

Uncovering the Shoah:
Resistance of Jews
and Efforts to Inform the World on Genocide

Proceedings from the Conference
Žilina, Slovakia, 25 – 26 August 2015

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Editors: Ján Hlavinka, Hana Kubátová, Fedor Blaščák

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Preface

Crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators, referred to as the Holocaust or Shoah¹ are described in hundreds of thousands pages in scientific works as well as popular works spanning hundreds of fiction titles, films, and theatre plays. Today, the symbol of these crimes is Auschwitz, where the Nazis planned and systematically murdered more than one million Jews in gas chambers. Yet, Auschwitz is only one of the camps in which Hitler and his followers used Nazi racial theories and gas chambers for mass murder of those whom Hitler and his followers called „subhuman.“ Historians and the general public alike, can access numerous studies that describe in great detail other Nazi camps with gas chambers (for example, Chelmno, Belżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, and Majdanek).

Nazi-organized genocide did not begin with gas chambers. Instead, it began with mass executions after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. These operations, also referred to in literature as „Holocaust by bullets,“ are well documented and available to readers. The Nazis kept the early mass murder as well as its climactic phase, or the systematic murder of victims in gas chambers, a secret. The perpetrators and their accomplices were keenly aware of the criminal nature of their actions.

Despite the murderers' efforts to conceal their unprecedented crimes, information (albeit incomplete and fragmentary) about mass executions and later the extermination camps during the war leaked. Members of the Allied armies of Nazi Germany (including the Slovak army), as well as their military and political leaders were informed about the places of executions in the former Soviet Union (or even participated in them). Historians are familiar with decrypted messages of Nazi squads that the anti-Hitler coalition received. Although the information about the death camps remained fragmented, the Nazis could not conceal it. Camp escapees, Polish resistance members, and secret services informed the world about the real nature of sites such as Auschwitz where victims from occupied Europe (and satellite states of the Third Reich) were deported. We know, for example, that the Polish resistance informed the Polish government in exile in London about what was happening in Auschwitz as early as 1942. In November 1942, the Polish government in exile shared the information that tens of thousands of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war were transported to Auschwitz “with the sole purpose of their immediate extermination in gas chambers.”² In May 1943 the Polish intelligence service

¹ The Hebrew term *shoah* means “catastrophe”.

² BAUER, Jehuda. *Úvahy o holokaustu*. Praha : Academia, 2009, 224.

announced to London that 520,000 Jews were killed in Auschwitz; in December 1943, they again announced that 640,000 were murdered.³ In his monumental work *Úvahy o holokaustu* (*Rethinking the Holocaust*), Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer wrote „*Why does the impression continue to exist that no one knew about Auschwitz until spring of 1944? It is always the same history: no one believed the mass killings of Jews.*“⁴ The information about Auschwitz that the British received was hard to believe. What also played a role was the legacy of the First World War, when all kinds of stories about atrocities were disseminated for propaganda purposes.⁵

Two Jewish prisoners, originally from Slovakia, escaped from Auschwitz in April 1944: Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba (previously known as Walter Rosenberg). After a fearful and dangerous journey to Slovakia, they provided a detailed description of the entire mechanism of mass extermination at Auschwitz. For those who had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the report drawn up based on Wetzler and Vrba testimonies exposed the consequences of a terrible truth. To this day historians, but not only they, dispute when and where the information was received and how it was disseminated.

The story of the escape, as well as A. Wetzler and R. Vrba's reports have been described in great detail in historiography (but not only there). Both actors published their own accounts in which they described their views on the matter. The proceedings of the scientific conference that you are about to read is the result of the efforts of the organizers of the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial as well as the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava to not only recall the heroic act of the two men but also to place it in a broader context: topics of information, misinformation, lies provided to Jews as well as the public in Slovakia by the organizers of anti-Jewish politics and deportations; themes of earlier and almost undocumented escapes of Jews from places where mass murder occurred; stories of Arnošt (Ernest) Rosin and Czesław Mordowicz who followed Vrba and Wetzler, successfully escaped from Auschwitz, and supplemented information from the first pair. An equally important theme was also included in the conference: the issue of resistance and collaboration of Jews during the Holocaust.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The organizers of the scientific conference, held in August 2015 in conjunction with the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial in Žilina, could not possibly cover all of the major problems and issues related to the aforementioned themes. It was our hope to outline the complexities in relation to information known on the eve of deportations of Jews from Slovakia to extermination camps; how (if at all) received the Jews information about the true nature of the camps, and how the *Shoah* developed, escalated, and peaked.

We hope that the present anthology will find its readers, further stimulating the much-needed discussion on problems outlined in this volume.

Editors

The Escape of Rudolf Vrba and Alfréd Wetzler from Auschwitz and the Fate of Their Report

Ivan Kamenec, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

While the story of Wetzler's and Vrba's escape and the complicated fate of their report have been fairly reliably reconstructed as far as the facts are concerned, its interpretation has often varied. I believe that there is no need to repeat the well-known facts to the readers of this volume. I will therefore limit myself to a few comments related to the most important facts and in particular to the post-war as well as current interpretation of their unique act. I base my comments on my own investigation of the topic and the knowledge of the relevant sources, existing scholarship and memoirs. I am aware that my conclusions may not be correct in every respect and that not everybody interested in the issue will agree with me. I see my interpretation as the continuation of a much needed discussion on the unique act of Alfréd Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba in 1944.

There are many contradictory, often mutually exclusive statements in the domestic and international scholarly and popular writings, in memoirs of direct or indirect participants in the event, as well as in film documentaries (I do not refer to the primitive figments by authors of revisionist literature denying the Holocaust). A historian must read them critically and in particular seek the reasons for the often surprising divergence of interpretation. Nevertheless, the discussions and polemics testify to the importance of the escape from Auschwitz of the two Slovak Jewish inmates and the subsequent fate of their report, which have continued to raise the attention of scholars as well as the general public until this day. In this context, let me use in my defence a quote from one of the books by Pierre La Mure: "For someone, history can mean just a list of past events [...] a very dry and exact list. But there is a catch in such a concept – history is anything but exact. In fact, [...] history is the least exact of all the sciences [...] Talking about the past is almost as unreliable as talking about the future. Dates in the records do not agree, documents contradict each other. Historians cannot agree about anybody and anything."⁶ So much for this view of history, a bit sceptical and generalising.

⁶ LA MURE, Pierre. *Život Mony Lisy*. Bratislava : Smena, 1983.

However, it can be partially applied also to the subject of my contribution and probably to the whole volume.

Individuals find their way into history books and into the historical awareness of society in different ways. Most often they are inscribed in them by virtue of their life's work or their long presence in a certain field of public life, mainly in the spheres of politics, economics, culture or religion. They leave an indelible mark, followed or even further developed by their followers but also revisited and critically commented upon by their opponents. However, there are also cases where people enter history inadvertently, as if through a "back door", in a single moment of time. In the words of Stefan Zweig, they live their "moments of glory" as they become known through a single, important act. Such a case, which is rather uncommon, is connected to an event of exceptional importance, the real impact of which may not be fully grasped even by its direct or indirect participants. Such a unique act finds its way into the consciousness of society slowly, sometimes it is forgotten for the sake of expediency, and historians or witnesses only uncover it after some delay, occasionally adding their own stories, interpretations and inaccuracies, which lead to the creation of myths and anti-myths.

I believe that this was also the fate of the escape of Alfréd Wetzler and Walter Rosenberg (Rudolf Vrba) from the Auschwitz extermination camp and, perhaps even more so, of the post-war interpretation of what became to be known as their Auschwitz Report. In terms of time, their "moment of glory" lasted about three weeks, from 7 April until the end of April 1944. During that time they had managed to escape from Auschwitz and immediately thereafter, already in Slovak territory, to compile a fairly detailed report on the death factory, which later became one of the most notorious symbols of the Holocaust in Europe. During World War II, almost one and a half million people perished in Auschwitz, an overwhelming majority of them Jews from the European countries under direct Nazi occupation or control, including the satellite wartime Slovak Republic, which was in many respects inseparably connected to the fates of Wetzler and Vrba.

The Polish historian Tadeusz Iwaszko mentions that from the summer of 1940 until January 1945, up to 667⁷ inmates managed to escape from Auschwitz; admitting, however, that it may not be the final and exact number. Most of the escapes were individual, spontaneous attempts whose protagonists acted in the hope of saving their own lives. Altogether 270 escapees were

⁷ The figure is taken from the study: KÁRNÝ, Miroslav: Historie osvětímské zprávy Wetzlera a Vrby. In TÓTH, Dezider (ed.). *Tragédia slovenských židov*. Banská Bystrica : Datei, 1992, p. 167.

caught and executed. There are no reports about the rest of them (397 inmates), which does not mean, however, that their escape was successful and they survived it. Naturally, even in the case of Wetzler and Vrba, we cannot ignore the motive of saving their own lives; however, their act was in a way extraordinary, both due to its important objective and its logistical preparation (expressed in contemporary terms), in which dozens of other inmates directly or indirectly cooperated. They collected not only the necessary means of survival (clothes, medicine, food and other personal items) for the escapees who had been selected in advance but the illegal organisation, which included the two escapees, also compiled figures, drawings, charts and other documentation in order to inform the public outside the camp about the murder machine of Auschwitz. Obviously, the data and figures thus collected and handed over were not and could not have been exact. Even though the members of the illegal group occupied a “privileged” position in the hierarchy of the camp inmates, they could not have always had a sufficiently relevant basis for the collection and summarising of the data. Furthermore, the escapees did not succeed in bringing all the documents to Slovakia. During their dramatic escape they lost some of them. When they subsequently set out to compile their report they had to rely primarily on their memory, knowledge and the experience they had gained during Wetzler’s two-year and Vrba’s 22-month stay in the camp. It was manifested in part shortly after the war when A. Wetzler, writing under the assumed name of Jozef Lánik, published a booklet in 1946, which was partly based on the report he had compiled together with Vrba immediately after their escape from Auschwitz: *Oswiecim, hrobka štyroch miliónov ľudí. Krátka história a život v oswiecimskom pekle (Auschwitz, the grave of four million people. A short history and life in the hell of Auschwitz in the years 1942 – 1945)*.⁸ It is evident already from the title of the book that the number of victims of Auschwitz is greatly exaggerated. The number likely included also the people murdered in other Nazi extermination camps located in the territory of occupied Poland. At the time immediately after the war when Wetzler was writing his booklet, no exact data was yet available. However, these circumstances do not diminish in the least the validity of the Auschwitz Report itself. It described reliably the mechanism of the death factory. It is a bitter paradox that it was this cruel truth, corroborated with dry facts, numbers and statements about the industrial mechanism of mass murder, that awakened mistrust on the part of the recipients to whom it was addressed, along with the suspicion that it was a tool of anti-Nazi propaganda. This is also one of the reasons (but not the only one!) why the report was only published

⁸ LÁNIK, Jozef. *Oswiecim, hrobka štyroch miliónov ľudí. Krátka história a život v oswiecimskom pekle*. Košice,: Povereníctvo SNR pre informácie, 1945.

seven months after its compilation, in spite of having been sent through several channels from Slovakia abroad – specifically to Hungary, the Vatican and Switzerland from where Jaromír Kopecký, then diplomatic representative of the Czechoslovak Government in exile, sent it to the United Kingdom and the USA. In this context, another question arises, brought to my attention by the historian Ján Hlavinka: why did the authors or the disseminators of the report not try to send the text also to the political or military authorities of the Soviet Union, whose armies stood closest to the Auschwitz extermination camp in the spring of 1944 and potentially had the best opportunity to do something militarily? After all, the escape of Wetzler and Vrba and the compilation of their report had occurred more than one month before the Allied invasion of Normandy and the opening of the second front in Europe. This serious factual and also moral problem has as yet remained unexplained and should become the subject of future historical research.

Now I would like to say a few words about the main protagonists of the escape and authors of the Auschwitz Report, which was later confirmed and complemented with more recent data by two other successful escapees from Auschwitz, Arnošt Rosin and Czesław Mordowicz, who escaped from the camp at the end of May 1944 and had arrived in Slovakia in June. The selection of Wetzler and Vrba to fulfil the main purpose of the action, namely to get information out, was not accidental. Besides their physical and psychic condition and mental composition, also the following objective factors played a role: the Slovak border was the closest to Auschwitz (about 130 kilometres), the territory of the satellite Slovak State had not yet been occupied by Nazi Germany in the spring of 1944, and on top of that the Slovak totalitarian regime had been gradually descending into a deep internal crisis, infiltrated by defeatism, responsibility dodging and opposition trends, which presented a fairly favourable outlook for the fulfilment of the escapees' mission. Several dozen Polish Jews were living illegally and in hiding in Slovakia at that time, trying to save their lives. On the other hand, even after the deportations of Slovak Jews to extermination camps had come to an end in the autumn of 1942, the Hlinka Slovak People's Party regime and its propaganda continued spreading hateful anti-Semitic attitudes, apparently trying to justify their crimes against humanity in the eyes of the public. Several weeks after Wetzler and Vrba had managed to return to Slovakia, the official paper of the HSL'S, the *Slovák*, labelled the remaining Slovak Jews as "a dangerous ulcer on the Slovak body [...] as destroyers of the sound and sober judgement of our community." It warned the population that "by being considerate of the

Jews, we are committing a crime against ourselves.”⁹ After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising and the occupation of Slovakia by Nazi troops, the anti-Jewish propaganda again assumed the character of hysterical hatred: “the Jews will again go to where they had been released from by the traitors and henchmen at the time of the Jewish-Bolshevik putsch [...] this stinking rotting vermin must be cast to a place of no return.”¹⁰

Unfortunately it is impossible to find out what exactly the organisers and escapees knew about the situation in Slovakia before the escape. They were undoubtedly aware of the danger but in comparison to the situation in the Auschwitz extermination camp, the risk must have appeared to them incomparably smaller, almost negligible. After their successful escape they were justified in relying on the above-mentioned manifestations of crisis and responsibility dodging on the part of the HSEŠ regime. The escapees were able not only to compile the report, which was quickly smuggled abroad; they even acquired, fairly easily, false personal documents in Slovakia¹¹ and managed to survive in a relative peace, albeit with the permanent risk of disclosure, until the occupation of Slovakia by German troops in September 1944. By that time they had joined the resistance movement and during the uprising they participated in active resistance.

Wetzler and Vrba differed in character and temperament but at the time of their heroic act they complemented and helped each other. While Wetzler, older by six years, was more of a rational type, Vrba, who was eighteen at the time of the escape, was rather hot-tempered, with an adventurous spirit and a strong egocentric touch, which manifested itself later in his post-war fate in connection with the interpretation of the joint escape. A historian must face a sensitive issue: he should not jump into one-sided conclusions or engage in too much psychologising when assessing both people whose development differed strongly after the war as far as their personal lives were concerned. I mention this because the different post-war paths both escapees had taken influenced also the subsequent recognition of the circumstances of their escape as well as the sometimes different interpretations of their common Auschwitz Report.

Rudolf Vrba emigrated abroad in 1958 and here, as a university professor, made a significant contribution in the field of chemical research. Given the situation in Czechoslovakia at that

⁹ *Slovák*, 7 July 1944.

¹⁰ *Slovák*, 8 September 1944.

¹¹ A. Wetzler acquired documents in the name of Jozef Lánik, which he used after the war as a pseudonym when writing his memoirs; Walter Rosenberg kept his code name Rudolf Vrba even in his post-war civilian life.

time, determined by the Iron Curtain, the exiled Vrba ceased to exist for the Czechoslovak or Slovak public and it was forbidden to write about his exceptional act and even about the Auschwitz Report which he had co-authored. Shortly before his emigration his book *Noc a mlha (Night and Fog)* was published in Prague¹². It contains the first short description of the circumstances of the escape of the two Slovak Jewish inmates who are, also for the first time, de-anonymised. Alfréd Wetzler remained in Slovakia and never attained any significant position in society. Both men were separated not only by the Iron Curtain but to some degree also by their personal relationship, which was not exactly cordial, as long as it was maintained at all, which became difficult after Vrba's emigration. Both of them appeared as witnesses in the Auschwitz trials with several Nazi guards and officers from Auschwitz in the early 1960s in the Federal Republic of Germany. I do not know if they personally met in Germany or talked about the experience they had shared in April 1944.

In Slovakia, as in all Czechoslovakia, the subject of the Holocaust was not really welcome in the 1950s and it was even banned from professional research, which has been reflected in the historiography. Nevertheless, several memoirs were published. It is a paradox that the absence of the Holocaust in the professional research was partially substituted by art – mostly fiction, film and drama. It was the result of a brutal ideological and political campaign against Zionism, which peaked in the form of fabricated trials against “Zionist agents” and overt or covert discrimination against people of Jewish descent. It recurred in a “milder” but all the more sophisticated form in the 1970s and 1980s during the so-called “normalisation” in Czechoslovakia.

In the more “liberal” 1960s, which preceded the reforms of the Prague Spring, A. Wetzler broke the taboo and returned to the circumstances of his and Vrba's escape from Auschwitz in literary form. Under his assumed name of Jozef Lánik he published a book in 1964 entitled *Čo Dante nevidel (What Dante Did Not See)*.¹³ The genre of the book stands between fiction and memoir. Wetzler is called Karol and Vrba goes by the name of Valér. The book was subsequently published in three more editions: the second edition came out in 1988, after the author's death, and the two latest ones after the changes in society in the early 1990s. The fourth edition was published in 2009 under the author's proper name.¹⁴ It is worth noting that the fourth edition includes the first Slovak publication of the complete Auschwitz Report by

¹² KRAUS, Ota – KULKA, Erich. *Noc a mlha*. Praha : Naše vojsko, 1958.

¹³ LÁNIK, Jozef. *Čo Dante nevidel*. Bratislava : Osveta, 1964.

¹⁴ WETZLER, Alfréd. *Čo Dante nevidel*. Bratislava : MilaniuM, 2009.

Wetzler and Vrba, as well as professional texts by three historians who deal with Vrba's and Wetzler's escape. The respected Slovak literary critic, A. Matuška, has called the book *our best novel in its genre* and stressed that the author had related his experience *without vain sentimentality* [...] *with a humanistic enthusiasm*.¹⁵ Matuška's words characterise not only the content of the book but generally Wetzler's reflection on his own experience, as confirmed also by his rational testimony before the German court in 1963.¹⁶

It is interesting that shortly before Wetzler's publication, in London R. Vrba also published his memories of the stay in and escape from Auschwitz, co-authored with the journalist Alan Bestic, under the title *I cannot forgive*.¹⁷ The book sparked great interest both in professional circles and among the general public. Soon after it was published in the US and Germany as well. This was a time when interest in the subject of the Holocaust was visibly on the rise in Europe and in the United States, influenced, among other things, by the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (1961-1962). Vrba's and Bestic's book was re-published in an emended edition in 1989 under a new title: *44070. The Conspiracy of the Twentieth Century*.¹⁸ The number in the title of the book refers to Vrba's inmate number tattooed after his arrival in Auschwitz in June 1942. The book was published in a Czech translation in 1997 under the title *Utekl jsem z Osvětimi (I escaped from Auschwitz)*¹⁹, this time without the co-authorship of A. Bestic (I do not know the reasons for this or the copyright contract details). Currently a Slovak edition is being worked on. A stricter professional judgement by a historian may find minor inaccuracies and disputable assessments in Vrba's otherwise readable book; however, they do not relate to the main facts of the escape itself but rather to some more general statements on

¹⁵ WETZLER, A. *Čo Dante nevidel*. Alexander Matuška's epilogue to the first edition, pp. 256-257.

¹⁶ 1. Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess »Strafsache gegen Mulka u.a.«, 4 Ks 2/63.Landgericht Frankfurt am Main. 108. Verhandlungstag, 5.11.1964. Vernehmung des Zeugen Alfred Wetzler. Dostupné na internete: <<http://www.auschwitz-prozess.de/index.php?show=Wetzler-Alfred>> I thank my colleague, Ján Hlavinka, for making the minutes of Wetzler's testimony at the court available to me. See <http://www.auschwitz-prozess.de/index.php?show=Wetzler-Alfred>.

¹⁷ VRBA, Rudolf – BESTIC, Alan. *I cannot forgive*. Sidgwick and Jackson: London : Sidgwick and Jackson, 1963.

¹⁸ VRBA, Rudolf – BESTIC, Alan. *44070. The Conspiracy of the Twentieth century*. Bellingham : Star and Cross Pub, 1989.

¹⁹ VRBA, Rudolf. *Utekl jsem z Osvětimi*. Praha : Sefer, 2007.

the history of the wartime Slovak State or some disputable assessments of the results or intentions of the escape.

The different positions in which Wetzler found himself in Czechoslovakia after 1968 and Vrba in Canada left a rather strong mark also on the subsequent interpretation of their unique act and the Auschwitz Report. From the early 1970s, Wetzler lived in a forced social and to some extent also civil isolation. According to his wife, Eta, he refused to give interviews or any information on the events of 1944 to Western journalists (domestic ones had neither the interest, nor probably the courage). At the same time, R. Vrba became quite active in this field and for the journalists he was a welcome person who could give interviews. To many historians in the West he was a rare and willing direct witness of the escape from Auschwitz and the origins of the Auschwitz Report. Czeslaw Mordovicz, a member of the other pair of escapees who also lived in Canada, was not very active in this direction, which has contributed to the fact that the escape of the second pair of Slovak Jews is much less known in historiography and public awareness. From this perspective, Vrba's activity certainly must be appreciated. However, except for the two above publications, we do not know and have no direct evidence as to what kind of information Vrba gave to those who were interested. We are confined to hypotheses and indirect conjectures. It is a fact that in the interpretation of most Western authors it is R. Vrba who appears to be the leading and the most important figure of the whole event, which in my opinion is not fully in line with reality. It is surprising that in some texts by foreign authors writing about the escape, Wetzler's name is not even mentioned. To shed responsibility again, I am going to avail myself of the assessment by an Israeli historian, Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, an expert on the Holocaust in Slovakia, from his book *Dávidova hviezda pod Tatrami. Židia na Slovensku v 20. storočí* (*The Star of David under the Tatras. The Jews in Slovakia in the 20th Century*). Regarding post-war interpretations of the events of April 1944, Jelinek writes: "After the war, various legends and interpretations about the escape spread. One of the escapees, Rosenberg, was also responsible for that [...] he exploited the fact that Wetzler had remained in Slovakia and there was no one who could oppose Rosenberg's version."²⁰

This is indeed a very sensitive question of the historical presentation of the escape. Neither the quoted assessment by Jelínek nor my comments are meant to denigrate Vrba's post-war activity or relativise, or much less belittle, the importance of the escape and the subsequent

²⁰ JELÍNEK, Ješajahu Andrej. *Dávidova hviezda pod Tatrami. Židia na Slovensku v 20. storočí*. Praha : Ipeľ, 2009, p. 349.

compilation of the Auschwitz Report. Vrba played an important and undeniable role in both. I am convinced however that the courage of both escapees in carrying out such an exceptionally heroic act does not need any additional glorification, subjective distortion or idealisation. Such an approach can only stand in the way of the elucidation of the real facts and furthermore it can put cheap arguments into the hands of revisionist authors. By the way there are similar problems in other countries, in particular in Poland, where long discussions and polemics have been held about the degree of importance and the benefits of individual testimonies by inmates who escaped from extermination camps.

Now I would like to make a few comments about the ambiguous interpretation of the actual content of the Auschwitz Report. There can be no doubt about the exceptional importance of the report, just as there can be no doubt about the exceptional heroism of its authors. The report was meant to alarm European public opinion, and in particular the decisive political elites of the anti-Hitler coalition. This objective was not achieved, as far as the original intent and in particular the intended time frame is concerned. However Wetzler and Vrba bear no responsibility for this outcome. As one of the experts most familiar with their moving fate, the Czech historian Miroslav Kárný, put it, the report “was not meant to be just a historical document, or an epitaph for the victims of Auschwitz. It was meant to become a warning to humanity, inspiring people to act [...]. A historian must bow with reverence and admiration before what the message of the courageous Auschwitz prisoners achieved in terms of factual material.”²¹ Thus it is unclear and puzzling why its path to the destination (the Vatican, Great Britain and the USA) took several months and why the Allies, except for some verbal warnings, did not bomb at least the railway lines leading to Auschwitz.

Probably the most irritating and hitherto not sufficiently answered questions stem from the fact that the leaders of Hungarian Jewry received Wetzler's and Vrba's report a few days after its compilation at the end of April 1944, yet they did not respond at all. It was at a time when Hungary had been occupied by German troops and its Jewish community numbering more than seven hundred thousand was in mortal danger. The deportations indeed started in May 1944, by coincidence first from the annexed parts of southern Slovakia. However, the leaders of Hungarian Jewry concealed the content of the report from their community – either because they did not want to frighten its members or because they did not believe that the Nazis, as close as they were to military defeat, would still continue carrying out their

²¹ KÁRNÝ, M. Historie osvětimské zprávy Wetzlera a Vrby..., pp. 168-169.

murderous programme or because they had already been negotiating with Eichmann about the “blood for products” programme, specifically, “trucks for Jewish lives”. Several authors, including Vrba, have reproached the leaders of Hungarian Jewry for their passivity and wait-and-see attitude. A historian may accept this reproach but he must also ask the question about what the realistic possibilities of Hungarian Jews were to resist the deportations. A historian can only restate the facts but he has no right to pass judgment. In spite of post-war claims, there are no trustworthy sources proving that Wetzler and Vrba had escaped from Auschwitz with a concrete task, namely to warn in particular the Hungarian Jews with their report. In fact, there is not a single reference to the immediately looming danger of deportations from Hungary in the Auschwitz Report. In my opinion it is disputable to say the least that it was the data from the report by Wetzler and Vrba and their impact that saved up to 100 thousand Hungarian Jews from being deported to the death factory. The deportations were suspended in the summer of 1944, when about 435 thousand Hungarian Jews had been forcefully removed from Hungary (mainly from the provinces) and murdered. The reasons for the suspension of the deportations were much broader, which does not rule out an important role for the Auschwitz Report. Further elucidation of the issue will be a matter for future research and may also become a subject for our discussion.

It has to be said in closing that the escape of Wetzler and Vrba represents one of the most important manifestations of the resistance of European Jewry in the history of the Holocaust. It also carries an ethical message in the sense that no political power which commits evil, violates basic human rights and moral rules, may think that its crimes will remain hidden forever.

And finally, one rather topical comment, to the point of being unwelcome: dozens of people provided assistance to the Auschwitz escapees, putting themselves in mortal danger. Religion, nationality, social and social background were not criteria upon which these people decided whom to help. I realize that every analogy limps, but the principles of humanity and self-sacrifice have remained the same and apply also to the refugee crisis of our day, with which the advanced, self-righteous and even selfish Europe is grappling so desperately.

Periodicals

Slovák

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The History of the Escape of Arnošt Rosin and Czesław Mordowicz from the Auschwitz – Birkenau Concentration Camp to Slovakia in 1944

Eduard Nižňanský, Department of General History, Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University Bratislava

How is it possible that there were Jews from Slovakia in Nazi concentration camps during World War II? How is it possible that the state, headed by President Jozef Tiso, a Catholic priest and chairman of the governing Hlinka Slovak People's Party (HSL'S), a "Leader" ("Vodca", similar to German "Fuehrer") himself according to the legislation, got rid of the Jews living in his territory by deporting them to concentration camps?

Ivan Kamenec is right in his comments: "[...] The Holocaust did not begin only with the loading of victims into deportation trains and did not continue only at the gates of extermination or concentration camps and gas chambers. It 'only' culminated there with relentless logic. Of course this is no surprise since all the researchers who are at least a little informed about the topic have found a rare consensus that the process of extermination began much earlier and perhaps, at the beginning, it assumed quite 'innocent' or discreetly sophisticated forms, hidden behind the economic, social, political, national and, more than once, also the religious priorities of the state and the nation. But this is where the clear responsibility of the respective political elites begins. Applied to Slovakia, the Holocaust began already in the autumn of 1938, when the local Jewish population was gradually labelled as an open enemy of the Slovak nation and from March 1939 also as a dangerous opponent of the newly-formed state. This process unfolded against a monstrous legislative backdrop, which initiated and legalised measures depriving 'non-Aryan' citizens of their political, economic, social, civic and in the end also basic human rights."²²

The indigenous antisemitism of the governing HSL'S party, which used the picture of the "Enemy Jew", formed the basis for the drafting and implementation of Slovakia's own antisemitic policy, also by the so-called moderates in the HSL'S (Jozef Tiso).²³ Tiso's idea was

²² KAMENEC, Ivan. Phenomenon of the Holocaust in Historiography, Art and in the Consciousness of Slovak Society. In VRZGULOVÁ, Monika – RICHTEROVÁ, Daniela (eds.). *Holocaust as a historical and moral problem of the past and the present*. Bratislava : DSH, 2008, p. 332.

²³ Jozef Tiso said in January 1939: "[...] The Jewish question will be solved in such a manner that the Jews in Slovakia will only be allowed to have such influence as corresponds to their numbers in relation to the population of the whole Slovakia. The Slovaks will be educated so that they can fully assert themselves in the economic and

based on the “*numerus clausus*” principle, which placed a limit of about 4% on the social, economic, professional and cultural life of the Jews in Slovakia – approximately the ratio of their population to the majority. The radicals in the HSĽS (e.g., Vojtech Tuka and Alexander Mach²⁴) implemented their antisemitic policy in particular after Salzburg in the summer of 1940, without taking into consideration the consequences of the exclusion of Jews from Slovak society. Hence, as I argue, there was a causal relationship between the antisemitic ideology of the representatives of the Slovak State and the implementation of the policy in both the executive and legislative domains. After the establishment of the Slovak State we can see a gradual exploitation and institutionalisation of the government policy of antisemitism. This started with the definition of a “Jew” from 1939 (Regulation 63/1939 Sl. z.), continued with the listing of Jewish property, the Aryanization and liquidation of Jewish businesses, the labeling of the Jews and their deportation to Nazi concentration camps.²⁵

The 1942 deportations of Jews formed the climax of the antisemitic policy of Slovak political bodies - the government, the Parliament and the State Council (and, last but not least, the President). They were a logical consequence of how the official places have treated the Jews. The liquidation and Aryanization of Jewish businesses as well as the prohibition of carrying out certain professions caused the widespread pauperization of the Jewish community. The state wanted to get rid of the poor Jews. Thus the tangible outcome of Slovak antisemitic policy coincided with the Nazi Holocaust, resulting in the deportations of Jews from Slovakia in 1942. Prime Minister V. Tuka and Minister of the Interior A. Mach brought the issue of the deportations²⁶ to the attention of the Slovak Government on 3 March 1942.²⁷ Thereafter Tuka spoke about the deportations at the State Council on 6 March 1942: “The Jewish question should be solved gradually by resettling them into the territory of the Ukraine. They have already indicated to us where they should be located. The Jews, by leaving the territory of our

industrial life and gradually take over all positions currently occupied by the Jews.” In *Slovenská politika*, 27 January 1939, p. 2.

²⁴ Alexander Mach stated already in 1939: “To the Jews who have gold, jewels, riches, they made things hot for them everywhere, and so will we. [...] Who does not work here, let him not eat either. What they stole will be taken away from them! This is a practical solution to the whole Jewish question!” In *Slovák*, 7 February 1939, p. 2.

²⁵ On the chronology of the Holocaust in Slovakia, see, e.g., NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. Holocaust in der Slowakei. In *Unterrichtsbeispiele zu den Verbrechen im Nationalsozialismus*. Berlin : Cultus e. V., 2005, pp. 7-17.

²⁶ For more details about the build-up to the deportations, see, e.g., NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. The discussions of Nazi Germany on the deportation of Jews in 1942 – the examples of Slovakia, Rumania and Hungary. In *Historický časopis*, vol. 59, 2011, suppl., pp. 111-136.

²⁷ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard – KAMENEC, Ivan (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939 – 1945). Dokumenty*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Židovská náboženská obec, 2003, p. 142.

state, will cease to be nationals of the Slovak Republic. They will be able to take food for 14 days. The Slovak Republic shall be obliged to pay 500 RM for each Jew”²⁸. At the same time, intensive Slovak-German negotiations were conducted, focusing not only on the dispatching of the deportation trains but mainly on the property of the deported. German notes from 29 April 1942 and 1 May 1942²⁹ dealt mainly with the payment for the deported Jews³⁰, the loss of their citizenship³¹ and the German commitment that the deported Jews would never return to Slovak territory.

From 25 March 1942 until 20 October 1942, 57 transports left Slovakia in which 57,628³² people were deported (two-thirds of the country’s Jewish population). But for a few hundred, all of them perished. The Slovak authorities (in particular the Department 14 of the Ministry of the Interior, the Hlinka Guard and also the Ministry of Transport) carried out the deportations. Five transit camps were established in Slovakia (Bratislava – Patrónka, Nováka, Poprad, Sered’ and Žilina), in which the Jews were first collected. Young male and female Jews were deported first. The deportation of families began on 11 April 1942. The deported Jews could only take 50 kg of exactly specified movable assets with them. The Slovak authorities made available six deportation trains, which took Jews to the Nazi concentration camps.

The German Ambassador, H. Ludin, wrote in a telegram to Berlin on 6 April 1942: “The Slovak Government agreed on the transportation of all the Jews from Slovakia without any pressure from the German side. Even the President personally agreed to the transportation, in spite of an intervention by the Slovak Episcopate. [...] The transportation of Jews continues steadily, with no complications.”³³

The representative of the Vatican, chargé d’affaires G. Burzio, wrote from Bratislava to Rome already on 9 March 1942, before the deportations started: “The deportation to Poland of 80,000

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 146-148.

²⁹ For more details, see NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. (ed.) *Holokaust na Slovensku 4. Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie (1939 – 1945)*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Židovská náboženská obec, 2003, pp. 135-138.

³⁰ For more details, see NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard – KAMENEC, Ivan. Poplatky za deportovaných slovenských Židov. In *Historický časopis*, Vol. 51, 2003, No. 2, pp. 311-342.

³¹ On 15 May 1942, Constitutional Act No 68/1942 Sl. z. was enacted – the so-called deportation law, which made it possible to deport Jews and strip them of their citizenship. For more details, see NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. Deportácie Židov zo Slovenska v roku 1942 a prijatie ústavného zákona č. 68/1942 Sl. z. o „vysťahovaní Židov“. In *Studia historica Nitriensia X/2002*, pp. 85 – 157; ZAVACKÁ, Katarína. Protižidovské zákonodárstvo slovenského štátu. In TÓTH, Dezider (ed.) *Tragédia slovenských Židov*. Banská Bystrica : Datei, 1992, p. 73.

³² Slovenský národný archív (SNA), fond MV, box (b.) 262, 12266/42.

