Jewish emigration on a much larger scale.⁷² The Hungarian regime's intention however became clear when every further Israeli attempt to renew negotiations was flatly rejected. Their only concession in excess of the agreed quota was the acceptance of about half of the few applications submitted by the Israeli authorities on behalf of Zionist leaders.⁷³

⁷² Interview with Bentsur.

⁷³ *ibid.*

The Hungarians were more eager to gain financially than any other East European regime. The Yugoslav and Bulgarian Communists had previously received per capita payments from Israeli authorities on Jewish emigrants at the time of their departure.⁷⁴ But the Hungarian demand was different in two respects: payment had to be made in advance, and it was per capita much higher. The Hungarians refused to start negotiations until the American (Jewish) Joint Distribution Committee (the "Joint") made a one-million dollar contribution towards the re-equipment of the Jewish Hospital in Budapest which was then quickly nationalised.⁷⁵ Thus this ransom had to be paid before agreement on the number of emigration permits was reached. As the subsequent treaty granted only 3,100 permissions, the payment received by the Hungarian regime was over \$30,000 for each emigrant.

The Hungarian government was also anxious to keep emigration to a minimum. The Israelis anticipated permission for some 30-50,000 emigrants.⁷⁶ However, the Hungarians, once agreement had been reached on the principles offered to grant only 3,000 permits, and even of those they wanted to deduct two-thirds in lieu of people who had already emigrated to Israel illegally.⁷⁷ Only after the Israeli government had argued that it could not be held responsible for the impenetrability of Hungary's borders, was the deduction demand dropped. The Hungarian regime rejected the Israeli request that the treaty should include a time limit. The Israelis accepted the treaty in an open-ended way, on the assumption that the emigration of the 3,100 people would be concluded in three to four months, and subsequent agreements - to which the "Joint" had already pledged further financial assistance - would cater for the emigration of many more Jews.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Interview with Bentsur.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Y. Rafael, the head of the Jewish Agency's immigration department stated that the negotiations will lead to the emigration of 50,000 Jews (Uj Kelet, February 7, 1948). This expectation was reduced after Avriel's visit to Budapest, to 30,000 (JTA, February 24, 1949).

⁷⁷ Interview with Bentsur.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

The two governments reached mutually satisfactory arrangements on the transfer to Israel of some of the emigrants' assets. A trade agreement, already in force since January 1949, permitted Israel to pay for part of its purchases in Hungarian currency.⁷⁹ This meant that Israel could utilise the proceeds of the sales of some of the emigrants' assets, who were then recompensated on arrival in Israel.⁸⁰ Although the Hungarian regime did not restrict the amount of transferable assets, the Israeli government limited ^{it} to 15-20,000 Forints per families. This was to assure that not only a few rich families could save their wealth, but more of the emigrants at least some of their assets.⁸¹ Hungarian consent to such reasonable arrangements was reciprocated by accepting that Hungary must purchase Israeli goods for only 27.5% of the value of her exports to Israel.⁸²

The Hungarian government's determination that the treaty should be the final concession on Jewish emigration transpired in the prolonged delays of its implementation. Contrary to Israeli expectations, that it would be concluded in a few months, the last group left Hungary four years later in November 1953.⁸³

The Hungarian authorities created difficulties right from the beginning. They demanded, for example, from every applicant under the family reunion scheme, proof of relatives living in Israel.⁸⁴ Because of this delay, the first group did not leave Hungary until six months after the signing of the treaty.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Sources are contradictory on proportions. Bentsur, the Israeli Consul in Hungary, recalled it as 20%. (Interview with Bentsur) but a contemporary statement by the then Israeli Under-Secretary of Finance, David Horowitz, put it at 35%. (Uj Kelet, October 28, 1949).

⁸⁰ It should be noted that this formula was accepted not only by the Hungarian regime, but also by the Czechoslovak government. See a statement by Moshe Sharet, the Israeli Foreign Minister at the time of the Slansky trial in Prague (JTA, November 25, 1952).

⁸¹ Interview with Bentsur.

⁸² An indication of Hungarian satisfaction with this proportion can be found in Izrael: Erec Jisrael etc, p.36).

⁸³ JTA, October 30, 1953.

⁸⁴ Jewish Chronicle, December 9, 1949.

⁸⁵ Jewish Chronicle, May 26, 1950.

In spite of obstacles, 1,800 Jews (i.e more than half of the quota) emigrated to Israel in the first eleven months before the Hungarian government suspended further transactions in October 1950.⁸⁶ It did so apparently in order to break Israeli resistance to a demand that Israel should pay the fares of Hungarian immigrants who wished to return from Israel.⁸⁷ As in an amnesty for returning emigrants, the Hungarian government had previously promised to pay their fares,⁸⁸ this demand was a blatant breach of promise. However the Israeli government eventually surrendered to the pressure, and emigration resumed in February 1951.⁸⁹

It should be noted that this was the only time when Hungary suspended this operation, and when it did so, it was for a purely domestic reason. The increasingly anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli climate of Eastern Europe that accompanied the preparations for the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia did not affect the Hungarian attitude in this respect. Emigration continued uninterrupted until August 1952, and by then 2,800 of the anticipated 3,100 Hungarians had reached Israel.⁹⁰ There is no record however of any further emigration until November 1953,⁹¹ i.e until after Stalin's death and the subsequent cancellation of the anti-Israeli campaign which was launched in the Soviet Union with the arrest of Jewish doctors in November 1952.

⁸⁶ For the number of arrivals, see JTA, January 24, 1951.

⁸⁷ Jewish Chronicle, February 23, 1951.

⁸⁸ Szabad Nep, June 15, 1950.

⁸⁹ Jewish Chronicle, February 23, 1951.

⁹⁰ Jewish Chronicle, August 22, 1952.

⁹¹ Ibid, November 6, 1953.

CHAPTER SIX: THE STALINIST PERIOD - AN EXERCISE IN CAUTION

The Effects on Jews

Hungary between 1949 and 1953 was ruled by the methods of Stalinist dictatorship. Subjugation to Soviet interests affected every area of life. The economy was war-oriented with emphasis on heavy industry and with the subsequent lack of consumer goods. Cultural life was impregnated with rigid Stalinist dogmae and the climate of high-pitched "class war" resulted in a rule of terror by the political police. It was a difficult period for the whole population, including of course the Jews.

The Jewish community - though seriously reduced since 1945 - was in that period still the second largest in the Soviet-controlled East European countries. Its estimated number was 100,000 with about 80,000 of them living in Budapest.¹ This represented an approximately 30% drop since the 1946 census,² which was due partly to natural losses, but mainly to emigration. The community's size remained largely unchanged during the Stalinist period as illegal emigration was at an almost complete standsill, and legal emigrants to Israel numbered only 2,800 between the end of 1949 and August 1952.³ Structurally the community had two significant characteristics: it was over-aged, and women out-numbered men in the higher age brackets, by almost two to one.⁴

¹ Estimates published by the World Jewish Congress in *European Jewry, etc.*, 1956 are the following: Poland 70,000 (p.24), Roumania over 300,000, (p.59), Czechoslovakia 18,000 (p.103), Bulgaria 5,000 (p.119), and East Germany 2,000 (p.143). Reference to Hungary on p.77.

² Katzburg, 1966, p.166.

³ Jewish Chronicle, August, 22, 1952.

⁴ In 1949, more than half of the community were over 46 years old (*European Jewry etc.*, 1956, p.72) and about 40% were over 60 (*Ibid*, p.79). In the higher age-brackets, there were 1,784 women for every 1000 men. (*Ibid*, p.72).

Communal organisations did exist, but on a reduced scale, and with activities confined to purely religious and charitable matters. They were supervised by the government's Office for Religious Affairs.⁵

The centralisation of communal organisations was completed by early 1951 (see Chapter four: The Re-shaping of the Jewish Community). It served two purposes: it made it easier for the state to control them, and it was an opportunity to reduce their numbers. The three religious institutions - the Orthodox, the Neolog, and the Status Quo bodies - which represented slightly different shades of observance, were amalgamated in 1950, and placed under the authority of the new National Bureau of Hungarian Jews. This had an executive council of lay leaders, and a rabbinical council. The previous religious designations were disregarded, and in any one town only a single congregation was permitted to function.⁶ Consequently the number of congregations decreased. An official Hungarian statement claimed that 150 synagogues and praying houses had eventually remained,⁷ but a Western estimate put their number to only 70.⁸ The fall was in either case significant, as in May 1949, the Budapest office of the World Jewish Congress still recorded 253 congregations.⁹

However, state-sponsored centralisation could not be blamed entirely for their disappearance. 163 of those congregations had a membership of less than 100. As many of their members might have left the country, or moved to larger towns, several of those congregations could have disintegrated without any outside interference.

All but one sphere of communal activities were placed under the control of the new National Bureau. The Jewish Literary Society (Izraelita Magyar Irodalmi Tarsag, IMIT), whose main concern was publishing, and the Jewish Cultural Association (Orszagos Magyar Izraelita Kulturális Egyesulet, OMIKE), were disbanded in 1950,

⁵ Deposition by Dr.S.Scheiber. 4

⁶ European Jewry etc, 1956, p.70.

⁷ Bulletin of the Legation of the People's Republic of Hungary, Tel Aviv, Vol.4, No.14, October 21, 1954.

⁸ European Jewry etc, 1956, p.77.

⁹ Ibid, p.78.

and their functions transferred to the Bureau's Cultural Department.¹⁰ The Bureau also controlled the only Jewish newspaper, the Uj Elet (which was then a weekly), the remaining educational institutions (two four-grade high schools and a rabbinical seminary), a burial society, an old-age home, and a hospital. This latter was however no longer the original 1000-bed Jewish hospital in Budapest. That had been nationalised, and the new "hospital" was merely 80 beds, reserved in the Jewish old-age home (with a total bed capacity of 320) for general hospital purposes.¹¹ The only work carried out for a while independently of the central organisation was the distribution of relief funds provided by the "Joint". Until May 1951, it was conducted by an American director, Charles Jordan, but after his departure, this function too was taken over by the National Bureau.¹²

Within this organisational framework, communal life was declining. Although the post-take over constitution of 1949 provided for the freedom of religious practice,¹³ the pronounced anti-religious nature of the regime deterred many state employees from an open observance of religion, in fear of impairing their career prospects. A former communal leader, who left Hungary in August 1950, claimed that "those found even in Orthodox synagogues are mainly people who have already lost their jobs, or were aged, invalids etc."¹⁴

The sharp drop in the number of pupils in Jewish day schools also reflected withdrawal from the community. In the 1946-47 academic year, there were still 4,642 children in Jewish schools, 4,326 of them in five secondary schools.¹⁵ By 1950, all the primary and three of the secondary schools had been nationalised. In the remaining

¹⁰ Ibid, p.69.

¹¹ JTA, March 1, 1951.

¹² Werner, p.23.

¹³ Paragraph 54, subsection 1. RFE East Europe Research and Analysis, Hungarian Press Survey, No.3804, March 28, 1972.

¹⁴ Summary of a report by Dr.A.Geyer to the World Jewish Congress, Haifa, Israel, October, 1950. Institute of Jewish Affairs, London, 80(182).

¹⁵ Duschinsky, p.399.

two secondary schools - both in Budapest - the number of grades were reduced in accordance with a general reorganisation of the school system, from eight to four. In 1950, these two schools had less than 150 pupils.¹⁶

It can be assumed that two further factors also contributed to the declining involvement in communal activities. One was that the communal leadership gave priority to the propagation of the regime's political aims over the representation of specifically Jewish interests. Although overt opposition to this policy was rare,¹⁷ it is conceivable that a number of Jews adopted an attitude of passive resistance by abstaining from communal activities. At the same time some supporters of the regime presumably relinquished their links with Judaism, finding it unnecessary to pursue political activities in a sectarian environment.

The second factor could have been the exclusively religious character of communal life. This might have distracted those whose bonds were more of the nature of a Jewish group identification than of religious affiliation. Communal life without its social and racial facets could hardly compete for the attention of those Jews who - with facile or no religious beliefs - were merely seeking identification on the basis of common interests.

The Jewish population was seriously affected by the transformation of Hungary's economic structure. A large section had been, by tradition, engaged in those sectors of the economy which were nationalised. Of the 51,299 gainfully employed Jews in Budapest in 1945, 21,800 were independent employers.¹⁸ An assessment by the Uj Elet, after the 1956 revolution, admitted that "the economic measures of the Rakosi regime rendered destitute many thousands of Hungarian Jews,

¹⁶ Report by Dr.A.Geyer, October, 1950. Institute of Jewish Affairs, London 80(182).

¹⁷ In 1951, two rabbis of provincial towns and a lay leader of a provincial community were arrested for organising the boycott of the Uj Elet, the official journal of the National Bureau, because they disagreed with its policy. (Jewish Chronicle, April 13, 1951).

¹⁸ Duschinsky, p.399. For the distribution of Budapest Jews by industry, and occupation, see *ibid*, p.400.

mainly small tradesmen and shopkeepers."¹⁹ The extent of the new economic system's effects could be judged from an assessment that of the 1,721 owners of retail stores nationalised by December 12, 1949, 1,504 were Jews.²⁰ Of the 491 buildings expropriated by the same time, 383 were owned by Jews, and of the 687 lawyers disbarred in 1948-48, 439 were Jews.²¹ Furthermore, many orthodox Jews could not accept employment in the nationalised sector, because it prevented them from observing the Shabbat.²²

The redeployment of the dispossessed Jews was carried out with a substantial financial contribution from the "Joint". An office for Retraining and for the Organisation of Co-operatives for Hungarian Jews (Magyar Izraelitak Atkepzo es Szovetkezetszervezo Irodaja, Mizra) was set up in February 1949. In the first month it dealt with 889 persons. 468 wished to be trained in some craft and 421 wanted employment in one of the new cooperatives,²³ where 1,000 Jews were then already apparently working.²⁴ In the first few months, the "Joint" spent approximately \$240,000 on the establishment of cooperatives,²⁵ and allocated a total of almost \$1 million for that purpose.²⁶ But because of the age and sex distribution, a considerable sector of the community was unfit for vocational readjustment. Thus in the second half of 1951, some 13,000 Jews were still receiving "Joint" relief, and even in July 1952, they numbered between eight and ten thousand.²⁷

¹⁹ April, 1957.