³³ For more details, see NIŽŇANSKÝ, E.. (ed.) *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, pp. 127-128.

people, who would be left at the mercy of the Germans, is a death sentence for a large portion of them.”³⁴

The first of the two escapees, Arnošt Rosin from Slovakia, was confronted with this situation in Slovakia. Under normal circumstances, A. Rosin and C. Mordowicz would have probably never met. Each of them had lived in a different country and a different city. Their fates crossed as a result of the Nazi Holocaust and the antisemitic policy in Slovakia during World War II. During the first stage of the deportations from Slovakia, Rosin's story is similar to that of the other approximately 58,000 Jews who were forcibly removed from Slovakia in the course of 1942. However, his escape in 1944 changed everything.

The Polish author Ján Zaborowski claims that “in total, 667 inmates escaped [...]” from the Auschwitz Concentration camp. “According to our knowledge, 270 inmates were caught by the camp guards. We have exact reports about the fate of 100 inmates whose escape was successful. No one knows exactly what happened to the other almost 300 escapees. [...] A third of the heroes of the Auschwitz escapes were Poles (232), while the other most numerous groups were Russians (95) and Jews (76).”³⁵

So much for the statistics. We even know the names of several Jews from Slovakia who unsuccessfully attempted to escape from the Auschwitz camp in 1942. According to D. Czech, the first to attempt escape was Leopold Almasi (inmate number 32695), already on 19 May 1942. According to the records of this historian, he had arrived, or more precisely, the number had been allocated to him on 24 April 1942.³⁶

On 24 May 1942, Martin Weiss (inmate number 30715, recorded at the camp on 17 April 1942) and Zoltán Hochfelder (inmate number 33319, deported from Slovakia on 29 April 1942) made their unsuccessful attempts to escape.³⁷ On the same day, a certain Isak Herskovic (inmate number 30256, recorded at the camp on 17 April 1942) also tried to escape.³⁸

On 4 June 1942, attempts to escape by Jozef Spitz (inmate number 30223, recorded at the camp on 17 April 1942), Franz Hauser (inmate number 31647, recorded at the camp at 19 April 1942) and Moric Citron (inmate number 33603, recorded at the camp on 29 April 1942) ended unsuccessfully.³⁹

³⁴ KAMENEC, Ivan – PREČAN, Vilém – ŠKORVÁNEK, Stanislav. (eds.) *Vatikán a Slovenská republika (1939-1945). Dokumenty*. Bratislava : SAP, 1992, pp. 79-80.

³⁵ SOBAŇSKI, Tomasz. *Úteky z Osvienčimu*. Bratislava : Pravda, 1982, p. 30.

³⁶ CZECH, Danuta. *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz – Birkenau 1939 – 1945*. Reinbek bei Hamburg : Rowohlt Verlag, 1989, p. 214.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 216.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 220.

On 8 June 1942, Ladislav Lilientahl (inmate number 29878, recorded at the camp on 17 April 1942) together with the Pole Wiktor Bansik (inmate number EH-2116) unsuccessfully attempted to escape.⁴⁰

All these unsuccessful attempts are marked just with the note “auf der Flucht erschossen” (shot on the run).

In 1944, two pairs of Jews escaped from the Auschwitz – Birkenau concentration camp and successfully reached Slovakia. Unlike the case of Alfréd Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba,⁴¹ the story of the escape of A. Rosin and C. Mordowicz is virtually unknown. In my opinion, one of the reasons is that they, unlike the two previously mentioned, never wrote about it.⁴²

This study is devoted to the story of Rosin’s and Mordowicz’s escape. Before the deportations, Arnošt Rosin⁴³ (born on 20 March 1913 in Snina, died in Düsseldorf in 2000) had been detained together with other 20 young Jewish men in Snina, from where he was brought to Humenné and subsequently to the Jewish concentration centre in Žilina.⁴⁴ There he experienced his first humiliation. “[...] the Guard members in their black uniforms. They taught us the first concentration lesson. They would swear, beat and kick us without reason, and rob us of our personal belongings.”⁴⁵

Rosin also described the departure of a deportation train from Slovakia: “Together with about 1,000 men, I was taken to the Žilina train station where they put us into cattle cars. When the sliding doors were shut and locked with heavy padlocks, and numerous members of the Hlinka Guard were commanded to accompany the train, we began to sense that something bad was afoot. They drove us at night in the direction of Čadca and the train didn’t stop until it reached the Polish border station Zwardoń in the morning. We were commanded to get off the cars, opened by the Hlinka Guard members. We were counted and handed over to German soldiers who forced us into the cars again and accompanied us on our further journey. On 10 April we

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 223.

⁴¹ KÁRNÝ, Miroslav. Historie osvětimské zprávy Wetzlera a Vrba. In TÓTH, Dezider (ed.). *Tragédia slovenských Židov*. Banská Bystrica : Datei, 1992, pp. 167 – 186; KÁRNÝ, Miroslav. Osudy jedné zprávy. In WETZLER, Alfréd. *Čo Dante nevidel*. Bratislava : Milanium 2009, pp. 312 – 321; VRBA, Rudolf. *Utekl jsem z Osvětimi*. Praha : Sefer, 2007; WETZLER, Alfréd. *Čo Dante nevidel. So správou Wetzlera a Vrba*. Bratislava : Milanium, 2009.

⁴² NIŽNANSKÝ, E. (ed.) *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, p. 487. According to the transport list, the transport left Žilina on 4 April and reached Zwardoń on 5 April. According to the published German list of deportation trains, however, this transport of Jewish men was supposed to go to Lublin.

⁴³ In the list of Slovak Jews of 1942 he is also found under the name Ernest Rosin.

⁴⁴ Before the deportations started in 1942, concentration centres had been established in Slovakia at Bratislava – Patrónka, Nováky, Poprad, Sered’ and Žilina.

⁴⁵ Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem (YVA), P 25/13. An interview with A. Rosin was recorded by E. Kulka in Czech in 1965/1966, p. 1.

arrived at a station denoted Oswiecim – Auschwitz. SS soldiers in uniforms were waiting at the station and took us to the Auschwitz concentration camp.”⁴⁶

There is a certain discrepancy in his account. According to D. Czech, Rosin was part of a group of Slovak Jews who arrived at the Auschwitz camp only on 17 April 1942, or more precisely, the numbers were allocated to the group on that day. Rosin received number 29858.⁴⁷

I would like to recall that Rosin was deported in one of the first transports of young male and female Jews from Slovakia, leaving – according to the official state propaganda –

“for work”.⁴⁸

The deported Rosin understood very quickly the terrible situation he had got into at the concentration camp: “Only on the second day we began to sense how bad it was. The SS were marching us already from the station at an unusually fast pace and I was intrigued to see the inscription ‘Arbeit macht frei’ over the gate through which we entered. I saw high fences with barbed wire all around, and inmates in striped clothes with shaved heads. What is going on here? Where are we? Prison clothes? We are not criminals, are we? [...] In the twinkling of an eye we were undressed, shaved, our hair was cut and then the SS came and started to call us names, beat and kick us in a way which defies description.”⁴⁹

By his own account, Rosin spent only three days in the main camp and then he was brought to the Auschwitz – Birkenau camp to work on the enlargement of the camp. As he recalls, about 5,000 inmates worked there (Soviet prisoners of war and prisoners from Poland, France and Slovakia). Then he got in a squad of 200 Jews from Slovakia, from among whom 50 were selected for the *Sonderkommando*. Rosin and other 150 Jews were deployed to dig “deep pits near the forest”, which was called Birkenau. Behind the forest there was a farmhouse where they gassed the Jews. Rosin had to bury the murdered Jews in the pits. He worked there for about 20 days. As he states himself, he was very lucky. In a piece of bread received from a friend from the *Sonderkommando* (who had stolen the bread from murdered Jews) he found a golden chain and gave it to the block typist (Leo Polák) who helped him move to block 14 where he was assigned to different work. That saved his life because according to him, all the members of the *Sonderkommando* were later executed for a collective escape attempt. Some

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 1-2.

⁴⁷ CZECH, Danuta. *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz – Birkenau 1939 – 1945*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1989, p. 199 (on 17 April 1942, 973 Jews from Slovakia were allocated numbers 29832 – 30804); p.786 (on this page in the book, A. Rosin’s number is stated – 29,858).

⁴⁸ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. Antisemitská propaganda počas deportácií Židov v roku 1942. In NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard – LÔNČÍKOVÁ, Michala et al (eds.). *Antisemitizmus a propaganda. Judaica et Holocaustica 5*. Bratislava : Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave, Katedra všeobecných dejín, Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Fakulta humanitních studií, Poľský inštitút Bratislava, 2014, pp. 125-159.

⁴⁹ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 2.

time in November 1942 he himself became a block elder (*Blockälteste*) on Block 23.⁵⁰ Later he contracted typhoid fever and was saved by Alfréd Wetzler⁵¹ and Jozef Zollmannk who worked as medical attendants on Block 7. After he recovered, he got to a block with the block elder named Danisch – a German criminal (criminals and murderers had green signs on their clothing).⁵² Danisch treated Slovak Jews well, probably because after he had arrived in Birkenau, he had contracted typhoid fever and it was Rosin who helped him overcome the disease. The absurdity of the relationships at the camp can be documented by another characteristic of Danisch described by Rosin: “Otherwise he was a ruthless gangster and murderer, and I heard that in the end the inmates beat him to death during the evacuation.”⁵³ According to Rosin’s testimony, the camp resistance (described by another Auschwitz escapee, Rudolf Vrba,⁵⁴ originally called Walter Rosenberg)⁵⁵ did not exist as an organized movement. He commented on this: “It was a group of friends, in my case Bandy Müller, Fred Wetzler, Ota Kraus, Erich Schön, Arnošt Schön, Ada Rosenfeld, Honza Čěšpiva and others. We were collecting every piece of information and exchanging it among ourselves, often fooling ourselves that things would turn out for the good. [...] We were helping each other with a piece of bread or by providing our friends with clothing, shoes, better work and, if they were sick, by hiding them from control or selection at the block until they recovered. We were encouraging one another by saying ‘wash yourself, keep your head high, do not let them beat you to death.’ [...] One could not help everybody; we did not have sufficient strength.”⁵⁶ In the spring of 1943, the above-mentioned German criminal, Danisch, came up to Rosin and told him that a new section of a quarantine camp D – II – A would be opened and, therefore, he would need new typists. Together with Wetzler they offered him, to train new typists, selecting Bandy Müller and Rudof Vrba.⁵⁷ In his testimony, Rosin even argues with Vrba, saying:

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵¹ For more details, see WETZLER, Alfréd. *Čo Dante nevidel*. Dunajská Lužná, Bratislava : MilaniuM, Pavel Zrinyi, 2009.

⁵² The following system of marking the inmates was used in the concentration camps: Jews were marked with the yellow star, political prisoners with red, murderers with green, Jehovah’s witnesses with violet, homosexuals with pink, etc. There were also combinations of colours. If a Jew was also Communist, he was marked with half yellow and half red.

⁵³ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 6.

⁵⁴ In his testimony, Rosin characterised Vrba in these words: “Vrba was a young boy of adventurous nature with a phantasy, dreaming about escaping and telling the whole world the truth about Birkenau. [...] Vrba writes in his book as though he took Wetzler with him like a suitcase, not as a partner.” YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, recorded by E. Kulka.

⁵⁵ For more details, see VRBA, Rudolf. *Utekl jsem z Osvětimi*. Praha : Sefer, 1998.

⁵⁶ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Vrba in his book claims that the resistance movement in the camp sent him there. For more details, see VRBA, Rudolf. *Utekl jsem z Osvětimi*. Praha: Sefer, 1998.

“Rudo,⁵⁸ you should have remained the friend you were in the camp also when writing your book; it was not right for you to take all the credit, as if there were no others. When you escaped, Fredo⁵⁹ was already a mature, prudent man, six years older than you, while you were still an inexperienced 18-year-old boy.”⁶⁰

According to Rosin, after Wetzler’s and Vrba’s escape on 7 April 1944 everybody knew that Rosin was Wetzler’s friend. Therefore, Rosin was interrogated in the cruellest manner, his teeth even being knocked out. Rosin had already reconciled himself to being shot to death. In his opinion what saved his life was that he said: “If I had known that Wetzler wanted to escape I would have run with him because I know I can expect nothing but death here.”⁶¹ Then he received the “Rotpunkt”⁶², meaning he was not allowed to leave the camp, not even for work. Regarding his motivation for escaping, he said: “Birkenau was like hell. The camps were being filled up, new ones were opened, flames went up from the crematoria and the pits day and night. I could see that the end of the whole camp was drawing inescapably near and there was nothing to wait for. It would be better to die on the run! I knew it was the only chance but I did not know where to find a good ally.”⁶³ On his block lived a kapo, Adam Lužnický, who had a typist in his commando at the gravel pit, a Polish Jew named Czesław Mordowicz.⁶⁴ As Rosin helped Lužnický get something from “Canada” (the block where items from the incoming transports were stored, like clothes, shoes etc.) – Lužnický told Rosin he would help him escape. Rosin noted that neither Lužnický nor other inmates who helped them hide in the gravel pit were Jewish. Mordowicz, who had been at Auschwitz since 1942, became his partner in the escape.⁶⁵ However, it was difficult for Rosin to get out of the camp because he had been under strict supervision since the escape of Wetzler and Vrba. His leaving the camp was dramatic indeed. This is how he described it: “We agreed with Mordowicz that we would escape on Saturday, I

⁵⁸ I.e., Rudolf Vrba, by his original name, Walter Rosenberg (1924 – 2006). In the English edition of his book, VRBA, Rudolf. *I Cannot Forgive* (Vancouver : Recent College Publishing 1997, p. 368f.) he wrote that he had not mentioned Wetzler and later Mordowicz in the original edition of his book in the 1960s out of concern for them, as they had lived in Communist Czechoslovakia.

⁵⁹ I.e. Alfréd Wetzler (1918 – 1988). For more details, see KAMENEC, Ivan. Alfréd Wetzler. Nechcený hrdina z Osvienčimu. In *Do pamäti národa*. In MICHÁLEK, Slavomír – KRAJČOVIČOVÁ, Natália et al. (eds.). Bratislava 2003, pp. 667-670; WETZLER, Alfréd. *Čo Dante nevidel*. Dunajská Lužná, Bratislava : MilaniuM, Pavel Zrinyi, 2009.

⁶⁰ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin. Rosin in this interview gives testimony also about the preparation of Wetzler’s and Vrba’s escape in 1944.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 10.

⁶² German: “red point”.

⁶³ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Czesław Mordowicz, born 1919 in Mława, Poland, died in Toronto, Canada, in 2001. From December 1942 he was incarcerated at the Auschwitz – Birkenau concentration camp. At the camp he received inmate number 84,216. After the war he lived in Bratislava and emigrated to Israel in 1965.

⁶⁵ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with s C. Mordowicz, recorded by E. Kulka in Czech in 1964.

think it was 27 May 1944. I was very upset and I had prepared in the cabin two pairs of underpants and two shirts to put on. [...] A large transport from Hungary had just arrived and the boys from “Canada” brought some alcohol; in order to suppress my nervousness and agitation, I took a little drink. [...] Blockführer Goetze was on duty. I brought him some cans and told him that my relatives from Hungary had arrived in the neighbouring camp B-II-C and I asked him to let me go to see them for a short while. Goetze took the cans, jotted down my tattooed number 29858 on a piece of paper and promised he would let me go later. But when I later wanted to get to the gate, Danisch stopped me and asked: ‘Wo gehst Du hin?’ [‘Where are you going’] and I had to go back. In my next attempt, the camp commander Schwarzhuber stopped me twice and I had to go back to my block again. I thought I really had bad luck but since we had made an agreement with Mordowicz, I tried once more. Goetze was still sitting there and as I was passing through the gate he reminded me: ‘Komm gleich zurück!’ ‘Sofort Herr Blockführer’ [‘Come back soon!’ ‘Yes, immediately, Herr Blockführer’], I assured him but I was so nervous and careless that I went out with a block band and I only became aware of it as I was already on my way and, again carelessly, I threw it to the side of the road.”⁶⁶

Rosin and Mordowicz in fact took advantage of the situation when transports were arriving from Hungary (on a mass scale from 15 May 1944), resulting in a confusion at the camp, so that they could start their escape on 27 May 1944.⁶⁷ Rosin met Mordowicz at the *Wasserversorgung* (Water supply) near the gravel pit. A “bunker” had been dug there. It was a pit 1.20 m wide and 1 m high, overlaid with wood and secured by a prop. They went into the bunker, covered by Polish inmates. Near the site they scattered some tobacco mixed with petroleum in order to hide their traces from the dogs. They were to stay in here for three days – until the strict measures related to their escape would be revoked. They used the same “bunker” and the same method as Wetzler and Vrba had done. The principle of such an escape was based upon the fact that after the SS had declared the search for the escapees, escapees remained hidden within the camp. They were to leave their hiding place in the bunker after the third day when the strict measures adopted in the search for the escaped prisoners had ended. So Rosin and Mordowicz were hiding in the bunker, waiting for the sound of the camp siren announcing the end of the strict security measures.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁷ For more details, see CZECH, Danuta. *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz – Birkenau 1939 – 1945*. Reinbek bei Hamburg : Rowohlt Verlag, 1989, p. 786.

⁶⁸ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, p. 1.

They had a hard time in the bunker. On one hand they knew they had to stay there for three days because that was the duration of the first phase of the pursuit of escaped prisoners from the camp and on the other hand it was difficult to bear it. Rosin said of it: “We were really scared. We were upset and our hearts were beating fast. We found it more and more difficult to breathe, we thought we would suffocate. After three hours of searching in vain for a ventilation opening, we resorted to a desperate and dangerous act. We pulled the propping beam from the bunker entrance inside. The gravel which covered the entrance penetrated inside and reduced the space in the bunker but at least we could breathe a little better.”⁶⁹

They did not endure in hiding for the three days: “[...] already on the second day, on Sunday evening, we could not stand it anymore. Our hands and feet were numb, we could not move. We decided to crawl between two watchtowers which we could see from our bunker. [...] We were lucky that evening. Several trains with Hungarian transports had arrived at the ramp. There was much commotion and confusion in the whole camp, we could hear the whistling of the locomotives, noise, shouting, barking of dogs, so that the watchmen did not hear us when we crawled beneath them. [...] At the moment when the Birkenau death camp, no more than 400 metres from our bunker, was filled with transports and the selected deportees were being guided by the SS to the crematoria, accompanied by dogs barking, beating and shouting – we escaped from that hell, into the opposite direction.”⁷⁰

Rosin’s description was precise. He and Mordowicz escaped, using the situation when others (the Hungarian Jews) were about to be murdered after the selection.

Originally they had not wanted to go to Slovakia, as Mordowicz was Polish. They wanted to go to Krakow or alternatively join the partisans who, as rumours in the camp had it, were in the vicinity. They swam across the Sola River but they lost their shoes there. Then they got near to the town of Chelmek, about 20 km from the camp. They walked only at night, resting during the days. As long as they had food, they stayed in the forest, avoiding dwellings. Only on the third day did they ask for old shoes and a piece of bread at a solitary house in the forest. About 15 km from Krakow, they heard that men were being caught and enlisted for work, so they decided to find the partisans, but without success. Nobody trusted them and people were looking at them with suspicion. Finally they decided to go to Slovakia. Rosin’s testimony describes their situation very clearly: “We lost all hope and we lacked the strength to continue walking. We had believed that everything would be fine once we left the camp. Everybody we asked would help us. But we started to fear outside: we saw danger lurking at every step, that someone

⁶⁹ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 14.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

would reveal us, we would be caught and brought back to the camp. [...] When I talked with Mordowicz in the evenings, we admitted we had been nearly as afraid in the camp as outside in freedom. At Birkenau, being older prisoners, we had a relatively quiet life. We were already used to the idea that death awaited us and we also knew how to postpone that moment to the most distant future possible. [...] But outside, it was a foreign world. We had no experience, we were afraid of light, space, people. We only felt secure in the darkness. Our excitement that the escape had been successful and that we would bring the report to the outside world was melting away as our physical strength was waned.”⁷¹

They even bought train tickets. The train they boarded departed in the direction of Nowy Targ and further on to Zakopane. However, as the train was full, they sat on the roof, hoping to avoid any inspection. Before reaching Nowy Targ, they jumped off the train and continued on foot. They found their way by following the tracks and finally they managed to cross into Slovakia. They arrived on 6 June 1944 – on D-Day, the Allied invasion of Normandy. From a littered matchbox they learned they were in Slovakia. Rosin, who was, according to the official propaganda, “a deported Jew, an enemy of the Slovaks”, commented on that moment as follows: “I knelt down and kissed my native Slovak soil. Fear and uncertainty were gone. I felt I was at home, free in my native country. I completely forgot that this was Fascist Slovakia, governed by Hlinka men and the Hlinka Guard.”⁷² Then both were arrested by Slovak gendarmes in a pub and interrogated in Nižná Apša. They claimed they were Slovaks who ran away from forced labour in Germany. They were still afraid to disclose that they are Jewish. In the end they confessed to that. Thereafter they were escorted by the police to Spišská Stará Ves to a court building. They told the gendarmes several times as they were on their way: “You can shoot us but you won’t bring us over alive.”⁷³ Once in the court building, Rosin spotted an acquaintance, a native from Snina, Aladár Juhás. In essence, he saved them. They were to confess that they are Jews who roam about villages, buying gold and foreign currency. They also received three dollars each from local Jews so that the gendarmes could find some money. As a result of this turn of events, they were escorted to the financial directorate in Liptovský Mikuláš as “foreign currency smugglers”. They were even brought as far as Kežmarok for some time. When they returned by train to Liptovský Mikuláš, they were surprised to meet Vrba and Wetzler at the train station, both of whom lived in a Jewish elderly home. They had to stay in

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁷² Ibid, p. 17.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 19.

prison for a few more days until the local Jewish community paid them out. After being released from jail, both of them stayed with the Gleich family.⁷⁴

Subsequently Mordowicz and Rosin told their story to the representatives of the local Jewish community. Most of them had already heard the story of Wetzler and Vrba. Members of the Jewish Center (*Ústredňa Židov*) from Bratislava, Kamil Krasňanský and Oskar Neumann, came to Mikuláš to see them.⁷⁵ According to Rosin, they complemented the original testimony of Vrba and Wetzler with information about the situation since April 1944, in particular about the deportations of Hungarian Jews, who Wetzler and Vrba did not witness. Mordowicz made a similar statement: “The protocol was more than five pages long, because the persons concerned, headed by Krasňanský, mainly verified the credibility of Fred’s⁷⁶ and Rudy’s⁷⁷ protocol and compiled a new protocol from the beginning, according to our testimony.”⁷⁸

The preserved report of Rosin and Mordowicz today represents only a complement to the Wetzler – Vrba report.⁷⁹ It relates to the situation at Auschwitz from April to May 1944, i.e., after Wetzler’s and Vrba’s escape. It mentions the transports of Greek and Polish Jews. It records the arrival of first transports from Hungary.⁸⁰ Mass transports from Hungary started on 15 May. Approximately 14–15 thousand Jews were arriving daily. They claimed that only 10% of these Jews made it into the camp, while others were immediately gassed and cremated. Surviving Jews from Hungary were, according to the report, later moved to other camps (Buchewald, Mauthausen, Grossrosen, Gusen, Flossenbug and others) and they even were not tattooed. They also recorded the arrival of an “Aryan” transport from France and they recalled the arrival of a transport from Terezín. They even mentioned the visit by Heinrich Himmler to the camp in May. They did not forget to list the names of the commanders at Auschwitz: Aumayer, Schwarzhuber, Weiss, Hartenstein, Höss and Kramer.⁸¹

Speaking generally on the importance of informing the public about the Auschwitz concentration camp and the industrialised murder of the Jews, Rosin said: “On the whole, however, Vrba’s book is true, except that he forgets to mention the others and takes all the

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 20-1.

⁷⁵ It is interesting that Oskar Neuman does not mention Rosin and Mordowicz in his book. For more details, see NEUMANN, Oskar. *Im Schatten des Todes*. Tel Aviv : Olamenu, 1956.

⁷⁶ I.e., Alfréd Wetzler.

⁷⁷ I.e., Rudolf Vrba.

⁷⁸ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, p. 5.

⁷⁹ For more details about the Wetzler – Vrba Report, see WETZLER, Alfréd. *Čo Dante nevidel. So správou Wetzlera a Vrba*. Bratislava : Milanium, 2009, pp. 276-311.

⁸⁰ For more details, see GAŠKO, Mikuláš. *Nad úkrytom*. Bratislava: SAK, 2014, pp. 65-67.

⁸¹ For more details, see SZENES, Sándor – BARON, Frank. *Von Ungarn nach Auschwitz. Die verschwiegene Warnung*. Munster : Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, pp. 153-161.

credit. All of us who escaped for the same reason should take the same credit for sharing in the informing of the world through the Auschwitz Protocols and take equal credit for it.”⁸²

Rosin also remembered that most people in Slovakia who heard their story about the situation at Auschwitz-Birkenau were distrustful. “The immediate effect on everybody was that they were shocked. ‘It is terrible’, almost everyone said. But then they started to examine and doubt and even when we explained each of their questions by giving small details, which were for them hard to comprehend, they remained distrustful. Mainly the publication of postcards and letters from extermination camps fed their suspicion. These letters kept coming, in 1944 to a larger extent also from Birkenau. [...] The letters were not sent directly but through the Jewish Center⁸³, which made them more trustworthy. No letter contained anything similar to our report, at least not in a plain language, and allegorical expressions were explained ambiguously.”⁸⁴

Thereafter, the representatives of the Jewish Center took care of them. They got them “Aryan” documents (Rosin was given a new identity as Štefan Roháč). They also received a Jewish birth certificate, sewn in their clothing, and regular financial assistance. All four escapees were moved to Bratislava.

In June 1944 a meeting between representatives of the escapees and a representative of the Vatican took place. Around 20 June 1944⁸⁵, Mordowicz and Vrba met the representative of the Vatican at a monastery in Sv. Jur near Bratislava.⁸⁶

Mordowicz claimed that the meeting had been mediated by Kamil Krasňanský from the Jewish Center. According to Mordowicz, the protocol he compiled with Rosin in Liptovský Mikuláš was given to Msgr. G. Burzio, who introduced himself as the Pope’s courier.⁸⁷ In this respect, based on today’s knowledge, we can say that Mordowicz was wrong. It was Msgr. Mário Martilotti who met them at the monastery.⁸⁸

⁸² YVA, P 25/13. Interview with E. Rosin.

⁸³ The Jewish Centre (*Ústredňa Židov*) was established in September 1940. All Jews from Slovakia had to become its members. For more details, see HRADSKÁ, Katarína. *Gizi Fleischmannová. Návrat nežiadúci*. Bratislava 2012; HRADSKÁ, Katarína (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3. Listy Gisely Fleischmannovej (1942 – 1944). Dokumenty*. Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Židovská náboženská obec 2003; HRADSKÁ, Katarína. *Holokaust na Slovensku 8. Ústredňa Židov. Dokumenty*. Bratislava: DSH, 2009.

⁸⁴ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordovicz, p. 24.

⁸⁵ C. Mordowicz claimed in his testimony that it occurred only in the first decade of July. For more details, see YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordovicz, p. 4.

⁸⁶ For more details, see KÁRNÝ, Miroslav. *Historie osvětimské zprávy Wetzlera a Vrba ...*, p. 170.

⁸⁷ Msgr. G. Burzio was active in Bratislava in 1940–1945 as the chargé d’affaires of the Vatican.

⁸⁸ According to Vrba, it was Msgr. Mario Martilotti. For more details, see VRBA, Rudolf. *I Cannot Forgive*. Vancouver: Recent College Publishing 1997, p. 369; Czech historian, M. Kárný, also claims that it was M. Martilotti. Kárný supports his claim with a document from the Vatican edition of *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège Relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*. Vol. 10. Vaticano 1980, Document 204, p. 281. For more details, see KÁRNÝ, Miroslav. *Historie osvětimské zprávy Wetzlera a Vrba ...*, p. 170.

Mordowicz said of the meeting: “Each piece of information, each word, made an enormous impact on him, he would often interrupt the conversation saying that we were a living document and he would do everything to save us for the future as the witnesses of history that the world must get to know. [...] He asked about the fate of priests because we explained to him that the life not only of Jews but also of other nationalities was at stake, and in particular we emphasised, and I expected that it would be the most interesting thing to him, the fate of priests about which the world knew absolutely nothing. I think he got into a sort of ecstasy and at this point he interrupted our meeting and asked for a break because he did not feel well and we were afraid [...] he might faint.”⁸⁹

Mordowicz in his testimony also mentioned Vrba’s role in the discussion with the representative of the Vatican. He said: “I feel awkward, in particular after having read his book, in which he only highlights his own credit, mentioning no one else as far as this phase of our activity is concerned [...] and also as far as the meeting with the Pope’s nuncio is concerned, he does not mention myself at all, not even that we were there together, and I really take offense at that. [...] Rudolf was only barely 19 years old, he was young and as we could observe, due to his youth he often behaved in an almost childlike manner, I don’t want to get into details about it – but he was not and could not have been as active as he writes in his book. [...] During the meeting he was more passive than active.”⁹⁰

The rabbi from Nitra, Michael Dov Weissmandel⁹¹, also met with them, recorded their story and sent the report to Switzerland and Turkey.⁹²

Mordowicz also recalled that in August 1944 – before the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising – he was with F. Wetzler in Nitra where Wetzler’s brother lived and they hid for a few days with Fred’s family at a castle, the residence of the Archbishop (Karol Kmeťko). According to Mordowicz, they handed in to the Archbishop the report, which had been given to Burzio.⁹³

⁸⁹ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, pp. 2, 6.

⁹⁰ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, pp. 6-7; Vrba responded to these claims by Mordowicz only in the English edition in 1997 as follows: “I did not mention Mordowicz at all because at the time of writing (1963) I lived in England, having left communist Czechoslovakia in 1958. Mordowicz at that time still lived in Bratislava under the neo-Stalinist regime of Antonin Novotny. To publicly describe in England a close connection between myself and Mordowicz might have caused him problems, including accusations of having been a “Vatican spy” or “closely connected with the exiled heretic R. Vrba.” For more details, see VRBA, Rudolf. *I Cannot Forgive*. Vancouver: Recent College Publishing 1997, p. 368ff; Although Mordowicz lived in Toronto, Canada, he never met Vrba.

⁹¹ Chaim Michael Dov Weissmandel (1903 – 1957), an orthodox Rabbi from Nitra, an important representative of the so-called Working Group, which tried to save Jews from the deportations.

⁹² VRBA, Rudolf. *I Cannot Forgive*. Vancouver : Recent College Publishing 1997, p. 369.

⁹³ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, p. 9.

Mordowicz lived in Bratislava together with Wetzler, Rosin and Vrba, and with Rosin's friend Ondryáš, who was a gendarme. That notwithstanding, Ondryáš helped all of them. Mordowicz testified about that: "I lived in a common apartment with Fred, and Rudolf lived with Arnošt as subtenants, all of us on false documents. Their situation was slightly easier because in that apartment, Ondryáš, a member of the police, who hailed from the same place as Rosin, also lived as a subtenant. He helped them and covered up as much as he could. [...] He was very friendly and true and helped mainly Arnošt, and after Ruda had joined the partisans and I had been arrested he and Arnošt found lodgings at another place."⁹⁴

After the outbreak of the Uprising they parted ways. The representatives of the Jewish Center could not take care of them anymore. Vrba left for Trnava where his mother lived, then joined the partisans and came back to Bratislava only two months later. Wetzler went to his brother in Nitra.

Mordowicz was arrested when sitting at the Palace Restaurant with Wetzler's sister-in-law. He was suspected of sitting with a Jewess. He tried to escape but he was caught by Hlinka Guard members who beat him up so badly that he was brought to the HG headquarters unconscious. He was interrogated by Jozef Vozár, who had been the commander of the Jewish labour camp at Sereď.⁹⁵ During the investigation he was thought to be a Soviet agent as he could not speak Slovak well. During the interrogation the Guardsmen continued physically abusing him: "I gave only negative answers to their questions as to whom I was meeting, where I was living, saying that I did not live anywhere, did not meet anyone etc., and I was terribly beaten. I was so battered that Vozár himself handed me a mirror to see how I looked and told me I had fainted at least 12 times in an hour."⁹⁶ Mordowicz mainly tried not to reveal anything about Rosin. In the end, Mordowicz confessed to being Jewish, but from Slovakia. In his trousers he had documents on the name of Koloman Altmann from Levoča. However, Vozár did not believe this version either.

Thereafter he was delivered to the Gestapo. Mordowicz understood that his situation was really bad. "[...] they commanded that I take off my clothes. Now the climax came. I had my tattooed number covered by a tape. I tried to prevent uncovering my right forearm so I started to speak

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 10.

⁹⁵ For more details, see HLAVINKA, Ján – NIŽNANSKÝ, Eduard. *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Sereďi 1941-1945*. Bratislava : DSH, 2009; HLAVINKA, Ján – NIŽNANSKÝ, Eduard – RAGAČ, Radoslav. *Koncentračný tábor v Sereďi vo svetle novoobjavených dokumentov (september 1944 – marec 1945)*. In KOVÁČOVÁ, Viera a kol. *Druhá vlna deportácií Židov zo Slovenska: Medzinárodná vedecká konferencia 8. september 2009, Zvolen, Slovenská republika, Technická univerzita vo Zvolene*. Banská Bystrica : Múzeum Slovenského národného povstania, 2010, pp. 50-80.

⁹⁶ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, pp. 12-14.

German and emphasised that I was just an ordinary Jew [...]”⁹⁷ The Gestapo did not find the tattooed number covered by the tape.

In later years, Mordowicz was unable to say exactly when he had been arrested and when he had been brought to Sered'. However, he recalled that at the time, many Jews were arrested in Bratislava. I can only assume that it could have happened at the end of September when a large anti-Jewish raid was conducted in Bratislava.⁹⁸ In the camp he told the Jews that “there is only one way from here for everybody, namely to Auschwitz.”⁹⁹ His suffering continued on the deportation train. “Still isolated, I was put in a car in a transport about which I did not know exactly where it was heading. It was said to be going to Wiener Neustadt. That was in October 1944, after the Uprising. I was desperate at the time: mentally, physically and morally exhausted, I was unable to continue living. While on the train, with my last strength I warned them that they could not believe the Germans about the destination of the transport, that they are going to their deaths, but they attacked me and beat me, our own people. [...] I repeated over and over again, you are going to your deaths, save yourselves if you can, I am willing to open the way for you! They beat me, kicked me, I was lying unconscious, not able to live.”¹⁰⁰ He decided that when arriving to the ramp in Auschwitz, where the selection was conducted, he would dash at the SS, snatch a pistol from him and first shoot him dead and then shoot himself. However, he was lucky: a Polish inmate from Gróvno¹⁰¹ recognised him at the ramp and helped him hide. Then they re-tattooed his number so that the SS could not recognise him. Mordowicz's condition at the time is best described by his own words: “When I was tattooed I felt terrible pain, but the physical pain was not as bad as the moral one. I did not care about my life anymore but I could not come to terms with what had happened to me. It was worse than if they had robbed me of life. It was a terrible moral blow to me and I did not know what to do. Had it not been for the words of my friends, it would have been probably much better for me if I was killed right there at the ramp.”¹⁰²

His Polish friends managed to move him, together with 60 Slovak Jews, to Silesia, to a labour camp at Frýdlant where he worked in the Schubert factory. He lived here until his liberation.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

⁹⁸ The raid took place in the night from 28 to 29 September 1944. For more details, see HLAVINKA, Ján – NIŽNANSKY, Eduard. *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Seredi 1941-1945*. Bratislava : Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2009, pp. 105-106.

⁹⁹ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁰¹ At the time of his testimony, Mordowicz could not remember his name anymore.

¹⁰² YVA, P 25/13. Interview with C. Mordowicz, p. 21.

Rosin's rescue in Bratislava was significantly influenced by his Slovak schoolmate, the above-mentioned Jozef Ondryáš, who served in Bratislava as a gendarme. According to Rosin's testimony, he met him by chance in Bratislava after escaping from Auschwitz. Ondryáš recognised him when he was getting off a tram and greeted him with the words: "Wait a minute, why are you running like a Jew?" At that time, Rosin lived together with Vrba in lodgings at Matičná Street in Bratislava.¹⁰³ After some time, Ondryáš moved in to the third room available to let. At that time he did not yet know that Rosin had escaped from Auschwitz. Rosin said in his post-war testimony: "I told him I had come back from Hungary with false documents as Štefan Roháč."¹⁰⁴ I was not the only one who lived like that and Ondryáš protected several more Jews."¹⁰⁵

Rosin characterised Ondryáš in these words: "He was a true friend, reliable; he never indicated that I was a nuisance, and so later, after the Uprising had started¹⁰⁶, we moved to a larger apartment with a sign on the door: Jozef Ondryáš, Police Inspector. I often realised how much danger he was in."¹⁰⁷ In this way, Rosin was even more secure. It was very unlikely that the police or the Hlinka Guards would check the apartment of a policeman. Rosin finally told Ondryáš that he had escaped from a concentration camp. The record of Rosin's testimony sounds quite simple, even after so many years. On the other hand, at the time after the Uprising had been put down, if such information were revealed, the life of both of them would be in danger, not only of Rosin, the Jew, an escapee from a concentration camp, but also of his Slovak "helper".

After many years, Rosin testified about his confession to Ondryáš with these words: "You know, Jožko, I escaped but you don't know where from. Why, he wondered. I escaped from the concentration camp at Auschwitz and this number on my forehead is the registration number of an inmate. Do you know what it means? If they find us they will shoot you and me without asking any questions. Then he (i.e. Ondryáš – E.N.) said: Don't be afraid, this is even better. As long as you see me, don't be afraid at all!"¹⁰⁸

Although Ondryáš was aware of the gravity of the situation, he continued helping Rosin. Even later, when together with Rosin, they witnessed the arrest of an unknown Jew by the Hlinka Guard in Bratislava. According to Rosin's testimony, in the winter of 1944/45 he helped him

¹⁰³ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ These documents, called Aryan papers, (i.e., documents proving that he was a Slovak Christian) were provided to all four escapees by the representatives of the Jewish Community.

¹⁰⁵ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ I.e. the Slovak National Uprising (August – October 1944).

¹⁰⁷ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ YVA, P 25/13. Interview with A. Rosin, pp. 26-27.

not only to acquire various certificates that were necessary for survival, or for travel, but he also got to know Mordowicz, Vrba and Wetzler, who stayed overnight in “their” apartment several times. He did not reveal anything about the escapees. He even helped Rosin to get a job under the name of Štefan Roháč.

However, the story of Rosin’s rescue had a tragic end. In April 1945, as the front was approaching Bratislava, the last days of fighting between the Red Army and the Nazi troops broke out. According to Rosin’s testimony, at that time Ondryáš was helping four more former inmates – escapees. During the fighting near their home, a Soviet soldier was wounded. Let us allow Rosin to tell the end of the story: “I went out with Ondryáš and we took him (i.e., the Soviet soldier – E.N.) to our room. We treated him and went out. The wounded Russian cried: Give me water! I went to get water and one of the soldiers said: Don’t go, they are shooting. Jožko replied: I am not afraid. He left and in the moment he stepped out of the front door he received three shots and was dead on the spot. I went down but there was nothing I could do. My first thought was that I should have fallen instead of him.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, Ondryáš became one of the Slovaks who died while helping their Jewish compatriots.¹¹⁰

Rosin’s and Mordowicz’s brave escape, an act of heroism, made it possible already in 1944 to gain further information about the murder of the Jews in the Auschwitz- Birkenau concentration camp. It complemented and confirmed the previous report by Wetzler and Vrba. However, the Allies were not able to use the reports to put strong pressure on Nazi Germany to stop the process. Neither could these reports stop the deportations of Jews from Hungary, which were under way.¹¹¹ However, this was none of their fault. Someone else was supposed to carry out such a plan. Their authentic report is a fine example of an important historical document of the period refuting revisionist trends that call into question the Holocaust, or specifically the murder of Jews in the Auschwitz concentration camp.¹¹²

Archives

Slovenský národný archív (SNA)

Yad Vashem Archive (YVA)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 28.

¹¹⁰ For more details, see NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. Židia a Slováci – šľachetnosť a pomoc v čase holokaustu. In *Park ušľachtilých duší 4*. Bratislava : IOK, 2010, pp. 52 – 54; SNOCKO, Ladislav - ŽIAK, Miloš. Pomocník. Záchranca. In *Park ušľachtilých duší 2*. Bratislava : IOK, 2008, pp. 12-25.

¹¹¹ GAŠKO, Mikuláš. *Nad úkrytom*. Bratislava : SAK, 2014.

¹¹² This study in an abridged form was published in: *Slovensko a nacistické koncentračné tábory*. Bratislava : Stimul, 2015, pp. 118 -132.

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Dionýz Lénard and Leo (Ladislav) Junger – Escapees from the Lublin District and their Effort to Inform the World About the Mass Killing of Jews

Ján Hlavinka, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

Between 25 March and 20 October 1942, almost 58,000 Jews were deported from Slovakia in 57 transports. The Hlinka Slovak People's Party regime told the Jews they were being sent to work in accordance with Section 22 of the so-called Jewish Codex (*Židovský kódex*). The transports with Slovak Jews headed for Auschwitz and the Lublin District. While 19 transports left for Auschwitz, the Nazis sent 38 transports to the Lublin District, deporting 39,899 Slovak Jews here. An absolute majority of them was killed. It is an undisputable fact that most Jews from Slovakia who perished during the Holocaust were killed in the Lublin District.¹¹³

In my paper I want to focus on the story of two men who escaped the Nazi killing machine from the Lublin District, almost two years before A. Wetzler and R. Vrba (or C. Mordowicz and A. Rosin) managed to escape from Auschwitz. These men are Dionýz Lénard and Leo (Ladislav) Junger, who escaped shortly after their deportation from Slovakia in the summer of 1942.

The names of D. Lénard and L. Junger are not unfamiliar to Holocaust historians: marginal references to both escapees can be found in historical works. However, neither their life stories nor circumstances of their escapes and the testimonies they gave after their arrival in Slovakia have as yet been documented in detail.¹¹⁴

Where do the stories of D. Lénard and L. Junger differ from, and what do they have in common with, Wetzler and Vrba, or Mordowicz and Rosin? What was the nature of the information these men gave after their escape, and what do we know about their further fate? These are the questions my paper seeks to answer.

¹¹³ BÜCHLER, Jehošua Róbert. Deportácie Židov zo Slovenska do oblasti v roku 1942. In *Acta Judaica Slovaca* 8, Bratislava : Slovenské národné múzeum-Múzeum židovskej kultúry, pp. 10, 25.

¹¹⁴ GRUDZIŇSKA, Marta. Dionyz Lenárd. Relácia z pobytu v obozích na Majdanku (kwiecień-czerwiec 1942 roku). In *Zeszyty Majdanka*, 2014, roč. XXVI, pp. 181 – 250; FATRANOVA, Gila. *Boj o prežitie*. Bratislava: SNM-Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2007, s. 56.

One fundamental difference should be mentioned right at the outset: the case of D. Lénard and L. Junger was a case of two separate escapes (and escapees). While D. Lénard, originally from Žilina, was deported from Slovakia to the Majdanek concentration camp in Lublin in March 1942, L. Junger, originally from Sabinov, was deported in May 1942 and his transport did not head directly for Lublin but to Rejowiec, one of the ghettos in the Lublin District. However, let us turn our attention first to the common denominator of both stories, namely the territory where Lénard and Junger were deported in 1942, and the conditions prevailing there when the transports from Slovakia were arriving. It is the Lublin District (*Distrikt Lublin*), which formed one of five administrative regions of the General Government (*Generalgouvernement*), as the part of occupied Poland was called by the Nazis.¹¹⁵ The Nazis considered the whole General Government an “Eastern territory” where they carried out the mass killing of Jews.

In March 1942, exactly at the time when the deportations of Jews from Slovakia started, the Nazis launched “Operation Reinhardt” (*Einsatz Reinhardt*) in the General Government. The purpose of the operation, with its headquarters in Lublin, was the physical extermination of all the Jews living in the territory of the General Government.¹¹⁶ The mass killing of local Jews as well as Jews brought from abroad was to be carried out in extermination camps especially built for this purpose: Belżec, Sobibór and Treblinka. In March 1942, when the transports with Jews from Slovakia began to reach the Lublin District, the extermination camps had not yet been fully completed, with only the Belżec camp serving its purpose. When it comes to the Sobibór camp, killing by gas began in May 1942.¹¹⁷

The plan was to first kill the Polish Jews, while the Jews brought from other territories were to be provisionally located in temporary ghettos and work camps and killed later.¹¹⁸

The first transports of men “fit for work” from Slovakia were sent to the Majdanek camp. Approximately from 11 April 1942, when the first so-called family transports of Jews were dispatched from Slovakia, Jews were sent – either after selection in Lublin or in some cases

¹¹⁵ The General Government was a territorial administrative unit created by the Nazis on the territory of occupied Poland in October 1939. It was originally divided into four areas (Cracow, Warszawa, Lublin, Radom), with further internal divisions. Cracow was the administrative centre of the General Government. After the attack on the Soviet Union, Eastern Galicia was joined to the General Government as its fifth part. Hans Frank served as the General-Governor. See <http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206246.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ KRANZ, Tomasz. *Extermination of Jews at the Majdanek...*, p. 127.

¹¹⁷ KUWAŁEK, Robert. *Obóz zagłady w Belżcu*. Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2010, p. 125. On the Sobibór extermination camp, see SCHELVIS, Jules. *Sobibor. A History of a Nazi Death Camp*. Oxford – New York : Berg, 2007.

¹¹⁸ KRANZ, Tomasz. *Extermination of Jews at the Majdanek...*, p. 15.

without selection – to the so called transit ghettos such as Rejowiec, Końskowola, Naleczow or directly to Sobibór.¹¹⁹

The Case of Dionýz Lénard

Let us now focus on Dionýz Lénard. His life story began on 23 September 1912 in Budapest. Dionýz's father, Adolf Lénard, was of Slovak origin while his mother, Tereza, was originally from Hungary. After World War I, the Lénard family moved to Žilina where they had their second child – daughter Klára. At first they lived a relatively good life in Žilina. Lénard's father had business in the field of shop-window cleaning, but with the latter economic crisis, the family faced existential challenges.¹²⁰

Dionýz, who was called Daniel at home and among friends, was of a short, slender build. As far as his education was concerned, he completed a primary school and four years of a council school in Žilina. He had never received any other formal education but thanks to his interest in literature, his passion for reading and love for music and poetry, his outlook was quite broad, in particular when it comes to arts and poetry, which he also attempted to write.¹²¹ He dreamed of a career of a singer but he was not able to fulfil this. Hence, Lénard earned his living as a waiter, learning on the job in restaurants, or as a warehouse keeper.

The Lénard family supported the Zionist movement and wanted to settle in then-Palestine already in the 1930s. Dionýz Lénard and his sister were members of the leftist Zionist youth organization, *Hashomer Hatzair*. In 1933, Lénard illegally emigrated from Czechoslovakia to Palestine. In Tel Aviv, he worked again as a waiter. A year later, in 1934, his parents and sister followed Lénard. They were all detained by the British authorities, and deported as illegal immigrants back to Czechoslovakia.¹²² Memoirs of Lénard's contemporaries tell us that Dionýz Lénard was in Prague in the summer of 1937, meeting poets and artists, even discussing his poetry with them and making attempts to publish these.¹²³

¹¹⁹ See: GRUDZIŃSKA, Marta. Žydzi slowaccy v obozie koncentracijnym na Majdanku In *Studia Żidowskie Almanach*, 2014, Vol. IV, No. 4, p. 56.

¹²⁰ Memoirs of Rakhel Anshel, the sister of D. Lénard, manuscript. Personal archive of Orly Anshel Peled. For more details see HLAVINKA, Ján. "Dôjst' silou-mocou na Slovensko a informovať..." Dionýz Lénard a jeho útek z koncentračného tábora Majdanek. Bratislava : Veda, 2015.

¹²¹ Some notes and parables in the testimony written by D. Lénard testify to his broad outlook, which even led some historians to the conclusion that he was highly educated. Memoirs of Rakhel Anshel; Štátny archív v Bratislave (ŠA Bratislava), f. Krajský súd v Bratislave (KS v Bratislave), Tk VI 238/1943, Dionýz Lénard, record of 8 February 1943; GRUDZIŃSKA, Marta. *Dionyz Lenárd. Relácia z pobytu v obozie na Majdanku (kwiecień-czerwiec 1942 roku)*. In *Zeszyty Majdanka*, 2014, Vol. XXVI, pp. 181 – 250.

¹²² Memoirs of Rakhel Anshel, manuscript. Personal archive of Orly Anshel Peled.

¹²³ BEDNÁR, Štefan. *Bohém hľadá vlast' II*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1984, pp. 38- 39.

Shortly after the proclamation of the Slovak State in March 1939, Lénard's sister Klára (who was also called Rachel at home) left for Denmark with the help of young Zionists. From Denmark, she later moved to Sweden. Dionýz remained in Slovakia, hoping that he, too, would be able to emigrate one day. There is not much we know about his fate during subsequent years when the anti-Jewish frenzy of the state reached its peak. What we do know, however, is that together with other young Zionists from Žilina, Lénard was preparing for emigration and spent several months in improvised "kibbutz" in Brezno nad Hronom and other locations in Eastern Slovakia. However, neither he nor his friends were able to fulfil their dreams of making an "aliyah" and building the Jewish homeland.¹²⁴ This was partly due to both the political situation and the low number of immigration approvals granted by the British authorities to the Slovak Jews.¹²⁵ In July 1941, disappointed about his failure and probably also because his family faced a desperate financial situation, which had been left destitute at the time of radical Aryanization in Slovakia, Lénard volunteered for the Jewish Working Centre in Svätý Kríž nad Hronom (today Žiar nad Hronom) where, under the supervision of the Hlinka Guard, he performed various types of manual work on road construction and helped in the kitchen.¹²⁶

The construction work did not continue during the winter of 1941/1942, and Lénard remained in Svätý Kríž nad Hronom. At the beginning of 1942, D. Lénard, like other people of his age, had plans for his life, and in spite of the prevailing conditions got engaged and planned to get married. It was here in Svätý Kríž nad Hronom that he learned that the Jews would be deported, allegedly for work. Soon it was clear that this measure was also to include him. As Lénard later recalled, an officer of the Jewish Centre gave him a circular note, claiming they would leave to perform seasonal work.¹²⁷

D. Lénard was escorted through Kremnica to the concentration centre in Nováky where he was to be included in a transport. He noticed how brutally the Hlinka Guard members mistreated the arriving Jews, remembering the words of a German advisor – an SS officer – in the camp at Nováky. Before getting on the transport, Jews were to surrender their valuables

¹²⁴ The young Zionists called their community by the Hebrew word "*pluga*", which means unit. Dionýz is said to have had the position of a "*maskir*", or secretary, in the *pluga* of Brezno. It was no fancy title; he in fact kept the records and worked hard at construction sites nine hours a day. All members of a *pluga* put their money in a common box. We are informed about the fate of D. Lénard in 1939 – 1940 and about the preparation to leave for Palestine from the letters he wrote to his sister in Denmark. D. Lénard's letters of 2 August, 6 October, 9 December, 6 August, 21 August and 6 October 1940. Personal archive of Orly Anshel Peled.

¹²⁵ See FATRANOVÁ, G.. *Boj o prežitie*., p. 56.

¹²⁶ At the working centre, Jews performed manual work for the company *Technika* from Žilina, which was building the road network. ŠA Bratislava, f. KS v Bratislave, TkVI 238/1943, Testimony of Jozef Tatár.

¹²⁷ Moreshet Archive (MA), Givat Chaviva, A. 1564. Testimony of D. Lénard.

and anyone who would be caught having valuables after the crossing of the border would be immediately shot dead by the SS.¹²⁸

A transport to Lublin followed, under appalling conditions in the cattle cars, and after arrival, a brutal escort to the concentration camp at the outskirts of the city, colloquially called Majdanek.¹²⁹ The Majdanek camp had been included in the Operation Reinhardt since March 1942. It was not only built by Jewish prisoners, it also provided the labour force needed to sort the personal items of Jews murdered in the extermination camps within the framework of the operation. As the Polish historian, Tomasz Kranz, wrote, from the spring of 1942 Majdanek “reflected Himmler’s efforts to harmonize two – rationally opposing – goals: the ‘final solution to the Jewish question’ and the solution to the problem of a lack of labour force, using the forced labour of Jews”.¹³⁰

What did D. Lénard experience and see in the Majdanek camp? When after the first two days without water he and other inmates from the transport received an offer from the guards to exchange a glass of water for one suit (and later for gold watches), D. Lénard asked himself, as he later wrote in his testimony, what was the value of a human life in this place? It was in this sense that his testimony continued: “Then we still did not know that all this was just a prelude, that the reality was even much crueler.”¹³¹ Within the few following weeks, D. Lénard lived through hell in the Majdanek camp. Thousands of Jewish men from Slovakia, the Protectorate and the General Government were packed into few barracks. They were put together with German criminals and Soviet prisoners of war. The SS with the assistance of Ukrainian guards and Lithuanian police¹³² introduced a cruel regime.

Working commandos made of prisoners built the camp, which was by far not yet complete, and also performed the hard manual work necessary to keep it going, or carried out slave labour under surveillance outside the camp. All this was accompanied by constant beating and murders, with food rations resembling slops rather than food, which weakened the body and caused illnesses. In the Majdanek camp many inmates suffered from infectious diseases and were plagued by lice.¹³³

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ KRANZ, Tomasz. Eksterminacja Żydów na Majdanku i rola obozu w realizacji “Akcji Reinhardt” In *Zeszyty Majdanka*, 2003, Vol. XXII, p. 16.

¹³¹ MA, A. 1564. Testimony of D. Lénard.

¹³² This concerns members of the 2nd Lithuanian Police Battalion, established by the Nazis from Lithuanian soldiers after the German attack on Soviet Union. During D. Lénard’s imprisonment, altogether 370 members of the battalion served in the Majdanek concentration camp. They were sent to Majdanek in November 1941. During the existence of the camp, two Lithuanian police battalions gradually served here. BUBNYS, Arunas. Bataliony policji litewskiej w Lublinie (1941- 1944). In *Zeszyty Majdanka*, 2011, roč. XXV, pp. 115-128

¹³³ MA, A. 1564. Testimony of D. Lénard.

In his testimony written after the escape from the camp, Lénard wrote about the position of a prisoner and the value of his life: “I think that any animal had more value than us.”¹³⁴ He stated that many people were dying daily and added: “Half of them in a natural way, if we can call premature death by exhaustion natural [...] The other half died a violent death [...]”¹³⁵

D. Lénard saw with his own eyes how an SS man shot a Slovak Jew dead on the spot because he slipped in the sloppy yard and inadvertently touched the SS man’s clothes when falling. He saw how a young prisoner was immediately shot dead because he stole a raw potato.¹³⁶ He saw how a Slovak Jew from Nitra came close to a wire fence and was immediately shot dead.¹³⁷ He also spoke with Jews from Lublin who had been transferred to the camp. All in all, he witnessed many crimes during the few weeks in the camp.

No gas chamber had yet been built at the Majdanek concentration camp at the time when Lénard was imprisoned there. Only in the autumn of 1942, after Lénard’s escape, did the camp become another centre for the mass murder of Jews by gas. The adaptation of the camp premises for the first gas chamber was carried out in August and September 1942¹³⁸ and the first known selection of Jewish prisoners for the gas chambers took place on 9 November 1942.¹³⁹ During the following months, tens of thousands of Jews were murdered in Majdanek in the gas chambers.¹⁴⁰ Thus D. Lénard, in contrast to A. Wetzler, R. Vrba, or C. Mordowicz and A. Rosin, who escaped from Auschwitz in 1944, did not witness the mass murder of Jews by gas in Majdanek.

However, it is clear from Lénard’s testimony that he considered survival in the Majdanek concentration camp impossible. When his fellow prisoner, Tibor Schneider from Vrútky, asked him if he thought he would ever see his wife again, if they would come back alive, Lénard is said to have responded: “It is difficult for me to answer these questions but if it continues at this pace, not one of us will survive, even if they do not shoot us [...] everything is an illusion when you see that of the 50,000 Jews from Lublin only 3,000 remain; why would they spare us of all people?”¹⁴¹

D. Lénard decided to escape from Majdanek at any price. His testimony shows that besides trying to save his life and thinking of his parents and fiancé, something else drove him to the

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ KRANZ, T. *Extermination of Jews at the Majdanek...*, pp. 45 – 46.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 48.

¹⁴⁰ In November 1943, the Nazis murdered most of the still living Jewish inmates of the Majdanek camp in the operation “*Erntefest*”. KRANZ, Tomasz. *Extermination of Jews at the Majdanek...*, pp. 67 – 69.

¹⁴¹ Moreshet Archive Givat Haviva, A. 1564. Testimony of D. Lénard.

decision to escape: as he wrote, he wanted to “influence on those powers that are in a position to prevent the continuation of this catastrophe. With all my might reach Slovakia and inform those who still remain at home as well as other Jews about the biggest deception in the history of the world”.¹⁴²

Although he had originally planned his escape with two fellow prisoners (Strasser and Schlesinger, both from Slovakia), at the critical moment he remained alone. On one evening at the beginning of June 1942 (the precise date is unknown), he hid in the fourth section (*Feld*) of the camp among building material. When it got dark, he crawled beyond the fence. He had only very limited provisions and, therefore, he soon had to turn for help to the local Polish inhabitants. Several Poles helped him. Many details of his journey were written on those pages of his testimony, which were not preserved, and, therefore, it is impossible to fully reconstruct these events. In any case we know that Dionýz Lénard reached Slovakia sometime in July 1942.¹⁴³ He did not find his parents at home. On 29 April 1942 they had been deported to Auschwitz where both perished.¹⁴⁴ Neither was his fiancé to be found in Slovakia.

Until recently, only very little information on the fate of D. Lénard after his return to Slovakia has been available to historians. They seemed to confirm the assumption that Lénard is the author of a testimony, not exactly dated and signed with a pseudonym, and that after compiling his testimony, Lénard escaped to Hungary where all traces of him were lost. A former employee of the Jewish Centre, Samuel Dvorín (Hoffman), confirmed Lénard's authorship of the testimony. He met Lénard personally after his escape and in 1968 he described some details of his fate to the historian Ladislav Lipscher. Dvorín (Hoffman) said that after his arrival from Majdanek, Lénard first hid in Banská Bystrica with a certain physician, the father of a fellow prisoner with whom he had been at Majdanek, and later lived and worked as a cleaner in the company “Puritas” in Bratislava, where someone recognized and reported him. For this reason Lénard was allegedly imprisoned in the concentration centre for Jews in Bratislava on Göring Street where Hoffman met him.¹⁴⁵ According to Dvorín (Hoffman), the meeting with Lénard took place “probably in April 1944”. He also said that Lénard had escaped to Hungary after the compilation of his testimony.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ SNA, MV, box 227, file 23.

¹⁴⁵ Dvorín (Hoffman) even claims that Lénard attempted to return to Majdanek to persuade the son of that physician to escape, and when he refused because of his weakness, Lénard escaped again. However, I together with other historians consider this information inaccurate and unlikely. Cf GRUDZIŇSKA, Marta. *Dionyz Lenárd...* .

¹⁴⁶ MA, A. 1564. Record of the interview with Samuel Dvorin by Ladislav Lipscher (1968).

Yet another source was made available to historians: a letter by D. Lénard from 11 August 1944, sent to his sister in Sweden, which was for many years chronologically the last document about his fate. Based on these sources, even Lénard's family thought that D. Lénard had been killed by the Nazis together with Hungarian Jews, probably at the Auschwitz camp.¹⁴⁷

My research has shown that this is not the case. It sheds some more light on the fate of D. Lénard after his escape to Slovakia. Dvorín's information can be confirmed that after the escape from Lublin, D. Lénard hid in Banská Bystrica. I have found that in the summer of 1942 he obtained a false document with personal data: Certificate of Citizenship of the State from another Jew, a certain Móric Markstein. The document was in the name of an economic adjunct, Mikuláš Pružinský. Equipped with false papers, which even made him the namesake of then Minister of Finance, D. Lénard moved to Bratislava, where he found a job in the company "Michal Lentulay, ústr. pre čistenie izieb a oblokov" (rooms and windows cleaner). In November 1942, Lénard obtained a card of the Workers' Social Insurance Institution, where his employer was recorded, and registered with the police for residence in Bratislava. He lived in different hotels, alternating between them.

Around January 1943, Lénard met an old friend in Bratislava, the academic painter (and at that time also a member of the Communist Resistance) Štefan Bednár, who he had become acquainted with in Prague in 1937. According to Bednár's memoirs, which have been left unnoticed by many historians, Lénard confided to him that he had escaped from Majdanek and described the conditions there. When Bednár asked whether he had already informed the Jews in Žilina, with the argument that some still lived there under the exception, Lénard allegedly said: "Yes, there are those, *and I visited them. They listened to me but chased me out.*"¹⁴⁸ According to Bednár, they also touched on the subject of whether Lénard had informed the Jewish Centre. Lénard allegedly said that he had been to the Jewish Centre in Bratislava but they had not wanted to even listen to him, so he "saw that the best thing he could do was to disappear quickly".¹⁴⁹

According to Bednár, it was on his suggestion that D. Lénard wrote about his experience from Majdanek. "I remember *that the manuscript had eighteen densely and calligraphically inscribed pages*", wrote Š. Bednár of the testimony D. Lénard had left with him. According to his memoirs, Bednár did not copy the text by typewriter but forwarded it to Elo Šándor who

¹⁴⁷ Letter by D. Lénard of 11 August 1944. Personal archive of Rakhel Anshel.

¹⁴⁸ BEDNÁR, Š. *Bohém hľadá vlast' II.* pp. 40 – 41.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

assured him that he would send it to the resistance abroad, specifically via Turkey, “to the Communist part of Czechoslovak political emigration in London”. The meetings between Bednár and Lénard were to continue but from a certain day, Lénard did not show up anymore.¹⁵⁰

According to my findings, D. Lénard was detained on 7 February 1943 in the Hotel Rudolf in Bratislava and taken into custody. His life hung by a thread when M. Markstein, who had falsely testified about his citizenship and who also used false documents issued on the name of Mikuláš Pružinský, had committed multiple frauds. As a consequence, a search was ordered and after checking hotel books, the police in Bratislava suspected that Markstein lived in the Hotel Rudolf.¹⁵¹

Upon his detention, Lénard immediately revealed his real identity to the police and willingly admitted to using false documents, and even to knowing Marsktein. He posed as a Jew running away from deportation, who had originally worked in Svätý Kríž nad Hronom, but later, as he was to be deported from Slovakia, he went into hiding and assumed a false identity. Neither the police, nor the prosecution or later the judge compared Lénard’s version with the records at the 14th department of the Ministry of the Interior where they would have found that D. Lénard in fact had already been deported from Slovakia and, therefore, he was a Jewish escapee from the General Government. A decision in Lénard’s case was reached in Bratislava on 17 May 1943, sentencing him to three months in jail and forfeiture of his voting rights (which he, being Jewish, had not possessed anyway). As the time spent in custody was set off, he was released from prison on the day of the ruling (with only the clothes he was wearing).¹⁵² He was immediately handed over to the State Security Headquarters (*Ústredňa štátnej bezpečnosti*). They assessed that Lénard’s case was not within their competence and forwarded it to the Police Directorate, which put Lénard in prison in the police concentration centre for Jews on Göring Street.

We know, again from the testimony of S. Dvorín (Hoffman), that the centre was established in August 1942 at the request of the social department of the Jewish Centre. It collected people who had been released from custody or a prison sentence and who were supposed to be imprisoned in a Jewish labour camp in Slovakia. The whole centre was located in the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 42.

¹⁵¹ Slovák, 12 January 1943, p. 5; ŠA Bratislava, f. KS v Bratislave, TK VI 238/1943, Official record of 7 February 1943.

¹⁵² ŠA Bratislava, f. KS v Bratislave, TK VI 238/1943, Judgement of 17 May 1943.

former building of a Jewish retirement home.¹⁵³ This is how D. Lénard met Samuel Dvorín (Hoffman) and probably this is where Lénard's testimony was produced. This can be corroborated by the dedication to S. Dvorín (Hoffman), written by Lénard in his own handwriting and dated 26 May 1943.¹⁵⁴

It follows from other sources that on 8 June 1943, D. Lénard was imprisoned in the Jewish labour camp in Sered', where he was kept with about 1,000 other Jews until February 1944. On 13 February 1944 he escaped from the Sered' camp.¹⁵⁵ Subsequently Lénard aimed for Hungary but came back after a few months. In the above-mentioned letter of 11 August 1944, sent to his sister in Sweden, Lénard requested her to send him letters to an address of his friends in Žilina. In a veiled form, he described his fate and that he had escaped from former Poland. He also hinted that his parents had been deported, too. He gave the names of some relatives in Hungary and informed her in a roundabout way that they, too, had been deported to the former territory of Poland.¹⁵⁶ Thus, it is clear that he witnessed the Hungarian deportations, which started in May 1944, but managed to escape them by returning to Slovakia. Other Jewish immigrants from Slovakia did the same at that time.

We do not know of the fate of D. Lénard in the summer of 1944. It is not known how he experienced the beginning of the occupation of Slovakia by German troops and the outbreak

¹⁵³ The same Samuel Dvorín (Hoffman) testified about the police concentration centre at the trial with Anton Vašek: "At the end of August 1942, the Police Directorate in Bratislava authorized the establishment of a police concentration centre for Jews in the former building of a Jewish retirement home. The establishment of the concentration centre was obtained by the social department of the Jewish Centre. It was to serve as an intermediate station for those Jewish citizens who had been released from police custody, or from the Centre for State Security, or from the Regional Court after serving a sentence or after the end of detention awaiting trial, as the case may be, and who were not freed but were to be sent to concentration centres or labour camps. The Jewish Centre argued that such persons needed to be equipped with the necessary clothes, shoes and personal items, and unified with their families, and only after that they would be transported together to the labour centres. They also argued that the feeding of the prisoners would only present an unnecessary burden for the prison management. The Police Directorate accepted this justification and consented to the establishment of the concentration centre with the provision that all costs related to the management and catering should be borne by the Jewish Centre. The leaders of the Jewish Centre, however, were in reality interested in buying time so that they could intervene in order to liberate the detainees, either through the interventionists at the Jewish Centre or by mobilizing acquaintances and helpers of the detainees. There was also the intention, when no help was possible to the detainee, to actually equip him with the necessary items." SNA, f. NS, Tŕud 17/45, Anton Vašek, Testimony of S. Hoffman.

¹⁵⁴ As mentioned, D. Lénard was arrested in Bratislava on 7 February 1943. The fact that he was unexpectedly arrested in his room at Hotel Rudolf and subsequently held in custody is important for establishing when Lénard actually wrote the testimony. I have originally thought Lénard could have written the document we have available only after arriving at the Jewish concentration center (*Sústredovňa Židov* on Göring Street) and handing it over to Samuel Dvorín (Hoffman). The rather vague entry of the historian Ladislav Lipscher seems to confirm this: "he wrote a written report and passed it to Hoffman." In line with this assumption, Dvorín (Hoffman) also told Lipscher that two copies of the same testimony were made. Although I consider the appearance of the testimony in May 1943 as the most likely option, we need to take into account the possibility that it was written a little earlier (but not earlier than in November 1942), kept somewhere, and handed over to S. Dvorín (Hoffman) by Lénard in May 1943. For more details see: MA, A. 1564. Record of the interview with Samuel Dvorin by Ladislav Lipscher, Dedication of the testimony; Cf HLA VINKA, J. "Dôjst' silou-mocou na Slovensko a informovať" ..., pp. 45-46.

¹⁵⁵ SNA, f. MV, box 573, 162-1-1944; SNA, f. MV-PT Sered' files, card No. 1173.

¹⁵⁶ Letter by D. Lénard of 11 August 1944. Personal archive of Orly Anshel Peled.

of the Slovak National Uprising. Traces of D. Lénard reappear only in November 1944, when the Uprising had been suppressed militarily and the Nazis and their Slovak collaborators tried to detain all the Jews in Slovakia. According to German plans, Slovak Jews who were caught had to be either deported from Slovakia or executed on Slovak territory.¹⁵⁷

Finally, D. Lénard fell into the hands of Nazi troops. He was detained on 23 November 1944 in Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš (today Liptovský Mikuláš) and from there he was escorted back to the camp in Sered'.¹⁵⁸ At that time, the camp was controlled by the German SS (under the command of Alois Brunner), becoming the centre for the organization of transports of Jews from Slovakia.

The man who had escaped the commander of Majdanek, Karl Koch, and the commander of the labour camp in Sered', Imrich Vašina, did not escape Alois Brunner. D. Lénard was deported from Sered' in a transport, which reached Sachsenhausen concentration camp on 6 December 1944. On 14 December 1944 in Sachsenhausen, one of the oldest and largest concentration camps of the Nazi Third Reich, Lénard was appointed to work for the Heinkel company, which manufactured fighter planes even in this final stage of the war. Several days later, on 18 December 1944, he was transferred to work for the Siemens concern.¹⁵⁹

Soon it transpired that Sachsenhausen was not to be the last concentration camp in which D. Lénard was incarcerated as the Third Reich was nearing its end. In January 1945, he was deported to the Buchenwald concentration camp where he arrived on 31 January. He received an inmate number 85 936.¹⁶⁰ On 2 February 1945, he was transferred to the Ohrdruf camp, an auxiliary camp to Buchenwald, which was denoted as "Buchenwald-Sonderbauvorhaben III]" (or "S3" or "Buchenwald/S3") within the framework of the complex of camps falling under the main camp of Buchenwald.¹⁶¹

The Ohrdruf auxiliary camp (SIII) was established by the Nazis in November 1944 at a distance of approximately 48 kilometres from the main camp at Buchenwald, south of the city

¹⁵⁷ For more details, see HLAVINKA, Ján – NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Seredi 1941 – 1945*. Bratislava : Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2009.