²⁰ The Jews of Hungary, etc, 1952, p.16.

²¹ Duschinsky, p.466.

²² Uj Elet, April 1957.

²³ Duschinsky, p.464.

²⁴ Uj Elet, February 17, 1949.

²⁵ The Jews of Hungary etc, p.16.

²⁶ Duschinsky, p.465.

²⁷ The Jews of Hungary etc, p.16.

Apart from the Communist policy's adverse effect on both the community and a large section of individual Jews, another factor that determined their attitude to the regime was its position on anti-semitism. The 1949 constitution proclaimed indeed that discrimination on religious grounds was punishable,²⁸ but the Jews apparently found a much weightier assurance elsewhere that the frequently abused constitution. According to a Western observer, the fact that many Communist leaders were Jews "kept the Jewish community in Hungary calm" until the "doctors plot" in Moscow in 1952.²⁹ An indirect confirmation of this view came from Jewish emigrants who stated that their main reason for leaving Hungary was "the fear of a revival of antisemitism on an unprecedented scale in the event of the Communist regime being overthrown."³⁰

Jews continued to play a prominent part in public life and were firmly entrenched in the highest level of leadership.³¹ Thus, it was the composition of the leadership which explained the seemingly contradictory attitude of many middle-class Jews who had suffered from the Communist measures and must have consequently disliked the regime, yet trembled that its collapse, as in 1919, would spark off anti-Jewish violence. Known instances of outright antisemitic incidents or agitation were rare during the Stalinist period. In 1950, the president of the Jewish community in a small provincial town and his wife were battered to death in their home. In 1952, antisemitic pamphlets were distributed in the country's largest steel works near Budapest.³² But latent antisemitism was fanned by the very same circumstances which the Jews themselves found reassuring. An investigation of antisemitic riots in Hungarian refugee camps in Austria, after the 1956 revolution, revealed that one of their roots was that anti-Communists identified Communism and its policies with Jewish Hungarian Communists.³³

²⁸ Paragraph 49, section 2, RFE East Europe Research and Analysis, Hungarian Press Survey, No. 3804, March 28, 1972.

²⁹ Jewish Chronicle, January 23, 1953.

³⁰ Ibid, May 23, 1951.

³¹ Jewish participation in Hungary's leadership during the Stalinist period will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

³² A. Werner, 1953, p. 24.

³³ JTA, January 28, 1957.

Zionism which made a forceful impression on Jewish communal life in the immediate post-war years, receded during this period into almost complete oblivion. First through illegal routes, then under the terms of the 1949 Hungro-Israeli agreement on emigration, most of the Zionist leaders left the country, while others were imprisoned. The dissolution of the Zionist organisations in March 1949, made Zionist work illegal. As Zionism had neither deep nor widespread roots in Hungary before 1945, with the most devoted leaders absent, and in face of the danger inherent in carrying out illegal activities, support for Zionism waned among Hungarian Jews.³⁴

A number of youth - mainly teenagers - maintained however Zionist groups until the arrest of some of their members in February 1953.³⁵ These groups were founded by former members of four Zionist youth movements with different political views and continued in their respective spirits.³⁶ A total of between 70 and 80 people were involved. Their aim was "to preserve the Zionist spirit until an opportunity presents itself for settlement in Israel." At their weekly meetings they studied the Hebrew language, exchanged information about current events in Israel, which they obtained from Israeli and other foreign radio broadcasts, newspapers, and information bulletins published by the Israeli Legation in Hungary. The groups worked independently, although their leaders kept contact to inform each other about emigration possibilities or arrests. They maintained no links with the Israeli Legation and employed conspirative methods to guard their personal safety.³⁷

³⁴ Israeli authorities noted that Jewish immigrants who left Hungary after the outbreak of the 1956 revolution were difficult to absorb, partly because only a "few among them had been brought up in Zionist tradition". Reports for the period January 1956 - March 1960, submitted to the 25th Zionist Congress in Jerusalem, December, 1960. Jewish Agency, Jerusalem 1960, p.143.

³⁵ Information on these groups is based on an interview with A.Kendi, one of its members, who is now an Israeli resident.

³⁶ They were Hashomer Hatzair, Maccabi Hatzair, Hanoar Hatzioni, and Bnei Akiva, representing respectively the following parties: Achdud Avoda-Mapam (which in Hungary was also known as the Marxist-Zionist party), Ichud-Mapai, (a Social Democratic party), Klal (General Zionists, a Bourgeois liberal party) and Mizrachi (a religious party).

³⁷ When meeting in private homes, for example, the members arrived and left separately. The groups did not appear together in public, except on hikes, when they assembled only in places far away from Budapest. Prospective members were screened by one or two members before being approached. Interview with Kendi.

Although Zionism as an ideology attracted apparently only a few Hungarian Jews, more appeared to have affections towards Israel. Budapest's largest synagogue, which accommodated over 2000 people, was filled to capacity in 1952 for a memorial service after the death of Israel's first president, Dr. Chaim Weizmann.³⁸ It should be noted however, that although it took place in an East European climate of increasingly vigorous anti-Israeli propaganda in preparation of the Slansky trial, the service was in memory of a head of state, thus in accordance with diplomatic protocol which the Hungarian government, according to an Israeli diplomat, observed meticulously,³⁹ Representatives of the Hungarian authorities, as well as of the diplomatic corps were present, it had been publicly announced, was conducted by the officially recognised Jewish communal organisation, therefore Jews could attend at a minimal risk. According to a former Zionist leader, who was present, "it reflected Budapest Jewry's attitude to Israel: when Israel was allowed to arrange a function openly and officially, they participated."⁴⁰

Another example indicated the Hungarian regime's belief that many Jews were solid in their support of Israel. When in 1951 the general press rebuked Israel for alleged interference in internal affairs, the Uj Elet, the official organ of the Jewish community referred to it cautiously only in general terms as a "foreign interference" without singling out Israel.⁴¹ The shallowness of Hungarian Jewry's attachment to Zionism manifested itself however in its attitude to settlement in Israel. Although in 1951 an Israeli government official reported that more than half of Hungary's Jewish population had applied to Israel for entry permission,⁴² after the 1956 revolution when Hungary's borders were open and many Western

³⁸ Interview with Galor.

³⁹ Interview with Bentsur.

⁴⁰ Interview with Galor.

⁴¹ June 21, 1951.

⁴² Uj Kelet, October 26, 1951.

states were offering hospitality to Hungarian refugees, only a small proportion of the Jewish ones emigrated to Israel.⁴³

Israeli Diplomacy

The dissolution of the Zionist institutions in March 1949 was meant to destroy Zionism as an organised force and thus erode its capability of mobilising supporters and providing them with scope for activities within a structured framework. But in their place there appeared now the diplomatic mission of Israel, a state which embodied those very same Zionist ideals. The Hungarian regime, which had recognised the Israeli government, was obliged to grant its representatives the customary diplomatic privileges. At the same time, the Israeli mission too was bound to observe the diplomatic etiquette, i.e. confine its functions to representing the interests of a sovereign state. However, the Israeli mission in Hungary in this period crossed those traditional boundaries of diplomatic activities. This trespassing had its roots in the Zionist principles guiding the Israeli government. As it regarded Israel as the homeland of all the Jews, it considered every Jew a potential citizen, whose interests it was obliged to defend.⁴⁴ It was also a fundamental tenet of Zionism that Jews should return from "exile to their traditional homeland: to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas."⁴⁵ Observance of this principle thus compelled the diplomatic

⁴³ An estimated 15-20% of the some 17,000 Jews who had escaped to the West, went to Israel. (See Jewish Chronicle, February 8 and May 3, 1957; Congress Digest Vol. XII, No. 2, January 25, 1957). Hungarian immigration to Israel must have been so insignificant that the Jewish Agency's immigration department, when reporting to the 25th Zionist Congress in 1960, on developments in Eastern Europe in the preceding four years - which included the Hungarian revolution and its aftermath - did not even mention immigration from Hungary. (Reports for the period January 1956 - March 1960. Submitted to the 25th Zionist Congress in Jerusalem. December 1960. Jewish Agency, 1960, p.82.

⁴⁴ A former high-ranking diplomat, who was one of the founders of the Israeli foreign service, described the functions of Israeli diplomats as follows: "It is a commonplace of our Foreign Service that every Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Israel has a dual function. He is Minister Plenipotentiary to the country to which he is accredited - and Envoy Extraordinary to its Jews." Eytan: The First Ten Years, London 1958, p.179.

⁴⁵ The Zionist terminology describes this process as aliya. For its definition see Patai, Vol. I, p.21.

representatives of the Zionist regime to encourage and abet Jewish subjects of their host governments to leave their country and settle in Israel. This element was bound to cause tension between Israeli diplomatic missions and the East European Communist regimes which restricted the free movements of their subjects.

The diplomatic mission in Hungary reflected the Zionist character of the Israeli government both in its composition and its aims and activities. The foreign service of the new State of Israel grew out of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, the high command of the Zionist movement, which had until then carried out the functions of a Foreign Ministry "in all but name and external authority."⁴⁶ Most of Israel's diplomats were thus devoted veteran Zionists. Her first minister to Hungary, Ehud Avriël had previously been a full-time Zionist official, who played a prominent part inter alia in the organisation of illegal Jewish emigration to Palestine.⁴⁷

The Israeli Legation opened in Hungary in November 1948. Its resident head - in the rank of consul and first secretary - was also a former Zionist official, Transylvania born, and Hungarian speaking Shmuel Bentsur, (his original name was Endre Péterfi), who had then already been in Hungary since 1947 as an emissary to Ichud-Mapai Zionist political party. That the recruitment of immigrants had a significant role in Israel's diplomatic activities in Hungary was evident from the fact that the only other resident diplomat was an "aliya officer", i.e. a person in charge specifically of immigration.⁴⁸ The Legation's locally employed staff - their numbers varied during the years between five and seven⁴⁹ - were deliberately recruited from the ranks of former Zionist officials, mainly because of their reliability and partly because the liquidation of the Zionist organisations had left them without a livelihood.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Eytan, p.193. The department's head, Moshe Shertok (known later as Sharet, the Hebrew name he adopted in 1949) became Israel's first Foreign Minister. The new ministry drew to a large extent on the staff and experience of his former department. Eytan, p.199.

⁴⁷ For Avriël's personal details, see Patai, 1971, p.

⁴⁸ He was Dr. Mozes Weinberger, a former rabbi from Transylvania (Uj Kelet, December 13, 1948). He also had the additional ranks of vice-consul and cultural attache. (Interview with Bentsur).

⁴⁹ Interview with Galor.

⁵⁰ Interview with Bentsur.

The Israeli Legation thus became a reservoir of Zionists and, consequently, a potential centre of Zionist activities. But the Zionist character of the Israeli diplomacy in Hungary was more apparent in the mission's objectives and its attitude to the local Jewish community. Its primary purpose was to obtain the Hungarian government's consent for Jewish emigration to Israel and all other bilateral links were subordinated to that.⁵¹

When Israel's minister, Avriel presented his credentials in February 1949, he immediately used his first contact with the Hungarian government to initiate negotiations about Jewish emigration. For the rest of that year, Israeli diplomatic activities concentrated on the formulation of an agreement on emigration - reached eventually in November 1949 - with trade negotiations being used to secure the transfer of some of the emigrants' assets. After the signing of the agreement, Bentsur's contact with Hungarian officials was restricted mainly to negotiations about its implementation. Even in unrelated routine meetings with Foreign Ministry officials, Bentsur tried to steer conversation towards the possibilities of further Jewish emigration to Israel.⁵²

The Legation conducted its contacts with Jews cautiously. In the earliest period, in the few months before the dissolution of the Zionist organisations, Bentsur relied on some help by Zionist officials,⁵³ presumably as a delayed application of his customary working methods acquired previously as a Zionist functionary. After the closing down of the Zionist organisations and collaterally with the implementation of Stalinist measures, the mission adopted the principle that its actions must not endanger the local Jewish community.⁵⁴ The Legation's contacts with the National Bureau of Hungarian Jews, the officially recognised representative organisation of the community,

⁵¹ Interview with Bentsur, who also stated that "the political contents of the two countries' relationship were minimal. There were neither common political aims nor diverse ones which had to be argued. Our whole relationship was reduced to what could be achieved in Jewish emigration to Israel."

⁵² Interview with Bentsur.

⁵³ A digest of the Hungarian press was, for instance, prepared for him regularly by Dr. Denes, who recalled later that "Peterfi (Bentsur) was so busy that he did not have time to browse through the newspapers and periodicals, and I undertook to watch them, for him, until my emigration." Denes, p.31.

⁵⁴ Interview with Galor.

was kept to a minimum. Successive mission heads,⁵⁵ exchanged courtesy visits with the leaders of the National Bureau on their arrival. They were also invited to routine diplomatic functions such as receptions on the anniversaries of Israel's establishment when the government representatives and the diplomatic corps were also present.

The Israeli diplomats avoided public or semi-public meetings with Jews. They very rarely attended synagogue services and refused to visit private homes if others than members of the immediate family were to be present.⁵⁶ The rule on relations with Jewish individuals was not to initiate contacts, but to respond when approached.⁵⁷

On an average about 50 - 60 Jews visited the Legation daily (mainly to enquire about immigration opportunities) and eventually a two to three hundred strong circle of friends surfaced. Those were invited in groups of 25 to 30 to the homes of diplomats for the celebration of Jewish festivals (like Channukah and Purim) and were entertained at the Legation on the anniversaries of Israel's establishment, separately from the formal diplomatic receptions for governmental and communal officials.⁵⁸

The circulation of propaganda material was guided by similar considerations. The Legation published duplicated information bulletins regularly,⁵⁹ reporting mainly the social and economic events in Israel. Information on political developments was cautiously selective to prevent recipients from being accused of obtaining Zionist propaganda. The bulletin's basic aim was to keep the Jews informed

⁵⁵ Avriel was replaced as minister by Shmuel Eliashiv in July, 1950. (The presentation of his credentials was reported in the Szabad Nep on July 13, 1950), and like his predecessor, he resided in Prague. Bentsur was resident head of the mission in Budapest as consul and first secretary, and from early 1951 as minister (Jewish Chronicle, April 27, 1951). He was replaced by Gershon Avner, in the rank of Charge d'Affairs, in 1952 (Szabad Nep, October 23, 1952).

⁵⁶ Interview with J.Yaron.

⁵⁷ Interview with Bentsur.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ From its inception in 1948 until 1950, the Legation issued 27 editions of such bulletins. In 1950 it employed a former Zionist official - Dr. Endre Gellert - as information officer and the bulletin was from then on published first monthly, then fortnightly, and eventually weekly. Circulation varied between 1,000 and 5,000. (Interview with Galor).

about events in Israel and thus enable them to maintain or to develop their identification with the Jewish state. Initially sample copies were sent to addresses on mailing lists obtained from various sources, presumably from the dissolved Zionist organisations, but circulation was subsequently restricted to those Jews who explicitly requested it.

To avoid appearance of a conspiracy between the Legation and the Jews, the bulletin was circulated through the post and sent to all such people and institutions who would normally receive such information, like the Foreign Ministry, the press and the radio station.⁶⁰

The Zionist character of Israeli diplomacy was specifically clear in one particular incident of this period. In 1950 and 1951 the Hungarian government transferred members of what it regarded as "alien classes" from Budapest and some provincial towns to villages. Information varies on the dates of these evictions and on the estimated number of people involved, but it can be assumed that 75-98,000 citizens were eventually moved.⁶¹ According to an official statement by Hungary's Minister for the Interior, those evicted from Budapest were "undesirable elements" including aristocrats, pre-war politicians, and military and police officers, former industrialists, bankers, factory managers, wholesalers, land-owners, and their families.⁶² These measures were not directed

⁶⁰ Information on these bulletins' aims, contents and distribution was obtained from Dr. Galor (Gellert) who was its editor from 1950 to 1954.

⁶¹ According to a not wholly reliable source, the first signs of this "resettlement" were notified in November 1950, when visitors to the Kistarcsa internment camp near Budapest found 650 of the 800 internees missing. Enquiries revealed that they had been transferred either to Eastern Hungary or to prisons (E.E. Cohen, p.34). Another not wholly reliable source, based on an alleged report by the Hungarian State Statistical Office, stated that in 1951, 38,633 persons were evicted from Budapest and an estimated 35,000 from provincial towns (Duschinsky p.477). The data concerning Budapest corresponds however with a Vatican Radio report of December 1951 which put the number of evictees at 38,000 (Ibid, p.476). Another source estimated the total number of evictees as 95,000 (Survey of events etc, p.59). According to Western sources, most of the evictions were carried out between May and July of 1951 (JTA, August 6, 1951) but were apparently resumed in December of the same year (JTA, March 4, 1952). The only official Hungarian statement declared that between May 21 and June 15, 1951, 924 persons and their relatives had been evicted from Budapest (Nepszava, June 17, 1951).

⁶² Nepszava, June 17, 1951.

against Jews. However, because of their preponderance in some of these economic categories, Jews constituted about one third of the victims.⁶³ Consequently in the narrower confines of the Jewish community, these measures had a far greater impact than on the national scale. While the evictions concerned at most about 1% of the total population, the Jews involved represented about one third of the Jewish community. Thus the forceful protests by Jewish organisations abroad appeared to be justified.⁶⁴

What should be specifically noted - in the context of examining the Zionist character of Israeli diplomacy - is the attitude of the Israeli government. While Western governments, individual politicians, and also the United Nations, confined themselves to vigorous protests against the deportations,⁶⁵ Israel was not only the first foreign government to protest, but also the only one which interceded actively through its diplomatic mission in Budapest on behalf of certain individuals, as well as the Jewish community as a whole.⁶⁶ The Israeli government interfered on two levels. On the first, its diplomatic

⁶³ A contemporary Western observer noted that "the proportion of Jews involved is very high because the government's eviction orders are directed primarily against former industrialists and middle-class businessmen - two groups in which Jews predominated" (Jewish Chronicle, June 22, 1951). Although an obviously exaggerated statement claimed that "75% of the tens of thousands of deportees were Jews" (Interview with a newly arrived Hungarian immigrant in Israel, Jewish Chronicle, January 4, 1952), most sources put their proportion between 30 and 40%. (See Duschinsky p.477, Uj Kelet, December 12, 1951, Werner p.22, Survey of events etc, p.59.

⁶⁴ A particularly strong condemnation was issued by the American Jewish Committee (JTA, January 28, 1951) and an international Jewish organisation even appealed to the United Nations (JTA, August 27, 1951).

⁶⁵ Nepszava, June 19, 1951.

⁶⁶ See Werner, 1953, p.23; JTA June 20, 1951, and July 9, 1951.

representative in Budapest intervened - and in most cases successfully - for exemption from eviction of those Jews who had already been permitted to emigrate to Israel under the terms of the 1949 Hungro-Israeli agreement.⁶⁷ This could be regarded as a legitimate action by a government to protect its own citizens, because the persons concerned had already been permitted both to leave Hungary and settle in Israel.

Its intervention on a second level revealed however the Israeli government's Zionist commitment. This appeared first in an attempt to negotiate with the Hungarian government the "fate of all (my italics = G.G) Hungarian Jews,"⁶⁸ and in its offer to settle all of them in Israel.⁶⁹ Subsequently the Israeli government tried to use the climate created by the evictions, to prove that the overwhelming majority of Hungarian Jews wanted to emigrate to Israel. Although the Minister, Bentsur, was aware that nobody would avoid eviction by the mere possession of an Israeli entry permit, through his contacts in the community, he stimulated the building up of long queues of applicants outside the Israeli Legation every day. This was intended to show to the Hungarian authorities and the diplomatic corps the strength of Jewry's wish to emigrate to Israel.⁷⁰

After the first wave of evictions in the early summer of 1951, the Israeli legation received 500 entry applications daily, and Bentsur quoted at least twice a week the latest figures to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry "to enable them to see the futility of their contention that Jews are 'perfectly happy' in Hungary."⁷¹

Such behaviour - which a contemporary observer described as vigorous and persistent⁷² was however the exception. The relationship

⁶⁷ Interview with Bentsur. For specific cases of families who were exempted from eviction, or even brought back to Budapest from their new places of residence, see Uj Kelet, December 6, 1951, Jewish Chronicle, January 4, 1952, and a confidential report by Dr. S. J. Roth, on information obtained from Hungarian emigrants, July 13, 1951. Institute of Jewish Affairs, London 80(182).

⁶⁸ JTA, July 1, 1951.

⁶⁹ JTA, June 29, 1951 and Jewish Chronicle, August 24, 1951.

⁷⁰ Interview with Bentsur. See also Jewish Chronicle report August 24, 1951.

⁷¹ Jewish Chronicle, August 24, 1951.

⁷² Ibid.

between Hungary and Israel was characterised by restraint in these years of the Stalinist era. Israeli diplomacy was subdued and unobtrusive, presumably to maintain an atmosphere conducive to Jewish emigration to Israel. The Hungarian Communist authorities on the other hand did not yet feel obliged by the growing anti-Israel climate with the Soviet bloc to seek a confrontation with Israel. At the same time, consistently with the Hungarian Communist attitude towards the Jews, they had no reasons for, or interests in, a clash with the Zionists in the community.⁷³

Non-Existent Jewry

In one important aspect the Communist regime treated the Jewish communal organisation - both its religious and lay sections - differently from the Christian churches. All religious organisations were expected not only to refrain from expressing objections to the regime's anti-religious principles, but explicitly support its general policies. Where the treatment of the churches and the Jewish organisations differed was that while the Churches were required to be seen doing so, Jewish activities in that respect remained largely unrecorded for the general public.

Religious leaders were occasionally obliged to manifest their solidarity even in such mundane and indeed humiliating fashion as expressing their loyalty and admiration for Rakosi, the Communist dictator of Hungary.⁷⁴ However, their public collaboration was channelled mainly into one specific area where their support for the regime appeared to be almost naturally compatible with their religious beliefs. This was the international "Peace Movement", Stalin's instrument for lining up at the lowest common denominator the broadest possible

⁷³In spite of the Israeli government's active interference in the evictions, the Szabad Nep confined itself merely to a remark that apparently the Israeli Legation is equally worried about evicted capitalist Jews and former Nazis. (June 17, 1951).

⁷⁴Szabad Nep (March 9, 1952) recorded that the Catholic, Reformed and Evangelic churches had sent greetings to Rakosi on his 60th birthday, which was incidentally turned into a wide-spread adulation of the Hungarian leader, fashioned on the public celebrations of Stalin's 70th birthday in 1949.

sector of the populations of various countries behind Soviet policies.

Outside the Soviet bloc, this new variation on Stalin's earlier "popular front" concept was designed to link up on an ostensibly non-political platform prominent intellectuals, clergymen, trade unionists, artists and writers, for the preservation of peace - the proclaimed goal of the Soviet Union - against the "war-mongering machinations" of the imperialist powers. This movement created a network of fellow travellers who could be indoctrinated without having to become committed Communists and - exploiting the freedom of expression in the democratic Western countries - could consequently attempt to influence public opinion in favour of some Soviet policies. In the Soviet-controlled East European states, the Peace Movement provided the structural framework for engaging influential non-political and certainly not Communist individuals in public manifestations of their sympathies for the regimes.

In Hungary the Peace Council - set up at the first peace congress in 1949 - was controlled by the Communists though its nominal leadership consisted of prominent non-Communists: distinguished academics, well-known writers, actors, musicians and artists whose eminence and popularity was expected to influence the uncommitted middle-classes and those sections of the population to which they themselves belonged. One of the main purposes of the Peace Council was however to involve in public support of the Communist regime, the religious leaders of the various denominations and thus demonstrate to their congregants that it was possible to integrate into the new social and political order in spite of its anti-religious attitude.

The participation of religious leaders thus served at least three purposes: it proved to the world that the relationship between the regime and the religious organisations was unruffled; it gave the religious leaders a certain amount of personal recognition and thereby placated their congregations; and finally it compromised those leaders to some extent and made them therefore personally interested in keeping up good relations with the authorities.

The treatment of the Jewish community's leaders should be considered against this background. At the beginning, Stockler, the head of the new National Bureau, did not only attend the first peace congress in 1949, but also addressed it.⁷⁵ However, there is no record of

⁷⁵ Uj Elet, June 23, 1949.

Jewish representation, neither at the second peace congress in 1950, nor on the National Peace Council. The presence of two rabbis at the third peace congress was reported, but only in the Jewish communal journal.⁷⁶ Although they were there, unlike representatives of all the Christian churches, they neither addressed the congress, nor were they elected to its Presidium or to the new National Peace Council.⁷⁷ Jewish clergymen were ignored when in 1953 the State gave awards to religious leaders for their "peace activities."⁷⁸

This treatment must have reflected a Communist view either that the Jewish community needed less appeasement than other religious denominations, or that it was of lesser importance. As for the compromising effect on Jewish religious leaders, this too must have appeared less significant than in the case of Christian potentates. In fact this was, by and large, the view of a contemporary Israeli observer.⁷⁹

The regime's determination to pretend the non-existence of Jews prevented it from exploiting the potentially rich Jewish angle in its anti-German campaign. In this Cold War period, the Communist propaganda tried to whip up anti-Western feelings by accusing the Western regimes of seeking an unholy alliance with former Nazis. They attacked strongly the Western powers' recognition of a separate West-German state, and their alleged attempt to re-arm that new country. This propaganda

⁷⁶ Uj Elet, November 27, 1952. They were Dr. B. Schwartz and J. Czitron, chief rabbis respectively of the Budapest and the provincial communities.

⁷⁷ Members of the Presidium were listed in Szabad Nep, November 23, 1952, and those of the new National Peace Council in Szabad Nep, November 24, 1952.

⁷⁸ Szabad Nep, March 4, 1953.

⁷⁹ "Non-recognition of the organised Jewish community as a political factor in Hungary," a memorandum by the Israeli diplomatic mission in Budapest of August 17, 1954, noted about this period that "The only difference between official Jewish representatives and the bishops was that the delegates of the (Jewish) community were not permitted to speak at the (peace movement) meetings." Institute of Jewish Affairs, London 80(182).

campaign ran on the following line: it recalled - often in exaggerated details - the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, then argued that many of the perpetrators were holding high office in West Germany, and concluded that the Western powers' cooperation with this West-German state was proof of their collaboration with a Nazi-dominated regime, in order to use it as a spearhead for yet another attack on the Soviet Union and other "socialist" countries.

In such a propaganda scenario, the Jews could have been assigned an important role. The cruel persecution and the eventual murder of millions of them - in a precisely planned and meticulously organised way - could have been a strikingly effective illustration of Nazi inhumanity. At the same time Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust, most of them with several relatives among its dead victims, could have been expected to speak out most loudly against attempts to forgive Nazis and revive their power.

But the Hungarian regime used this potential only to gain support from Jewish communities in the west. In 1951, a declaration by the National Board of Rabbis, issued in English by the state-sponsored National Bureau of Jews, and distributed to Jewish organisations in the West, used indeed the three basic arguments of the Communists' anti-German propaganda.⁸⁰ But this condemnation was not published in the Hungarian press. On the contrary, Jews were kept away from public protests against German re-armament,⁸¹ and the anti-Jewish aspects of the

⁸⁰ The statement by the National Board of Rabbis said: "We appeal to you and implore you to do your best, wherever you are, to frustrate the intention of every war-monger... We took the news of the re-armament of the German army.... with a profound indignation... We have been scandalised by the news that the term of punishment of Weesenmayer (German Ambassador in Hungary during the war and the person allegedly in charge of the deportation of Jews from Hungary during the Nazi occupation in 1944 - G.G) has been reduced by half, and Krupp and his fellow murderers have been set free." Institute of Jewish Affairs, London 80(182).