¹⁵⁸ SNA, f. Koncentračný tábor v Seredi 1944-1945, Evidenčný denník.

¹⁵⁹ USHMM, Häftlingspersonalkarte Dionysz Lenart, Buchenwald, 1.1.5.3./ 6471824_0_1 and 6471824_0_2 /ITS Digital Archive.

¹⁶⁰ USHMM, Arrivals book (numbers) of prisoners (men) - Book 1 - 82, No. 1 - 139538, 1.1.5.1./ 5270224/ITS Digital Archive.

¹⁶¹ USHMM, Arbeitskarte Dionysz Lenart, Buchenwald, 1.1.5.3./ 6471826_0_1 and 6471826_0_2/ITS Digital Archive; On the *Arbeitskarte* with the name of D. Lénard it is written "KDO 2/2 S3", meaning he was transferred on 2 February to the auxiliary camp S3. The note "S3" is also given in the records of inmates arriving in Buchenwald (*Zugangsbuch*). See *Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations found in the Archive of the International Tracing Service (ITS)*, (a version of 14 July 2015), pp. 39,214. Available online: <<http://itsrequest.ushmm.org/its/Glossary.pdf>>

of Gotha. It served a single purpose: to provide slave labour (prisoners) for the building of a command centre under Mühlberg Castle. The task of the prisoners was to connect the castle to the railway and dig a tunnel in the adjacent hill, in which a train with Hitler's headquarters (*Führershauptquartier*) could be hidden. It was to become the hiding place for the German high command after their withdrawal from Berlin.

The number of inmates at the Ohrdruf camp increased rapidly within a short period. From 2,500 inmates in November 1944, the numbers grew to 4,500 in December of that year. In March 1945, there were already 11,700 inmates at the Ohrdruf camp.¹⁶² Each morning, following a roll call and the distribution of miserable food rations, prisoners would leave for a cave from which they would carry stones left there by the blasting and continue digging deeper. As there were no safety protections, prisoners often suffered serious injuries or died at the site of the blast. The pace of work was enormous and the SS beat the prisoners brutally.¹⁶³

Sick or injured prisoners were sent to the camp "hospital", or rather infirmary, at the Ohrdruf camp. One of the chronologically last sources testifying to the fate of D. Lénard that I have been able to find is a list from the ambulance station at the Ohrdruf camp in which also his prisoner number (85 936) is given. This list is dated 7 March 1945.¹⁶⁴

According to Abram Korn who survived the Ohrdruf camp as well as a stay in the infirmary, the conditions in it were "deplorable". The barrack where the infirmary was located was actually a horse stable with no windows or beds. Korn testified: "We slept on dirty straw on the floor, with one blanket per person [...] Whenever one of the prisoners died, someone else would take his blanket and any food that he might have." Sick prisoners were sometimes sent to the main camp at Buchenwald.¹⁶⁵

In spite of the fast pace of the work, the Nazis were not able to finish the project at the Ohrdruf camp. At the beginning of April 1945, because the Allies were advancing quickly, they had to evacuate 8,000 – 9,000 prisoners to Buchenwald and in the direction of Regensburg. Before the evacuation, the SS killed hundreds of prisoners who were unable to

¹⁶² MEGARGEE, Geoffrey P. et al. (eds.). *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum encyclopaedia of camps and ghettos, 1933 – 1945*. Bloomington – Washington, D.C. : Indiana University Press. In association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009, p. 402.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 403.

¹⁶⁴ USHMM, Registry of patients in the prisoners' infirmary of the external camp detachment S III Ohrdruf, 7 March 1945, 1.1.5.1./ 5320599/ITS Digital Archive

¹⁶⁵ MEGARGEE, Geoffrey P. et al. (eds.). *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum encyclopaedia of camps....*, p. 403.

walk on foot. Some prisoners were shot dead while others were locked in the barracks kitchen which was then blown up by the Nazis.¹⁶⁶

The Ohrdruf and Buchenwald camps were liberated by American troops in April 1945: the Ohrdruf camp on 4 April 1945¹⁶⁷ and the main camp at Buchenwald on 11 April 1945.¹⁶⁸

There is a source indicating that D. Lénard lived until the camp's liberation. His name appears in the list of survivors of the Buchenwald camp made after the war.¹⁶⁹ It is chronologically the very last known document containing the name of this extraordinary young man from Žilina. It is a source, which was unknown to historians as well as to Lénard's own family for decades. His sister Klára (Rachel) never heard from Dionyz Lénard after receiving the letter of 11 August 1944, and until her death in 2009 she never learned of his fate. Even though the list of survivors may contain errors, it is also possible that D. Lénard lived to be liberated and died afterwards as a result of sickness or exhaustion.¹⁷⁰

Let us now turn to the nature and impact of the information which D. Lénard provided after his escape in his testimony: as far as the content is concerned, the testimony is written in the form of a letter to a friend, to whom D. Lénard describes his deportation, the Majdanek camp, the conditions in the camp, as well as his escape. For conspiratorial reasons, the whole "letter" is signed with another name (Šaňo). Judging only from the content this extensive undated testimony which is available to us must have been compiled sometime between November 1942 and May 1943. The time of the emergence of the testimony is limited by two events: in his testimony, Lénard criticizes the articles by Fritz Fiala, the editor-in-chief of the German language daily, the *Grenzboten*, which were published in November 1942 and misinformed the Slovak public about the fate of the Jews deported from Slovakia.¹⁷¹ The preserved version of the testimony also contains a dedication to the above-mentioned employee of the Jewish Centre, S. Dvorín (Hoffman), dated 26 May 1943.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Evidence of the murder and crimes found by the American troops in Ohrdruf was inspected by several American generals, including Dwight D. Eisenhower and George S. Patton. MEGARGEE, Geoffrey P et al. (eds.). *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum encyclopaedia of camps...*, p. 403.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁶⁹ USHMM, Register of survivors in KL Buchenwald - Belgians and Czechs - (post-war compilations), 1.1.5.1./5355073/ITS Digital Archive.

¹⁷⁰ During several months following the liberation of the camp and its taking over by the American Army, up to 4,700 prisoners of the Buchenwald camp died of serious illnesses contracted at the time of their incarceration. MEGARGEE, Geoffrey P et al. (eds.). *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum encyclopaedia of camps...*, p. 293.

¹⁷¹ It is a report, divided into three articles. The first one appeared on 7 November, the second one on 8 November and the third one on 10 November 1942. For the circumstances under which the report was written, see Michal Schvarc. *Fritz Fiala. Muž ktorý poslužil zlu*, in these proceedings.

¹⁷² The dedication affixed to the testimony is only preserved in the copy deposited in the Moreshet Archive in Givat Chaviva, Israel. Moreshet Archive A.1564.

The testimony was evidently copied from another paper (it can be seen from the numbering “5-6” at one of the pages) and has not been preserved in its completeness. From the original 46-page typewritten material several final pages are missing and some are damaged.¹⁷³

In his testimony, Lénard is evidently trying to describe in the most faithful way possible what he witnessed himself, clearly differentiating from information he only heard. In my opinion, one fundamental fact can be derived from his testimony: Dionýz Lénard witnessed an earlier phase of the crimes. As I have already mentioned, he had escaped several months before the first gas chamber was installed at Majdanek and before the Nazis started killing the Jews with gas. However, and it must be underlined, Lénard saw enough to come to the conclusion that the transports from Slovakia meant death to the deportees, and after his escape he was determined to warn Slovak Jews against them.

How important is the fact that D. Lénard could not have warned against the mass killing by gas? The importance lies in the fact that Lénard, and the persons he warned, may not have been able yet to recognize the full intent of the perpetrators, i.e., to identify genocide. Israeli historian, Gila Fatran, has the following opinion about the impact of Lénard’s testimony: “The testimony represented another piece in the puzzle of news about the situation in the East, which trickled into Slovakia over many months. However, it could not persuade the representatives in Bratislava that a planned and systematic extermination of Jews was going on in Poland”.¹⁷⁴ However, were Lénard’s experience and information not sufficiently alarming for the Jews in Slovakia, even without the findings about the gas chambers (which, furthermore, no one had encountered before)? Is the information that people at Majdanek were dying in scores every day less alarming than the information that people in Majdanek were being killed by gas? For a historian, it is difficult to give a final answer to such questions but it is legitimate to ask them.

The key question is where Lénard’s warnings (information) ended up, when did they reach their destination and what was their impact? Unfortunately, we do not know exactly when and who D. Lénard informed since he had returned to Slovakia before he wrote the testimony which is available to us. It is evident that he provided information about what he had seen to several Jewish as well as non-Jewish people (e.g., Š. Bednár) in Slovakia before he wrote the testimony. In the source itself he argues on several occasions against what he heard from

¹⁷³ 35 complete pages are available, page 36 is destroyed to a large extent, pages 37-42 are missing, pages 43 and 44 have been preserved, page 45 is damaged and page 46 is denoted 45a. In addition, there is one unnumbered page with the names of inmates.

¹⁷⁴ FATRANOVÁ, G. *Boj o prežitie*, p. 265.

people in Slovakia about the fate of the deported Jews and the camps. If we are to believe Š. Bednár, it is quite likely that Lénard was repeatedly disappointed with the reaction of the Jews who lived in Slovakia and had not been deported.

When did Lénard's information reach the illegally active representatives of Slovak Jewry? When did the illegal Jewish Working Group (*Nebenregierung*) learn about his experience?¹⁷⁵ In my opinion, for the time being it is difficult to confirm the hypothesis of the Slovak historian, Katarína Mešková Hradská,¹⁷⁶ that the information about the fate of deported Slovak Jews which was available to Working Group in July 1942 could come from D. Lénard.¹⁷⁷ Why? In July 1942, D. Lénard had just arrived in Slovakia, and his testimony was evidently compiled several months later. Neither K. Mešková Hradská nor anyone else have so far shown a source which would confirm a personal meeting between Lénard and Fleischmannová or any other member of the Working Group in July 1942. Furthermore, Bednár's memoirs hint at a rather negative experience Lénard had contacting the Jewish Centre (let me repeat that, in his own words, they did not want to hear D. Lénard at the Jewish Centre, so he "disappeared"). Lénard, however, may not have spoken with any illegally active employees of the Jewish Centre, who were members of the Working Group. The illegal Working Group was a group of people who acted in secret (it was not an office with a sign on the door). It has to be conceded, though, that information from D. Lénard could have reached members of the Working Group in another way: from Jews who had talked to him (let us recall that according to Bednár, Lénard had spoken to some of them in Žilina), rather than directly from him. However, in my opinion the claim by K. Mešková Hradská still requires some further research.

We know that at least one member of the Working Group, Rabbi Armin Frieder, read Lénard's testimony which is available to us today, and inscribed his own comments on it. A fragment of the testimony is included in his diaries. However, Frieder does not mention Lénard by name, and in the book edition of his diaries compiled by a relative he refers to the author of the testimony as an "unknown young Jew from Central Slovakia, from the vicinity of Sv. Kríž nad Hronom, a city on the Hron River."¹⁷⁸ At the same time, it states that the

¹⁷⁵ It was a group of illegally active representatives of Slovak Jews. Among its members were Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, Gisi Fleischmannová, Rabbi Armin Frieder, Andrej Steiner, Tibor Kováč, Willi Fürst and Vojtech Winterstein. For the establishment of the Working Group (*Nebenregierung*), see FATRANOVÁ, G. *Boj o prežitie*, p. 206.

¹⁷⁶ See the article by K. Mešková Hradská in these proceedings.

¹⁷⁷ HRADSKÁ, Katarína (ed). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3. Listy Gisely Fleischmannovej (1942-1944)*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Židovská náboženská obec, 2003, p. 17.

¹⁷⁸ FRIEDER, Emanuel. *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi During the Holocaust*. New York : Holocaust Library, 1990, p. 95.

testimony was 36 pages long. This number of pages is actually included in the diary.¹⁷⁹ Thus it is evident that Frieder did not know the identity of D. Lénard and probably he did not have the whole testimony at his disposal. The 36 pages which Rabbi Frieder read and modestly commented upon are identical to the 36 pages of a more complete copy of the testimony stored in Moreshet Archive¹⁸⁰, which, as I have already mentioned, could not have been written earlier than in November 1942, and likely came into being only in May 1943.

If the Working Group learned about D. Lénard's testimony only from the testimony written in November 1942 at the earliest, the testimony could not have influenced their activity during the first wave of deportations which was suspended on 20 October 1942.

The life story of Dionýz Lénard, a young Jew from Žilina, is the story of a person who fought all his life and never gave up. In spite of the material need his family was wrestling with, this poor Jewish boy first fought to build a homeland for Jews in then-Palestine, and to fulfil his dream and become an artist. When the HSLŠ regime and Nazism intervened in his life and the lives of his family, he fought an admirable fight for his own survival and for the survival of other Jews. He escaped, warned other Jews, and escaped again. He escaped from Majdanek, went through prison in Bratislava and the labour camp in Sered'. He crossed the border to Hungary and back and after the Uprising had been suppressed he went into hiding. Even his last journey through Sered' to Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald was a great struggle for survival.

The Case of Leo (Ladislav) Junger

The man known to historians mainly for his testimony at the trial before the National Court as "Ladislav Junger" was originally called Leo Junger, and he is listed as "Ladislav Junger" only

¹⁷⁹ Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), Jerusalem, M5/193. Pages 1-35 of the testimony plus a page with the names of the prisoners.

¹⁸⁰ The fragment of Lénard's testimony, stored in the Yad Vashem Archives, was for many decades attributed to "an unknown young Jew". In 1961, the Israeli historian Livia Rothkirchen, a pioneer in the research on the Holocaust in the Czech lands and Slovakia, published its Hebrew translation. The testimony was also published in 1980 in Polish, still without identifying the author. Meanwhile scholars identified the author of the testimony as D. Lénard. In an extended form, Lénard's testimony (a copy of which is in the Moreshet archives) was subsequently published in Polish and German. In Slovak, this document has been made available as part of the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial research project, namely in a book written by myself and entitled "*Dôjst' silou-mocou na Slovensko a informovať' ...*" *Dionýz Lénard a jeho útek z koncentračného tábora Majdanek*. ROTKIRCHEN Livia. *The Destruction of Slovak Jewry. A Documentary History* (hebrejsky). Jeruzalem: Yad Vashem, 1961; HEIM Susanne – HERBERT, Ulrich – HOLLMANN, Michael – MÖLLER, Horst – PICKHAN, Gertrud – POHL, Dieter – WALTHER, Simone – WIRSCHING, Andreas (eds.): *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933 – 1945. Band 9. Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941-1 945*. Mnichov : Oldenburg Verlag, 2014, Dokument 88, pp.309-322.

in several sources written after World War II. He was born on 3 May 1911 in the village of Repedea in what is now Romania, and his parents Jakub and Hana Junger moved with the whole family to Eastern Slovakia in the same year. The family then settled in Sabinov. Leo's father was a carter¹⁸¹ and together with his wife they brought up Leo and eight other children in Sabinov. The Junger family was one of poorer Jewish families there.¹⁸²

In Sabinov, Leo Junger completed four years of primary school, two years of council school and then he helped his father. Later the parents decided he should become a shoemaker. He learned the shoemaking trade sometime between 1926 and 1929. After completing his apprenticeship in Sabinov he tried his luck in Užhorod where he lived and worked as a shoemaker's assistant until 1932. Compulsory military service in Kežmarok followed and after its completion he came back to Sabinov.¹⁸³

There L. Junger met a young girl, a daughter of a local railway employee, who was not Jewish. When in October 1938 the Hlinka Slovak People's Party came to power in Slovakia, their first son was only a few months old.

The Junger family began to feel the antisemitic policy of the new Slovak regime already in November 1938. In the process of the forceful eviction of Jews from Slovakia, which started on 4 November 1938 on the orders of the Prime Minister, Jozef Tiso, both Leo Junger's parents and several siblings were evacuated. They were included in the operation because they still had Romanian citizenship in 1938.¹⁸⁴ Like hundreds of other Jews, Leo Junger's relatives also returned to Slovakia after the operation had been halted.¹⁸⁵

We have no detailed information about the fate of L. Junger during the first years of the Slovak State. We only know that he fell under the definition of a "Jew" and so the anti-Jewish measures of the regime applied to him. In 1940 officials in Sabinov made life difficult for him under the pretext that he did not have Slovak citizenship.¹⁸⁶ When, in 1942, the administrative build-up to the deportations of Slovak Jews started, Leo Junger was listed as a "shoemaker's assistant" in the List of Jews of the Sabinov District.¹⁸⁷

L. Junger was included in a deportation list in May 1942, which was the time when the attention of Slovak authorities responsible for the deportations of Jews focused on the

¹⁸¹ ABS, KP 258/11, Biography.

¹⁸² WIEDERMANOVÁ, Oľga – FROHMAN, Walter – BAZLEROVÁ, Soňa. *Sabinov a jeho Židia*. Prešov : DAH, 2008, p. 107; ABS, KP 258/11, Biography.

¹⁸³ ABS, KP 258/11, Questionnaire.

¹⁸⁴ SNA, f. Krajinský úrad, box 309, 2000/1938.

¹⁸⁵ SNA, f. MV, box 189, List of Jews, Sabinov District.

¹⁸⁶ WIEDERMANOVÁ – FROHMAN – BAZLEROVÁ, Soňa. *Sabinov a jeho Židia*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁷ SNA, f. MV, box 189, List of Jews, Sabinov District.

territory of Eastern Slovakia. At that time almost every day the commissioners of Department 14 of the Ministry of the Interior, as well as local commissions of officials and regime members with special squads of Hlinka Guards and gendarmes would organize a transport of Jews from a district town in the Šariš-Zemplín County. Leo Junger was included in the transport which was to deport the Jews from Sabinov, scheduled to leave on 22 May 1942. As was the custom in Eastern Slovakia, also in Sabinov on the day of the deportation the Guardsmen and gendarmes concentrated the Jews destined for transport in one place. Leo Junger allegedly addressed the Chief District Officer in Sabinov, Ján Kapralčík, and asked him to take him out of the transport. A few days before, on 15 May 1942, the Assembly of the Slovak Republic enacted a constitutional act on the resettlement of Jews, which stipulated that the Jews who lived in marriage with a “non-Jew” were to be exempted from the deportations.¹⁸⁸ Leo referred to the non-Jewish descent of his spouse and the baptism of their children. The Chief District Officer, however, refused to exclude L. Junger from the deportation and did not relent even when Junger’s spouse begged him.¹⁸⁹

L. Junger, together with approximately 1,000 other Jews, was deported on 22 May 1942 to the territory of the General Government. The transport went through Žilina, where food supplies were loaded, and then it was directed out of the country. As was the custom, the Nazis took the transport over in Zwardoń. We are informed about the course of events as well as about other details of the deportation from the testimony of another Jew from Sabinov of unknown identity, who escaped from the General Government in the spring of 1943 and gave testimony in Slovakia, in which it is written: “At the border, German security /SD/¹⁹⁰ took us over according to numbers: men stood at roll-call at the station while women were counted in the cars. After a journey of 2-3 days we were unloaded at Rejowiec – Lubelski. During the whole journey we suffered from a terrible lack of water, we only received water twice during the whole journey. We received no food but we had enough food with us.”¹⁹¹

In Rejowiec the Jews deported with this transport were put in the ghetto which has been mentioned above. In the ghetto, as in other locations in the Lublin District, the original local Jewish inhabitants had been incarcerated, but before the arrival of transports from Slovakia the Nazis had murdered most local Jews.

¹⁸⁸ Constitutional Act No. 68/1942 Sl. z. *Slovenský zákonník*.

¹⁸⁹ WIEDERMANOVÁ – FROHMAN – BAZLEROVÁ, Soňa. *Sabinov a jeho Židia*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁰ It is the *Sicherheitsdienst*, SS Secret Service.

¹⁹¹ YVA, M5/193. The testimony of an unknown Jew.

In the above-mentioned testimony of an unknown Jew from Sabinov from 1943 it is written: “Jews from Rejowietz were evacuated [...] so that from the old Jewish inhabitants we found only 300 souls in the ghetto. In addition there were about 60 Jews from the Protectorate there and a few women from Nitra /Slovakia/, whose transports had been evacuated from Rejowietz in the meantime.”¹⁹² According to the same witness, a few days after the arrival of the transport with the Jews from Sabinov, other Jews from Slovakia (from Stropkov and Humenné) also arrived in Rejowiec. At the turn of May and June 1942, there were approximately 3,000 Slovak Jews in Rejowiec.¹⁹³

The Jews incarcerated in the ghettos of the Lublin District were kept in appalling hygienic conditions in overcrowded quarters with minimal food. So it was in Rejowiec. The quoted testimony of an unknown Jew says the following about the living conditions in Rejowiec: “Part of former Jewish homes was allotted to us as apartments. There was very little space, so that 20 – 25 people lived in one room 3x4. For 8 days no one cared about us. There was no surveillance. Disorder beyond description reigned. No one cared about nourishment either.”¹⁹⁴ Such conditions prevailed in other ghettos of the Lublin District as well.

Only some of the Jews imprisoned in the ghetto were used for work. The Nazis allowed only young and strong men to work. Fathers of families with more than three children were not allowed to work. Poor but still at least relatively regular food was given only to those who worked.¹⁹⁵

Leo Junger was among those who did work. After the war, he testified about his living conditions in Rejowiec as follows: “we received coffee without sugar for food and when we came to work we were given millet soup with no grease”.¹⁹⁶ After a few weeks of hard labour, the moment came which prompted Junger to escape. It was a talk with a certain foreman of Ukrainian nationality who revealed what had happened to Jews who had worked on land improvement in the past. Junger testified about this: “I asked the Ukrainian foreman about the people who had started these land improvement works, and he told me they were Polish Jews. When I asked him where were these Jews today he told me they had been shot dead, having been forced to dig holes for themselves first, and then they had been shot to the back of their necks. Therefore, I decided to escape from Poland.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ SNA, f. Národný súd, Tnľud 17/46 Anton Vašek. Testimony of L. Junger.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Junger escaped from the Rejowiec ghetto after about five weeks of imprisonment. According to the few short sentences which he said or wrote about his escape after World War II, he went to Slovakia on foot, like D. Lénard, and crossed the border between Slovakia and the General Government near Zborov in Eastern Slovakia.¹⁹⁸

After his arrival in Slovakia, he allegedly went to Sabinov and hid in his own home. However, someone recognized and reported him; he was arrested and deported to the Concentration Centre in Žilina.¹⁹⁹

This is where L. Junger gave important testimony. According to his own statement, as well as the testimonies of other witnesses, in the Concentration Centre in Žilina he was interrogated by Anton Vašek, the Head of Department 14 of the Ministry of the Interior. He said the following before the post-war National Court, at the trial of Vašek, about the imprisonment in Žilina and the interrogation by Vašek: “In Žilina I was completely isolated from other Jews for about five weeks, so that I could not tell them about the different acts, about what was going on with the Jews in Poland. I saw the defendant [A. Vašek – comment by J. H.] in the camp about five weeks after my arrival, but then he was a bit more bulky and had sports clothes. A Guardsman [member of the Hlinka Guard – comment by J. H.] who led me from the prison at the point of a bayonet told me that I was going to see the Ministerial Council, Mr Vašek. I note that when I came to the camp in Žilina they immediately took everything from me and put me in jail. The next day I was interrogated and they beat me badly, probably because I had escaped from Poland. Then they beat me with rubber and I fainted three times and they would always pour water on me. Having beaten me, they put me back in prison. I came to Žilina at the end of July and I was incarcerated there for five weeks, during which time there were no transports. After five weeks a Guardsman came and brought me for interrogation to the defendant. The defendant asked me when I had been deported, what we did in Poland, what kind of food we had and how they treated us.”²⁰⁰ Junger told Vašek about the conditions in the ghetto as well as about his talk with the foreman from whom he learned about the murder of Jews in mass graves.²⁰¹ Vašek denied any interrogation of Junger before the National Court. However, another witness, Imrich Staněk, who had been present when Junger had been interrogated by Vašek, unequivocally confirmed the interrogation and added some more details about it.²⁰² The National Court, also on the basis of these testimonies,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ SNA, f. Národný súd, Tnľud 17/46 Anton Vašek; ABS, KP 258/11, Questionnaire.

²⁰⁰ SNA, f. Národný súd, Tnľud 17/46 Anton Vašek. Testimony of L. Junger.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² SNA, f. Národný súd, Tnľud 17/46 Anton Vašek. Testimony of I. Staněk.

concluded that Vašek had known about the murder of Jews in Poland in the summer of 1942.²⁰³ Stanek also said that after Vašek, D. Wisliceny also interrogated Junger.²⁰⁴

It is very difficult to find out today about the fate of L. Junger after his imprisonment in Žilina and interrogation by Vašek. I was able to find only very limited sources on the subject, and all of them stem from the post-war period. They are personal questionnaires and career assessments which usually only briefly mention that period of Junger's life, mostly without any dates. The only available document with a date (even if probably not exact) is Junger's typewritten biography of 10 July 1950, in which it is stated that Junger was deported to Poland on 22 May 1942 and which continues as follows: "After my return on 3 August 1942, I was in hiding until 1943 and then I obtained illegal documents and worked for the company Nahalka továrň na obuv (a shoemaking company) in Sp. Nová Ves. In 1943 I was caught by gendarmes in the factory of the company I mentioned. An unknown gendarme was to escort me to an extermination camp. I escaped before the escort. Then I was in hiding until 1944. In 1944 I went to the mountains to join the Partisans, in the Kyrov commando. In the East until the front passed...."²⁰⁵ In some personal questionnaires and CVs, less detailed formulations are found, in which, probably due to the distance of time, and sometimes lack of space, there are various deviations. For instance, in another questionnaire from 1950, within the limited space of the form, Junger only wrote that he had escaped from the camp in Žilina and joined the Partisans.²⁰⁶

It is not quite clear from the various sources if Junger escaped from the camp in Žilina or from a transport in which he was to be deported again after having been interrogated by Vašek.²⁰⁷

Even if my research yielded some new findings in the case of L. Junger, in my opinion the reconstruction of his life in the period 1939 – 1945 requires further detailed archival research. As far as the period after 1945 is concerned we know that in 1945 L. Junger joined the Communist Party. Shortly after the liberation he worked in Sabinov, first as an assistant and later as a tradesman, having obtained a trade certificate for trade with butter. In the first post-war years he testified before courts in retribution trials (both against A. Vašek and against the

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ SNA, f. Národný súd, Tnľud 17/46 Anton Vašek. Testimony of I. Staněk. The mention of his being interrogated by D. Wisliceny also appears in WIEDERMANOVÁ, O. – FROHMAN, W. – BAZLEROVÁ, S. *Sabinov a jeho Židia*, p. 107.

²⁰⁵ ABS, KP 258/11, Questionnaire of 10 July 1950. Original version.

²⁰⁶ ABS, KP 258/11, Questionnaire.

²⁰⁷ SNA, f. SNA, f. Národný súd, Tnľud 17/46 Anton Vašek. Testimony of I. Staněk. Cf. with the testimony of L. Junger and the paper WIEDERMANOVÁ – FROHMAN – BAZLEROVÁ, Soňa. *Sabinov a jeho Židia*....

District Chief Officer from Sabinov, J. Kapralčík). Sources from this period list his name as “Ladislav”. He also attempted to supplement his education and completed two years of council school.

After two years of carrying out his trade, in 1949 Junger terminated his business and took employment as a warehouse keeper. In the same year 1949 he changed his last name to “Junek” (Leo Junek) and shortly thereafter volunteered for service in State Security where he was accepted.²⁰⁸ He graduated from a 1st degree school in Nové Město nad Metují, with a not very good rating, and from 10 March 1950 he served as a member of the State Security, first in Bratislava and later in Eastern Slovakia.²⁰⁹

His career in the Communist secret police, however, did not last long. At the beginning of 1953 he was arrested, interrogated and released from service due to testimony by several secret collaborators of the State Security whom he had managed within the framework of his involvement in the “Zionism” case and who testified that he had talked them out of carrying out assignments against Jews, revealed details about the activity of the State Security, criticized his superiors and them for reporting Jews, etc. In 1953 he had been originally sentenced by the Lower Military Court in Bratislava to 6 years in prison but after appeal his judgment was partially repealed and for “jeopardizing professional secrecy” he was sentenced to eight months in prison, which he had already served.²¹⁰ In addition, his membership in the Communist Party was cancelled.²¹¹ Regarding his further fate I was only able to find that he lived in Eastern Slovakia where he died in 1986.²¹²

Both escapees, D. Lénard as well as Leo (Ladislav) Junger were undoubtedly among the first who provided information about the murder of Slovak Jews deported to the territory of the General Government. Both witnesses can be assessed as individuals who testified neither about the gas chambers nor about the industrial killing machine (in which they differ from A. Wetzler, R. Vrba, C. Mordowicz or A. Rosin). However, both of them brought quite vivid and shocking testimony two years earlier, when the deportations were still going on. Regardless of the absence of information about the gas chambers, the information was a warning to the endangered and served to expose the perpetrators.

²⁰⁸ ABS, KP 258/11, Oath of a member of the National Security Corps of 16 November 1949.

²⁰⁹ ABS, KP 258/11; Archív ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB S Štb Košice, Vyš.zväzok .archívne číslo 486.

²¹⁰ A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB S Štb Košice, Vyš.zväzok .archívne číslo 486, Arrest warrant; ABS. KP 258/11 HR assessment of 15 January 1953, Copy of the Sentence of the Supreme Military Court Bratislava No. T 205/53.

²¹¹ ABS, KP 258/11. Official record.

²¹² WIEDERMANOVÁ, O. – FROHMAN, W. – BAZLEROVÁ, S. *Sabinov a jeho Židia*, p. 108.

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Archív bezpečnostných složek (ABS), Prague,
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<<http://itsrequest.ushmm.org/its/Glossary.pdf>.>

The President, the Government of the Slovak Republic, and the Deportations of Jews from Slovakia in 1942

Martina Fiamová, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

The build-up to the deportations and the attitude of the central government bodies

What was known in Slovakia as the “solution to the Jewish question” became a major point on the internal political agenda of the governing Hlinka Slovak People’s Party (*Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana*, HSĽS), which had manifested anti-Jewish attitudes long before an independent Slovakia was established in 1939. Even though the relationship of the government to the Jewish minority was clear, the process by which the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party regime (referred to also as the “Ľudák regime”) planned and carried out their persecution went through different phases during the existence of the Slovak Republic.

Several internal as well as external political factors influenced its dynamics.

The systematic exclusion of Jews from political, cultural, social and especially economic life through a series of laws and regulations bitterly affected tens of thousands of them and left them destitute. The Aryanization or liquidation of Jewish businesses as well as the prohibition on carrying out various professions led to far-reaching social changes within the Jewish community. By the end of 1941, the representatives of the governing powers had succeeded with their targeted anti-Jewish policies in producing a mass of poor citizens devoid of any means of subsistence, depending on assistance from a state that considered them enemies. Neither the efforts of the government to find a solution by enacting a Jewish obligation to work nor V. Tuka’s proposal to create a ghetto²¹³ were successful.

However at the end of 1941 an opportunity arose for the Slovak government to “get rid of the burden”. The opportunity arose with the deportations of Jews from the territory of Nazi Germany. It can be inferred, although mainly on the basis of an assertion by the Minister of Interior, Alexander Mach, that the question had been discussed by top Slovak representatives already in October 1941 during Jozef Tiso’s visit to Hitler. Alexander Mach mentioned the

²¹³ “Jews who were stripped of their trade licenses or sacked are wandering around en masse without work. I intend to colonize the Jews and therefore I request that the local office call representatives of the Jewish religious organization and discuss with them the possibility of building a city for approximately 10 000 souls with some industry as a source of income for the inhabitants. Jewry must build the city by its own means.” KAMENEC, Ivan – NIŽNANSKÝ, Eduard (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939 – 1945)*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2003, Document 20, p. 82.

visit at the meeting of the State Council on 26 March 1942: “We were soliciting German help also in regard to the Jewish question. With the help of Germans we want to get rid of the Jews. We took the most important step when we were at the Headquarters with the *Führer*. We had the opportunity to talk with Himmler and, in the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, we answered the question ‘how many Jews are there in your country’ by saying there were 90,000. They told us they would need them. In the regions where we stayed there are areas just like two or three of our counties and there are no villages, which were – which are destroyed. And the land is good. This is how the idea was suggested. We did not let it fall asleep.”²¹⁴ It was in the autumn of 1941 that the issue of the resettlement of Jews, Slovak nationals as well as other Jews from the Reich’s territory (including the Protectorate and the Ostmark) to the “ghettoes in the East” was discussed. State undersecretary of the Nazi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Martin Luther, in a letter dated 17 November 1941 requested the German ambassador in Bratislava, Hanns E. Ludin, to ask the Slovak government if it agreed to deportations or if it would take its own Jews. After notifying the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs²¹⁵, already on 4 December 1941 Ludin was able to inform Berlin that the Slovak Government “agrees in principle with the transfer of the Jews of Slovak nationality to the ghettoes in the East, emphasising, however, that justified Slovak claims to movable and immovable assets of these Jews not be jeopardized.”²¹⁶

In spite of extensive research in domestic and international archives, it is still difficult to reconstruct exactly the course of the preparation of deportations of Jews from Slovakia in January and February 1942. Even the question of whether it was the Slovaks who offered their Jews to the Germans or rather the Reich that requested the Jewish force has not yet been conclusively answered. According to some sources, after Germany had requested an increase in the quota of the Slovak labour force in the Reich, the Slovak Government plenipotentiary, having agreed with the presidiary head of the Ministry of the Interior, Izidor Koso, offered 20,000 Jews as compensation to the representative of the Reich Ministry of Labour, Sager.

²¹⁴ KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 57, p. 172.

²¹⁵ On 21 November 1941 the councillor of the German Embassy, Dr. Ringelmann, notified the MZV “that the German Government had decided to carry out as quickly as possible the transfer of all the Jews from the Reich and the Protectorate to the East. The German Government requests an immediate answer, in particular with regard to the large number of Jews of Slovak nationality established in the Protectorate, as to whether the Slovak Government wishes these Jews to be transferred together with other Jews from the Reich to the East or if it wishes to have these Jews transferred to Slovakia.” KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 42, p. 136.

²¹⁶ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 4. Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie (1939 – 1945)*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Židovská náboženská obec, 2003, Document 27, p. 112.