⁸¹ Following a Moscow meeting which demanded German disarmament, prominent Hungarian personalities expressed their support, including church leaders, but excluding representatives of the Jewish Community. (Szabad Nep, December 9, 1954). A similar protest by the Hungarian Peace Council, also contained a declaration by Church dignitaries, but none by Jews. (Szabad Nep, December 10, 1954).

Nazi regime were ignored in the press propaganda.⁸²

The same reluctance to involvement with Jewish issues was probably behind the remarkable difference between the attitudes of the Hungarian and other East European regimes over the reparation agreement between West-Germany and Israel. In contrast to a whole series of vicious attacks on Israel by Romania and Poland,⁸³ in Hungary Israel was directly and harshly blamed only in the Uj Elet whose readership was limited to Jews.⁸⁴ The official Communist newspaper, the Szabad Nep, confined itself to one brief single-column comment which condemned the United States and West-Germany rather than Israel.⁸⁵

⁸² A colourful report in Nepszava (April 10, 1951) described how a Budapest artisan - who was obviously Jewish - signed a protest against German rearmament, but the fact that he was Jewish was not mentioned: "The former prisoner of the Mauthausen and Gunskirchen concentration camps remembers... He probably sees the murderers of his mother and sister. His features harden as he takes the pen to sign the peace petition." An article in Szabad Nep (December 19, 1954) about the "children of Terezin" and the "death camp of Birkenau" stated that "it is more timely than ever to recall the face of German militarism as Europe learned to know it between 1939 and 1945" but did not mention that the overwhelming majority of the victims in both camps were Jews. An even more striking example of this attitude was a report in Szabad Nep (April 24, 1955) about a protest rally in Auschwitz against German rearmament, which stated that "in the gas chambers of Auschwitz masses of Hungarian soldiers and officers were murdered" but omitted any reference to the Jews who were also killed there.

⁸³ For reports on these attacks, see Jewish Chronicle March 16, 1951, March 30, 1951, and April 4, 1952.

⁸⁴ The Jewish Chronicle (May 2, 1952) reported that Uj Elet had described the reparation agreement as "means of rehabilitating war criminals who under Hitlerite domination murdered six million Jews."

⁸⁵ On February 27, 1953, the Szabad Nep stated: "The agreement is a million-worth business for the West-German monopolcapitalists, as the Bonn government will pay from the workers' taxes for the goods delivered by the industrialists... It is clear that the United States supports the Zionist clique at the expense of the West-German population...."

A similar restraint characterised the regime's overall public position towards Israel. The Soviet bloc's growing interest in the Middle East was obviously responsible for the three lengthy essays in the party's theoretical monthly on this issue in the second half of 1951. All three were noticeable however for the lack of attention they paid to Israel and its actual or potential role in the developments in the area. In June a detailed analysis depicted the essence of the Middle East problem as a fight between the Arab countries and Anglo-American imperialism without even a single reference to Israel.⁸⁶ In November another long article named Israel only as one of several bastions of American influence, and concentrated on the American strategy towards the Arab countries to build up a chain of bases embracing the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ In the following month, as a sign of growing interest in the Middle East, the journal launched a series of articles on the individual countries of the area, starting with Egypt. In a general introduction, analysing the major tendencies and influences, Israel was yet again completely ignored.⁸⁸ When, however, four months later, the series reached Israel, the party journal painted the picture of an economically underdeveloped country, with high unemployment and poverty, which was politically completely subservient to America. The article attributed it to "American order" that Israel established links with the "revived Nazi-militant Adenauer regime in West-Germany" and noted that the "peace movement" was growing and that the "Israel Communist Party was leading the fight for peace, independence, and social progress."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Pal Lendvai: "A kozel- es kozepkeleti helyzet." Tarsadalmi Szemle, Budapest, Vol.VI, No.6, June 1951.

⁸⁷ Pal Lendvai: "A Kozel- es Kozep-Kelet nepei harcban az imperializmus ellen", Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.VI, No.10-11, October-November, 1951.

⁸⁸ Anna Bebrits: "A Kozel- es Kozep-Kelet orszagai I.Egyiptom", Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.VI, No.12, December 1951.

⁸⁹ Laszlo Nemes: "A Kozel- es Kozep-Kelet orszagai. IV. Irak, Izrael, Transzjordania." Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.VII, No.4, April 1952.

While such a theoretical journal could quite naturally adopt a posture of some detachment from a more directly propagandistic and, in tone, more extremist policy, it is remarkable that the Communist party's official daily newspaper, the Szabad Nep too showed a significantly moderate stand.

This expressed itself in various ways. The highest leadership of the party lent its own authority to the policy of denying the international importance of the Middle East problem,⁹⁰ while when dealing with the political conditions in that area the Szabad Nep refrained from the customary Communist argument about Israel's role as an outpost of Western imperialism.⁹¹ Occasional criticism of Israel and Zionism by party leaders was not followed up by elaboration on their brief references, which was usually done when the leaders spoke on other subjects.⁹² The official party organ showed also a tendency of pointing out Israeli public opposition to American "manipulation" and of not condemning Israel's leaders more strongly than Arab rulers.⁹³ Finally there were several examples even of

⁹⁰ The First Secretary, Matyas Rakosi, when making his keynote speech at the MDP's second congress in 1951, delivered his customary survey of the international situation but ignored completely the Middle East. See text of his speech in Szabad Nep, February 26, 1951.

⁹¹ October 21, 1951.

⁹² A notable example of this restrained attitude was the following: in his address to the MDP Central Committee on "The fight against the clerical reaction" Jozsef Revai, a leading member of the Politbureau, said that "there is a tendency in the Jewish organisations to support the reactionary Zionism instead of the constructive efforts of the Hungarian workers. Under no circumstances are we prepared to help in the exportation of hundreds of thousands of people for the purposes of their exploitation in Palestine. We are receiving hundreds of letters from emigrants to Palestine pleading with us to make their return possible." (Szabad Nep, June 6, 1950). In the same speech, Revai also attacked other denominations, and the Szabad Nep subsequently published several articles elaborating on his criticism of those and supporting statements from Protestant clergymen. But the paper did not follow up Revai's remarks about the Jews, neither with further attacks, nor with self-criticism by Jewish communal figures. His reference to emigrants to Palestine wishing to return was also played down. Although the Szabad Nep (on June 15, 1950) published a lengthy article about illegal emigrants who wished to take advantage of the Hungarian government's recent amnesty and return, it made no reference to people wanting to do the same from Israel.

⁹³ For the former see Szabad Nep, August 15, 1950, for the latter Szabad Nep May 31, 1951.

showing Israel in a favourable light though only by "writing between the lines", a method which was practiced widely in the East European press. It should be noted that this device in most cases was not a subterfuge for individual journalists, but a subtle expression of party views.⁹⁴

There is no evidence that the Hungarian Communist party deviated from the Soviet bloc's ideological principles on Zionism and Israel. Whenever it defined Zionism, that was in line with the others by describing it as reactionary and anti-Socialist. The official Hungarian evaluation presented the Middle East as a battlefield between imperialism and the forces of national liberation, with Israel slotted into the role of an imperialist outpost. Where the Hungarian Communist approach diverged was in the style and the tone of the public expressions of these views. To some extent even in its theoretical journal, the Tarsadalmi Szemle, but most certainly in the Szabad Nep, the party's official daily newspaper for a wider readership the aim appeared to be to avoid harsh words, the language of tension building, in short, the elements of creating a confrontation. The castigation of the Israeli regime was tempered by appreciation for the population's genuinely progressive instincts in order to blunt the edges.

⁹⁴ A few examples: A report on the United Nations Political Commission proposal that Hungary and thirteen other countries should be admitted, said: "Twenty-one countries supported the proposal (the Soviet Union, the Ukraine, Bjelorussia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Asian countries, Argentina, Israel, Sweden, and others" (Szabad Nep, January 26, 1952). Israel was thus singled out with only seven other countries - five of them Communists - from the twenty-one which supported Hungary's admission. Reporting an Arab peace congress in Cairo, the Szabad Nep (February 5, 1952) praised the "progressive forces" in the Arab countries as well as Israel, though Israel was neither an Arab country nor a participant of the congress. An exceptionally good example of "writing between the lines" was the presentation of two brief news items, next to each other, in the Szabad Nep (February 14, 1952). The first reported that the trial of the First Secretary of the Communist Party will soon open in Transjordan, and the second, the public celebrations in Israel of the fifteenth anniversary of the Israel Communist Party's official newspaper.

The explanation can be found in the party leaders' consistent, tactically motivated approach to the presence of Jews in Hungarian society. The fact that many of them were of Jewish origin was a major determining factor. The Hungarian Communists had to operate in the shadows of the 1919 Communist Republic, or rather, of the intensive indoctrination by the antisemitic and increasingly pro-Nazi regime which followed its fall. This regime encouraged the deepening of the population's latent anti-Jewish feelings, and at the same time, in its anti-Communist propoganda, identified Communism with Jews. The post-war Communist leadership was a striking illustration of this allegation. The four men who in effect controlled the Hungarian party - Rakosi, Farkas, Gero, and Revai - were all of Jewish origin. The party's attempt to ignore the existence of any specific Jewish problems, and even the presence of Jews in the society was largely to divert attention from this fact.

This consideration remained valid after the assumption of complete Communist rule in 1949. Although a numerical growth in party membership enabled Rakosi to reduce gradually the proportion of Jews in the lower and middle ranks of the party machinery, the original quartet of leaders retained its powerful position and many of the key functions remained in the hands of their most trusted collaborators who, for historic reasons, happened to be of Jewish origin. On the Central Committee elected by the first congress of the MDP (the new party created from the amalgamation of the MKP and the SZDP) in 1948, almost 30% of the members were of Jewish origin.⁹⁵ Their proportion was even higher among the key functionaries. They occupied almost one third of the places on the Politbureau, constituted half of the Secretariat, almost half of the Organisation Committee. The party's general secretary was Rakosi; one of the three deputy general secretaries was Farkas, and the editor-in-chief of the party's principal propaganda organ, the daily newspaper Szabad Nep, was Revai.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Of the 79 full or deputy members, at least 20 were of Jewish origin. For list of Central Committee members, see Szabad Nep, June 15, 1948.

⁹⁶ Szabad Nep, June 16, 1948.

Jewish participation declined in the ruling bodies which were elected at the party's second congress in 1951. In the Central Committee it dropped to just over 20% and in the Politbureau to less than 25%. Rakosi retained his post as general secretary, and the editorship of the party newspaper, although changed, remained in the hands of a Jew, Oszkar Betlen. The decline was the largest in the Organisation Committee, where only two of the eleven members were Jews. The proportion on the Secretariat remained the same, with the members of the original quartet - i.e Rakosi, Revai, Farkas, and Gero - occupying four of the eight places.⁹⁷

The variation between the sizes of reductions in the different party organs reflected the way in which the leaders were trying to free the party from a disparate Jewish participation without endangering their own hold on power. The largest reduction in the proportion of Jews was made where the party was more closely related to its grass roots, the Central Committee and the Organisation Committee. Neither were real policy-making bodies, but both were in intimate touch with the lower ranks of the party machinery where Jewish participation was proportionately less than at higher level. The composition of the Central Committee indicated clearly that a weeding out of Jews from the leadership was indeed in progress. The 1951 Central Committee showed a small increase in membership over 1948, but the actual intake of newcomers was larger. In 1948 about one third of the Central Committee consisted of members of the former SZDP, but most of them were purged before the 1951 congress. From an estimated 25 to 30 newcomers to the 1951 Central Committee only three were Jews. The overall proportion of Jews on the Committee remained higher only because Rakosi retained a hard core of Moscow-trained Communist veterans - his most reliable allies - and many of them were Jews.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Szabad Nep, March 3, 1951.

⁹⁸ In 1948 twenty of the seventy-nine Central Committee members were Jews; in 1951, sixteen out of eighty-nine. Of the thirteen Jews who were members of both Central Committees, twelve were Muscovites.

A similar tendency was noticeable in the party's two most powerful policy-making and executive bodies, the Politbureau and the Secretariat. None of the PB's ten new members in 1951 were Jews, while the five Jews who retained their places from 1948 were the members of the leadership quartet (Rakosi, Gero, Farkas, and Revai), and one of their closest Muscovite collaborators, Zoltan Vas. It could thus be concluded that in spite of a reduction in the proportion of Jews in the party leadership at large, the effective rulers remained those of Jewish origin. Therefore their earlier efforts to divert attention from this by playing down matters relating to Jews - either on local level or in regard to Israel - remained valid.

¹ Karel Kaplan, a Czechoslovak historian, disclosed that in a letter to the Czechoslovak party in September 1949, Rakosi had named sixty persons as agents of American imperialism, including several victims of later purges, such as V. Clementis, L. Farkaš, S. Lohy, S. Goldstucker, and A. London. Radio Free Europe Research, Czechoslovak Press Survey, No. 2147, December 9, 1968.

² A Czechoslovak analyst, in the light of the disclosures of the details of the Czechoslovak purge during the 1968 "Prague Spring" period, gave the following explanation: "The deterioration in Soviet-Israeli relations set in when American influence gained the upper hand in Israel while the progressive movement failed to achieve any notable success. This change in one aspect of Soviet foreign policy and strategy had its reflections not in basic policies, with a growing mood of suspicion and outright repression directed against certain Jews. The political and security implications of the Jewish question began to receive more attention. Theories emerged about the big part played by Jews in a world imperialist plot, and in ideological and political subversion throughout the socialist countries. As the (Czechoslovak) trials were prepared and conducted the emphasis on Zionism and on the Jews as a whole became more pronounced." Felikso, p. 47.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SLANSKY TRIAL AND THE DOCTORS' PLOT

Caught in the Net

The Hungarian Communist leaders' - and primarily Rakosi's - carefully nurtured and almost unflinchingly sustained policy to avoid any open and public confrontation with Jews, Zionism and Israel came to a crucial test in 1952. The challenge arose as Stalin's identification of his principal enemies was gradually undergoing a change. The unfolding of this process could be distinctly gauged in the development of the Communist party purge in Czechoslovakia.