(German advisor for the “solution of the Jewish question” in Slovakia, Dieter Wisliceny, confirmed this offer in his testimony after the war).²¹⁷

However, Martin Luther wrote in August 1942 that a lack of labour was constantly arising after the Jews had been transported from the Reich. Therefore, the Germans requested 20,000 Jewish workers from the Slovak Government. (“The Reich Main Security Office, acting on the instruction of the *Reichsführer-SS*, turned to the Foreign Office to request that the Slovak Government provide 20,000 young, strong Slovak Jews for transfer to the East. The German Embassy in Bratislava [...] was informed in the same way.”)²¹⁸ In any case, Luther wrote on 16 February 1942 to Ambassador Ludin in Bratislava that: “further to the measures of the final solution of the Jewish question in Europe, the German Government is ready to take over 20,000 young, strong Slovak Jews and transfer them to the East where the need for work efforts persists. Please notify the local Government hereof. As soon as an agreement in principle from the Slovak Government is submitted, the advisor for the Jewish question will clarify details in person.”²¹⁹ A few days later Ambassador Ludin replied that the Slovak Government “took to the proposal enthusiastically”²²⁰ and that preparatory works could begin. According to Luther’s above-mentioned report of August 1942: “The *Reichsführer-SS* responded to the enthusiastic approval by the Slovak Government by proposing to also transfer the rest of the Slovak Jews to the East, thus making Slovakia free of Jews [...] The Slovak Government agreed to transport all the Jews without any pressure from Germany and the President personally agreed to the transport. The report was submitted to the office of the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, the Slovak Government agreed to pay 500 RM for each evacuated Jew”.²²¹

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vojtech Tuka and Alexander Mach, informed the government of the deportations at its meeting on 3 March 1942. Tuka simply communicated that Reich government officials “showed willingness to take all the Jews, laying down as a condition the loss of citizenship.” Minister Mach referred to the issue in detail, “which was noted by the Government”.²²²

As we ponder the question of the build-up to the deportations from Slovakia in the spring of 1942, the role of the State Council must be mentioned, even though it did not possess decisive

²¹⁷ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. *Politika antisemitizmu a holokaust na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945* (in print).

²¹⁸ NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, Document 65, p. 211.

²¹⁹ Ibid., Document 28, p. 113.

²²⁰ Ibid., Document 29, p. 114.

²²¹ Ibid., Document 65, pp. 211-212.

²²² KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 47, p. 142.

legislative or executive powers in the state. On the other hand its individual members held important positions in the Government as well as in the Assembly. On 6 March 1942, V. Tuka appeared at its meeting and said: "The Jewish question should be solved gradually by resettling them into the territory of the Ukraine. They have already designated where they should be located. The Jews, by leaving the territory of our State, will cease to be nationals of the Slovak Republic. They will be able to take food for 14 days." At the same time he mentioned that the Slovak Republic was obliged to pay 500 RM for each Jew and defined the time frame for the deportations as between March and (probably) August 1942. The State Council also simply took note of the announcement and did not deal with it any further.²²³ However, it would be wrong to assume that the preparation for deportations started only following these announcements. The preparatory work had in fact been in progress for several weeks by then. It was organized mainly by the ("Jewish") Department 14 of the Ministry of the Interior and the gendarmerie, the Ministry of Transport and Public Works (the railway department), the Central Economic Office, the HSL'S, the Hlinka Guard or *Freiwillige Schutzstaffel* and the public administration bodies.

For instance, already on 12 February 1942 the Ministry of the Interior had ordered the compilation of a list of all Jews in Slovakia and by the decision of the same office of 21 February, a "presentation" of all Jewish men and women aged 16 to 45 was to be made by the end of the month. The Ministry of the Interior also issued several decrees aimed at facilitating the organization of the resettlement. Already on 25 February 1942 Jews were limited in their freedom of movement and one day before the first transport left Slovakia, on 25 March, the Ministry limited all travel by Jews. The preparation of deportation trains started on 5 March and district authorities received the first guidelines relating to deportations on 12 March 1942. At the time when the first transports with young people were leaving it was already clear that soon it would be the turn of all the Jews, without distinction. The presidium of the Ministry of the Interior informed the Ministry of Transport and Public Works that an important change had resulted from a meeting about the transport of Jews, held between the head of the Department 14, Gejza Konka and the German "advisor" Wisliceny. Wisliceny announced that "he had received an order from Berlin that after 4th of April of this year, programmed and organized transports were to include family members, i.e., not only the Jews able to work but also their family members."²²⁴

²²³ KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 50, p. 147.

²²⁴ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 6. Deportácie v roku 1942*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2005, Document 117, p. 201.

On 26 March 1942, the State Council discussed the deportations again. Within the discussion a proposal was read, put forward by its member, Ján Balko, asking whether “it was in line with the ethical and moral principles of the Constitution to deliver abroad also baptized Jews, i.e., Christians, in the same way as unbaptized Jews?” He elaborated on the economic impact of the deportations (“If we are to resettle the Jews, let us request, as compensation, the release of our workers from the Reich, who we are missing at home and whose wages encumber our balance of payments with the Reich. If such a solution were not possible we would put Jews to work at home in labour camps to compensate with their cheap labour for the expensive labour which is missing at home”). In this context however he saw the Jews mainly as a means to “fill the large gap in the national economy” of the Slovak Republic. Noteworthy is his comment as to whether the agreement between Slovakia and Germany on the deportations of Jews was concluded as an international treaty (“according to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, such a convention should be concluded by the President of the Republic, or his plenipotentiary”) as well as the response by A. Mach, a member of the State Council: “You lawyers, you quibble with words. We will put it in order on the basis of international law later. What is important is to win the war. It is also a matter of political prestige – to show our ability, even without the Jews, to stand our ground in every area. I note that I will submit it to the Prime Minister, for the Germans play into our hands in everything. When they see that we want a piece of paper we will receive it. This is not something I would emphasize. It is important to have that law on the solution of the state citizenship issue. It is already before the Assembly. I would just ask you not to set it as a condition. At no price would we stop this action. I ask the distinguished State Council to agree to these measures which we are taking and to take note of these words.”²²⁵

Noteworthy as well are statements by other members of the State Council. Karol Mederly did not agree with the separation of families (“Not one Catholic Christian could bear responsibility for this before his own conscience. [...] We would run counter to our consciences. I agree, let the Jews go, but in a properly organized manner.”) At the same time, he commented on the necessity of regulating deportations by an international treaty (“Let the Government arrange the issue in accordance with international law. If a country asks for these Jews and we want to give them, then a proper international treaty should be signed between these countries.”) He also drew attention to the “pitfalls” of depriving the Jews of their citizenship: “We will deprive them of Slovak citizenship but no one else might receive them.

²²⁵ KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 57, pp. 153-175.

As soon as the war is over, this must be dealt with. Otherwise all of them could come here, which is what we don't want. I recommend to the Government to consider it and make arrangements according to international law.”²²⁶

Another participant in the discussion, Ferdinand Klinda, was aware that the deportations would result in a loss to the local economy but he said: “On the other hand, if we consider that this is not a purely economic question, that in the words of the Prime Minister we have the last and only chance to get rid of the Jews, we have come to the conclusion that even if they are needed today, which in the current perspective means a certain sacrifice, even so [...] when there is such a chance, all the Jews should be sent gradually to one place. Having said this we underline that allowances should be made for certain, most important economic issues.”²²⁷

Alexander Mach summarized the attitude of the State Council: “each member of the State Council who spoke about this matter has said that we should get rid of the Jews, only in such a manner that we could stand before history and, therefore, do it according to natural law. Mr. Vice-President of the Assembly was right, however, when he said that at a time like this we cannot always adhere strictly to the letter of the law. I admit in this context that it was not possible to take into account all these legal regulations in every aspect.” After the debate was over, the State Council finally decided to ask the President of the Republic to either grant or reject the petitions of baptized Jews for exemption in the near future, “so that district authorities and the public are clear about who should and who should not be taken to the resettlement action.” The State Council also decided to recommend to the Government to take into account economic interests when selecting Jews for resettlement.²²⁸

Thus it is evident that at the beginning of 1942, preparation for the deportations in Slovakia was running without any major impediment and that any effort to stop it failed because of the unwillingness of Slovak officials to see Jews as anything but evil-doers and enemies of the nation. However, already at that time voices were raised which, regardless of any knowledge about the real meaning of the German “final solution”, understood that Jews in the East were threatened with physical liquidation (for instance information in this sense, relating to the situation at the Eastern front, was received by the Vatican chargé d'affaires, Giuseppe Burzio, from Bishop Michal Buzalka and sent from Bratislava to the Vatican on 27 October 1941.) During the build-up to the deportations, Burzio intervened with the Prime Minister, V. Tuka.

²²⁶ Ibid., Document 57, pp. 153-175.

²²⁷ KAMENEC, I. – NIŽNANSKÝ, E. (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 57, pp. 153-175.

²²⁸ Ibid., Document 57, p. 178.

On 9 March 1942 he wrote in a report to Cardinal Maglione, Vatican Secretary of State: “A report was leaked that the mass deportation of all Slovak Jews to Galicia and the Region of Lublin was imminent. I am told that this cruel plan is the work of the Prime Minister, Mr. Tuka, acting in agreement with the Minister of Interior, without any pressure from the German side, which even requested from Slovakia 500 Marks and food for two weeks for each deported Jew. On Saturday I visited the Prime Minister who confirmed the report, defended the legitimacy of the measure vehemently and dared to tell me (he who boasts so much of his Catholicism) that he did not see anything inhuman or antidemocratic in it. The deportation to Poland of 80,000 people, who would be left at the mercy of the Germans, is a death sentence for a large portion of them.”²²⁹ The Vatican tried to stop the deportations also with a written note on 14 March 1942²³⁰, and Ambassador Karol Sidor arrived in Slovakia from Rome and met with Tiso and Tuka, but all these steps were in vain.

Constitutional Act No. 68/1942 Sl.z. on the Resettlement of Jews

At the same time the Government tried to provide a legal footing for the deportations. Therefore on 24 March 1942 Alexander Mach proposed at a Government meeting a draft constitutional law on the resettlement of Jews which was sent to the Assembly of the Slovak Republic for debate a day later. In a letter to the Assembly presidency the Government requested that the bill be discussed as soon as possible “because deportations are going to start in a matter of days”. The first transport of the deportees left from Poprad on the very same day. For the time being, the Government based the transports on Section 22 of Government Regulation 198/1941 Sl. z. (the so-called Jewish Codex).²³¹ In essence, the draft constitutional law proposed by the Government made it possible to deport all the Jews from Slovakia, depriving them of state citizenship; however the Assembly did not discuss the bill in March. The president of the Assembly, Martin Sokol, said after the war of the adoption of the law: “I did not put the bill up for discussion immediately and tried to achieve the necessary rectification by negotiating with Tuka.” When his efforts proved to be of no avail he realized “that it was necessary to discuss the Government proposal in order to prevent a greater

²²⁹ NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Politika antisemitizmu a holokaust ...* (in print).

²³⁰ “The State Secretariat wants to believe that the report does not correspond to the truth because it holds it impossible that in a country which wants to abide by Catholic principles such regrettable measures with so painful consequences for many families could be applied.” NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 6...*, Document 44, p. 147.

²³¹ “Section 22. (1) Jews aged 16 to 60 years, in as far as they do not carry out work according to Sec 38 of the Defence Act, shall be obliged to carry out work ordered by the Ministry of the Interior. (2) The Ministry of the Interior shall provide for work opportunities or organize the work as the case may be and define working conditions for the persons mentioned in paragraph (1)....” *Slovenský zákonník* 1941.

evil.”²³² The law was finally adopted by the Assembly on 15 May 1942 and made it possible to deport the Jews from Slovakia, legalizing retroactively the deportations, which had been going on since the end of March and at the same time “protecting” a certain part of the Jewish community from evacuation.²³³

The Government dealt with the question of deportations also in the ensuing months, for instance at a Government meeting on 29 May 1942, where A. Mach agreed with the Minister of Education, Jozef Sivák, that Jewish teachers would be deported only after 31 July 1942; in June the Government discussed the draft law on the limitation of adoptions of Jews, which was approved in the Slovak Assembly on 2 July 1942. The passing of the law was motivated by an effort to prevent people from helping Jews by adoption, which would spare them from deportations.

M. Sokol returned to the resettlement of Jews as well as the anti-Jewish laws of the previous months at a joint meeting of Assembly Committees on 3 September 1943: “The unconstitutionality of the Codex was known to the Assembly already during the discussions on the law on the resettlement of the Jews but the political situation of that time made it impossible to do anything else. The proposal for the resettlement of the Jews had been in the drawer for several months and only when it became obvious that the Jews would be resettled anyway, even without a legal basis, did the Assembly start discussing the proposal so as to prevent a worse development.” At the same meeting, several deputies voiced critical opinions on previous anti-Jewish legislation. Eugen Filkorn drew attention to the fact that by empowering the Government to solve the Jewish question in 1940 the Assembly had made itself jointly responsible for Government actions, “and it is therefore its duty to seek a way to rectify them”. Deputy Orlický spoke in a similar way (“The Government went farther in defining the notion of a Jew, and the Assembly did not react”). He proposed a revision of the Codex and the exclusion of issues which “do not belong there and are subject of condemnation”.²³⁴ It remains to be noted that during the time when the cited laws were being adopted similar views were not heard in the Assembly (and not only there).

²³² NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Politika antisemitizmu a holokaust ...* (in print)

²³³ “(1) The provisions of Sec 1 shall not apply to: (a) persons who became adherents of the Christian faith by 14 March 1939 at the latest, (b) persons who live in a valid marriage with a non-Jew, concluded before 10 September 1941. (2) Persons who were or will be awarded liberation by the President of the Republic pursuant to Sec 255 of Regulation No 198/1941 Sl. z., as well as doctors, pharmacists, veterinarians, engineers and other persons, if the competent Ministry considers it necessary to retain them in Slovak public, technological or economic life, shall not be resettled as long as the decision on their liberation or retention remains in force. (3) The exemption from resettlement (para. 1 and 2) shall also apply to the wife (husband), minors and in the case of Paragraph 1 (a) also to the parents of the exempted persons”. *Slovenský zákonník* 1941.

²³⁴ KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 116, pp. 278-279.

German pressure for the implementation of resettlement and payments for the deportees

Research conducted so far has clearly shown that as far as the deportations in 1942 are concerned the Slovak Government was subject to no pressure or threats to deliver up Slovak Jews. The single case in which the Germans expressed displeasure at the fluency of the process is worth noting. It concerned the cancellation of a transport of Jews scheduled to depart on 24 June 1942 for Lublin, because the number of exceptions issued by different Ministries was higher than the number of yellow cards of the Ministry of the Interior.²³⁵ The German Ambassador, H. E. Ludin, then (on 26 June) reported to Berlin: "The evacuation of Jews from Slovakia has currently come to a standstill. As a result of Church influence and the corruption of individual officers, about 35,000 Jews received a special card which allows them not to be evacuated. Resettlement of Jews is quite unpopular among large sections of the simple Slovak population [...] However, the Prime Minister, Tuka, still wishes to continue resettling the Jews and asks for support in the form of sharp diplomatic pressure from the Reich."²³⁶ The State Secretary of the Nazi Ministry of the Interior, Ernst v. Weizsäcker, replied to Ludin in the sense that "you can provide the diplomatic support requested by Prime Minister Tuka by mentioning to President Tiso at an opportune occasion that the stopping of the resettlement of Jews, and in particular the exclusion from evacuation of the 35,000 mentioned in the cable, would cause all the more surprise in Germany as the collaboration of Slovakia in the Jewish question hitherto has been strongly appreciated."²³⁷ State Undersecretary of Nazi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, M. Luther, also recalled the situation in his report on the solution of the Jewish question in Europe in August 1942: "Prime Minister Tuka, however, wishes to continue resettling the Jews and therefore he requested support

²³⁵ Anton Vašek, head of the ("Jewish") Department 14 of the Ministry of the Interior, wrote to A. Mach in a report about the cancellation of the transport: "the issuance of decisions within the meaning of Section 2 of Constitutional Act 68/1942 Sl. z. was transferred to the relevant Ministries and the Ministry of the Interior is obliged to respect them, within the meaning of the decision of the inter-governmental meeting. These decisions of the relevant Ministries do not arrive all at once but on a daily basis... I have established on the basis of the decisions issued so far by the relevant Ministries that the number of decisions issued was higher than the number of yellow cards issued by the Ministry of the Interior so far; as a consequence of this, in the absence of the revision mentioned, the transports had to be stopped." NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 6...*, Document 339, pp. 419-420.

²³⁶ NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, Document 59, p. 151.

²³⁷ Ibid., Document 60, p. 152.

through diplomatic pressure from the Reich [...] The Ambassador was empowered to grant the diplomatic support requested [...]"²³⁸

Another question, often debated in the context of deportations, is the commitment of the Slovak side to pay Germany 500 RM for each person evacuated from the country. The first mention of the obligation to pay for deported Jews is known from 6 March 1942, when the Prime Minister, V. Tuka, informed the State Council about it at a meeting. The German side justified the fee with the costs of accommodation, food, clothing and retraining of the evacuees. Even though the Slovak Republic agreed to the request, it did not make much effort to pay the millions to Germany. Shortly before the deportations started in March 1942, M. Luther called on Ambassador Ludin to initiate the necessary steps with the Slovak Government, since the first transports were soon to leave the country.²³⁹ However Vojtech Tuka requested the conclusion of an international treaty on the deportation of Jews in which it would be clearly stipulated that Germany would not return the Jews to Slovakia and would make no claims to their property. This was however without prejudice to the obligation to pay 500 RM for the deportees.²⁴⁰ Although such treaty was never signed the Germans responded with two written notes. In the first one, of 29 April 1942, they requested the Slovak Government "to transfer to the Reich Government the fee of 500 RM for each Jew taken over by the Reich." In the second one, of 1 May 1942, they confirmed the above requests of Tuka. As the negotiations on the payment did not proceed quickly enough the Nazis exerted pressure on the Slovak side at the beginning of June proclaiming that Slovak workers who worked in Germany would be remunerated from the money Slovakia would pay for the

²³⁸ Ibid., Document 65, p. 212. Finally, in August 1942, the Government took a decision regarding the "smooth operation" of the transports: "[...] in the interests of orderly economic life..., instead of determining dates for the next transport, in the future a transport should be dispatched as soon as 1,000 Jews have assembled at the centre in Zilina." KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 86, pp. 226-227.

²³⁹ "The head of Security Police and SD Berlin notes the following in his letter of 18 March 1942 in relation to the taking over of Jews from Slovakia. It is expected that within the framework of this action, Slovakia will transfer to the Reich 500 RM for each Jew taken over. This one-off amount of 500 RM will be used to cover the costs of accommodation, meals, clothing and retraining of these Jews. It has to be taken into account that, based on experience, the work output of Jews who have not yet been retrained is very low and the effects of retraining appear only after some time. It is expected that current Jewish property in Slovakia will be used (over Ks 3 billion). It has been confirmed that not only will the Slovak side have no objections to these measures but it will take responsibility for the payment of the amount..." NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, Document 31, pp. 115-116.

²⁴⁰ On 18 April 1942 H. E. Ludin informed State Undersecretary M. Luther: "Today Prime Minister Tuka has proposed to me the conclusion of an international treaty on the evacuation of Jews from Slovakia in the sense that (a) the Reich will under no circumstances return the evacuated Jews to Slovakia and (b) the Reich will make no claims to the property of the evacuated Jews who have held Slovak citizenship. This is, of course, without prejudice to the agreed rule on the payment of 500 (five hundred) Reich Marks. I have replied to Mr. Tuka that the Reich undoubtedly will not want to conclude a state treaty in this respect. However, I am of the opinion that, having received authorization, I will be able to affirm his request in writing in the form of a verbal note." NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, Document 43, p. 133.

evacuated Jews.²⁴¹ In a written note of 23 June 1942 Slovak Government finally confirmed its readiness to pay 500 RM for each deported Jew (“the Slovak Government is ready to pay the Reich Government the amount of 500 RM for each person of Jewish race with Slovak citizenship who was or is to be transferred from the territory of Slovakia to the territory of the Reich. [The Slovak side] reserves the right to give notification of the method of payment of the remaining amount later.”)²⁴² Several German-Slovak meetings on the subject took place in Bratislava in the summer and autumn of 1942 at which the Slovak side tried to obtain a reduction in the fee from 500 to 250 or 300 RM. The treaty, which included the obligation to pay the full amount for the deported Jews, was finally concluded only in September 1942 at the fifth joint session of the German and Slovak Government Committee (10 to 30 September).²⁴³

The method of acquisition and transfer of the funds is described in a letter from the Ministry of Finance²⁴⁴ to the Government Presidency of October 1942: “According to the Slovak-German international treaty [...] the Slovak Government is obliged to pay the German Reich for each Jew, who is a Slovak citizen, 500 RM as reimbursement of the costs related to the resettlement of Jews. The agreed method of payment of the above-mentioned resettlement costs was that the Ministry of Finance would immediately deposit Ks 200 million in cash at the Slovak National Bank and, if the required amount does not come from the proceeds of formerly Jewish, now nationalized, assets the rest would be paid by treasury bills.”²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ M. Luther on 8 June 1942 to the German Embassy in Bratislava: “Further to cable No 640 of 1 May of this year, please remind the Slovak Government to send a declaration about its willingness to pay 500 Reich Marks for each Jew taken over from Slovakia as soon as possible. The German side intends, after accounting for the receivable, to use the remaining amount to cover the wages of Slovak workers, which currently cannot be paid, so that the corresponding amount of approx. 25,000,000 RM (Information Centre) will be earmarked for subsistence to family members of the workers living in Slovakia.” NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, Document 54, p. 146.

²⁴² NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, Document 58, p. 150.

²⁴³ The Protocol from the 5th joint session of the German and Slovak Government Committee cites the following on the subject: “31. Resettlement of Jews ... it was agreed that the Slovak Government would pay to the German Government 500 RM for each Jew of Slovak nationality who was or will be taken over to the Reich territory. The German Government renounced in the notes mentioned any further claims to the assets located in Slovakia of Jews taken over to the Reich. In order to carry out the measure foreseen in the note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 23 June 1942 regarding the question of payment, the German Embassy in Bratislava shall immediately contact the competent Slovak authority to establish the number of Jews already taken over by the Reich and the ensuing amount payable by the Slovak Government. The Slovak Minister of Finance shall see to it that the amount so established as well as future payables, the amount of which shall also be agreed upon between the German Embassy in Bratislava and the competent Slovak authorities, shall be made available to the *Reichsführer-SS*.” NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 4...*, Document 70, p. 219.

²⁴⁴ On 15 October 1942 the Ministry of Finance first requested from the Ministry of the Interior the information on how many Slovak Jews had been taken out of the country. The Ministry notified them on the same day that the State had resettled 57,628 Jews to date. KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Documents 93, 94, pp. 234-235. NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Politika antisemitizmu a holokaust ...* (in print).

²⁴⁵ KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 96, pp. 236-237.

The fact that Slovakia indeed paid the required amount is confirmed by a letter from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 21 December 1943 which states: “The Slovak State was to pay Ks 200 million to the Warenkonto on account of the costs related to the resettlement of Jews from Slovakia. The Ministry of Finance paid the amount of Ks 200 million to the Warenkonto and the Slovak National Bank, in accordance with the above-mentioned agreement, transferred the equivalent in RM to the respective German authorities.”²⁴⁶

Jozef Tiso

Jozef Tiso, the Prime Minister and later the President of the Slovak Republic, was certainly responsible for the systematic deprivation of rights and influence of the Jewish community in Slovakia from the beginning of the existence of the independent state. J. Tiso’s political power and his priestly authority played an important role in the development of anti-Jewish policy as well as in its perception by the public. Tiso stated: “Everything we did in the Jewish question ... was in line with love towards our people. It is about providing for undisturbed national development.” President Tiso used the same arguments also in the case of the deportations in 1942. A wide range of persecutory measures could be included under the motto of love of the nation.

Already at the beginning of March 1942, at the time of the build-up towards the deportations, J. Tiso received two memoranda from Jewish circles. On 5 March 1942 the Yeshurun Association of Jewish Religious Communities and the Central Office of Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia jointly petitioned him. In a letter from the Rabbis’ Association, which was personally delivered to Tiso by Rabi Armin Frieder in Bánovce nad Bebravou, the following words can be found: “This measure can be called by any name in the law and justified by any motives; it remains a fact that under the circumstances it is tantamount to the physical liquidation of Jews in Slovakia.”²⁴⁷ Tiso, however, did not respond to these petitions. Negative reactions from the Vatican also remained without answer from him.

²⁴⁶ KAMENEC, I. – NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (eds.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 2...*, Document 121, pp. 292-293. The payment of the full amount is also confirmed by the minutes of the 13th meeting of the Review Committee of the Slovak National Bank in Bratislava of 14 February 1945: “... For each deported Jew the State was obliged to pay 500 RM. There was no basis for it, except an optical one.” NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Holokaust na Slovensku 6...*, Document 489, p. 571.

²⁴⁷ NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 6...*, Document 19, p. 118.

The President's attitude is clearly reflected in the exceptions, which were in his purview pursuant to Sec 255 of Government Regulation No. 198/1941 Sl. z. They could be full or partial and could be revoked at any time. I do not think that J. Tiso saw any contradiction in the fact that by granting an exception he was in fact protecting a member of the Jewish minority against the State of which he was the President and against the system that he himself was establishing. Tiso was convinced of the righteousness of the anti-Jewish course and he felt no need to protect Jews (as such). The exceptions in his eyes were a reward for the usefulness of the individual, for his renunciation of his faith, for the possibility to make financial profit out of him (considering, for instance, the amount of the fee required by the Office of the President for the granting of exceptions). In most cases, a Presidential exception was only granted to Jews who had converted before 14 March 1939. Tiso granted over 1,000 exceptions, which protected also the closest family members (i.e., approximately four to five thousand Jews).²⁴⁸ We learn the following from the post-war process with the head of the Office of the President, Dr. Anton Neumann: "The President retained the decision-making power; he ordered me to make a list of applications for liberation received, in which there were different fields according to his wishes, detailing who the applicant was, where he was from, what was asking for and why. He always had this list presented to him and wrote his decisions in it in his own hand. From case to case the President ordered the Office to collect from different Ministries lists of people who were in the public interest, in particular in the economic interest, from the perspective of the given Ministry... when granting the liberation, an appropriate fee for the official act was claimed, commensurate with the individual's property, which was fairly high, from Ks 1,000 up to half a million."²⁴⁹

It is difficult not to mention the famous appearance of Jozef Tiso at a religious and national celebration in Holíč in August 1942 where he said: "Self-love is God's command and this self-love commands me to get rid of everything which hurts me, which endangers my life[...] It would have been much worse had we not risen in time, had we not purged ourselves of them. And we have done this by God's command: Slovak, get rid of your evil-doer, throw him off!"²⁵⁰ In this manner, Jozef Tiso "explained" or defended to the public the deportations,

²⁴⁸ According to statistics compiled at the Ministry of the Interior and dated 17 March 1944, J. Tiso granted 577 direct and 251 indirect (together 781) exceptions to that date.

²⁴⁹ NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. *Politika antisemitizmu a holokaust ...* (in print).

²⁵⁰ Čo nám patrí, z toho nikomu nič nedáme. In: *Slovák*, 18 August 1942, p. 3.

which were slowly coming to an end. It is irrelevant whether he spoke as a priest or as the President at that moment, since in his case, the two positions are difficult to separate.²⁵¹

Conclusion

The forced resettlement of the majority of the Jewish community from Slovakia to concentration camps and ghettos “in the East” from 25 March to 20 October 1942 was the climax to the systematic persecution of the Jews by the Slovak State (however, a strong anti-Jewish course in the policy of the governing Slovak regime had been obvious already from autumn 1938). The possibility of deporting Slovak Jews represented for the Government an “ideal solution” to the less and less manageable social situation in which the Jews found themselves at the end of 1941. Otherwise the State would have had to expend a significant amount of money to ensure the survival of the very people it had marginalized and pushed into poverty by its own measures.

Although it was V. Tuka and A. Mach who were the most engaged of Government officials in negotiating with Nazi Germany, political responsibility for the deportations rests with the whole Slovak Government as well as the Assembly and the President, J. Tiso. Voices which drew attention to the inhuman character of the action or criticism based on the economic “disadvantages” of deportations remained unheard or were deliberately ignored.

Thus, in 1942 the local political representation managed to get rid of about 58,000 people, its own citizens, who in 57 transports ended up in Auschwitz (19) and the Lublin District (38) in the territory of occupied Poland. The rest of the Jewish community, people who legally remained in Slovakia, consisted of economically and professionally indispensable people (doctors, veterinarians and engineers). Aside from those granted exceptions, several thousand worked in the Jewish labour camps of Nováky, Sered' and Vyhne (or in the 6th labour battalion). Together with them, their closest family members were also able to avoid deportation.

Periodicals

Slovák

Slovenský zákonník

²⁵¹ In his speech at the National Court he said, in relation to deportations of Jews: “...I had no participation in this and, therefore, I can be assigned no guilt in this respect.” HRADSKÁ, Katarína (ed.) *Jozef Tiso. Prejavy a články (1944 – 1947)*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2010, p. 212.

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NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard *Politika antisemitizmu a holokaust* (in print).

Attempts of the “Working Group” to Save Jews from Deportations²⁵²

Katarína Mešková Hradská, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

The Working Group, an illegally operating offshoot of the state-imposed Jewish Centre (*Ústredňa Židov*), could be considered the only manifestation of active resistance at the time of the deportations of Slovak Jews to concentration camps. The core of the group consisted of certain leading officials of the Jewish Centre. These adherents of various ideological streams – from ultra-orthodox, through Zionists to liberals – were united by a joint purpose: to work for the benefit of the Slovak Jewish community.

There are several theories about the exact date when the group came into being: it was either at the time the deportations began or even earlier as the looming danger was discussed internally at the Jewish Centre. It appears that the Working Group was most likely created quite spontaneously immediately after Arpád Sebestyén was nominated head of the Jewish Centre in May 1941. The growing dissatisfaction of some members of the Jewish Centre with his submissiveness and servility towards the superiors as well as towards the German advisor on the Jewish question, Dieter Wisliceny, was a strong enough impetus for a small group of officials to detach themselves from the centre. The situation forced them to react. At first they organized the rescue of individuals – helping them to flee from Slovakia to Hungary, forging documents. Gizi Fleischmann is known to have intervened on behalf of over 500 refugees on the Palestine-bound ship *Pentscho* and spent efforts in obtaining visas for those who decided to emigrate from Europe. Important branch offices of institutions which cooperated with their central offices in different European countries, including Hungary, also came under the emigration department at the Jewish Centre, headed by Gizi Fleischmann. The Palestine Office in Budapest provided transit visas for emigrants, received inter alia through the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As late as April 1941, Bulgaria allocated about 400 emigration permits; due to problems with the ship however the plans were not implemented. Visa negotiations were partially successful also in Turkey and Syria. In order to remove administrative barriers preventing the smooth processing of transit certificates, it was necessary to open a branch of the Palestine Office also in Bratislava. As the interest in emigration grew, the *Jewish Centre* requested the Central Economic Office (*Ústredný*

²⁵² This study was made possible by grant VEGA No. 2/0133/12-15: Problematika výskumu holokaustu na Slovensku: genéza metodologických a terminologických prístupov.

hospodársky úrad, ÚHÚ) to re-open an office also for the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HICEM), which collected applications for handling the required formalities. Hundreds of people were recorded in order to acquire travel documents and emigration certificates and use the possibility of leaving Slovakia voluntarily before the Government took radical steps to solve the Jewish question.

In mid-March 1942 the head of the ÚHÚ, Augustín Morávek, together with the German advisor, Dieter Wisliceny, visited the Jewish Centre. The leaders of the Centre learned from Morávek that a transfer of Jews to Poland was imminent and that they would be able to build their own settlements there in which they would work.²⁵³ As the first transports were leaving Slovakia for the concentration camps in occupied Poland, activists from the illegal *Working Group* devised a strategy to rescue both those who had already been deported and those who were still waiting for inclusion in a transport. As they worked they also struggled to shed the immense psychological pressure the Working Group had been under ever since they had learned about the looming danger: the need to fight various saboteurs from among Jewish ranks who were known to “work against the good of the Jews” was exacerbating the pressure even more. Their priority was to stop the deportations, which included obtaining funds for the operation of labour camps in Slovakia where the Jews were to a degree safe from deportation. Fleischmann was charged with those tasks. She relied on her contacts with international rescue organizations and she encouraged them not to hesitate with financial assistance as the fate of the Jewish community depended on it.²⁵⁴

The Working Group could have learned in July 1942 – and this is only a hypothesis – that Slovak Jews in Poland were probably beyond help from Dionýz Lénard, a native of Žilina who had been deported to Lublin at the end of March 1942. He managed to get civilian clothes, find a hiding place, wait for an opportune moment and escape from the camp. Through Krakow he arrived in Nowy Targ and from there he came to Slovakia. In an extensive report which he made available to the *Jewish Centre* only with a delay, he described, inter alia, the catastrophic conditions in the Lublin concentration camp. He did not mention mass murder in his report but wrote that Slovak Jews suffered from hunger and various diseases in the camp.²⁵⁵ His report later became the subject of discussions aimed at

²⁵³ HRADSKÁ, Katarína (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 8. Ústredňa Židov (1940–1944). Dokumenty*. Bratislava : Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2008, p. 33.

²⁵⁴ See: HRADSKÁ, Katarína (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3. Listy G. Fleischmannovej. Snahy Pracovnej skupiny o záchranu slovenských aj európskych židov*. Bratislava : Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2003, p. 124.

²⁵⁵ See: ROTHKIRCHEN, Livia. *The Destruction of Slovak Jewry. A Documentary History*. Jerusalem : Yad Vashem, 1961, Document 76, pp. 166-204, as well as HEIM, Susanne – HERBERT, Ulrich – HOLLMANN,

confirming or refuting the claim that the *Jewish Centre* had information about mass murder available and had withheld it in order not to cause opposition of the Jewish public to their deportation. Thus it opened up room for speculation about what the Jewish Centre actually knew about the deportations, what they had published and what they did to prevent the tragedy from continuing.

Owing to the time difference between Lenárd's escape and his compiling and submitting the report, his testimony could not have had any influence on Fleischmann's response to the deportations. She formulated it in a letter she sent on 27 June 1942 to Switzerland to the leading representative of the international rescue organization *Relico*, Artur Silberschein. She stated that since 25 March, 60 transports had left Slovakia. Those able to work were included in labour centres where they carried out hard work and about whom no information was available. Families that could not be considered for work were deported to the Lublin district. *"It clearly follows from the information we have received that the situation of the prisoners is tragic."*²⁵⁶ Fleischmann received this information from her informers: from railroad workers who accompanied transports up to the Slovak-Polish border, from smugglers of food and other goods and from officials in diplomatic services who were connected to various international organizations – they all provided information about the conditions in Poland. Her report, even though it is imprecise in certain data and contexts, is one of the first pieces of information on the tragedy of the Slovak Jews. When she compiled it she asked her allies for financial assistance for labour camps in Slovakia, which she considered a priority at that time. She was well aware that it would be quite difficult to get foreign currency to keep the labour camps operating. Anticipated pressure from the National Bank notwithstanding, she dared formulate the following call and request and sent it to Switzerland: *"Charitable Jewish aid organizations abroad are ready to provide funds in the form of free foreign currency for men and women included with their family members in the working process as well as for maintaining a Jewish hospital or retirement home. The National Bank which shall obtain the foreign currency is obliged to pay the Jewish Centre the equivalent in Slovak Crowns. The money shall not be sent to a blocked account but shall be freely available."*²⁵⁷ This idea of hers was far from reality. The possibilities of international aid organizations were rather

Michael – MÖLLER, Horst – PICKHAN, Gertrud – POHL, Dieter – WALTHER, Simone – WIRSCHING, Andreas (eds.). *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945. Band 9. Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941–1945*. Munich : Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014, Document 88, pp. 309-322.

²⁵⁶ HRADSKÁ, K. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3*, pp. 20ff. See also: Národní archiv, Prague, Archiv Huberta Ripku, 1- 46-7-1, carton 178.

²⁵⁷ HRADSKÁ, K. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3*, Document 1, p. 24.

limited and, as transpired in many cases, any help was also complicated and demanding in terms of implementation.

The activities of the *Working Group* after the start of the deportations concentrated mainly on the German advisor for the solution of the Jewish question, Eichmann's close colleague and personal friend, Dieter Wisliceny.²⁵⁸ The *Working Group* relied on him, thinking that he would be willing and able to intervene on behalf of the Slovak Jews, i.e., that he would speak up with his superior to stop transports not only from Slovakia but later also from other countries where he was active. Wisliceny identified with the role of rescuer easily.

Fleischmann spoke to him personally on behalf of the Working Group, mentioning her ideas about help and it has to be said that she received virtually all his proposals, often uncritically and without reflection, because she identified with them and was excited by them. When the Working Group decided that they would bribe Wisliceny in return for some hope of stopping the transports, Fleischmann immediately supported this proposal put forward by Rabbi Weissmandel. This "economic cooperation" can serve as a good example to characterise the conditions in which the Working Group was acting: restlessly, hectically, in fear and stress, but also with no small amount of naiveté, which in certain cases it was unable to subdue or correct. The efforts to stop deportations with the help of a German advisor prove how in particular Fleischmann relied on this "*good and reliable contact that will not disappoint us*". It also shows how they all believed in the power of money, not noticing (deliberately or simply for lack of time) that with this hard-to-get money (mostly smuggled) Jews were in fact being sold rather than rescued.

The kind of conditions under which Wisliceny agreed to cooperate with the representatives of the Working Group as well as the related complications are nowadays widely known and therefore I will only deal with them briefly. For 50,000 dollars the German advisor was willing to speak to Eichmann on behalf of the Slovak Jews. According to an agreement between him and the Working Group, three transports with 3,000 persons were to be delayed as a goodwill gesture, creating a break of ten days. After the expiration of the time the German advisor was to receive half of the agreed amount. Then another pause of seven weeks was to follow after which the remaining amount was to be paid. The money for the German advisor could under no circumstances arrive in Slovakia legally. It was ultra-orthodox circles in Hungary with which the Jewish Centre as well as the Working Group maintained contacts who smuggled the money in autumn 1942 under complicated circumstances to Bratislava.

²⁵⁸ See more in: HRADSKÁ, Katarína. *Nemeckí poradcovia a židovská otázka na Slovensku. Prípady Wisliceny*. Bratislava : AEP, 1999, p. 133.

Everything was done under top secrecy. Only a few individuals were informed about the enterprise. They succeeded in working in secret also during the following period, for strategic reasons. Therefore, hardly anybody knew that the Bratislava underground organization was connected to international structures with networks ranging from Switzerland through Budapest to Istanbul, devising tactics and looking for ways to organize aid.

The fact that the corrupt Wisliceny at the same time worked on further proposals for the continuation of deportations and submitted them to Vojtech Tuka in August 1942 shows his speculative character, which the Working Group evidently overlooked. They considered the short break in transports (from 1 August until 18 September 1942) as their success, even though in fact it did not happen in fulfilment of the agreement but rather as the result of the interplay of many circumstances. Fleischmann did not understand the seriousness of the situation sufficiently, still relying on her accommodating German advisor. On the day before the first transport after the break she notified Switzerland that on 18 September another consignment (i.e., transport) would leave and in another four days, another transport (both dispatched from Žilina), and again requested from international organizations financial and material aid destined for Poland. At that time more reliable reports from her *Schlichim* were available to her²⁵⁹, conveying testimonies about the situation in Poland on the basis of which she could confirm her conviction that the tragedy of the deported Jews was irreversible. The couriers were bringing negative news. They had just announced the tragic fact that the whole *Generalgouvernement* was void of Jews and that also the Slovak Jews were the victims of industrialized mass murder. Fleischmann was becoming desperate that all her efforts had brought no results. She gradually became the victim of her own imagination. Her letters to Switzerland were more and more depressed and full of despair.

Rabbi Frieder writes in his diary that the envoys mentioned other atrocities as well. With a long delay they brought information about the existence of facilities in the Jews' new place of residence, Belzec, designed to kill people with poison gas. In a letter to rescue organizations from the beginning of December 1942, after the first wave of transports had finished, they confirmed definitively that "information has reached Slovakia about the organized mass murder of Jews on the basis of industrialized and careful planning."²⁶⁰ However it is difficult to state with certainty when the Working Group learned about "industrialized murder" in

²⁵⁹ *Schlichim* (Hebr.) – envoys, couriers. They formed important connections in rescue operations. In certain cases they were Embassy workers who had diplomatic immunity. As such, they operated as connections and spies, visiting different places and carrying reports, letters and money. Also groups of influential orthodox Jews maintained contacts with them.

²⁶⁰ ROTHKIRCHEN, L.: *The Destruction...*, Document 76, p. 194.

Birkenau since – according to the Slovak-Israeli historian, Gila Fatran – at least until September 1943 the Working Group was not aware that Birkenau was an extermination camp.²⁶¹ It is true that Fleischmann wrote in one of her letters that “*the death rate in Birkenau is high, young people lose their lives because of hunger, diseases and often through the use of violence*”, without however specifying the violence more closely.²⁶² The Working Group continued to believe that the Jews sent to work were alive and proposed sending them money and various other forms of aid to improve their living conditions.

After the last transport of the first deportation wave had left (October 1942), the Working Group was tipped off that until the spring of the following year, not one transport would leave Slovakia. Everybody was relieved but the order of Rabbi Weissmandel was: rescue operations must go on without respite. However when they learned that deported Slovak Jews were sent as far as the Bug River, to Belžec and Sobibór, and that they would never see them again, their response was almost immediate: help anyone who can still be rescued. It meant getting the Jews out of Poland to a safer place, seeking children and saving them, sending money to ghettos to improve living conditions and also smuggling money in order to bribe camp commanders and officials.

In mid-1943 the German adviser was still considered by the Working Group one of its most important collaborators, even though he was no longer in Slovakia as Himmler had commanded him to go to Greece. The architect Andrej Steiner also considered him reliable enough to propose to him to help save children from Poland. Wisliceny is said to have responded that it was an impossible mission, but after a few weeks he communicated that it would be possible to carry out the “child action” if “the Jews will be willing to guarantee an extensive amount in dollars and certain deliveries from Slovakia for Germany”.²⁶³

Fleischmann and Rabbi Weissmandel started to hunt for money abroad as well as goods that were to be made ready for transport to Germany. However, Jewish aid organizations, including the American Joint, did not support the initiative, reasoning that “to give the enemy large amounts of dollars is tantamount to aiding the enemy”.²⁶⁴ Wisliceny did not hear about it from Steiner and therefore he is said to have organized a transport of one thousand children from Auschwitz to Terezín, from where they were to be sent via Switzerland to Palestine. The *Working Group* did not receive the requested amount of money from rescue organizations and

²⁶¹ FATRANOVÁ, Gila. *Boj o prežitie*. Bratislava : SNM – Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2007, p. 262.

²⁶² HRADSKÁ, K. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3*, Document 10, p. 67.

²⁶³ Quoted from letters by Andrej Steiner. In: Yad Vashem Archives. Jerusalem M-5/131. The author thanks Siegfried Steiner for making this letter available to her.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

the transport of Jewish children, which had actually arrived in Terezín, changed direction: instead of Switzerland, it went back to Auschwitz and the children's transport was sent to the gas chambers right away. In his post-war testimony Wisliceny defended himself by saying that he was the rescuer of Jewish children but that the Jews themselves, or more precisely the Jewish rescue organizations, did not release the funds for this rescue operation to be successfully implemented.²⁶⁵

Rabbi Weissmandel, thinking that the interruption of transports was due to the negotiations with Wisliceny, came to the conclusion that since bribery had already proved to be the right solution, the Working Group would devise another plan, as bold as the previous one.

Fleischmann, still optimistic, had in mind not only the remaining Slovak Jews but also the European Jews who were to become victims of the tragedy. It is a paradox that the idea of their rescue on the basis of what they called "Europa plan", which was almost exclusively about money, was thought through well but they could not bring it about. Not only because of the absolutely negative attitude of Jewish rescue organizations which refused to solicit and provide the funds but also due to other political reasons. Wisliceny announced to Fleischmann in September 1943 that "by the order of the highest competent persons it has been decided to stop negotiating about the Europa plan"²⁶⁶, to which the Working Group responded by saying that the German officials were not ready to take any fixed obligations. Israeli historian Livia Rothkirchen dismissed these words as a fabrication: the failure of the largest rescue operation of the Working Group had, in her opinion, a different, namely political and personal, background (in this case Himmler).

Fleischmann and her co-workers, she wrote, had spent difficult weeks, they were exhausted but they believed they would find the strength to continue.²⁶⁷ The Working Group focused on sending parcels with food and medicine to the concentration camps. In mid-May 1943 Fleischmann obtained a permit from the Highest Supply Office and from the Ministry of Economy to organize a separate parcel project for deported Jews. Parcels weighing not more than 6 kg could contain clothing (old clothes and underwear) except leather shoes and could only be sent to those whose address was known. About 100 parcels could be sent per week. The recipients in the "resettlement province" were to confirm in their own hand that they took the parcel.²⁶⁸ In 1943–44, thanks to this initiative, thousands of parcels were sent to Terezín

²⁶⁵ The German adviser also cited as a reason for the failure of the operation the decision by the Mufti of Jerusalem, who knew Eichmann and who is said to have foiled the plan. In: Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Police Israel 281.

²⁶⁶ HRADSKÁ, Katarína. *Gizi Fleischmanová – návrat nežiadúci*. Bratislava : Albert Marenčin: 2012, p. 139.

²⁶⁷ HRADSKÁ, K (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3...*, Document 6, p. 57.

²⁶⁸ HRADSKÁ, K (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 8...*, Document 151, p. 316.

but also to Auschwitz, Birkenau, Majdanek and other places. They were joined by so-called charity parcels with food which contained even jam and dried fruit. From Geneva, the Red Cross Headquarters, a consignment with medicine and 110 boxes of condensed milk was successfully sent to labour camps in Slovakia. Fleischmann noted in one of her letters to Switzerland: *“It drives one crazy if you consider that the mass dying continues without end. The reports we received from couriers last week are historically unique. I hardly believe that I will see any of our friends again. Thank you for reporting that you sent clothes, medicine and food parcels but I have so far received no confirmation from the Jewish Social Self-Help (with a headquarter in Krakow – note K. H.) whether these gifts actually arrived.”*²⁶⁹ The fact of the matter is that only a fraction of the parcels sent were delivered because most of the addressees had been killed by then.

It is only natural that the Working Group was closely following developments in neighbouring Hungary, which was occupied by the Germans in March 1944. *“We are all grieved by the fate of our brother Hagar. It is so sorrowful, it is beyond description.”*²⁷⁰ On this account, from the summer of 1944 members of the Working Group started to cooperate with the Budapest Relief and Rescue Committee (*Vaadah l’ezra ve hacalah*), a Hungarian underground rescue organization similar to the Bratislava Working Group. They knew that Hungary was extremely important for Slovak Jews. It was in Budapest that important institutions were headquartered to which Palestinian emigration offices were smuggling entry visas for immigrants, thanks to which also a handful of Slovak Jews reached their new homeland, Palestine.

The incorrigible Fleischmann still thought that Wisliceny, who had become a member of Eichmann’s Budapest commando, would be as “helpful” in Budapest. They made available to the German advisor a list of the most reliable Hungarian Jewish officials, for whom contact with the German advisor was at the same time a major challenge and a great hope. When Reszö Kasztner, a member of the underground Jewish organization, came to Bratislava, he met members of the Working Group, including Fleischmann, Rabbi Weissmandel and the head of the Jewish Centre, Neumann, from whom he sought assistance and advice. The connection between the Working Group and the Hungarian underground was, in spite of difficult circumstances, logical. Kasztner asked the Working Group to help Hungarian Jews, while the Bratislava centre demanded that Kasztner should bear in mind also the rescue of

²⁶⁹ HRADSKÁ, K. (ed.) *Holokaust na Slovensku 3...*, Document 28, p. 114.

²⁷⁰ A letter by Fleischmann of 17 May 1944 addressed to N. Schwalbe. In: HRADSKÁ, K.(ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 3...*, Document 26, p. 109.

Slovak Jews when negotiating with the Germans. When Kasztner returned to Bratislava, this time accompanied by SS-Hauptsturmführer Max Gröson, shortly before the outbreak of the uprising, it was too late: even so members of the Working Group asked the German officer to intervene with his superiors also on behalf of Slovak Jews. Any rescue operation however was unrealistic, in particular because Slovakia had been occupied by the Germans since August 1944. At any rate nothing changed the fact that implementation of the principle that “*he who wants to rescue has to haggle about his own life with the mass murderer*”²⁷¹ had one and only one dimension during the whole period, a purely economic one.

At the end of September 1944 one of the last letters by Fleischmann to Switzerland felt like a desperate cry in the darkness. She drew attention to the danger of a renewal of deportations and for the first time, albeit indirectly, she identified those who were responsible for the fate of the Slovak Jews: from top political representatives up to corrupt high-level Ministry officials who were assembling deportation trains. However she did not mention the name of Wisliceny. She could not free herself from the thought that a person whom she had fully trusted had in essence betrayed her.

In the preceding text I have concentrated deliberately on Gizi Fleischmann, a leading member of the Working Group who was responsible for the organization and implementation of rescue operations. Her sense of responsibility for helping those most in need prevailed over the value of her own life. We cannot glorify her but at the same time I believe we cannot criticize her for not being able to understand in time that she had become a victim of her own convictions regarding the best partner who had the fate of Slovak Jews in his hands. If she wanted to rescue them she had to collaborate with the German advisor. In an atmosphere of tension and fear for the present and for the future, she could not do more.

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²⁷¹ LÖB Ladislaus. *Geschäfte mit dem Teufel. Die Tragödie des Judenretters Reszō Kasztner. Bericht eines überlebenden*. Köln – Wien: Böhlau, 2010, p. 263.

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Fritz Fiala: A Man in the Service of Evil. (An Attempt at a Biographical Study)*

Michal Schvarc, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

Fritz Fiala entered indelibly into the history of the first half of the 20th century in the context of perhaps the most perfidious attempt of the National Socialists to cover up their most horrendous crime, the mass murder of European Jewry. While his name can be found in almost every important work dealing with the subject of the Holocaust, so far no serious historical research has been done on this peculiar and slightly enigmatic person.²⁷² Fiala's name comes up in connection to his role as the editor-in-chief of *Grenzbote*, a German-language daily published in Bratislava, his visit of the camp compound of Auschwitz in the second half of 1942 and the series of false propaganda articles he wrote about the situation of Slovak Jews "in the East".²⁷³ No historian has yet asked the direct question of who Fiala actually was, in what kind of milieu he socialized, what led him to identify with the Nazi regime, why it was he who was chosen, what impact the publication of the report had on his life after 1945 and also what his fate was after the war and during the Cold War.²⁷⁴ It is not easy at all to answer these questions, given the limited resource base and credibility of Fiala's assertions. This notwithstanding, I will try to provide at least a partial answer in this chapter.

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²⁷² For instance, in the Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust there is no entry devoted to this person. See JÄCKEL, Eberhard – LONGERICH, Peter (eds.). *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust. Band I*. Munich: Piper, 1995. Raul Hilberg mentions his name only when quoting Eichmann's letter to the Auswärtiges Amt of 2 June 1943. HILBERG, Raul. *Vernichtung der europäischen Juden. Band 2*. Frankfurt am Main : Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990, p. 789.

²⁷³ See, e.g. LIPSCHER, Ladislav. *Die Juden im Slowakischen Staat*. Munich : R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1980, p. 135. RUBIN, Barry. *Istanbul Intrigues*. New York : Pharos Books, 1992, p. 199. BAUER, Yehuda. *Freikauf von Juden? Verhandlungen zwischen dem nationalsozialistischen Deutschland und jüdischen Repräsentanten von 1933 bis 1945*. Frankfurt am Main : Jüdischer Verlag, 1996, p. 152. LOZOWICK, Yaacov. *Hitlers Bürokraten. Eichmann, seine willigen Vollstrecker und die Banalität des Bösen*. Munich : Pendo Verlag, 2000, p. 176. CESARANI, David. *Adolf Eichmann. Bürokrat und Massenmörder. Biographie*. Berlin : List Taschenbuch, 2012, pp. 214-215.

²⁷⁴ The text by German philosopher and historian, Bettina Stangneth, is a certain exception in this regard. See STANGNETH, Bettina. *Zur Informations-, Freigabe- und Schwärzungs-Praxis des Bundesnachrichtendienstes im Fall der BND-Akten mit Bezug zu Adolf Eichmann*, pp. 13-15. Available online: <<http://kanzlei-partsch.de/de/cjp/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/130622-ASV-20-Stangneth.pdf> .>

From medical studies to a career in journalism

Friedrich “Fritz” Fiala, a native of Vienna (born on 16 March 1906), was born to an ethnically mixed German-Czech white-collar family. While ancestors on his father’s side claimed Czech nationality, Fritz’s grandparents, probably hoping to improve their social status, considered themselves German from the mid-1800s. According to Fiala’s not very credible biography, his father considered himself Czech, and after the breakup of the Habsburg monarchy he left Vienna and offered his services to the new Czechoslovak state in the structures of the emerging Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Trade.²⁷⁵ The father’s departure for Prague caused the breakup of the family. It is not completely clear from available archival sources how Fritz with his mother and two other younger siblings managed under the unstable post-war conditions in the Austrian Republic. Neither is it clear how Fiala paid for his relatively costly medical studies at the University of Vienna. He successfully graduated, yet it remains a mystery why he never managed to work in the medical profession.

Fiala’s stay with his uncle, the well-known Czech sculptor, Albín Polášek, in Chicago became a transfer station on his way to becoming a journalist. It was there that he, in his own words, studied “electro-surgery” at a local university in 1930.²⁷⁶ Aside from his studies, he also wrote minor journalistic articles. His satirical feuilletons on American society caught the attention of the renowned English weeklies *The Sunday Dispatch* and *The Sunday Times* to the degree that they published them, opening the door to his own journalistic career. After his return from the United States Fiala did not go back to Vienna and rather settled in Czechoslovakia where he found a job at the renowned liberal daily *Prager Tagblatt* as a correspondent in Karlovy Vary. While this position did not correspond to his previous socialising in the youth structures of the Austrian Social Democrats, it sheds light on one of Fiala’s main character traits – boundless opportunism. Further confirmation of this is his joining of Henlein’s *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (SdP) after its colossal election victory in May 1935²⁷⁷, a step he tried hard to make light of after 1945, citing the poor financial situation of

²⁷⁵ SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala.

²⁷⁶ A ÚPN, I. správa Zboru národnej bezpečnosti (ZNB), 40194/21. Protocol on F. Fiala’s testimony of 1 April 1955.

²⁷⁷ In the record of the Study Institute of the Ministry of the Interior (MV) of 30 June 1961 there is information that he joined the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront on 5 November 1933. However, F. Fiala mentions it on a list of Deutsche Partei officials with the evident aim of drawing attention to his merits during the nationality struggle (*Volkstumskampf*) in Sudetenland. See Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) Prague, 10-P-181.

his own family.²⁷⁸ At the turn of 1935/36, Fiala was already active as the head of journalists' unions in the SdP and also as an editor in the Karlovy Vary daily *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.²⁷⁹ This initially independent paper was coming more and more under the influence of the SdP, apparently mainly due to Fiala's position in the SdP structures, which resulted, inter alia, in intensified anti-Jewish invective.²⁸⁰ Here lie the roots of Fiala's later extreme, ideologically motivated anti-Semitism.

After the *Anschluss* with Austria in March 1938, F. Fiala became a Reich citizen. In order to continue his journalistic career he had his name registered in the membership list of the *Reich Association of the German Press (Reichsverband der deutschen Presse)* and voluntarily joined Hitler's NSDAP.²⁸¹ All these facts stand in stark contrast to how he tried to mislead the Czechoslovak courts or later Communist State Security officials.²⁸² Nothing speaks for his anti-Nazi views, and the ironic comments he made about the Minister of Propaganda during the visit to Vienna at the end of March 1938 were meant more as a pragmatic lie aimed at earning some trust in the eyes of State Security investigators at the beginning of the 1950s.²⁸³ He certainly had not become a victim of the regime, as he tried to present himself in almost all his testimony after 1945.²⁸⁴ Rather the opposite. He received a *Medal commemorating the 1st October 1938* (known as *Sudetenmedaille*) dedicated to the annexation of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany and was able to continue making his living as a journalist.²⁸⁵ Though he did not live in his native Vienna, Fiala worked in Liberec (Reichenberg) on the daily of Henlein's SdP, *Die Zeit*. As an editor of this paper he had gone through an ideologically oriented three-month retraining course in the *Niedersächsische Tageszeitung* in Hannover at the turn of 1938/39 and thereafter he returned to the seat of the new Reich County. Due to an unspecified

²⁷⁸ SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala.

²⁷⁹ ABS, 10-P-181. A record of the Study Institute of MV of 30 June 1961. Cf. SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala.

²⁸⁰ TESAŘOVÁ, Michaela. *Zánik německého tisku na Karlovarsku v letech 1938 a 1945*. Diploma work. Univerzita Karlova Praha: Fakulta sociálních věd, 2013, pp. 50-54.

²⁸¹ ABS, 10-P-181. A record of the Study Institute of MV of 30 June 1961.

²⁸² SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala. A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/21. Protocol on F. Fiala's testimony of 1/4/1955; 40194/22. Undated translation of Fiala's biography; Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at VI. Department of the Commission of the Interior (povereníctvo vnútra) of 30/10/1946. Štátny archív (ŠA) Bratislava, Okresný ľudový súd Bratislava 1945 – 1947 (OES Bratislava), T ľud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala 19 May 1947.

²⁸³ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/22. Undated translation of Fiala's biography. Cf. Goebbels' diary records of March – June 1938. FRÖHLICH, Elke (ed.). *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. I. Aufzeichnungen 1923-1941. Band 5: Dezember 1937 – Juli 1938*. Munich : K. G. Saur, 2000.

²⁸⁴ He adopted this position in particular as he faced the West German judiciary. Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ) Munich, MB 43/1. Fiala's testimony in criminal proceedings against Friedrich Boßhammer 23 and 24 March 1970.

²⁸⁵ ABS, 10-P-181. A record of the Study Institute of MV of 30 June 1961.

conflict he left for Bratislava in June 1939 and the German-language daily *Grenzbote* became his main employer until the end of 1942.²⁸⁶

Editor-in-chief of the *Grenzbote* and collaborator with the Nazi secret services

At the time of Fiala's arrival in the Slovak capital the daily had existed for 67 years, during which time it changed its political orientation as well as owners several times.²⁸⁷ The last time this occurred was in November 1938 when Vienna's Governor, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, bought the periodical including its debts and donated 51% of its shares to the Nazified Deutsche Partei (DP) under the leadership of Franz Karmasin.²⁸⁸ A radical turn in the political orientation of the *Grenzbote* was manifested not only in the new subtitle *Deutsches Tagblatt für die Karpathenländer*²⁸⁹ but mainly in its open promotion of National Socialist ideology, inflammatory attacks against Czechs and fierce anti-Semitic propaganda. The change in ownership was followed by a purge of the editorial staff. The politically inconvenient Eugen Holý was replaced at the helm by Seyss-Inquart's protégé, Ferdinand Meissner-Hohenmais.²⁹⁰ However, even he did not stay for long in the position of the editor-in-chief. As a representative of political Catholicism (A. Seyss-Inquart was descended from conservative Catholic circles) and an opponent of the National Socialists, Ferdinand Meissner-Hohenmais emigrated to Great Britain at the end of July 1939.²⁹¹ This made it possible for F. Fiala, who had served as F. Meissner's official deputy from 1 July 1939,²⁹² to assume the vacant position of chief editor. In no way was it a coincidence, since unlike his

²⁸⁶ SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala. A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at VI. Department of the Commission of the Interior (Povereníctvo vnútra) of 30 October 1946.

²⁸⁷ RESCHAT, Gertrud. *Das deutschsprachige politische Zeitungswesen Preßburgs. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Umbruchperiode 1918/20*. Munich: Verlag Max Schick, 1942, pp. 43-46, 103-106, 152-155.

²⁸⁸ SCHRIFFL, David. *Die Rolle Wiens im Prozess der Staatswerdung der Slowakei 1938/39*. Frankfurt am Main : Peter Lang, 2004, p. 28.

²⁸⁹ See *Grenzbote*, 24 November 1938.

²⁹⁰ SCHRIFFL, D. *Die Rolle...*, p. 28.

²⁹¹ Národní archiv (NA) Prague, 109-4/341. Hermann's letter to the state secretary at the Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia of 28/9/1939. See also disclaimer of the DP press office. *Slovák*, 8 August 1939, p. 4. ABS, 10-P-181. Record of the Study Institute of MV of 30 June 1961.

²⁹² SNA, Národný súd v Bratislave 1945 – 1947 (NS), Tn ľud 13/1946 – O. Kubala, microfilm II. A 924. Record of the State Secretariat for the issues of the German ethnic group in Slovakia of 23 June 1939.

criticized predecessor, Fiala was perceived by the SS – *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) as a person steeled “in the struggles in the Ostmark and Sudetenland”.²⁹³

Under Fiala’s leadership, the daily, in which A. Seyss-Inquart kept a majority share,²⁹⁴ stopped stagnating, grew in circulation to 7,000 (in 1942 up to 17,000²⁹⁵) and, most importantly, it unambiguously toed the National Socialist political line.²⁹⁶ As the SD Vienna Center could note with satisfaction in the autumn of 1939, the *Grenzbote* has “under Fiala’s leadership become the best-led, best-informed and most topical paper among all Slovak newspapers”.²⁹⁷ However the periodical was not completely problem-free. Reich censorship officials confiscated the part of the circulation destined for Germany several times. At the end of 1941, a three-month ban on distribution was imposed on the *Grenzbote* and the Vienna office of the State Police included it under the promoters of political Catholicism.²⁹⁸ These circumstances could have spelled some trouble for Fritz Fiala, but he certainly was not in danger of being sent to a concentration camp, as he would exaggeratedly claim in his post-war statements.²⁹⁹ Neither was it an act stemming from his anti-Nazi views, which he liked to emphasize after 1945.

On the contrary, F. Fiala was closely affiliated with the National Socialist regime and worked in Slovakia not only as an ordinary journalist. He came to Bratislava mainly with an intelligence mission. Available sources show that he worked not only for the Sicherheitsdienst but also for the NSDAP party office headed by Martin Bormann and for the military counterintelligence organisation, the Abwehr.³⁰⁰ He played a particularly important role in compromising the Minister of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior, Ferdinand Ďurčanský, who

²⁹³ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record group (RG) 242, T-175 (Records of the Reichleader of the SS and chief of the German Police), roll 541, frame 9 414 812-813. Undated record about the German press in Slovakia.

²⁹⁴ A. Seyss-Inquart kept his share in the paper at least until November 1941. See SNA, 116-11-1/219. Karmasin’s letter to A. Seyss-Inquart of 15 November 1941.

²⁹⁵ See RESCHAT, G. *Das deutschsprachige...*, p. 155.

²⁹⁶ SCHRIFFL, D. *Die Rolle...*, p. 29.

²⁹⁷ SNA, Alexandrijský archív, microfilm II. C 985, 9 405 735-736. Goldbach Report of 7 October 1939. Also microfilm II. C 970, 9 383 139-141. IdS Administration Vienna, RSHA of 17. October 1939.

²⁹⁸ SNA, Alexandrijský archív, microfilm II. C 985, 9 405 744. Record of Vienna SD of 11 December 1941; 9 405 748-749. Urbantke Report of Vienna SD (III B) of 16 June 1942.

²⁹⁹ SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala. A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/21. Protocol on F. Fiala’s testimony of 1/4/1955; 40194/22. Undated translation of Fiala’s biography; Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at VI. Department of the Commission of the Interior (povereníctvo vnútra) of 30/10/1946. ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T ľud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala, 19 May 1947.

³⁰⁰ Bundesarchiv (BArch) Berlin, ehem. BDC, RuSHA-Akte Konrad Goldbach, Film RS B5236. Goldbach’s letter to RuSHA of 20/2/1940; R 70 Slowakei/257, Bl. 75. Administration of Vienna SD, RSHA VI of 30 May 1940. Politisches Archiv Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin (PA AA), R 27659. Killinger Report AA (Luther) of 11 August 1940. SNA, Alexandrijský archív, microfilm II. C 932. Several agent’s reports on the political situation in Slovakia.

faced growing German criticism. The Vienna SD was in all likelihood the taskmaster.³⁰¹ In the second half of May 1940, as the internal political crisis in Slovakia broke out in full strength, F. Fiala started bombarding leading Nazi circles in Berlin with memoranda.³⁰² At the end of the month he submitted to the Vienna managing department 14-pages of compromising material on F. Ďurčanský. Two weeks later, as it landed through the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) at the Foreign Office, the main protagonist of the German *Slowakei-Politik*,³⁰³ the end of this ambitious Slovak People's Party politician was only a matter of time. It came under well-known circumstances on 28 July 1940 in Salzburg.³⁰⁴ For his active participation in Ďurčanský's fall Fritz Fiala allegedly won personal praise from Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop.³⁰⁵

Fiala's work for Nazi intelligence agencies did not end with Ďurčanský's involuntary departure from the political scene. Although his contact to Bormann's party office was discovered by the German Ambassador, Manfred von Killinger³⁰⁶, he continued supplying information to it. Fairly extensive reports on the internal political situation in Slovakia in 1941, sent to the NSDAP organizational head, prove this.³⁰⁷ It remains unclear whether F. Fiala also continued collaborating with the SD and military intelligence. He likely did³⁰⁸ but it is impossible to reconstruct the scope of his activities in more detail due to missing sources.

Under Fiala's leadership the *Grenzbote* quickly assumed the profile of an anti-Semitic paper. The editor-in-chief himself set the tone for the anti-Jewish propaganda in his editorials.³⁰⁹ Fiala's post-war allegations that he only obeyed instructions from the Propaganda Office and

³⁰¹ BArch Berlin, ehem. BDC, RuSHA-Akte Konrad Goldbach, Film RS B5236. Goldbach's letter to RuSHA of 20 February 1940

³⁰² NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard a kol. (eds.). *Slovensko-nemecké vzťahy 1938 – 1941 v dokumentoch I. Od Mnichova k vojne proti ZSSR*. Prešov : Universum, 2009, Document 312, pp. 831-832. BArch Berlin, R 142/85, Bl. 113-114. Record of 22/5/1940.

³⁰³ NA Prague, 136-77-1. Letter of the chief of the Security Police and SD (Jost) AA (Habicht) of 16/6/1940.

³⁰⁴ LIPTÁK, Ľubomír. *Príprava a priebeh salzburských rokovaní roku 1940 medzi predstaviteľmi Nemecka a Slovenského štátu*. In *Historický časopis*, Vol. 13, 1965, No. 3, p. 361.

³⁰⁵ NARA, RG 263 (Records of the Central Intelligence Agency), Name File Ferdinand Durcansky. Excerpts from Fiala's interrogation 3–10 September 1944 made on 25 September 1944.

³⁰⁶ PA AA, R 27659. Correspondence between M. von Killinger and M. Luther, 11 and 20/8/1940.

³⁰⁷ BArch Berlin, NS 22/626, 1081.

³⁰⁸ At the end of 1942 the German Ambassador in Bratislava, H. E. Ludin, considered F. Fiala an important man in the SD. F. Fiala tried hard to deny it. See SNA, Alexandrijský archív, microfilm II. C 985, 9 406 785-786. Urbantke's report to Vienna SD (III B) of 7/11/1942. After the war, the former advisor on the "Jewish question", D. Wisliceny, also called him an honorary collaborator of the SD. See HUBENÁK, Ladislav (ed.). *Riešenie židovskej otázky na Slovensku (1943–1945). Dokumenty 3. časť*. Bratislava : SNM-Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 1994, Document 355, p. 236.

³⁰⁹ See, e.g., *Grenzbote*, 17 May 1940, p. 1.

Goebbels' Ministry and had to sign vitriolic articles written by someone else under the threat of repression³¹⁰ sound more than dubious. Preserved sources testify to the contrary. In his efforts to persuade his Nazi masters of his loyalty to the ideology and the regime, he himself took the initiative, often going beyond the framework of issued directives. He was downright animated when he welcomed the adoption of the racist legislation in September 1941 as the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in Slovak political practice.³¹¹ A few months later, at the beginning of 1942, he openly criticized the failure to keep the provisions of the Jewish Codex and demanded strict punishment for "any collaboration with the arch-enemy of our future, the Jews".³¹² In March 1942, for a change, shortly before the start of the deportations, he pilloried the Church, in particular the Protestant church, for mass baptisms of Jews.³¹³ Immediately after the start of the deportations he approved of the measure as the only fitting solution, proclaiming the uncompromising fight "against the Jews until the last one is resettled where their ancestors came from".³¹⁴ And he did not stop there. In August 1942, when the deportations were temporarily halted, F. Fiala strongly urged that the alleged corrupt Jews be sent to transports and all the Jews who were to stay temporarily in the country wear special markings.³¹⁵ At the same time, he proposed a strict control of baptism certificates, of issued work permits and the establishment of a Jewish cadastre with data on their employment and the validity of the work permits on the pages of the *Grenzbote*.³¹⁶

Reportage "With the Jews in the East"

At the time when such strict requirements were published, reports on the fate of the resettled Jews had already reached Slovakia. It was not only the information broadcast by the BBC's European Service³¹⁷ but also the testimony of the first escapees from the transports.³¹⁸ The government, trying to refute the information about the mass murder of Jews, asked the Germans to dispatch a commission that would visit the territories where the Jews had been

³¹⁰ SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala. A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at VI. Department of the Commission of the Interior (poverníctvo vnútra) of 30 October 1946. ŠA Bratislava, OES Bratislava, T Iud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala, 19 May 1947.