The initial steps were made concurrently with the 1949 anti-Titoist show trials in Bulgaria and Hungary. The basic aim was identical: the incrimination of the Yugoslav leader. Rakosi, who forged ahead to please Stalin by proving in a court of law that Tito had not only deviated from Marxist-Leninist ideology, but was an outright imperialist agent, offered the evidence that had been concocted in the investigations in Hungary for similar purges in Czechoslovakia.¹ During the slow preparations for a show trial in Prague, the twists and turns in the accusations reflected Stalin's changing identification of his principal enemies. The outdrawn preliminary investigations ^{coincided} with a cooling off of the drive against Tito and the emergence of an anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist concept.²

¹ Karel Kaplan, a Czechoslovak historian, disclosed that in a letter to the Czechoslovak party in September 1949, Rakosi had named sixty persons as agents of American imperialism, including several victims of later purges, such as V. Clementis, L. Frejka, E. Lobl, E. Goldstucker, and A. London. Radio Free Europe Research, Czechoslovak Press Survey, No. 2147, December 9, 1968.

² A Czechoslovak analyst, in the light of the disclosures of the details of the Czechoslovak purge during the 1968 "Prague Spring" period, gave the following explanation: "The deterioration in Soviet-Israeli relations set in when American influence gained the upper hand in Israel where the progressive movement failed to achieve any notable success. This change in one aspect of Soviet foreign policy and strategy had its reflections now in home policies, with a growing mood of suspicion and outright repression directed against certain Jews. The political and security implications of the Jewish question began to receive more attention. Theories emerged about the big part played by Jews in a world imperialist plot, and in ideological and political subversion throughout the socialist countries. As the (Czechoslovak) trials were prepared and conducted the emphasis on Zionism and on the Jews as a whole became more pronounced." Pelikan, p.49.

The gradual shift from an anti-Tito to an anti-Zionist line reached its peak in the Czechoslovak trials in 1952. There - on Soviet insistence - prominence was given to the Jewish Communist leader, Slansky, because by then "Zionism was regarded as a major weapon in the imperialist conspiracy against the socialist camp."³ An analyst of this period has put the date of the switch in Soviet strategy to the spring of 1951, when Soviet security advisers, working on the preparation of a conspiracy trial in Prague, began to change the ideological basis of its plot from "bourgeois nationalism" to "Zionism" and subsequently Slansky's name began to appear in the depositions of the detainees.⁴

It could be safely assumed that Rakosi was aware of this Soviet shift in enemy identification, at least from the spring of 1951, nevertheless the Hungarian party's policy remained virtually unchanged. The anti-Yugoslav measures and the propaganda had subsided somewhat from its peak reached just before the Rajk trial in September 1949, but remained substantial and at the centre of the party's attention. Yugoslavia was repeatedly depicted as representing a direct military threat to Hungary's security.⁵ It was accused frequently of frontier violations and of cunning attempts at destruction;⁶ Yugoslav diplomats

³ Ibid, p.102.

⁴ Lendvai, 1971, p.251.

⁵ Mihaly Farkas, the Minister of Defence, and one of Rakosi's closest collaborators, told the party's second congress in the spring of 1951: "Today in Yugoslavia almost 750,000 people are in arms. This means that Tito is keeping more than 50% of Yugoslavia's potential armed forces in arms even in peace time. Only a government with offensive intentions keeps such an army in peace time." Szabad Nep, February 27, 1951. In the trial of a Catholic Archbishop, Jozsef Grosz, later that year, a witness confessed that they wanted to take over power with the help inter alia of armed Hungarian units in Yugoslavia. He even named a former Hungarian Nazi general as head of those troops. Szabad Nep, June 26, 1951. A Yugoslav army officer who defected to Hungary, said that in the 1950 manoeuvres the occupation of two Hungarian towns was practised. Szabad Nep, January 6, 1952.

⁶ A Hungarian Note in 1951, protesting against Yugoslavia border violations claimed that 111 such incidents had occurred in the last four months, and accused the Yugoslavs of shooting at houses on their own side of the frontier, pretending that the Hungarians did it. Szabad Nep, November 24, 1951. Another Note, in 1952, claimed that the Yugoslavs were burning up fields on their side of the border and were making it spread on to the Hungarian side. Szabad Nep, June 29, 1952. There were also allegations of provocations in air space. Szabad Nep, April 20, 1952.

were harassed,⁷ and in one incident, the Yugoslavs were accused of having beaten up the Hungarian Charge d'Affaires in Belgrade.⁸ Wide publicity was given to statements in which Yugoslav defectors denounced the Tito regime.⁹ Yugoslav refugees in Hungary were supported and given public forum.¹⁰ Even the tone of diplomatic communications was rude.¹¹ As late as April 1952, the Hungarian government was still roundly rejecting any reconciliation like a Yugoslav proposal to set up a joint committee for the investigation of border incidents.¹²

This sustained, vehement, anti-Titoist campaign reached its climax exactly at the same time as the new anti-Zionist policy of the Soviet Union came to its peak in the Slansky trial. Just a few days before Slansky was to appear in a Prague court, the only public political trial of 1952 opened in Budapest. The six defendants were accused of trying to kidnap Yugoslav political refugees and of attempting to set up a centre in Budapest for the elimination of anti-Tito Yugoslavs and for the murder of Hungarian Communist leaders, including Rakosi.¹³ This, the so-called "kidnappers' trial" was clearly designed to compromise the Yugoslav diplomatic mission in Budapest, to put the frequent border incidents into a sinister context, and discredit the Hungarian nationals who had escaped to Yugoslavia.¹⁴ Completely disregarding the new Soviet line, the trial was exclusively anti-Titoist and not even the names of the defendants indicated any possible Jewish origin.

⁷ The Charge d'Affaires was expelled from Hungary in June 1951. Szabad Nep, June 6, 1951.

⁸ Szabad Nep, April 3, 6, 8, 1951.

⁹ Szabad Nep, April 21, July 24, December 6, 1951 and February 10, 1952.

¹⁰ The publication of a Yugoslav emigree newspaper was reported in Szabad Nep on May 1, 1951.

¹¹ The following official communique appeared in Szabad Nep on April 10, 1951: "Authoritative quarters have authorised the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency to state that this announcement by the Titoist news agency is, from the first letter to the last, a pack of lies."

¹² Szabad Nep, April 19, 1952.

¹³ Szabad Nep, November 16, 1952.

¹⁴ For reports of the trial, see Szabad Nep, November 16, 17, 1952.

Simultaneously with this remarkable consistency in the identification of the principal enemy, the Hungarian regime showed hardly any response to the shift in Soviet policy by increasing its anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda even as a supplementary issue. Trade relations with Israel continued normally until September 1952.¹⁵ In the spring of 1951, the Hungarian media refrained from such vicious attacks as were then made by Polish and Romanian officials on Israel over the negotiations for West-German compensation of Nazi victims.¹⁶ Although the representative of the Israel Communist party painted a depressing picture of Israel's economic conditions when she addressed the second congress of the MDP in Budapest in March 1951, press reports of her speech contained neither any reference to the West-German compensation, nor any critical remarks about Zionism.¹⁷ In fact after a noticeably long absence, the first critical press reports about Israeli life started appearing in the party press only in April 1952.¹⁸ Taking into account the customary Communist style of making policy statements by implication, an incident in April 1952 should be noted. At a time when the preparation of the Slansky trial - on an anti-Zionist and anti-Israel line - must have been already in an advanced state, a message of congratulation from Israel's acting President on the anniversary of Hungary's liberation in 1945, was the first one published in the Szabad Nep, apart from similar goodwill greetings from Communist countries and India.¹⁹

¹⁵ According to Israeli sources in the January-August 1952 period, the volume of Hungary's trade with Israel amounted to £1,228,000 and in the other direction to £135,000. JTA, February 16, 1953.

¹⁶ Jewish Chronicle, March 16 and 30, 1951.

¹⁷ Szabad Nep, March 3, 1951.

¹⁸ On April 4, 1952, Szabad Nep quoted a report by Tass, the Soviet news agency, that food prices in Israel were rising by 17 to 50%. On April 26 1952, the same paper reported that 10,000 Tel Aviv workers had demonstrated against the government's pro-American policy. On June 4, 1952, Szabad Nep published a Tass report on the congress of the Israel Communist party, which called for the liberation of the country from American imperialist oppression.

¹⁹ April 4, 1952.

The real watershed appeared when the Hungarian party was obliged to respond publicly to the Slansky trial in November 1952. Apart from clashing head-on with the Hungarian party's policy to avoid direct involvement in specifically Jewish issues, the trial touched a particularly sensitive point as far as Rakosi and the other three top leaders - Farkas, Gero, and Revai - were concerned. The fact that it was Slansky who was the principal defendant represented a challenge to the loyalty and reliability of Communist leaders of Jewish origin. The Prague trial appeared to prove that the ties inherent in a person's Jewish origin were strong enough to turn even such a party veteran as Slansky into a traitor of the Communist cause.

It made evident that the only Jew in the highest hierarchy of the Czechoslovak Communist party was a traitor because his commitments to Jewish causes were stronger than those to Communism. A comparison with the four Jewish leaders of the Hungarian party was far too obvious. If the devious Slansky managed to penetrate the highest echelons of the Czechoslovak party despite the presence of Gottwald and other non-Jewish leaders, it would not seem inconceivable that Hungarian Jews might have done the same, particularly as they were holding the four commanding key positions in the party.

Rakosi must have been considerably certain of Stalin's personal support, otherwise he would not have dared to ignore the shift in Soviet policy by maintaining his anti-Tito priority. His stand might have been justified also by Hungary's long border with Yugoslavia, which could have presented a real and immediate threat to the country's security. All the evidence of several years of frontier violations and border incidents could help Rakosi's presumed argument that Hungary was genuinely endangered by its southern neighbour and therefore entitled to give it priority.

Having thus secured himself against attacks from Moscow, Rakosi's main concern in regard to the Slansky trial, was to lessen its impact on the Hungarian party and the public. He had at least two tactical alternatives. He could either duplicate the Czechoslovak purge by producing his own Hungarian Jewish and Zionist scapegoats, or play down the Zionist and Jewish aspects of the Slansky case. The first could have led him on to a dangerous path. He would have had to match the Czechoslovak model with an equally high-ranking Communist of Jewish origin; in other words he would have had to sacrifice one of his

closest and most trusted collaborators. In view of his long association with all of them, the choice of either of the three could have resulted in the eventual incrimination of Rakosi himself, particularly as they all shared a common factor, their Jewish origin. At the same time, there might also have been another danger. All three were veteran Muscovites with their own personal contacts in the Soviet party, and if those forces were to be allowed to act, Rakosi's personal position in Stalin's favour might have been weakened or even eroded.

The actual Hungarian response to the Slansky trial indicates that Rakosi followed the second alternative. The coverage of the trial in the two principal daily newspapers, the party's own Szabad Nep and the Nepszava, the official organ of the completely Communist-dominated National Council of Trade Unions, was relatively brief, remarkably short on original comments, and with the emphasis on the defendants' role as American agents.²⁰ Both papers confined themselves to reports by MTI, the official Hungarian news agency and neither had their own correspondents at the trial. Apart from straight trial reports, the Szabad Nep's first comment appeared on the sixth day of the hearing,²¹ and even that was only an article taken from Pravda, which dealt exclusively with the American Administration's support for espionage activities. The Nepszava supplemented its trial reports with a review of the Czechoslovak press,²² but none of the articles quoted were dealing either with Israel or with Zionism.²³

²⁰ For comparison, see Jewish Chronicle report (December 12, 1952), on an anti-Israel article in the official Polish party paper, the Trybuna Ludu and another Jewish Chronicle report (December 26, 1952) on a Polish government Note accusing the Israeli Legation in Warsaw of espionage.

²¹ November 26, 1952.

²² November 23, 1952.

²³ One article stressed the defendants' aim to murder Klement Gottwald, the other reported that workers had responded to the trial by working harder.

Both newspapers made their first original comment on the case at the conclusion of the trial. In a fair-sized editorial of some 25 inches, the Szabad Nep²⁴ did not mention Israel at all, and made only a single reference to Zionism: "The American imperialists utilised their various agents, including the Zionists." The rest of this editorial attacked the Americans and the Yugoslavs. The proportions were similar in the Nepszava editorial.²⁵

In a lengthier and more analytical assessment, the party's theoretical journal nevertheless maintained both the same proportions and attitude.²⁶ In a brief section on the Jewish and Zionist aspects of the trial, the author said that the Zionists wanted to destroy the people's democracy from within, then rejected at a little greater length Western accusations that the trial reflected antisemitism.

Two further aspects of the Hungarian response should be noted. One was an attempt to avoid any relevance to Hungary. Although the Szabad Nep²⁷ reported the confession of the Israeli defendant, Mordechai Oren, that he "had since 1945 been engaged in espionage activities in various people's democracies, including Hungary, and was trying to find collaborators, particularly among the Zionists," it made no comments about it. Had the party been interested in pursuing an anti-Zionist line, such a golden opportunity would not have been missed. The other aspect was the Hungarian attitude to the Jewish community's reaction to the Slansky trial. While in Poland and Romania officials of the Communist controlled Jewish organisations attacked Zionism and Israel,²⁸ the Uj Elet, the journal of the National Bureau of Hungarian Jews, made no reference at all to the Slansky case or the issues it was concerned with. As the National Bureau was controlled by the Government, such an omission could not have been made without the regime's consent.

²⁴ November²⁸ 1952.

²⁵ November 28, 1952.

²⁶ Oszkar Betlen: "A Slansky-fele osszeeskuyo bandarol". Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.VIII., No.1, January 1953.

²⁷ November 23, 1952.

²⁸ See a report of a violently anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli speech by the Romanian Chief Rabbi, Dr. Moses Rosen in Jewish Chronicle, December 12, 1952, and another of an article in the Yiddish journal in Poland in Jewish Chronicle, December 26, 1952.