³¹¹ *Grenzbote*, 11 September 1941, p. 1; 14/9/1941, p. 1.

³¹² *Grenzbote*, 18 January 1942, p. 1.

³¹³ *Grenzbote*, 22 March 1942, p. 1.

³¹⁴ *Grenzbote*, 29 March 1942, p. 1.

³¹⁵ NIŽNANSKÝ, Eduard a kol. (eds.). *Slovensko-nemecké vzťahy 1941–1945 v dokumentoch II. Od vojny proti ZSSR po zánik Slovenskej republiky v roku 1945*. Prešov : Universum, 2011, Document 94, p. 347.

³¹⁶ *Grenzbote*, 23 August 1942, p. 1.

³¹⁷ CESARANI, D. *Adolf Eichmann...*, p. 214.

³¹⁸ KAMENEC, Ivan. *Po stopách tragédie*. Bratislava : Archa, 1991, p. 191.

deported. The initiative, supported by the Government advisor on the Jewish question, Dieter Wisliceny³¹⁹, as well as Ambassador Hanns E. Ludin, was evidently rejected by Adolf Eichmann, the executive officer of the “final solution”, for most of the deportees had been killed. While A. Eichmann held to his opinion, he decided, apparently after consulting directly with Reich SS leader Heinrich Himmler, to allow a visit of a loyal journalist coming from outside Germany and to use his reportage as an effective counterbalance against the growing number of reports of the physical extermination of Jews. F. Fiala was selected.³²⁰ In my opinion, it was his offensive anti-Semitism, publicly displayed in the *Grenzbote*, together with his connection to Himmler’s SD that played a decisive role in the selection.

Fiala’s journey to occupied Poland remains obscure even now. There are no official documents with a single exception. A scholar can only rely on the post-war testimonies of D. Wisliceny and F. Fiala, which contain many inaccuracies and, in particular as the latter is concerned, are marked by his tendency to exculpate himself and shift the responsibility on to someone else. Later, when D. Wisliceny and A. Eichmann were long dead, Fritz Fiala kept presenting new fabrications to his German investigators, which the Bonn prosecution had no chance of verifying. It did not consider it necessary either because no criminal prosecution was conducted against Fiala – he only appeared as a witness for the prosecution in the proceedings against Franz Karmasin³²¹ and the sometime members of Eichmann’s department at the RSHA IV B 4, Friedrich Boßhammer and Otto Hunsche.³²²

The first comprehensive picture of Fiala’s journey was provided by D. Wisliceny in July 1946. The advisor of the Slovak Government on the “Jewish question” claimed that the initiative had come from F. Fiala himself. In the spring of 1942, during the first weeks of the deportations, the editor-in-chief of the *Grenzbote* asked him if he could visit Jewish labour camps in the “East”. The objective was to be, as F. Fiala argued, to appease unstable public opinion in Slovakia. D. Wisliceny forwarded the proposal to A. Eichmann. The manager of the “final solution” reported back about two months later. In a telephone call to Bratislava he announced that H. Himmler, with Ribbentrop’s approval, had ordered the publication of a

³¹⁹ On D. Wisliceny, see HRADSKÁ, Katarína. *Prípady Wisliceny (Nacistickí poradcovia a židovská otázka na Slovensku)*. Bratislava : AEP, 1999. TÖNSMEYER, Tatjana. *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei 1939–1945. Politischer Alltag zwischen Kooperation und Eigensinn*. Paderborn : Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003, pp. 137-162.

³²⁰ LIPSCHER, L. *Die Juden...*, p. 135. KAMENEC, I. *Po stopách...*, p. 191. CESARANI, D. *Adolf Eichmann...*, p. 214. STANGNETH, Bettina. *Eichmann vor Jerusalem. Das unbehelligte Leben eines Massenmörders*. Zürich – Hamburg : Arche, 2011, pp. 62-63.

³²¹ IfZ Munich, Gm 07.108, Band 1. Fiala’s testimony at the Prosecution in Bonn, 9/3/1970.

³²² IfZ Munich, MB 43/1. Fiala’s testimony in criminal proceedings against Friedrich Boßhammer, 23 and 24 March 1970.

propaganda report on the situation in Jewish camps, which was to serve as rejoinder to the reports of the physical extermination of Jews that were being spread by the Allies' media.

A. Eichmann, the superior of D. Wisliceny, ordered him to make organizational arrangements for the journey. Thereafter D. Wisliceny informed F. Fiala of the conditions of the visit. He agreed to them as well as to Himmler's request that the article be submitted to him for editing.³²³

According to D. Wisliceny the journey took place in the high summer of 1942. They made the first stop at a concentration centre in Žilina and continued the next day to Katowice. In the morning F. Fiala, accompanied by the advisor on the Jewish question and an officer of the local secret police, visited the Jewish ghetto at Sosnowiec where he found staged humane labour efforts by Jews from Upper Silesia. In the afternoon, at about 2 p.m., they visited the camp at Auschwitz, where F. Fiala and D. Wisliceny were expected by the commander of the camp, Rudolf Höß.³²⁴ After a short introduction he guided the visitors, keeping to a carefully prepared scenario. F. Fiala saw clean accommodation rooms, sanitary facilities complying with the common standards of the time, a kitchen and a concert hall where the camp orchestra was busy rehearsing. They continued by car to visit one of the satellite camps. R. Höß took F. Fiala to a laundry where he could talk with women from Slovakia and take a few pictures. The inspection of the satellite camp concluded with a visit to a joinery workshop.³²⁵ The camp management had forced Jewish men from Slovakia to go there and made them participate in the perfidious game of the National Socialists.

F. Fiala in principle confirmed this version to Czechoslovak investigation and justice officials in 1946 and 1947. Attempting to exculpate himself, he denied any trace of his own initiative or closer contacts with D. Wisliceny.³²⁶ Fiala stated that he had been interested in ascertaining the truth of the fate of the deported Jews and had therefore put pressure on Ambassador H. E. Ludin to make such a journey possible. Now he played a self-styled deceived victim who had been shown a Potemkin Village by the Nazis. In order to strengthen his arguments,

³²³ IfZ Vienna, WFT-0010. Wisliceny's report regarding F. Fiala of 26 July 1946. ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T Iud 588/1946. Wisliceny's sworn statement of 15 July 1946.

³²⁴ Höß's biographical notes make no mention of the visit to the camp by Fiala and Wisliceny. See BROSZAT, Martin (ed.). *Kommandant in Auschwitz. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen des Rudolf Höß*. Munich : Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1963.

³²⁵ IfZ Vienna, WFT-0010. Wisliceny's report regarding F. Fiala of 26 July 1946. ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T Iud 588/1946. Wisliceny's sworn statement of 15/7/1946.

³²⁶ D. Wisliceny confirmed that they had been meeting only on official and social occasions. At one of such meetings at the end of November 1940 F. Fiala asked D. Wisliceny for stronger support of the DP in the Aryanization process. He rejected the request and recommended the German minority concentrating on the acquisition of smaller businesses. See SNA, 116-51-2/102. Fiala's undated note.

Fiala made reference to his own criticism of the inhuman conditions in the Žilina concentration centre and even to his personal delivery of a written report to the Prime Minister, Vojtech Tuka.³²⁷ Given that such a document has never been found, it is with all likelihood Fiala's expedient fabrication.

Although Wisliceny's post-war testimony is relatively reliable³²⁸, the story as presented contains certain discrepancies. The most significant one is the date of Fiala's journey. Both the people stated that it had taken place in mid-summer, i.e., in August 1942. However, the only preserved document fundamentally refutes their claim. In Ludin's telegram to the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 1 September 1942 there is only a reference that the journey could be made by 10 September at the latest.³²⁹ Consequently, F. Fiala could have travelled only after that date, or to be exact, after approval from Berlin, which arrived in Bratislava two days later.³³⁰ The destination of Fiala's propaganda journey is to a certain degree unclear, too. D. Wisliceny and F. Fiala stated that they had been to Sosnowiec and Auschwitz but in Ludin's above-mentioned telegram the destination is marked as the Lublin District,³³¹ where most Slovak Jews had been deported in 1942³³² and killed in the Reinhardt Operation.³³³ The location may have changed at the last moment. In September 1942 the killing machine in the Lublin District was running at high speed and H. Himmler and A. Eichmann did not consider it suitable for unauthorized persons to move around the territory. On the basis of available resources it is not quite clear whether F. Fiala saw Sosnowiec and Auschwitz or one of the retaining ghettos in the Lublin District and the Majdanek camp. Unequivocally determining the destination of Fiala's visit is complicated for several reasons. On the one hand, in the last part of his report he published the names of people who had been deported to the Lublin

³²⁷ ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T ľud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala on 19 May 1947. A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at VI. Department of the Commission of the Interior (poverenictvo vnútra) of 30/10/1946. See also SNA, NS, Tn ľud 17/1946 – A. Vašek. Testimony of F. Fiala at the main proceedings against A. Vašek (I thank my colleague, Ján Hlavinka, for making the document available to me).

³²⁸ MICHMANN, Dan. Täteraussagen und Geschichtswissenschaft. Der Fall Dieter Wisliceny und der Entscheidungsprozeß zur Endlösung. In MATTHÄUS, Jürgen – MALLMANN, Klaus-Michael (eds.). *Deutsche, Juden, Völkermord. Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Darmstadt : WBG, 2006, p. 209.

³²⁹ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 4. Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie (1939–1945)*. Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2003, Document 66, pp. 212–213.

³³⁰ PA AA, R 100887. Telegram AA (Luther) to the Embassy in Bratislava of 12/9/1942.

³³¹ NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 4....*, Document 66, pp. 212–213.

³³² NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 6. Deportácie v roku 1942*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2005, p. 84.

³³³ On the "Reinhardt" Operation, see ARAD, Yitzhak. *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. The Operation Reinhard Death Camps*. Bloomington (Ind.) : Indiana University Press, 1987. BROWNING, Christopher. *Ganz normale Männer. Das Reserve-Polizeibataillon 101 und die "Endlösung" in Polen*. Reinbek bei Hamburg : Rowohlt, 1993. MUSIAŁ, Bogdan (ed.). „Aktion Reinhardt“. *Der Völkermord an den Juden im Generalgouvernement 1941–1944*. Osnabrück : Fibre Verlag, 2004.

District³³⁴ and on the other hand there is the testimony by Dionýz Lenard from 1943, in which he strongly disagreed with Fiala's fabrications.³³⁵

However, whatever the exact location was, F. Fiala fulfilled his role. Shortly after his return to Bratislava he drafted several articles, complete with photographs. As had been agreed, D. Wisliceny sent the texts to Berlin to A. Eichmann who forwarded them directly to H. Himmler. The response came after a few weeks. The Reich SS leader requested a revision of the articles. D. Wisliceny refused, citing Fiala's position as a reputable journalist. In the end, only minor corrections were made and at the end of October 1942, H. Himmler gave his consent to the publication.³³⁶ The first part of the reporting was published in the *Grenzboten* on 7 November, the second part on 8 November and the third on 10 November 1942. The articles were taken up in an abridged version by the *Slovák, Gardista, Slovenská politika, Magyar Hírlap* and from foreign periodicals by the Romanian *Gardiste*, the *Donauzeitung* published in Beograd and by the German-language daily in occupied France, *Pariser Zeitung*.³³⁷

The wording of all three articles is utterly ruthless, misleading and full of traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudice. A derisive tone, contemptuous of Jews as such and their degradation to a kind of sub-human, incapable of work and any accomplishment, dominates the whole of the reporting. At the same time, F. Fiala highlights the National Socialist contribution to the solution of the Jewish question, stressing humane treatment of the deportees by the German staff. In the reports he describes the life of the Jews in the East as idyllic, quoting those interviewed as saying they had never had it so good. The cynicism peaks in passages about their own clergy, self-government, own shops, adequate food rations, sufficient clothing, usual standards of hygiene and satisfactory level of healthcare.³³⁸ These were unbelievable lies, which provoked more and more suspicion as reports about the physical extermination of Jews were spreading. It follows that the propaganda objective of the journey was only met in part. It did not refute the doubts, but on the contrary provoked more

³³⁴ *Grenzboten*, 10 November 1942, p. 5; NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 6...*, Document 441, pp. 515-516.

³³⁵ HEIM, Susanne – HERBERT, Ulrich – HOLLMANN, Michael – MÖLLER, Horst – PICKHAN, Gertrud – POHL, Dieter – WALTHER, Simone – WIRSCHING, Andreas (eds.). *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945. Band 9. Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941–1945*. Munich : Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014, Document 88, p. 311.

³³⁶ IfZ Vienna, WFT-0010. Wisliceny's report regarding F. Fiala of 26/7/1946. ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T Iud 588/1946. Wisliceny's sworn statement of 15/7/1946. IfZ Munich, MB 43/1. Fiala's testimony in criminal proceedings against Friedrich Boßhammer, 24/3/1970.

³³⁷ IfZ Munich, MB 43/1. Letter from IfZ to the Police President in Berlin of 16/2/1970. NIŽŇANSKÝ, E. (ed.). *Holokaust na Slovensku 6...*, Document 441, p. 517.

³³⁸ See *Grenzboten*, 7 November 1942, p. 5; 8. November 1942, p. 5; 10 November 1942, p. 5.

questions. None the less Fiala's report served A. Eichmann for almost two more years as an excuse to refuse official requests to grant access to National Socialist concentration camps.³³⁹

A double agent in Istanbul and defection to the Allies

Even if the reportage did not bring the expected propaganda effect to Fiala's masters it resulted in another advance in his own journalistic career. In January 1943 he became the chief correspondent of *Transkontinentpress*, the press agency of the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Istanbul.³⁴⁰ An intelligence task was naturally part of the assignment, namely to infiltrate Allied intelligence networks in Turkey.³⁴¹ Neutral Turkey, cleverly manoeuvring between the warring parties, had become an invisible battleground between the intelligence agencies of the Axis and the Allies.³⁴² As Fiala possessed a good knowledge of the circumstances prevailing in Slovakia he was also assigned the task of monitoring the activities of Czechs and Slovaks in the city on the Bosphorus,³⁴³ in particular the employees of the Slovak export and import company (*Dovus*), which Himmler's Security Service suspected of having contact with the Czechoslovak civil resistance in London. F. Fiala focused on them. Still being officially the editor-in-chief of the *Grenzbote*, after several months of observation he published the results in his own daily in the form of an aggressive article under the title "Musterbeispiel" in mid-October 1943. While F. Fiala did not name any names, he made serious accusations that some employees of the semi-state company were maintained connections with the government-in-exile in London.³⁴⁴ Fiala's reporting had a double effect: on the one hand, it threatened to paralyze smoothly operating courier communication between Slovakia and the Czechoslovak agency in Istanbul, and on the other hand it compromised the governing People's Party circles in Slovakia in the eyes of their German "protector".

³³⁹ STANGNETH, B. *Eichmann vor Jerusalem...*, p. 64.

³⁴⁰ IfZ Munich, MB 43/1. Fiala's testimony in criminal proceedings against Friedrich Boßhammer, 23/3/1970. See also ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T I'ud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala, 19. May 1947. A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at the VI Department of the Commission of the Interior (povereníctvo vnútra) of 30/10/1946. It has to be noted that he intended to make light of his position at the agency.

³⁴¹ RUBIN, B. *Istanbul Intrigues*, pp. 199, 268.

³⁴² GUTTSTADT, Corry. *Die Türkei, die Juden und der Holocaust*. Berlin – Hamburg : Assoziation A, 2008, pp. 164-167.

³⁴³ NARA, RG 263, Name File Fritz Koellner. A record of 8 July 1944.

³⁴⁴ JABLONICKÝ, Jozef. *Z ilegality do Povstania (Kapitoly z občianskeho odboja)*. Banská Bystrica : Dali-BB, 2009, pp. 81-82.

Aside from the Czechoslovak intelligence service, F. Fiala also managed to penetrate a network of informers and agents working for the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), namely the network of Alfréd Schwarz, acting under the code-name Dogwood.

F. Fiala, posing as a staunch opponent of National Socialism, managed to worm himself into the confidence of this Czechoslovak emigrant. A. Schwarz planned to use his new acquisition to infiltrate the office of the German Ambassador in Turkey, Franz von Pappen. However, F. Fiala alias Dália did not meet Schwarz's exaggerated expectations. His reports lacked appropriate substance, did not reflect current developments, proved to be inaccurate and even misleading in a certain sense. The OSS forbade A. Schwarz from continuing contact with Dália and criticized him strongly for his naïve trust in such an unscreened person. From April 1944 the Americans knew clearly that they were dealing with a German agent.³⁴⁵

In his post-war trial, F. Fiala did everything he could to deny his role as a double agent. He managed to convince the People's Court in Bratislava of his disinterested offer of service to the Allies with his arguments.³⁴⁶ He was later unmasked by the then secretary of the Istanbul office, Imrich Scheer.³⁴⁷ According to his testimony, F. Fiala was much more than a simple agent. He managed a network of informers among German and Turkish journalists and was in constant contact with Berlin, probably with Office VI of the RSHA, for which he had been working since 1940. His meetings with the head of a secret SD office in Istanbul, SS-Obersturmbannführer Bruno Wolff, with the media expert and member of the Vienna SD, Franz Ronneberger, as well as with other involved representatives of German secret services confirm this.³⁴⁸

There was likely a more prosaic reason for Fiala's defection to the Allies, with a clear opportunistic background.³⁴⁹ After the Anglo-American invasion in Normandy on 6 June 1944 it must have been evident to him that National Socialist Germany would never be able to win the war. This is why he decided to stake everything on one card and join the Allies. The opportunity arose on 2 August 1944 when Turkey cut diplomatic ties with Hitler's

³⁴⁵ RUBIN, B. *Istanbul Intrigues...*, p. 199. BAUER, Y. *Freikauf...*, pp. 206-207.

³⁴⁶ A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at Department VI of the Commission of the Interior (povereníctvo vnútra) of 30 October 1946. ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T I'ud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala, 19 May 1947. Judgement of 15 December 1947.

³⁴⁷ It is interesting that the District People's Court in Bratislava did not take into account in its verdict Scheer's testimony recorded at the secret police office in Trnava at the end of August 1947.

³⁴⁸ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/21. A report from the District office of the Ministry of the Interior in Piešťany regarding F. Fiala, 25 March 1956.

³⁴⁹ BArch Berlin, R 70 Slowakei/272, Bl. 258-259. A report by the head of the network IV of Vienna SD, 6/9/1944.

Germany.³⁵⁰ F. Fiala utilized all his contacts gained in the secret service milieu, acting on hints that the other side could be interested in his services. Turkish police arrested him and threatened to expel him but he managed to escape custody thanks to the intervention of the Americans. Sometime in mid-August 1944 F. Fiala definitively made himself available to American military intelligence.³⁵¹ From that moment he became *persona non grata* in Germany. The Reich Association of the German Press deprived him of membership and the SD found it a suitable excuse to discredit its own purported opponents and possibly force them to leave their positions at the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁵²

After his defection, F. Fiala became a prisoner of war. The Americans questioned him at length, probably while he was still in Turkey, on 18–25 August 1944. They were in particular interested in information on F. Karmasin.³⁵³ At the turn of August and September 1944 the OSS brought him to Cairo³⁵⁴ where, together with the British intelligence services, they mined him for more information. The Western Allies used the information to gain and complement their knowledge about the Slovak internal political scene,³⁵⁵ about F. Karmasin, about the German minority in Slovakia, about the process of its nazification, and naturally also about the tragedy of Slovak Jewry. However, the intelligence officers were not satisfied with the results at all and one of them could not help suspecting that F. Fiala was not responding truthfully to questions relating to his relations with F. Karmasin, with the German offices in Bratislava and with the deportations of Jews.³⁵⁶ The information on the targets of air raids, which he had given to the OSS, proved to be untrue as well.³⁵⁷ These facts strongly refute Fiala's post-war claims of his completely altruistic cooperation with Allied intelligence services.

³⁵⁰ GUTTSTADT, C. *Die Türkei...*, p. 166.

³⁵¹ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/11. A Memorandum of Department 37 of the 1st administration unit of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (FMV) related to F. Fiala of 8. 6. 1973. Compare ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T ľud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala, 19. May 1947. Sworn statement by Wilhelmine Thamm of 18. July 1947.

³⁵² BArch Berlin, R 100/78. A letter by the head of the press at the Reich Government to the Reich Association of the German Press of 22. September 1944; R 70 Slowakei/272, Bl. 258-259. A report by the head of the network IV of Vienna SD, 6. 9. 1944.

³⁵³ NARA, RG 263, Name File Franz Karmasin. A CIA record of 22 November 1954.

³⁵⁴ SNA, S-428-2/1-12. Lebenslauf des Friedrich Fiala. A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/21. A protocol on the testimony of F. Fiala of 1. April 1955; 40194/22. Undated translation of Fiala's biography; 40194/11. A Memorandum of Department 37 of the 1st administration unit of the FMV related to F. Fiala of 8. June 1973.

³⁵⁵ NARA, RG 263, Name File Ferdinand Durcansky. An excerpt of a record of the Service Intelligence Middle East of 25. 9. 1944.

³⁵⁶ NARA, RG 263, Name File Franz Karmasin. A CIA record of 22 November 1954.

³⁵⁷ RUBIN, B. *Istanbul Intrigues*, p. 268.

Extradition to Czechoslovakia, the trial, the sentence and a secret agent of Czechoslovak counter-intelligence in West Germany

After the war's end F. Fiala lost all significance for the Allies. In addition, overcrowded prisoner-of-war camps forced the British to get rid of needless prisoners. Therefore, at the turn of September and October 1945 they made contact with the Czechoslovak Embassy in Cairo with the intention to extradite him for criminal proceedings to Czechoslovakia (ČSR). The Prague authorities naturally agreed, as they had listed F. Fiala as a war criminal towards the end of the war.³⁵⁸ The former editor-in-chief of the *Grenzbote*, who in the meantime was held in a prisoner-of-war camp near Jerusalem, made every effort to avoid extradition. He well knew what would await him in the ČSR and so he offered the British his services as an informant and intelligence officer again.³⁵⁹ However, the Intelligence Service did not respond, having had negative experience with Fiala earlier. On 18 April 1946 the British military brought him back to Cairo and two days later to Vienna. At the end of April 1946 he was finally handed over to the Czechoslovak authorities.³⁶⁰

F. Fiala, who appeared as one of the prosecution witnesses of the National Court in the process against Anton Vašek³⁶¹, awaited his fate in the custody of the Regional Court in Bratislava until the second half of August 1946. In a certain respect he was lucky. The main prosecutor at the National Court, Ľudovít Rigan, after consultations with the commissioner of the interior, decided to remand him before the District People's Court in Bratislava.³⁶² At the end of October 1946, the first interrogation took place at department VI of the Commission of the Interior. It foreshadowed in broad outline Fiala's defence strategy: to present himself as an opponent of National Socialism and a victim of its practices, to exaggerate alleged bullying by the Gestapo and to focus consistently on his collaboration with the Allies at the end of the war.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ NA Praha, 316-121-2. Undated record from the MV section responsible for the prosecution of war criminals. A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. A letter from MZV to department Z/4 MV of 21 November 1945.

³⁵⁹ A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Fiala's undated proposal and letter from the Intelligence Service centre in Cairo.

³⁶⁰ ŠA Bratislava, OES Bratislava, T Ľud 588/1946. Minutes from the main hearing in the criminal case against F. Fiala of 15/12/1947.

³⁶¹ SNA, NS, Tn Ľud 17/1946 – A. Vašek. F. Fiala's testimony in the main hearing in the trial of A. Vašek.

³⁶² A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. A letter of a delegate of VI department of PV at the prosecutor of the National Court of the VI department (I. section) PV of 22 August 1946.

³⁶³ A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. Minutes from the interrogation of F. Fiala at VI. Department of the Commission of the Interior (povereníctvo vnútra) of 30 October 1946.

He kept repeating these claims throughout the whole trial, which started on 14 February 1947. They were to be corroborated with sworn statements by his colleagues in Bratislava or Istanbul. Fiala's constant drawing of attention to his own merits in aiding the Allies was meant to act as a counterbalance to the unpleasant testimony of Wisliceny about the journey to the Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Since the reports had been published, F. Fiala could not deny them and so he claimed in his defence that at the time of his visit to Auschwitz he had not known about the physical extermination of Jews and had only learned about it in Istanbul. Such a terrible finding, in his words, became an impetus for his offering of services to the Allies.³⁶⁴ In this case it was a deliberate lie. F. Fiala, being an experienced and relatively important journalist, must have had indications as to which direction the Nazi "final solution" to the Jewish question was heading. As Heinrich K, a former member of the DP and its paramilitary wing, the *Freiwillige Schutzstaffel*, openly admitted: "we all knew, at least we considered it a fact, that Jews were being killed. We only did not know how it was being done."³⁶⁵

After all, F. Fiala's misleading defence did not help him avoid a prison sentence. On 15 December 1947 the District People's Court in Bratislava sentenced him to 10 years in prison and the loss of civil rights for 15 years for his journey to Poland, the publication of the propaganda reports "With the Jews in the East" and the series of offensive editorials published in the *Grenzboten*. However, one lie actually helped F. Fiala. The Court took into account his distorted testimony about his disinterested collaboration with the Allies and considered it when setting the final penalty.³⁶⁶ He served the sentence in the prisons of Leopoldov, Jáchymov and Rtyň v Podkrkonoší.³⁶⁷

While serving his sentence, F. Fiala showed willingness to collaborate with Czechoslovak intelligence. The vision of an early release may be cited as his main motive. Already in Leopoldov he compiled a document about the activities and methods of American and British intelligence services in the Middle East.³⁶⁸ Later he willingly participated in the reconstruction of the intelligence networks of the SD, Gestapo and Abwehr in Slovakia during World War II. In an effort to win over his Communist interrogators he did not hesitate to

³⁶⁴ ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T 1'ud 588/1946. Interrogation of F. Fiala, 19 May 1947.

³⁶⁵ IFZ Munich, Gm 07.108, Band 1. Interrogation of witness H. K. on 19 January 1970 by a State Prosecutor in Munich.

³⁶⁶ ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T 1'ud 588/1946. Judgement of 15 December 1947.

³⁶⁷ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/11. Memorandum of the 37th Department of the 1st administration unit of the FMV related to F. Fiala of 8 June 1973.

³⁶⁸ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194. A record of the NB office in Jáchymov of 15 August 1953.

fabricate a number of lies³⁶⁹, which could have hurt many of those he mentioned. In the summer of 1953 the collaboration reached such an extent that the Štb proposed releasing F. Fiala and dispatching him abroad, specifically to the Federal Republic of Germany (NSR).³⁷⁰ His future role would be to infiltrate the Federal Press Office (Bundespresseamt) in Bonn.³⁷¹

Almost two years passed before F. Fiala, who Adenauer's West Germany had expressed interest in repatriating already at the turn of 1949/50,³⁷² could start fulfilling another intelligence mission. During that time the Štb was screening him, conducting intensive interrogations and getting him ready for his activity in the NSR. It started while he was serving his prison sentence and from January 1955 it continued after his release. The last interrogation before his departure for West Germany took place at a conspiratorial cottage of the Communist Secret Police near Prague at the beginning of April 1955. However, the officer managing the "yielding" process was not fully satisfied with the results. "He did not tell us all he knew",³⁷³ noted the Štb officer. Despite this, the path for Fiala's departure for NSR was cleared.

After arriving in Germany, F. Fiala managed to get a position as a journalist in Bonn, thanks to his contacts from the National Socialist period.³⁷⁴ In 1957 he became a member of the Federal Press Conference (*Bundespressekonferenz* – BPK), an association of representatives of the German media working in West Germany's capital.³⁷⁵ Under the code-name Werner he reported from this milieu on the political situation in the NSR to Czechoslovak counter-intelligence. Fiala's collaboration with Communist counter-intelligence was far from problem-free. In 1960, the secret agent Werner severed all contact because the West German intelligence service, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND), suspected him of connections with its Czechoslovak counterpart.³⁷⁶ It was probably from this moment that F. Fiala became an

³⁶⁹ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/22. Minutes from F. Fiala's testimony of 7 June 1953.

³⁷⁰ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194. A record of the NB office – the Štb section in Jáchymov of 8 August 1953.

³⁷¹ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194. A record of II. section, 1st department of MV of 26 October 1953.

³⁷² NA Praha, 316-121-2. A record of the section of the Ministry of the Interior for the prosecution of war criminals of 3/1/1950. Undated description of a telex by the section of the Ministry of the Interior for the prosecution of war criminals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³⁷³ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/21. A record of section IV, 1st department of MV of 4 April 1955.

³⁷⁴ A ÚPN, Krajská správa ZNB, S-Štb, S-7202. A record from the district department of MV in Hlohovec of 14/3/1957.

³⁷⁵ STANGNETH, B. *Zur Informations-, Freigabe- und Schwärzungs-Praxis...*, p. 14.

³⁷⁶ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/11. Record of the 37th department of the 1st administration unit of the FMV related to the evaluation of cooperation with the secret collaborator Werner of 26 January 1982.

agent of the BND.³⁷⁷ Contacts with Czechoslovak security officials were re-established in 1969 and continued with small breaks until the early 1980s. During the time of his collaboration, F. Fiala met his case officers from the ŠtB 177 times and delivered countless volumes of intelligence documents of varying nature and quality. After his retirement Czechoslovak counter-intelligence lost interest in him.³⁷⁸

The shadows of a “brown” past

The process of Ulm with the members of the Einsatzgruppen at the turn of 1957/58 and the establishment of the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*) at the end of 1958 caused a certain shift in how the process of confronting the Nazi past was perceived, not only among the West German judiciary but also the public.³⁷⁹ The A. Eichmann trial in 1961 contributed strongly to making another step forward in the process, and in the context of the charges against the manager of the “final solution”, F. Fiala and his almost forgotten reportage “With the Jews in the East” accidentally caught media attention again. As a member of the prestigious Bundespressekonferenz he had to answer unpleasant questions and face a scandal related to exclusion from the German Federation of Journalists (*Deutscher Journalisten-Verband*). Even if the former editor-in-chief of the *Grenzbote* managed to survive the scandal with suspension of membership in the BPK,³⁸⁰ he remained in the spotlight of the judicial authorities. The shadows of his “brown” past had caught up with him at last.

In 1962 the Bonn prosecutor started an investigation into him. It suspended the proceedings for lack of evidence in the same year.³⁸¹ In subsequent years he would only appear before the

³⁷⁷ STANGNETH, B. *Zur Informations-, Freigabe- und Schwärzungs-Praxis...*, p. 13.

³⁷⁸ A ÚPN, I. správa ZNB, 40194/11. Record of the 37th department of the 1st administration unit of the FMV related to the evaluation of the cooperation with the secret collaborator Werner of 26 January 1982.

³⁷⁹ GREVE, Michael. Von Auschwitz nach Ludwigsburg. Zu den Ermittlungen der »Zentralen Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Gewaltverbrechen« in Ludwigsburg. In WOJAK, Irmtrud – MEINL, Susanne (eds.). *Im Labyrinth der Schuld. Täter – Opfer – Ankläger*. Frankfurt nad Mohanom – New York : Campus Verlag, 2003, pp. 41-63. EICHMÜLLER, Andreas. Die strafrechtliche Verfolgung von NS-Verbrechen und die Öffentlichkeit in der frühen Bundesrepublik Deutschland. In OSTERLOH, Jörg – VOLLNHALS, Clemens (eds.). *NS-Prozesse und deutsche Öffentlichkeit. Besatzungszeit, frühe Bundesrepublik und DDR*. Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011, pp. 53-73.

³⁸⁰ KRÜGER, Gunnar. “Wir sind doch kein exklusiver Club!” *Die Bundespressekonferenz in der Ära Adenauer*. Münster : LIT Verlag, 2005, pp. 111-114. See also ABS, 10-P-181. A letter of the Study Institute of the Ministry of the Interior to its internal administration of 30 June 1961.

³⁸¹ IFZ Munich, Gm 07.108, Band 1. Fiala’s testimony at the Prosecution in Bonn, 9 March 1970.

judicial authorities as a witness. Specifically, in March 1970 in investigatory proceedings against his former superior in Slovakia, F. Karmasin, and in criminal proceedings against Friedrich Boßhammer, who in October 1942 argued with D. Wisliceny in Vienna about the editing of Fiala's notorious reports.³⁸² F. Fiala's answers during the interrogation were based on his post-war version of events. Aware that both D. Wisliceny and A. Eichmann were no longer alive, Fiala seasoned them with half-truths and his own fabrications. He claimed that two more journalists, from Spain and France, had participated in the journey – allegedly smuggled into the delegation by Jozef Tiso – and that after his return to Bratislava he had informed the President and members of Tuka's Government about his impressions of the journey. In both witness statements he did not forget to underline his position as an “innocent, clueless victim”³⁸³, making light of Wisliceny's fairly fitting judgement of him as a “victim of his own journalistic curiosity and his own convictions at the time”.³⁸⁴ In spite of his admitting that he had agreed with the resettlement of Jews from Slovakia,³⁸⁵ F. Fiala was not further criminally prosecuted by the German Federal judiciary. The author of the disgraceful reports “With the Jews in the East” was able to continue working undisturbed as a journalist in the daily *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, a periodical close to the CDU Party. In 1970 his membership in the BKP was renewed and he remained a member until 1998/99.³⁸⁶

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³⁸² See IfZ Vienna, WFT-0010. Wisliceny's report regarding F. Fiala of 26 July 1946. ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T řud 588/1946. Wisliceny's sworn statement of 15 July 1946.

³⁸³ IfZ Munich, MB 43/1. Fiala's testimony in criminal proceedings against Friedrich Boßhammer, 24 March 1970.

³⁸⁴ IfZ Vienna, WFT-0010. Wisliceny's report regarding F. Fiala of 26 July 1946. ŠA Bratislava, OLS Bratislava, T řud 588/1946. Wisliceny's sworn statement of 15 July 1946.

³⁸⁵ IfZ Munich, Gm 07.108, Band 1. Fiala's testimony at the Prosecution in Bonn, 9 March 1970.

³⁸⁶ KRÜGER, G. “*Wir sind doch kein exklusiver Club!*”, p. 114.