The Doctors' Plot

The public announcement in Moscow in January 1953 of a "conspiracy" by mainly Jewish doctors to murder the leaders of the Soviet Union, represented the escalation of the Communists' anti-Jewish and anti-Israel campaign. Links between the accused doctors and various Jewish organisations - primarily the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint) - were claimed to have been established and the roots of the "conspiracy" were traced to Israel, which was allegedly acting as agents on behalf of Western imperialism. Thus the shift in enemy identification, which had apparently started in 1951, reached its peak. The campaign ascended from proving Jewish-Zionist infiltration into the leadership of a satellite country, Czechoslovakia - to the height where it was declared as powerful as having been able to penetrate the heartland of Communism, Moscow itself.

Such widening of the campaign's dimensions must have - on the face of it - deepened the dilemma of Rakosi and other Hungarian Communist leaders. The full weight of the Soviet Union was so obviously thrown in against Jews, Zionists, and Israel, that Rakosi would have found impossible to maintain the Hungarian party's carefully sustained detachment from a direct confrontation with the Jewish issue. Avoiding it to the extent he had done it in the case of the Slansky trial and giving continued priority to anti-Titoism would have amounted to an open revolt against Soviet policy. Rakosi's attitude regarding the Jewish issue appeared to have been caught in the trap created by the new Soviet line which now clearly identified Jews as the principal and most active agents of imperialism.

The Moscow doctors' plot and the Slansky trial were however different in one vital aspect, and this in fact enabled Rakosi to opt for an acceptable compromise. In the Czechoslovak purge the predominant role was assigned to Slansky to prove how high the Jewish conspiracy could reach. The culprits in the Moscow plot came from much lower party ranks. That particular implication of the Slansky trial which was the most embarrassing to Rakosi - the challenge to the reliability of Communist leaders of Jewish origin - therefore did not apply to the Moscow plot. On the contrary, the composition of the defendants in Moscow gave Rakosi an opportunity to clear out the middle-ranks of the Hungarian party on the pretext of adapting the Soviet experience. As many leaders of the security police were Jews, Rakosi could exploit the conditions created by the Moscow developments for the decimation of this organisation which, through its

role in the purges since 1949 and its direct contact with its Soviet counterpart, had grown into a power-base within the party and thus into a possible challenger to Rakosi's total authority.

The Moscow announcement on the "discovery" of the plotting doctors²⁹ was followed swiftly by the arrest of Gabor Peter, the head of the security police, himself a Jew, and others of its leading officers.³⁰ The extent of the purge in the security police was somewhat concealed by the fact that a number of the detainees appeared to be officials of other departments, though in fact they were security police officers assigned to work in other fields. Hungary's Minister to Austria, Tamas Matrai³¹ for instance, was placed to the Foreign Office by the security police to supervise it on its behalf.³²

The reported arrests of the physicians, Dr. Istvan Balint, and Dr. Istvan Lowi - both Jews - gave the impression that the purge was merely a duplication of the Moscow hunt for doctors, though in fact the former was the chief medical officer of the security police, and the latter an eye specialist for the same force.³³ The removal of Gyula Decsi, the Minister of Justice³⁴ suggested a government purge, while in fact until his ministerial appointment a few months previously, Decsi was one of the highest ranking security police officers who was involved in the construction of the cases against leaders of various churches.

Rakosi's purge was not confined to the security police. At least one veteran Jewish communist leader was arrested - Istvan Szirmai, former head of the party's organisation department and in 1953 head of the Hungarian broadcasting authority - and three were demoted:

²⁹ It was reported in Szabad Nep on January 14, 1953.

³⁰ The arrests were not reported in the Hungarian press but from Western sources it can be assumed that they took place in January, 1953. See Uj Kelet, February 3, 1953. Valis (p.68) too places it to the same time.

³¹ His recall was reported by the Observer, London, February 22, 1953.

³² Szasz, p.29.

³³ Their arrest was reported as early as February 23, 1953 by Uj Kelet and later (March 25, 1953) by the New York Times.

³⁴ Uj Kelet, February 3, 1953.

Zoltan Vas, the head of the National Planning Office, who spent sixteen years in prison in the inter-war period for Communist activities and was released to the Soviet Union in 1940 together with Rakosi; Zoltan Szanto, a Muscovite, Ambassador to Washington, and Dr. Emil Weil, the Ambassador to France.³⁵

The particular reasons why Rakosi chose these people have not yet been satisfactorily established. Szirmai, in his early youth, was apparently briefly associated with the Zionist movement in his native Transylvania,³⁶ while Vas was related to Dr. Benedek, a Communist leader of the Jewish community in Hungary. Not even such remote association with Jewish or Zionist causes is known however of the other two. It should be noted that all - except Weil - came to hold important offices during the Premiership of Imre Nagy - an opponent of Rakosi - in 1953-54, and were closely associated with him during the 1956 revolution. It is however unclear whether their sympathies for Nagy led to their stricturing by Rakosi or their dismissal turned them into Nagy's followers.

The purge indicates that Rakosi wanted to imitate the Moscow doctors' plot. An estimated 30 doctors were arrested in the first few months of 1953.³⁷ They included the Jewish head of the party's medical clinic and sanatorium on the charge of - echoes of Moscow - having had obtained party secrets by the use of drugs from high officials under his care. His two non-Jewish chief medical assistants were only dismissed.³⁸ Also arrested was Dr. Laszlo Benedek, the director of the Jewish Hospital, who was the principal instigator of bringing the Jewish communal organisations under Communist control.³⁹

³⁵ These incidents were not announced officially in Hungary at the time, though they were reported in the Western press (on Szirmai, see New York Times, March 25, 1953; on the others, Survey of events etc, p.58). Vas's transfer to the directorship of a new steel works in a remote part of the country was fairly widely known. But he disappeared from the public view until Rakosi was replaced by Imre Nagy as Prime Minister in 1953, and Szabad Nep (November 7, 1954) reported that Vas was head of the Premier's secretariat. Szanto's removal was only announced during the Nagy era, when he was appointed head of the government's Information Office (Szabad Nep, March 28, 1954). Also Weil's recall and appointment to a university post was made public only after Rakosi's dismissal (Szabad Nep, August 18, 1953). Szirmai, after his release, became the editor of the official daily newspaper of the Budapest party organisation.

³⁶ Interview with Dr. Y. Marton.

³⁷ JTA, April 6, 1953.

³⁸ JTA, April 2, 1953.

³⁹ JTA, February 9, 1953.

The only indication that the party considered a serious anti-Jewish purge, can be found in an uncorroborated Western press report.⁴⁰ This stated that Arpad Házi, the non-Jewish head of the party's control committee had demanded at a meeting of the central committee, the dismissal of all Jewish party officials. After a long debate, the committee decided that the Jewish officials on the list provided by Házi should be closely examined to ensure that they were not tainted with Zionism. This incident might be typical of the contemporary climate, but the fact nevertheless remains that the anti-Jewish hunt within the party affected only security police officers who were personally inconvenient for Rakosi, a few, higher officials selected at random, and a handful of doctors. Without Stalin's death so soon after the beginning of the purge, the consequences might have however been quite different of course.

In spite of such a restraint on the anti-Jewish purge, there is evidence that the regime was at least contemplating an anti-Zionist show trial incriminating Israel, and linking it up to some of the purged security police officers. Dr. Denes, one of the principal defendants in the 1949 trial of Zionist leaders, was held interned when his three-year prison sentence expired in 1952, and in early 1953, other former prominent Hungarian Zionists were arrested.⁴¹ Denes himself later found his continued detention logical: "After all, in the trial under preparation they needed Zionists, physicians (Denes was a physician - G.G), and preferably a Zionist physician."⁴² Although the authorities had known - through an informer - of the existence of a small illegal Zionist youth circle since 1949, some of its members were detained only in February 1953, obviously also in preparation for a show trial.⁴³ The international character of the impending case would have been assured by the involvement of Dr. Ilona Benoschofsky, head of the Hungarian section of the World

⁴⁰ Jewish Chronicle, February 13, 1953.

⁴¹ They were Henrik Galos, who was general secretary of the MCSZ at the time of its dissolution in 1949, and Abraham Kornitzer, a former leader of the religious Zionist movement. World Jewish Affairs, December 17, 1953.

⁴² Denes, p. 335.

⁴³ Interview with A. Kendi.

Jewish Congress, who was arrested in January 1953. At the end of that month, Julia Steiner, a Hungarian employee of the Israel Legation - she was the receptionist and switchboard operator - was also arrested.⁴⁴ Her interrogation indicated two intentions: on the one hand to implicate the Israel Legation in espionage activities, and on the other to obtain evidence for collaboration between the Legation and some security police officers, particularly those most closely associated with its former head, Peter.⁴⁵

Lajos Stockler, the president of the National Bureau of Hungarian Jews - which had faithfully collaborated with the regime - was arrested on January 8, 1953.⁴⁶ The only other Jewish communal leader whose detention could be reliably confirmed was Dr. Benedek. His occupation as a physician and his party membership could have been the decisive factors in the action against him. The selection of Stockler is open to speculation. What might have prompted the regime was his background (he was a small-time manufacturer before 1945) and the fact that since the departure of the last American director in May 1951, Stockler - obviously because of his reliability - was entrusted with the control of the distribution of Joint funds and with maintaining contact with the American organisation.⁴⁷ In view of the Joint's incrimination in the Moscow plot it seemed logical to arrest the person who nominally represented the organisation in Hungary. It might also be considered that by arresting its president, the regime would have wanted to frighten the Jewish community.

⁴⁴Steiner later emigrated to Israel and got married. Information obtained from her is marked: Interview Yaron.

⁴⁵ Interview with Yaron.

⁴⁶ Although this was announced in Szabad Nep only on January 17, for the actual date of the arrest see Duschinsky p.483.

⁴⁷ The Joint made sizeable contributions to Hungary right up to the cessation of its work there in the wake of the Moscow disclosures in 1953. Joint aid to Hungary in 1951 was \$2,754,783.11, and in 1952 \$2,107,766.13 (Deposition by Katzki). The 1953 contribution is not specified in the same deposition, but the Joint's reported budget for 1953 was \$3,821,000 for the relief of 40,000 European Jews including 30,000 in Hungary (Jewish Chronicle, January 30, 1953.) A large proportion of the budget was thus earmarked for Hungary, but it is unknown how much had actually reached the country before the discontinuation of Joint operations was announced.

The public treatment of Stockler's detention however eliminates this last possibility. Were it designed to unnerve the Jewish population, it would have had to be made known to the community. But the National Bureau's official journal the Uj Elet, in its January 1953 issue, did not mention Stockler's arrest.⁴⁸ As for the general public, Stockler's arrest was even more clouded over. The Szabad Nep, when reporting it, made no reference to his communal post, and the Nepszava did not even report the incident.⁴⁹ The press coverage of Stockler's arrest was characteristic of the regime's public response to the doctors' plot and the Soviet Union's subsequent breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel. The factual measures - the purging of the security police and the party, the arrest of the doctors, the preparations for an anti-Zionist trial - were not disclosed to the public, with the sole exception of Decsi's dismissal from the government.⁵⁰

It appears that Rakosi was cunningly trying to square the circle, i.e. to toe loyally the new, openly anti-Jewish Soviet line, while at the same time contain it domestically within such confines that it would not erupt into a witch hunt, of which Rakosi himself could become the eventual target. On the one hand, ruthlessly exploiting the new climate, he purged the party from potential challengers who were gathering around the emerging new power base, the security forces, while keeping at hand the elements of an anti-Zionist show trial, should such a public declaration of his trustworthiness become unavoidable. On the other hand he manipulated public opinion to react with only little less sluggishness than at the time of the Slansky trial.

⁴⁸ It was brought to the community's notice in a roundabout way, when after Stalin's death, in its May 5, 1953 issue, Uj Elet announced the election of a new president, without explaining though, how the post had become vacant.

⁴⁹ A single-column news item in Szabad Nep (January 17, 1953) said: "The police have arrested Lajos Stockler, former factory owner. A large amount of dollars and Swiss francs were found hidden in his flat."

⁵⁰ This was reported without comment in Szabad Nep, February 8, 1953.

Although the Szabad Nep dealt with the Moscow doctors' plot and its related issues extensively, it showed again a remarkable lack of original comments and a disinclination to elaborate on the relevance of the evidence presented in Soviet and other Communist sources. The paper's original comment - as in the Slansky case - was again limited to a single editorial, though unlike on the previous occasion, it no longer felt it possible to concentrate on the anti-imperialist and anti-Titoist elements with a one-sentence reference only to the anti-Zionist aspects. The editorial⁵¹ laid the blame squarely on the American and English imperialists, but drew attention to the "role which the Joint, the Zionists, the Jewish bourgeois nationalists play in the imperialist schemes." It went even further by relating the case directly to Hungary. The party paper said: "We too had experiences in this connection. I.G. Jacobson, the director of Joint in Hungary had to be arrested and expelled in December 1949 for espionage."⁵² In conclusion, the Szabad Nep pointed out that the danger was greater in Hungary than in the Soviet Union because "the Joint conducted in Hungary a wider and more diverse operation." Its recent expulsion did not eliminate all traces of its "work", the paper said, and declared that "the role of the Joint in the direction of the murderous gang is an added warning to take stronger action against bourgeois nationalism, Zionism." The Nepszava⁵³ used similarly strong language in denouncing imperialism, and particularly the Joint, "this international Zionist espionage agency." But when drawing its conclusions, this paper confined itself to generalities: "The people draw the conclusion from this blood-curdling crime and defend with increased vigilance the cause of peace." Omitting thus any specific reference to Hungary, it also refrained from naming Zionism among the hostile ideologies.

⁵¹ Szabad Nep, January 15, 1953.

⁵² See p.150.

⁵³ January 15, 1953.

The rest of the coverage in these two newspapers consisted only of factual reports and of articles translated from Soviet and other foreign Communist publications. It was - particularly in the Szabad Nep - an intensive campaign, with almost daily references to this issue. The intention of keeping a low profile was however unmistakable. The attack on the Soviet Legation in Tel Aviv was reported⁵⁴ in the vitriolic language of a Tass (the official Soviet newsagency) commique, but only in two modest columns on the back page, and without any comment. The Soviet Union's breaking off of diplomatic relations with Israel had a similar uncommented, Tass-based treatment.⁵⁵ Analysis of this event was confined to a translated Pravda article,⁵⁶ while in such obvious places as the paper's regular columns - "Foreign policy notes" and "International Survey" - there was no reference to it. Propagandistic observations remained confined to translations.⁵⁷ The Nepszava displayed the same reticence on original comments.⁵⁸ The party's theoretical journal, the Tarsadalmi Szemle, in January 1953, published a Hungarian author's assessment of the Slansky trial with only a brief reference to its anti-Zionist aspects, and in February reprinted an essay from the German-language Soviet journal, Neue Zeit, with a clear indication of the source.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Szabad Nep, February 12, 1953.

⁵⁵ Szabad Nep, February 13, 1953.

⁵⁶ Szabad Nep, February 15, 1953.

⁵⁷ Szabad Nep on February 18, 1953, contained an article from the Soviet newspaper, Trud, on the Joint, and on February 21, 1953, one from Literaturnava Gazetta, on how Washington dictated Israel's policies.

⁵⁸ On January 16, 1953, it published a brief international press survey, on January 17, an abbreviated version of an Izvestia article, on February 8, a Pravda article, and on February 15, the same Zhukov article from Pravda, which appeared in the Szabad Nep.

⁵⁹ V.Minajev: "Az amerikai kemszolgalat cionista ugynoksege," Tarsadalmi Szemle, Vol.VIII, No.2, February 1953.

The party's deliberately low public profile was best illustrated by the Szabad Nep's response to a specific incident. On January 24, 1953, the paper quoted the Daily Worker, the organ of the British Communist Party, that "The Joint maintained contact with the head of the Hungarian clerical reaction (Cardinal Mindszenty) and tolerated even his anti-semitism." On January 27, it published another Daily Worker report that I.G. Jacobson, who was the Joint director in Hungary until his expulsion in December 1949, told a meeting in Toronto in April 1950, that "he was proud of his connections with the Hungarian underground movement." Jacobson was reported saying that he had saved many Jews and had sent them to Israel. Some of those returned to Hungary to participate in illegal activities. Jacobson reportedly admitted that Cardinal Mindszenty, two weeks before his arrest, had sent him a confidential document proposing the overthrow of the government within fourteen days.

The Szabad Nep merely reported these allegations with prominent attribution to the Daily Worker and without any comment or further elaboration. Had the regime been interested in stirring up anti-Jewish feelings, it could have certainly used this golden opportunity which linked the Joint to the often proclaimed arch-enemy of the Hungarian people, Cardinal Mindszenty. The Daily Worker allegations contained also evidence of Jewish collaboration with known antisemites in a conspiracy against the ordinary people's power, and of Israeli citizens' participation in attempts to overthrow the People's Democracy. Although the allegations were apparently inaccurate,⁶⁰ supporting evidence could have been fabricated and presented to the public. Neither this, nor even an official confirmation of the Daily Worker's allegations were made, and this clearly indicates that Rakosi had no intention of widening the anti-Jewish campaign beyond the necessary minimum.

This attitude was also evident in the treatment of the Israeli Legation in Budapest. While behind the scenes an anti-Israel show trial was being prepared, in public the anti-Israel measures were kept to a mere formality. Though Israel expected the breaking off of diplomatic relations and its diplomatic staff was preparing for the closure of the Legation in Budapest,⁶¹ the government only expelled

⁶⁰ Deposition by Jacobson.

⁶¹ Interview with Galor.

a relatively low-ranking Israeli diplomat, and did even this mainly for propaganda purposes, without seriously disrupting the Legation's structure or work. The Szabad Nep⁶² dutifully reported that the Hungarian government had declared Jozsef Walter, the Israeli cultural attache persona non grata, because "abusing his diplomatic privileges he conducted espionage activities." Walter, said the report, left Hungary on the day of the announcement. In fact, the Israeli government had recalled Walter some months previously and he was granted an extension only to finalise legal procedures in connection with his marriage to a Hungarian girl. With Mrs. Walter already abroad, a day before the Hungarian announcement, the Israeli Charge d'Affairs notified the Hungarian Foreign Ministry that Walter was ready to leave the country and required the issue of the necessary exit documents. Instead, the Hungarians declared Walter persona non grata.

Of the about five or seven Hungarian employees of the Legation,⁶³ one - Julia Steiner, the receptionist - was arrested. Another, Gabor Freund and his son were shot dead while apparently trying to cross the border into Austria illegally. His wife and daughter were wounded and arrested.⁶⁴

Tying Up Loose Ends

The political changes which took place in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death in March 1953 also affected developments in Hungary. While in the Soviet party it was probably the lack of sufficient power by either of Stalin's closest associates which led to the temporary introduction of collective leadership, most of the satellite countries too had to adopt a similar division of authority. At the same time the new Soviet leaders were determined to stop some of the dangerous policies of the dead dictator both in the Soviet Union and its dependent states. *

⁶² February 4, 1953.

⁶³ The number was obtained in an interview with Galor.

⁶⁴ Interview with Galor. The incident was also reported in the New York Times, April 3, 1953.

In Hungary Moscow was looking for a person less tainted by Stalinist methods than any of the four leaders: Rakosi, Gero, Farkas, and Revai. They selected Imre Nagy, also a Muscovite, but a long-standing opponent of Stalinist excesses, particularly in agricultural policy. In the spirit of the new "collective leadership", they ordered Rakosi to give up the Premiership to Nagy, while he was permitted to remain First Secretary of the party.⁶⁵

The reforms which Nagy, the new Premier, announced in Parliament on July 4, 1953, were mainly of an economic nature; excessive industrialisation must cease; more emphasis must be laid on the development of light industry to provide consumer goods and on food production at the expense of heavy industry; more attention must be paid to agriculture; the excessive pace of agricultural collectivization has to be abandoned and individual farming supported; more opportunity must be given for private enterprise, particularly in service industries. In the political field the new Premier promised greater tolerance in matters of religion; pledged himself to the "consolidation of legality" in other words, stronger adherence to the law. He promised the abolition of internment camps, amnesty for minor offenders, and the revision of sentences against "people who had been wronged."

These reforms were far reaching indeed in this immediate post-Stalinist period, but implementation was seriously hampered by the power struggle between the Premier, Nagy and Rakosi. The latter, still head of the party, used its apparatus and his own faithful followers in various government agencies to preserve the Stalinist system and his own authority. Rakosi was particularly concerned with covering up the illegalities (imprisonments and even executions) that had been committed under his regime.

Nagy's era - which became known in Hungarian history as the New Course - had some immediate advantages for a considerable section of the Jewish population. The abolition of deportations and the more liberal attitude towards private enterprise benefited directly the largely middle-class Jewish elements,⁶⁶ and a greater tolerance of

⁶⁵ For assessments of these events by Hungarian historians now in the West, see Vaili, p.93-97, and M.Molnar, 1971, pp.17-21.

⁶⁶ In July, already some 2000 Jews, who had been deported from the capital, were allowed to return to Budapest. Survey of events etc, p.58.

religious observance brought about a speedy restitution of communal activities. The offices of the National Bureau of Hungarian Jews, which had been closed down in January, were re-opened in late March, and its general secretary, Miksa Domonkos, who had been arrested two days before Stalin's death, was released.⁶⁷ Some limited contact with organisations abroad could be renewed. The National Bureau was permitted to receive relief - particularly medical supplies unobtainable in Hungary - from the ultra-orthodox and non-Zionist Agudath organisation, which was also allowed to send Hebrew textbooks to Hungary for religious classes.⁶⁸

Dr. Benjamin Schwarcz, the president of the National Rabbinical Council, was permitted to send greetings for the Jewish New Year to the Jewish Chronicle newspaper in London.⁶⁹ The communal leadership which was destroyed in January with the arrests of Stockler and Dr. Benedek was allowed to be re-established.⁷⁰

Rakosi was still powerful enough to obstruct rectification of illegal prosecutions which had been carried out under his rule.⁷¹ This led to a curious situation. Although the victims of the Moscow doctors' plot were released in the Soviet Union as early as April 1953, in Hungary, the prosecution continued of the Jews who had been arrested in its wake. Stockler and Dr. Benedek were sentenced to eight years and ten years imprisonment on December 8, 1953,⁷² though the latter was released a few months later.⁷³ There are no details available on the charges against them, but information on the proceedings in other cases of Jewish detainees indicate how the prosecutors adapted themselves to the post-Stalin conditions.

⁶⁷ The Observer, London April 5, 1953.

⁶⁸ JTA, October 14, 1953.

⁶⁹ Survey of events, etc. p.58.

⁷⁰ The National Bureau's official journal, Uj Elet, reported on May 5, 1953, the appointment of Dr. Lajos Heves as the new president.

⁷¹ The Hungarian party's official history stated: "Rakosi, Farkas, and Gero, who were primarily responsible for the fact that loyal comrades and other innocent people had fallen victims to groundless accusations, were afraid to face up to their responsibilities. They endeavoured to postpone the revision of the trials, they tried to avoid a complete rehabilitation with ambiguous measures and various manoeuvres." A Magyar Forradalmi etc, p.553.

⁷² Survey of events etc, p.60

⁷³ Jewish Chronicle, March 5, 1954, reported his release.

The anti-Zionist aspect was retained but most of the defendants' were treated leniently. Dr. Denes, a physician, could no longer play the anticipated key role in an anti-Zionist doctors' trial. The security police tried to change the accusations to industrial espionage,⁷⁴ but he was eventually acquitted in February, 1954 for lack of sufficient evidence.⁷⁵ The other two defendants in his trial (Galos and Kornitzer) were also acquitted.⁷⁶

Julia Steiner, the former receptionist at the Israel Legation in Budapest, who was arrested in January 1953, was first accused of espionage for Israel. This was subsequently replaced by a purely criminal charge of currency speculation and by another, Zionist agitation.⁷⁷ She was sentenced to four years imprisonment in December 1953, but obtained immediately an eighteen months remission.⁷⁸ A number of other Jews were also sentenced, but only the cases of two former Zionist youth leaders - Jeno Ratz and Gyorgy Shay - could be confirmed reliably. The former was imprisoned in 1954 for four years and the latter in December 1953 for five years.⁷⁹

Although these defendants were undoubtedly still the victims of the Stalinist illegalities, this was not recognised even by the new regime of Imre Nagy. While victims of the Rakosi era's fabricated prosecutions - or their surviving relatives - were subsequently rehabilitated both legally and financially, these Jewish defendants were never relieved of their "criminal records". The more liberal climate of the New Course certainly contributed to the leniency of their sentences, but the lack of rehabilitation indicates that even then, Zionism was regarded as a criminal offence and its punishment not an excess of legal codes.

⁷⁴ Denes was interrogated about his knowledge of Hungary's largest steel works at Csepel and about an electric components factory in Ujpest. His wife worked in the latter after Denes' imprisonment in 1949. He was eventually charged with having supplied confidential information, mainly about the textile industry, to Palestinian emissaries in 1946-47. Denes, pp. 348-349.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 366.

⁷⁶ JTA, February 11 and 17, 1954.

⁷⁷ She dated the change as June 16, 1953. It was then that she was called for a night-time interrogation and told that the police had discovered that she had told them a lot of lies. "We must start now from scratch," the security police officer said. Her previous confessions about espionage were scrapped. Interview with Yaron.

⁷⁸ Interview with Yaron.

⁷⁹ The Christian Science Monitor, December 15, 1953, and Jewish Chronicle, June 1, 1956.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

Drawing the conclusions of this study on the Communist party's policy towards Jews and Zionism in Hungary between 1945 and 1953, the three principal characteristics of, and the major developments within the three components of this triangle could be summed up as follows:

Jews. Two historic factors of late 19th century Hungary contributed decisively to the development of its Jewish population; the urgent need to replace the feudalistic economic system with capitalism and the overwhelming desire to establish Hungarian hegemony over the whole of the "historic" land which was then populated to a considerable extent by national minorities.

The roles assigned to the Jews by the ruling regime in regard to both, encouraged their rapid and total assimilation with and integration into the Hungarian bourgeois sector of the population. In the process firm foundations were laid for the Jewish community's affluence, influence, and social integration. When, with the removal of the national minorities in the peace treaty at the end of the First World War, the political usefulness of the Jews ceased and anti-Jewish discrimination became the official policy of the inter-war regime, the community was already strong and wealthy enough to provide for the new needs from its own resources. This, together with the continued strong assimilationist tendency made it unnecessary to maintain close links with

Jewish communities abroad, and enabled the community to retain immunity from the new trends and attitudes prevailing in Jewish circles beyond the borders of Hungary.

The destructions caused by the Second World War in general, and by anti-Jewish measures in particular, decimated Hungarian Jewry numerically, reduced its wealth considerably, and created doubts in the advisability and reliability of total assimilation. The need of material assistance from Jewish communities in the West forced Hungarian Jewry out of its pre-war isolation, and widened the door to the increasingly popular idea of Jewish national identification, i.e. to Zionism. This fell on fertile ground in some disillusioned minds, while what others found attractive was the escape it was offering from the tightening economic restrictions of the emerging new Communist regime.

The overwhelming majority however remained in Hungary. They did so partly because of the usual reluctance to tear up roots, partly because of the physical dangers and difficulties associated with illegal emigration, partly because the traditional inclination to assimilate still prevailed, and partly because some Jews became genuine supporters of the Communist ideas and practices. All these feelings were supplemented by the recognition that the Communists did not tolerate racial discrimination.

After the Communists take-over, Zionism was outlawed, other channels to world Jewry were sealed off almost hermetically, and Jewish religious educational, welfare and cultural institutions were given a precisely confined place in the new system. With practically all the devoted Zionists already out of the country and with religious observance traditionally rather shallow among the overwhelming majority, the remainder of Hungarian Jewry found integration into the new economic and social structure conceivable, particularly as it contained no discrimination against them on purely religious or racial grounds.

Through a rapid, though possibly somehow superficial integration by the end of the subject period, i.e. by 1953, the Jews by and large, adapted themselves to the conditions of Communist rule. With the exception of a few remaining Zionists, and a small section of strictly orthodox religious observants, Jews had no ill feelings towards the Communist regime specifically because they were Jews, only in common with others because of the economic and social restrictions which this Stalinist system had imposed on the country.

Zionism. Zionism proved to be a brief passing phase in the history of Hungarian Jewry. By 1953 it disappeared almost without trace. Before the end of the First World War, this new concept of Jewish national identity could not compete successfully with the officially encouraged and well rewarded assimilationist tendencies in Hungary. Only shortly before the Second World War could the Zionists broaden their support, because of an influx of devoted and experienced Zionist leaders from the then newly annexed territories in Slovakia and Transylvania, and because the increasingly severe anti-Jewish restrictions enabled the Zionist movement to play its customary rescue role.

After the war, the Zionists were the only ideologically sound, disciplined and organised section of the Hungarian Jewish community.

Exploiting skilfully the chaotic conditions of the immediate post-war era, they obtained a number of key positions in those communal institutions which they wanted to influence. The disorientated Jewish community became more receptive than ever before to the Zionist claim that Jews could live safely only in their own country.

The Zionists in Hungary met then only minimal resistance by the assimilationist communal leadership which had been gravely discredited by its ineffectiveness in saving the Jews from the Nazi-Hungarian annihilation attempt in 1944. Also, they found little open opposition from the new coalition government which was reluctant to seek a confrontation with Jews so soon after the holocaust. At the same time they were strengthened both through financial assistance by western Jewish organisations and structurally through the use of experienced Zionist workers provided by the Jewish Agency. They made serious inroads into the Jewish communal institutions and were particularly successful in attracting the younger generation.

In the 1945-48 period, the Zionist movement as a whole was on a world-wide offensive, demanding the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. It took advantage of the guilt feelings the western public had over the Allied powers' ineffectiveness in preventing the mass murder of European Jewry by the Nazis. Its claim was also supported by the Soviet Union which regarded the Zionist struggle as a means of weakening British influence in the Middle East.

In Hungary the Zionist leaders tried to make the most of this ambiguous Communist policy. They supplied the fighters in Palestine with arms and manpower up to the moment when the consolidated Communist regime banned Zionist organisations. This ban meant the almost complete liquidation of the briefly flourishing Zionist movement in Hungary. Faced with the danger inherent in the fact that organised Zionism had been outlawed and with most of the Zionist leaders already abroad or in prison, the shallow sympathies for Zionist ideals dissipated further and only insignificant pockets of supporters remained.

It was indicative of the small impact which Zionism had made on Hungarian Jewry that when, after the 1956 revolution, the country's borders were open and many western states offered hospitality to the refugees, only very few of the Jews who had escaped chose to settle in Israel.

Communists. The Communist party in Hungary between 1945 and 1953 was Stalinist in its structure, policies, tactics and commitments. Modelled on the Communist party of the Soviet Union, it was completely centralised, the leadership rested solely with its First Secretary, Rakosi. The party's policies adhered rigidly to Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrines in the restructuring of the economic and social system, in its attitude to non-Communist ideologies and ideals and in its relationship with national, religious and ethnic minorities. It followed the Stalinist tactics in its moves to achieve hegemony, and was committed to subordinate Hungarian national interests to those of the Soviet Union. Only on one issue did the Hungarian party deviate from Stalin's policies - in its attitude to the Jewish population and to Zionism.

This diversion was not made by an unusually deep concern for the economic and social welfare of the Jews after the devastating effects of the Nazi-Hungarian annihilation attempt of 1944. On the contrary, the party, officially, did nothing to rectify such regulations about recompensation and reintegration which the Jewish community had claimed to be inadequate. Nor did the party rebuke with any exceptional force manifestations of antisemitism. Ideologically it was opposed to all forms of discrimination on religious or racial grounds. In practice, it subscribed to the policy of the post-war coalition government that antisemitism was intolerable and punishable, but did not help with any particular enthusiasm in the implementation of that policy.

This attitude had its roots in the party's needs in the 1945-48 period of power struggle. Following Stalin's instructions to achieve hegemony through parliamentary means, the Communists had to compete for public support with political parties much better established than theirs. As the liberal, democratic and social democratic sectors of the population were during the war already attached to one or the other of the older and more established parties, the Communists sought support among those working and lower middle class elements which had supported the Fascist regime mainly because that made them the main beneficiaries economically and socially of its anti-Jewish measures. Therefore, aiding Jewish claims fully to recover their lost assets and social status could have antagonised the Communist party's new supporters.

Regarding Zionism, the party was ideologically committed to oppose it. Officially the party never accepted any justification for its existence though some functionaries, for personal reasons, occasionally

helped in Zionist endeavours. The Hungarian party assisted Zionist activities in Hungary, like the recruitment of soldiers and the supply of arms only to the extent of Soviet support for the Zionist fight against the British authorities in Palestine. With the new State of Israel, the Hungarian Communist regime maintained a diplomatically correct, but cool relationship. Practical contacts were almost entirely confined to negotiations about the Israeli government's request that Jews should be permitted to emigrate to Israel. On this question the Hungarian regime - bargained harder than any other East European government, conceded the least, and made the most in financial gains.

A hint of possible deviation from the Soviet line over the attitude to Jews and Zionism was noticeable throughout the subject period, but only emerged with some clarity in its last phase, in connection with the Slansky trial and the Moscow doctors' plot. It was rooted in Rakosi's determination to keep the party away as much as possible from involvement with Jewish issues, even to the extent of pretending that neither such problem nor Jewry as a community existed at all. This attitude served the interests of the party, but served Rakosi's personal interests too.

The Hungarian Communists had to live with the damaging effects of the 1919 Soviet Republic. That short-lived regime carried out the functions of a proletarian revolution and dictatorship, using the methods of the 1917 Russian revolution. It was tactlessly direct in declaring its aims and identifying its enemies, and violently fighting them. It should be noted that the Communist dictator, Bela Kun, as well as many others in the leadership, and significantly, many of those in charge of the oppressive agencies, were Jews.

The inter-war regime of Regent Horthy pursued a passionately anti-Communist and systematically anti-Jewish policy. It found it eminently convenient that the strong Jewish involvement with the Hungarian Communist movement could be exploited to discredit both. Twenty-five years of sustained indoctrination left its marks on the mentality of the population. It left them with the impression that the interests of Jews and Communists were identical and the Communist party, when it entered the political arena legally, at the end of the Second World War, was a striking example of that contention. Its highest leadership - the quartet of the Muscovite Rakosi, Gero, Farkas, and Revai - was exclusively Jewish, and Jews played a prominent part in the party's central institutions as well as in the

Communist-dominated political police, which had the task of hunting down the obviously non-Jewish war criminals and other prominent supporters of the fallen Horthy regime. In a deeply antisemitic country, this could be a considerable disadvantage to the Communist party, and a personal risk to Rakosi.

In recognition of this danger, together with the tactical considerations in recruitment as mentioned previously, the Communist party, under Rakosi's direction, adopted an attitude of complete disinterest in issues and problems concerning Jews. This could rightly be claimed to have been in the best interest of the party under the specific conditions in Hungary. Its dogged pursuance may not have amounted to giving priority to specific Hungarian national interests over those of the Soviet bloc, but it was a potential point of conflict, depending on the extent of Rakosi's determination to follow this policy.

The day of reckoning arrived in the early 1950s, when Stalin's openly anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist policy culminated in the Slansky trial and the Moscow doctors' plot. The Slansky trial was particularly dangerous for Rakosi, because it questioned the reliability of Communist leaders of Jewish origin. This danger was apparently strong enough to make Rakosi deviate slightly from the Soviet line by playing down for internal consumption - the significance of the Slansky case and concealing its anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist essential message. Rakosi survived this defiance and found himself in a much easier position when he had to follow the line of the doctors' plot. This at least, as it developed until Stalin's death, only discredited lower-ranking Communist officials, particularly doctors, and therefore represented no personal danger to Rakosi.

It remains an open question what would have happened had Stalin not died at the height of this new anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist campaign. Although a hypothesis, it is not an inconceivable one, that the net of suspicion might have widened in the Soviet Union and the East European countries also to catch higher ranking party officials of Jewish origin. Such a development would have followed logically the Slansky trial. Stalin's death probably saved Rakosi from a dilemma, similar to that caused by the Slansky case, but more serious because of its direct Moscow origin.

The strength of Rakosi's determination to keep the party detached from Jewish issues for his own personal safety, even if it meant deviation from the Soviet line, thus never came to the test. It remains pure speculation therefore, whether Rakosi's Jewish origin would eventually have made a basic impact on his political posture, particularly on his, until then, almost unblemished loyalty to the Soviet Union.

Another question also remains unanswered. What would have been the consequences of Rakosi defying Stalin's line? Would it have led to a repetition of Tito's 1948 desertion of the Soviet bloc, or to the replacement of Rakosi's regime with a non-Jewish leadership spurred into an anti-Jewish witch hunt?

Disregarding however these hypothetical considerations, the conclusion is clear. The party's attitude to the Jews and Zionism did not affect its domestic policies, though it contained the potential of a defiance of Soviet instructions. In fact the party's unwavering opposition to antisemitism, particularly after the take-over of power in 1949, motivated considerably by Rakosi's personal interest in it, made it easier for Hungarian Jews to integrate into the country's new economic and social system and to obtain positions according to their abilities, without the hindrance of discrimination against them.

A P P E N D I X

GUIDE TO THE MOST FREQUENTLY USED NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS

- Benedek, Dr. László, director of the Jewish Hospital in Budapest 1945-53; the leading Communist in the PIH; was imprisoned in 1953.
- Bentsur, Shmuel, Transylvania-born, Hungarian speaking Zionist; Jewish Agency emissary to the Ichud-Mapai Zionist party in Hungary 1947-49; Consul-General of the State of Israel in Hungary (the highest ranking resident Israeli diplomat) 1949-51.
- Denes, Bela, chairman of the Ichud-Mapai Zionist party 1945-49; vice-chairman of the MCSZ 1945-49; vice-president of the PIH; imprisoned in the first "Zionist trial" in June 1949 and released in 1953.
- Farkas, Mihály, one of the closest collaborators of Rakosi; Moscow-trained member of the MKP Politbureau 1945-53; held various leading party posts 1945-49; Minister of Defence 1949-53.
- Gero, Erno, one of the closest collaborators of Rakosi; Moscow-trained member of the MKP Politbureau 1945-53; Minister of Transport 1945-49; held several other Ministerial posts until 1953.
- Peter, Gabor, Moscow-trained member of the MKP central committee and head of the State Security Police from 1945 until his arrest in 1953.
- Rakosi, Matyas, Moscow-trained head of the MKP (with the subsequent titles of general-secretary and First Secretary) 1945-53; member of the government 1945-53; first as Minister without Portfolio, then as Deputy, and eventually as Prime Minister.
- Revai, Jozsef, one of the closest collaborators of Rakosi, Moscow-trained member of MKP Politbureau 1945-53; editor of Szabad Nep, the party's official daily newspaper 1945-49; Minister of Arts 1949-52.
- Salamon, Mihály, president of the MCSZ 1946-48.
- Sos, Endre, journalist, member of the Communist group in the PIH, regular contributor to its journal, Uj Elet.
- Stockler, Lajos, president of PIH from 1945 until his arrest in 1953.
- Szirmai, Istvan, Transylvania-born former Zionist, pre-war Communist, MKP official, and member of its central committee.
- Vas, Zoltan, Moscow-trained Communist, member of MKP Politbureau, for various periods between 1945 and 1953; the party's leading economic administrator.

- AVH, Abbreviation of Allam Vèdelmi Hatosàg (State Defence Authority) the political police, later the security services, Communist controlled from 1945.
- FKGP, Abbreviation of Független Kisgazda Párt, (Independent Smallholders Party), small landowners - based political party; in opposition during the inter-war Horthy regime; invited into the post-war coalition government; the largest party in the first elected post-war parliament; main target of MKP in the struggle for power.
- JOINT, Abbreviation of American Joint Distribution Committee, major Jewish relief organisation which operated in Hungary until 1953.
- MCSZ, Abbreviation of Magyar Cionista Szövetség, (Hungarian Zionist Federation); disbanded in 1949.
- MKP, Abbreviation of Magyar Kommunista Párt (Hungarian Communist Party); changed to MDP (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja) when amalgamated with the SZDP in 1948.
- NPP, Abbreviation of Nemzeti Paraszt Párt (National Peasant Party); established by village-oriented intellectuals in 1942; peasant based, strongly infiltrated by Communists, part of the post-war coalition.
- PIH, Abbreviation of Pesti Izraelita Hitközség (Congregation of Israelites in Pest); the largest Jewish religious organisation in Hungary.
- SZDP, Abbreviation of Szociáldemokrata Párt (Social Democratic Party); merged with MKP in 1948.

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Palgie, Arie, Tel Aviv, November 2, 1971. Leader of Hashomer Hatzair Zionist youth movement, 1949; defendant in first "Zionist trial" in Budapest, June, 1949.

- Rosen Yonah, Tel Aviv, November 4, 1971. Jewish Agency emissary in charge of illegal emigration operation centre in Budapest, 1945-46.
- Rosinger, Mrs.A. Jerusalem, October 19, 1971. Secretary of the Ichud-Mapai Zionist party in Hungary, 1945-48.
- Salamon, M. Tel Aviv, October 31, 1971, President of the Hungarian Zionist Federation 1945-48.
- Schwarcz, Dr.B. Jerusalem, 16 October 1971. A leader of the General Zionist movement in Hungary, 1945-49; a defendant in the first "Zionist trial" in 1949.
- Talmi, Y, Tel Aviv, November 1, 1971, Jewish Agency emissary dealing with illegal emigration 1945-46; head of illegal operation centre in Budapest.
- Yaari, A. Givat Haviva, Israel, November 3, 1971. Jewish Agency emissary to Hashomer Hatzair Zionist movement in Hungary, 1946-48.
- Yaaron, Mrs.J. Jerusalem, October 14, 1971, under her maiden name Julia Steiner. Receptionist at the Israeli diplomatic mission in Hungary 1949-53; arrested and imprisoned in 1953.