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The Concepts of Collaboration and Resistance in Slovak-Jewish Relations³⁸⁷

Hana Kubátová, Charles University

The cover of the last *Jewish Yearbook for Slovakia* from 1940, drawn by Fritz Weinwurm, an architect from Bratislava, depicts a tree trunk rising from the ground. The tree itself has been cut down but eight branches sprout from its trunk and eight more flowers come out of the ground nearby. The tree is dead but it has found a way to continue living, just differently – this seems to be the message of the cover picture. The opening article is written in a similar spirit: “Rarely in history has the Jewish community stood before such difficult and fateful tasks as today. [...] We find ourselves in the midst of changes, having to reorient our thinking and feelings, trying to attain a better future with all the strength and means we have. If we seek eternal Jewish values and bear in mind even now that we have to find a way to these sources, we will be able to walk happily on the new path, working diligently and acknowledging the Slovak State and our homeland.”³⁸⁸

The issue, edited by David Gross, lamented in the editorial “the difficult situation of the Jews today [...] how hard we have been hit by the loss of all conveniences” but at the same time called on the Jewish minority in Slovakia to reorient their thinking, adapt to the new conditions and act responsibly towards the State.³⁸⁹ More than thirty years later, a copy of a German version of the editorial found its way into the as yet unpublished memoirs of Benjamin Eichler, the long-time chairman of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities (*Ústredný zväz židovských náboženských obcí, ÚZŽNO*; in office from 1955 to 1972). Eichler had no understanding for these words, adding a note in English: “Sometimes it is better to be silent.” Eichler, who was also critical of certain acts of the Jewish Center (*Ústredňa Židov*) during the war, thought that it would have been “more productive to tell people the truth, to describe the situation more truthfully, to draw attention to the real dangers, which would – likely – have resulted in a higher percentage rescued”.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ This chapter was written within the framework of the grant project under GAČR, Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews: Together but Apart (13-15989P), carried out at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University.

³⁸⁸ GROSS, David. *Židovská ročenka pre Slovensko. Jüdisches Jahrbuch für die Slovakei*. Bratislava, 1940, p. 3.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁹⁰ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Papers of Benjamin Eichler (RG 1097), box 1, file 1, Memoirs – Slovak.

Eichler's memoirs, accessible in Slovak, German and English, represent a highly interesting source for several reasons.³⁹¹ They are written from the viewpoint of an "author who had lived through those times and convey his experience as an observer, as a direct witness."³⁹² In contrast to many other published or unpublished memoirs that logically focus on the war years and the Holocaust, Eichler, who in April 1945 was one of the founders of the re-established Jewish religious community in Bratislava, devoted a significant part of his recollections to the post-war period. As he claims, "the purpose of my work is to capture significant phases of this period (1945-1972 and later) from the perspective of positive but more often negative aspects".³⁹³ Eichler's memoirs are interesting for at least one other reason – the author does not describe the past, including the Slovak-Jewish relations, the object of my research focus, in a passive way. In Eichler's view, the Holocaust was not something that simply happened, against which the Jews could not or did not act. What is more, the majority Slovaks were not just passive witnesses either. This chapter aims to show that Eichler's memoirs offer a unique, non-stereotypical view of the Holocaust in which both the majority Slovaks and the Jews actively participated, not only by responding to events but also by playing an active part in them.³⁹⁴ Hence, I will not examine Eichler's memoirs as such but I will study them in the context of a wider debate as to who were the perpetrators, the victims and the bystanders of the Holocaust in Slovakia (referring to the often criticized but as yet unsurpassed categories coined by the historian Raul Hilberg in 1992).³⁹⁵ Where do the majority of Slovaks and the Jewish minority fit into this scheme? As Eduard Nižňanský, one of the editors of a series of documents *Holokaust na Slovensku* (Holocaust in Slovakia), notes in the introduction to the seventh volume dealing with the relations of the Slovak majority and the Jewish minority, "the vast majority of writings by domestic as well as foreign authors on the Holocaust in Slovakia described the Jews in Slovakia as a minority, an object of the Slovak anti-Semitic policy carried out in the fields of executive and legislative power by the majority Slovaks (or to be exact, by the leading elite represented by Hlinka's Slovak People's Party)".³⁹⁶ The distinction between "victims (Jews) – and perpetrators (in the wider sense, the leading elite of the HSLŠ) – the silent

³⁹¹ Eichler's memoirs are accessible in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, where the author donated them in years 1981 and 1982.

³⁹² YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, RG 1097, box 1, file 1.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ GROSS, D., *Židovská ročenka ...*, p. 3.

³⁹⁵ HILBERG, Raul. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*. New York, NY : Aaron Asher Books, 1992.

³⁹⁶ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. *Holokaust na Slovensku 7. Vzťah slovenskej majority a židovskej minority (náčrt problému)*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku – Katedra všeobecných dejín FF UK, 2005, p. 6.

majority” remained long unchanged.³⁹⁷ Eichler’s work, written in the 1970s, offers a different view and lends a voice to the alleged silent majority. As I argue, this is what distinguishes Eichler’s unpublished memories even from many newer writings on the Holocaust and the aftermath. How should we understand it? And what connection does it draw to the post-war image of Slovaks and Jews? This chapter deals with memories of the Holocaust in Slovakia, focusing on the alleged passive and active behaviour of the two (mostly ethnically defined) groups. I do not claim to give definite answers. On the contrary, it is a mere outline of how post-war appraisal of everything anti-Fascist affected memories (the plural is here intentional) of the Holocaust in Slovakia.

A Tale of Two Slovaks

Jozef Lettrich, the chairman of the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská národná rada*, SNR) from 1945, welcomed the participating members to the plenary session of the SNR on 15 May 1945 with the following words: “Distinguished Slovak National Council! Today’s plenary meeting of the Council is a festive occasion, which will be remembered as a meeting of revolutionary representatives of the legislative and executive powers in Slovakia. It is festive and memorable because the Council meets for the first time after the complete liberation of our homeland by the glorious Red Army and after the liberation of the whole of the Czechoslovak Republic by the Red Army and the Allied Armies in the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava, to pursue its serious and responsible work.”³⁹⁸

The serious and responsible work referred to by Lettrich was for the Slovak National Council to “approve the regulation on people’s courts and the National Court”, officially Regulation No. 33/1945 on the punishment of Fascist criminals, occupants, traitors and collaborators, and on establishing the people’s judiciary.³⁹⁹ As many speakers at the plenary session underlined together with Lettrich, “the Slovak nation had nothing to do both with the defeatist policy which led to the Munich dictate [...] and the so-called Slovak State under the protection of imperialistic Germany, which had been imposed on it and represented an artificial creation of Nazism and Fascism”.⁴⁰⁰ The idea of the innocent Slovak people, who not only had had nothing to do with the undemocratic regime of the Slovak State but had even taken up arms to resist it, was

³⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

³⁹⁸ *Spoločná česko-slovenská digitálna parlamentná knižnica*, Slovenská národná rada, 15 May 1945. Available online:< <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1945snr/stenprot/003schuz/index.htm> >.

³⁹⁹ ŠUTAJ, Štefan a kol. *Prezidentské dekréty Edvarda Beneša v povojnovom Slovensku*. Bratislava : Veda, 2002.

⁴⁰⁰ *Spoločná česko-slovenská digitálna parlamentná knižnica*, Slovenská národná rada, 15 May 1945. Available online:< <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1945snr/stenprot/003schuz/index.htm> >

repeated also by Lettrich's colleague from the Democratic Party, Samuel Belluš: "By the adoption of the regulation on people's courts we want to demonstrate to the world that the will of the Slovak nation was not identical to the will of the Nazi usurpers and to show that the Czechoslovak Republic and the brotherly Czech nation were not betrayed by the Slovak nation but by a handful of henchmen such as Tiso and Tuka, who will be sharply and justly condemned by the nation. Yes, all those top men of the former regime's public political life shall be put before the national court: all those who, acting as mercenaries of the defeated enemy, wanted to exterminate the nation's inherent will to live an independent, free and democratic life, all those who sought to fulfil their ambition by suppressing the spirit of natural resistance of our nation, manifested so magnificently in our uprising last August. The National court will settle accounts with these traitors and henchmen in a way which will guarantee that the horrors and hardship experienced by the whole nation will never be repeated."⁴⁰¹

It follows from Belluš' speech that the adoption of the regulation on people's courts served a double purpose. On one hand, it was to show the world, in particular the West, that there was no equivalence between the Slovak nation and the wartime state; on the other hand, it was aimed at Prague, indicating that it was not the Slovak people as such who was responsible for the break-up of Czechoslovakia but only "a handful of henchmen such as Tiso and Tuka". Those people were to be put on trial before the newly established retribution courts. As the quote from Samuel Belluš' speech shows, the guilt of the representatives of the former regime and their henchmen consisted mainly in what they (allegedly) did to their own nation – "they wanted to exterminate the nation's inherent will to live an independent, free and democratic life".⁴⁰² The Slovak National Uprising was to serve as proof that the love of freedom and democracy, inherent in the Slovak nation, had prevailed after all. It is as if *two* types of Slovak appeared in post-war Slovakia – the partisan, representing the true attributes of the Slovak people, and the collaborator or traitor, who betrayed the Slovak nation. While the first was to stand for the majority of the nation, there was only "a handful" of the henchmen.

Not all the speeches made on 15 May 1945 echoed the simplifying narrative of an innocent and freedom-loving majority and a small group of henchmen whose character and acts in no way personified the nature of the Slovak people. Several speakers, both from the Democratic and the Communist Party, carefully drew attention to the fact that "a handful" was a relative notion. For instance, then Commissioner for the Interior, Gustav Husák, a member of the Communist

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² *Spoločná česko-slovenská digitálna parlamentná knižnica*, Slovenská národná rada, 15 May 1945. Available online:< <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1945snr/stenprot/003schuz/index.htm>>.

Party, was more critical than Lettrich. In Husák's view, the wartime regime not only ruined the good reputation of the Slovak nation, but it also "spoiled many characters at home. Many Slovak people could be bought for a comfortable life, for material gains, and many people spoiled their characters in this way, so that at times our nation appeared to be a nation without its own will, not caring about the kind of regime under which they live, not caring who governs them, as long as they have a good life."⁴⁰³

Current research on Slovak-Jewish relations, which draws attention to the complicity of the majority population in the Jewish question, as Nižňanský puts it, confirms Husák's words about the people being bought off with a comfortable life and material gains.⁴⁰⁴ As I have shown elsewhere, the interest of the majority population in the so-called solution to the Jewish question manifested itself not "only" in their participation in the Aryanization (or Slovakization) of Jewish property. The eagerness to gain something out of the "Jewish question" was manifested in many other ways, including the playing of the "Jewish card" in order to solve private conflicts or "to attain a better position, to get rid of business competition or personal enemies, up to stealing and auctioning property left behind by deported Jews".⁴⁰⁵

A glance at the period immediately after the war, however, shows that critical voices on their own history were drowned out by the glorification of the Slovak National Uprising (SNP) and its ritualization in the later period. Miroslav Michela and Michal Kšíňan are right when they argue: "The primacy of the SNP and the anti-Fascist resistance in the discourse on the Second World War almost completely pushed into the background public remembrance of the Slovak Republic 1939-1945, which was politically condemned to oblivion. Only selected stories of the 'resisting people', 'Slavic belonging' and 'clerical Fascist oppression' were told."⁴⁰⁶

In other words, it was *our* Slovak, the partisan, who played the key role in selected stories about the "resisting people" that Michela and Kšíňan refer to. The question of collaboration, widespread in Slovakia due to the pragmatic interest of the majority population in Jewish property, was put on the back burner.

Who is a partisan, after all?

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Eduard. Typológia vzťahov majoritného obyvateľstva a židovskej minority v období holokaustu. In *Národnostná politika na Slovensku po roku 1989*, ed. Štefan ŠUTAJ. Prešov : Universum, 2005, p. 204.

⁴⁰⁵ KUBÁTOVÁ, Hana. *Nepokradeš!: nálady a postoje slovenské spoločnosti k židovské otázce, 1938-1945*. Praha : Academia, 2013, p. 218.

⁴⁰⁶ MICHELA, Miroslav - KŠIŇAN, Michal. Slovenské národné povstanie. In *Komunisti a povstania: Ritualizácia pripomínania si protifašistických povstanií v strednej Európe (1945-1960)*, ed. Michal KŠIŇAN. Kraków : Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce, 2012, p. 11.

In his recently published book *Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer: Tschechische Repräsentationen des Holocaust* (National Heroes and Jewish Victims: Czech Representations of the Holocaust), the author Peter Hallama notes a discrepancy between the place assigned to Jews and Czechs in the post-war memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War.⁴⁰⁷ A similar inconsistency can be found in the Slovak case as well. While Czech resistance fighters and Slovak partisans were made into heroes in the immediate post-war period – and national heroes emerged from both categories – the prevailing view of the Jews was that they were defenceless, paralyzed victims. What is more, as passive victims, Jews also disappeared from the memories of the Second World War. To quote Peter Hallama, “the Jews – allegedly in contrast to non-Jewish Czechs and Slovaks – certainly did not die for the freedom of their homeland or for specific political ideals”.⁴⁰⁸

The emphasis placed on the innocence and resistance of the Slovak people resulted in the marginalization of the Jewish participation in the Slovak National Uprising. As I have already noted, the Jews were portrayed as passive victims, not as bold partisans. This picture has changed significantly over the recent years, which is in part due to important historical research on the topic. Now we know, for instance, that the participation rate of Jews in the uprising strongly exceeded their share in the population.⁴⁰⁹ However, the Second World War narrative of the immediate post-war period presented the Slovak National Uprising in an ethnic sense, as a Slovak, ethnic, non-Jewish uprising. The existence of such a narrative is corroborated by the words of the members of the Slovak National Council, according to which the Slovak State (1938/1939-1945) “suppressed all personal civil rights of our people”, “the Slovak nation at the first opportunity clearly showed that it had nothing in common with the traitors of its own and foreign blood”,⁴¹⁰ “the Slovak nation had anti-German views and worked against Fascism”.⁴¹¹ The ethnocentric view of its own history and the glorification of resistance (at the same time, observing the current efforts at the trivialization of the Slovak National Uprising or its intentional denigration, I feel the need to add that the SNP by right occupies an important place in European anti-Fascist resistance) resulted in overlooking the role and merits of Jews in the struggle for liberation at the end of the war. We can demonstrate the perverse logic by which

⁴⁰⁷ HALLAMA, Peter. *Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer: tschechische Repräsentationen des Holocaust*. Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p.146.

⁴⁰⁹ LIPSCHER, Ladislav. *Židia v slovenskom štáte: 1939-1945*. Bratislava : Print-Servis, 1992, p. 211.

⁴¹⁰ *Spoločná česko-slovenská digitálna parlamentná knižnica*, Slovenská národná rada, 15 May 1945. Available online: <<http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1945snr/stenprot/006schuz/index.htm>>.

⁴¹¹ *Spoločná česko-slovenská digitálna parlamentná knižnica*, Slovenská národná rada, 5 June 1945. Available online: <<http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1945snr/stenprot/003schuz/index.htm>> .

the Jews allegedly intentionally (sic!) avoided resistance in the example of an essay by a Slovak lawyer, Juraj Šujan, one of the prosecutors at the National Court in Bratislava, which was published in *Svobodné noviny*, a paper claiming to continue the tradition of the pre-war *Lidové noviny*. Šujan responded with his editorial entitled “Židovský problem na Slovensku” (“The Jewish Problem in Slovakia”) to a pogrom in Topoľčany at the end of September 1945, which again drew attention to the interests of the majority population, in this case manifested in unveiled opposition to the restitution of stolen Jewish property: “With the National Uprising, the Jews missed a unique opportunity to be inscribed in golden letters not only in the history of the uprising but also in the hearts of our people. If they had suffered in the war effort as much as they were later forced to suffer anyway, hiding in villages, towns and mountains after the quelling of the uprising, no one would have dared harm a hair on the head of a Jew today and it would have been obvious to anyone that their property should be returned to them and that they should be helped even with social action, they in the first place.”⁴¹²

Šujan’s words in which he accuses the Jews of not participating in the uprising and infers that they, therefore, cannot claim restitution of their property, are surprising for many reasons. They not only contradict historical reality and defy logic, but they also reverse what official propaganda had said about the Jews and the uprising just a few months earlier. I will give just one example from the radical periodical of the Hlinka Guard, the *Gardista*: “The Bolshevik monster, in order to conquer our dear Slovakia faster, has dropped partisans. They are people of various nationalities, with Czechs and Jews being the leading elements among them”.⁴¹³ Ivan Kamenec also confirms the connection made between the uprising, Jews, Czechs and Bolshevism by the wartime propaganda: “at the time of the uprising as well as after its military defeat, the *Slovák*, *Gardista*, *Ludové noviny* and other Government papers were filled with hateful anti-Jewish articles”.⁴¹⁴ It is evident that the regime change made the condemned partisans the heroes of “our nation”, “valiant fighters of the Slovak National Uprising”, all of a sudden acknowledged also by the part of the majority population that had compromised with the former regime.⁴¹⁵ As we will see, the glorification of resistance and everything anti-Fascist influenced also the “Jewish” memory of the Holocaust and the war.

Emanuel Frieder, who took over the leadership of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities after the sudden death of his brother, Rabbi Armin Frieder, in June 1946, also

⁴¹² *Svobodné noviny*, 18 October 1945, p. 1.

⁴¹³ *Gardista*, 5 October 1944, p. 1.

⁴¹⁴ KAMENEC, Ivan. *Po stopách tragédie*. Bratislava : Archa, 1991, p. 265.

⁴¹⁵ *Spoločná česko-slovenská digitálna parlamentná knižnica*, Slovenská národná rada, 15 May 1945. Available online: <<http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1945snr/stenprot/003schuz/index.htm>>

noticed the tendency to remove Jews from stories about the “resisting people”. Needless to say, Rabbi Frieder was one of the members of the so-called Working Group (*Pracovná skupina*), which had tried to save Jewish lives by bribing authorities during the war. At the celebration on the occasion of the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising in August 1945, held among other places at an orthodox synagogue in Nové Mesto nad Váhom, the following words could be heard: “Even though the anti-Jewish propaganda of the Nazi Slovak State was based on lies, it was right in one regard – that many “Jewish Bolsheviks” participated in the Uprising – this is why Slovak Nazis asked for the annihilation of the Jews as enemies of the Slovak nation.”⁴¹⁶

At the end of the 1950s and mostly during the 1960s, Jews persecuted during World War II were increasingly portrayed as representing positive, universal human values.⁴¹⁷ Such is for instance the character of the Jewess Martha in Ladislav Mňačko’s novel *Smrt’ sa volá Engelchen* (*Death is called Engelchen*).⁴¹⁸ A similar tendency can be noticed also in other literary or film works dealing with the war, in newspaper articles or commemoration speeches. According to Hallama, such a transformation of Jewish characters – who are no longer just passive victims – is closely connected with the concept of a “martyr”. He or she is an active agent, an active victim, even though his or her attitude may not correspond to the usual picture of an armed anti-Fascist fighter. In other words, a “martyr” is not (only) a soldier or partisan, but first and foremost a human being, who is still master of his destiny, in spite of all the tragic losses. The “martyr’s” suffering was meaningful, after all.⁴¹⁹

The fact that Slovak Jewry “was not feeble, in decline and resigned to its fate” was underlined already in 1949 in the book *Tragédia slovenských Židov: Fotografie a dokumenty* (The Tragedy of the Slovak Jews: Photographs and Documents), published by the Documentary Section at the ÚZŽNO in Bratislava. According to the editors, for instance, “Slovak Jewry, from whose ranks arose many notable fighters for the freedom of nations, deserve much credit for exposing Nazi crimes in time, so that the world, entangled in a war with murderous Hitlerism, could learn what was happening in Polish concentration camps.”⁴²⁰ In a similar vein, when on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the end of World War II Chief Rabbi Eliáš Katz compiled a list of

⁴¹⁶ FRIEDER, Emanuel. *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*. New York : Holocaust Library, 1990, p. 244.

⁴¹⁷ HALLAMA, P. *Nationale Helden* ..., p. 186.

⁴¹⁸ MŇAČKO, Ladislav. *Smrt sa volá Engelchen*. Bratislava : Slovenské vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1959.

⁴¹⁹ HALLAMA, P. *Nationale Helden* ..., p. 186.

⁴²⁰ STEINER, Bedrich a kol. *Tragédia slovenských židov: fotografie a dokumenty*. Bratislava : Dokumentačná akcia pri ÚSZNO, 1949, p. 8.

murdered rabbis, he referred to them as “martyrs”.⁴²¹ The shift described by Hallama is even more clearly discernible in commemoration speeches by František Komjáty, deputy chairman of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities, delivered in Žilina and Košice in mid-1959. In Košice, Komjáty did not refer to the dead only as those who had been murdered “in a vile and bestial manner”, but also as human beings through whose blood the spring of 1945 had been redeemed. Their death had not been in vain, as he said in Žilina – where also his parents, a sister, in-laws and other family members had been concentrated and later deported to “gas murdering camps” – they were “martyrs to their faith and nation”.⁴²²

Benjamin Eichler devoted the tenth chapter of his memoirs to those who “did not go voluntarily to the slaughter but resisted”. For Eichler, the Jews were not “only” martyrs but also heroes. He lists names, “at least of a part of them – those valiant fighters against Nazism, and I would like to draw attention to the heroism of Slovak Jewry, which was enormous when compared to the number of Jews in the neighbouring countries”. Eichler also invokes Biblical analogies, likening the fight against the Nazis to the fight against “Haman-Amalek, about whom the Bible says: Milchamah Adonai Baamalek Medor Dor”.⁴²³ He recalls the victory of the Israelites over Amalek in Refidim, as described in the Second Book of Moses: “Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.” Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is My Banner. He said, “Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”⁴²⁴

Eichler’s list of dozens of active Jewish fighters and members of resistance contains, among others, names from Banská Bystrica, Bánovce nad Bebravou, Levice, Trenčín, Levoča, Topoľčiany, Lučenec, Humenné, Snina, Košice, Prešov, Nitra, Hlohovec, Dunajská Streda, Nové Zámky and Bardejov as well as Bratislava and Žilina. It is evident from the way he would go back to different cities that he continued expanding the list. He also called upon those who “know about Jews who volunteered to fight the Nazis – not in a compulsory way, by being drafted into the army – and did not go to a concentration camp to the slaughter but resisted in any way” to make their names known.⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ KATZ, Eliáš. *Cedry Libanonu: na nehynúcu pamiatku umučených veľikášov židovstva a 110.000 občanov židovského vyznania zo Slovenska 1942-45*. Nitra : Židovská náboženská obec v Nitre, 1961.

⁴²² *The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem*, fond Franz Komjati, P223/9.

⁴²³ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, RG 1097, box 1, file 1.

⁴²⁴ Exodus, 17:14-16, NIV

⁴²⁵ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, RG 1097, box 1, file1.

As I have already mentioned, Eichler's memoirs are interesting also by not simplifying the attitudes of the Slovak majority population towards the Jews (and the Jewish question) during the war. In contrast to many other works dealing with the Holocaust in Slovakia, in Eichler's memories, the majority Slovaks participated in the events. We must bear in mind, however, that Eichler wrote his memoirs probably in the early 1970s when he already lived in exile – and that they were probably influenced by the liberalization era of the “Prague Spring”, which had opened up for a short time certain sensitive issues, including the question of collaboration of the local population.⁴²⁶

But let us return to Eichler's examination of Slovak-Jewish relations, claiming that “the great majority of the Slovak non-Jewish population considered the Jew only as a guest in Slovakia, who can be and should be expelled, or a second-class citizen without full civil rights”.⁴²⁷ The fact that it took Slovakia so long – even in comparison with the Czech lands – to adopt the restitution law was related to the fact that “[a] large number of the Slovak population was compromised by directly participating either in the deportations of Jews, Aryanization and other forms of robbing the Jews, or even in their persecution (cruel treatment etc.). [...] Complete denazification has never been performed in Slovakia. I have in mind all these little “volunteers” who would voluntarily catch the Jews, beat them “assiduously” at different occasions and put them into cattle cars, having robbed them, before delivering them to the Germans to be murdered. [...] There were too many of these thieves of Jewish property”.⁴²⁸

As a side note, I think it is telling that the word “collaboration” has different connotations in different languages, resulting from distinctive historical contexts. What is more, it has taken on a pejorative meaning only after 1939, and most expository dictionaries and lexicons now mention Vidkun Quisling or Philippe Pétain as typical examples. Hence, for instance, the Polish *Political Dictionary* from 1996 defines collaboration as (political, cultural or any other form of) voluntary cooperation with an occupying force during World War II. According to the Polish *Political Science Lexicon* from 1999, the term “collaborator” denotes, in Polish context, also the political elites who justified the martial law in Poland (proclaimed in December 1981).⁴²⁹ Also according to some Czech dictionaries, collaborator is the “label of a traitor who cooperated with the occupiers”.⁴³⁰ In some newer dictionaries, however, a broader definition

⁴²⁶ HOLÝ, Jiří. The Six Versions of The Shop on Main Street. In: *Aspects of genres in the Holocaust literatures in Central Europe*, ed. Jiří HOLÝ. Praha : Akropolis, 2015, pp. 97-113.

⁴²⁷ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, RG 1097, box 1, file 1.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ See *Słownik polityki*, ed. Marek BANKOWICZ. Warszawa : Wiedza Powszechna, 1996, p. 113; *Leksykon politologii*, ed. Andrzej ANTOSZEWSKI a Ryszard HERBUT. Wrocław : atla2, 1999, p. 207.

⁴³⁰ REJMAN. Ladislav. *Slovník cizích slov*. Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1966, p. 177.

of collaboration can be found. For instance, according to the Academic Dictionary from 2001, collaboration is a “dishonest (usually voluntary) cooperation (overt or secret) with the governing enemy, with occupiers”.⁴³¹ *The Dictionary of Current Slovak Language* from 2011 goes even further and extends the meaning of the word to include willing cooperation with a “domestic non-democratic governing system”.⁴³²

Eichler avoids such a black-and-white picture and the subsequent eleventh chapter of his memoirs is dedicated to those who helped “the Jews at the time of persecution and lack of freedom”. He is well aware that as impossible as it is to compile a complete list of “active Jewish fighters”, so it is impossible to “compile a complete list of non-Jews who helped the Jews at the time of persecution”.⁴³³ He calls twenty-two people from his incomplete list of *tsadikim*, righteous ones. And even in those cases Eichler requests that “out of gratefulness, the Jews who survived Hitler’s persecution by being saved by non-Jews should report their names to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, in order to complete the list of non-Jews.”⁴³⁴ As my contribution suggests, it is the non-schematic approach taken by Eichler in his memoirs that can inspire us even today, after so many years. In his unpublished memoirs, the Jewish and non-Jewish characters not only respond to events but also active participate in them. Not only silence and passivity but also collaboration and resistance are present in Eichler’s account of the Holocaust. As I wrote in the introduction, this chapter is to be read as a mere outline of how post-war glorification of the uprising, the partisans and anything anti-Fascist influenced the memories of the Holocaust in Slovakia. The story of the “resistant people” became the dominant post-war narrative of the Second World War, which has overlaid the question of collaboration, still sensitive in Slovakia. The ethnocentric view of Slovak history and schematic approach towards the Jews as passive victims, and victims of anonymous Fascism at that, with which the majority Slovaks had nothing to do, also influenced the post-war representatives of Slovak Jewry in their efforts to draw attention to the heroism in *their own* ranks. As I argue, the post-war story of two types of Slovaks – mostly partisans and a few traitors – has survived until today. Next to it, at least two other memories have survived. On one hand, the memory of World War II, as the story of *us*, Slovaks, symbolized by August 29, the anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising, an official state holiday since 1992. On the other hand there is the memory of the Holocaust, which has not yet found its place in *our* memory.

⁴³¹ *Akademický slovník cizích slov*, eds. Věra PETRÁČKOVÁ a Jiří KRAUS. Praha : Academia, 2001), p. 396.

⁴³² *Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka H-L*, eds. Alexandra JAROŠOVÁ a Klára BUZÁSSYOVÁ. Bratislava : Veda, 2011. Available at <http://slovník.juls.savba.sk> (quoted on 25 October 2015).

⁴³³ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, RG 1097, box 1, file 1.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

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Anton Vašek, Head of the Interior Ministry's 14th Department, His Responsibility, and Information about the Deportees

Vanda Rajcan, Northwestern University

Anton Vašek was born on 29 April 1905 in Hrubá Borša, near Senec. After earning a law degree he worked as a civil servant and editor in Bratislava. In 1927 he became the general secretary of the National Association of Slovak Villages, Towns and Districts. From 1930 to 1938 he was the editor of the *Správy mesta Bratislavy* and *Hlas slovenskej samosprávy* newspapers. On 3 April 1942, Vašek became the head of the Slovak Department of Jewish Affairs as well as one of Interior Minister Alexander Mach's most trusted and loyal advisors.⁴³⁵ In June 1946, he stood accused of racial discrimination against over 60,000 Slovak Jews, accepting a bribe of 2.5 million Slovak crowns (Ks), and the publication of pro-Nazi and anti-Soviet propaganda. How did he arrive before the Slovak National Court?

Slovak government officials created anti-Jewish legislation long before Anton Vašek accepted the position at the Interior Ministry. The 1940 Aryanisation legislation decreed the confiscation of Jewish-owned property and transferred it to non-Jewish (so-called Aryan) populations at vastly discounted prices. The state aryanized or liquidated more than 12,000 Jewish-owned businesses between 1941 and 1942.⁴³⁶ The *Ludák* leadership boasted that the 270-paragraph Jewish Codex (the so-called *Židovský kódex*) surpassed the Nuremberg Laws in scope, depth, and breadth. The German ambassador to Slovakia Hans E. Ludin agreed when he characterised the Codex as excessive and more stringent than the German Nuremberg Laws.⁴³⁷ Many of the paragraphs, or individual laws, covered not only Jews but also individuals of "mixed Aryan" and Jewish origins. The Codex required all Jews to wear a yellow Star, deprived Jews of all basic human rights, prevented them from joining organisations (except Jewish Centre, *Ústredňa Židov*), restricted shopping hours, and banned them from owning radios, phones, and valuables.⁴³⁸ The forced pauperisation of the Jewish

⁴³⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMMA), Record Group 57.004M, Folder 58, File Number 438. (USHMMA, 57.004M, 58/438)

⁴³⁶ JELÍNEK, Ješajahu A. *Dávidova hviezda pod Tatrami: Židia na Slovensku v 20. storočí*. Praha : Ipeľ, 2009, p. 37.

⁴³⁷ LIPSCHER, Ladislav. *Židia v slovenskom štáte (1939-1945)*. Bratislava : Print-Servis, 1992, p. 54.

⁴³⁸ Ústav Pámati Národa, "Nariadenie zo dňa 9. septembra 1941." Available at: http://www.upn.gov.sk/data/pdf/vlada_198-1941.pdf

community reinforced propaganda as it showed Jews as a social problem and an unwanted burden.

Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka and Interior Minister Alexander Mach, the two most powerful men in Slovak domestic politics in 1942, agreed to send additional 20,000 Slovak labourers to Germany to help the Reich with wartime labour shortages. Their first initiatives to send “workable Jews” predated Anton Vašek’s arrival in the Interior Ministry’s Department 14. Tuka later negotiated the deportation of all Jews and agreed for Slovakia to pay Germany a significant 500 Reichmarks “resettlement fee” per each deportee. Ultimately, the Slovaks only paid about 70% of that amount. The money did not come from the state budget but from seized Aryanisation revenues.⁴³⁹ In other words, Interior Minister Mach and Prime Minister Tuka ensured that Jews paid for their own deportation and death.

Anton Vašek served as an inconsequential Interior Ministry bureaucrat when Alexander Mach, Izidor Koso, as well as Vašek’s predecessor in Department 14 Gejza Konka created deportation plans in March 1942. The first five transports were supposed to follow strict German-established quotas of 1,000 per train as otherwise German personnel refused to receive the trains at the border. The Interior Minister empowered the Hlinka Guard (HG), the HSĽS party’s paramilitary organisation, and gendarmes to arrest local Jews. The deportations allowed HG members and gendarmes to enrich themselves through seized money and valuables. Neither the Prime Minister, the Interior Minister nor other politicians and officials placed limits on the force that could be used against Jews, and thus HG nor gendarmes’ treatment of deportees was brutal and unchecked. The brutality was only limited by logistics. On this point, Konka’s grandiose plans to remove 5,000 Jews from Slovakia in five days were untenable - local officials could not gather that many people from various villages that quickly.

Furthermore, the first transports did not go according to plan and their failures led to major personnel changes at the beginning of April 1942. Interior Minister Alexander Mach fired Gejza Konka as the head of Department 14 for his inability to carry out the deportations. In Bratislava, for example, the first transport of Jewish girls from the Patrónka concentration centre only included 770 girls and not the required 1,000.⁴⁴⁰ When asked about the events of that week, Mach maintained during the trial that he replaced Konka for “health reasons” and

⁴³⁹ KAMENEC, Ivan. *Po stopách tragédie*. Bratislava : Archa, 1990, p. 68.

⁴⁴⁰ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/111-112.

did not elaborate further.⁴⁴¹ Dieter Wisliceny, former German advisor on the Jewish Question in Slovakia, testified in 1946 that as far as he knew, “Konka was unexpectedly removed. He was allegedly implicated in some corruption affairs, and investigations were pending.”⁴⁴² Whatever the reason was, Mach reassigned Konka within the Interior Ministry and hired Anton Vašek on 3 April 1942. Anton Vašek served as the head of the Department of Jewish Affairs (Department 14) between April 1942 and September 1944.

Most European countries held national trials in an attempt to sentence or rehabilitate collaborators. The Slovak National Council’s Law 33/45 Sl. z. established a triple-tier retributive justice system in Slovakia, defined the courts’ scale, and outlined punishable criminal offences.⁴⁴³ The Slovak National Council, the legislative body of Slovakia, authorised the courts to function until December 1947 to punish a specific set of crimes related to collaboration, treason, the Slovak National Uprising, and the dissolution of the Czechoslovak republic. These crimes did not exist in the common criminal code and in some cases carried the death penalty. Lesser crimes, including Hlinka Guard membership and local HSL’S participation, carried penalties such as confiscation of property, imprisonment, or loss of civil rights.⁴⁴⁴

A seven-member Senate adjudicated cases; the law mandated that the Senate president and his deputy were judges by profession.⁴⁴⁵ Igor Daxner served as the Senate president during Vašek’s proceeding.⁴⁴⁶ The two dominant political parties, the Communist Party of Slovakia and the Democratic Party, chose the remaining six members as well as two alternate justices. Thus, National Court senate membership was indeed political and reflected the domestic climate of the 1946 Slovak elections rather than thorough expertise in jurisprudence. The law stipulated minimal requirements for Senate members: justices had to be Czechoslovak citizens, be at least 21 years old, and be literate.⁴⁴⁷

The Court’s conscious choice to prosecute Vašek as one of the first defendants most likely stemmed from overwhelming evidence against the defendant and an almost guaranteed guilty verdict. The two main SNR-appointed attorneys, Dr. Juraj Šujan and Dr. Michael Geró

⁴⁴¹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/652.

⁴⁴² USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/186-98.

⁴⁴³ BEŇA, Štefan. *Slovensko a Benešove dekréty*, Bratislava : Belimex, 2002, p. 199-210.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 199-200.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 200.

prepared charges and the indictment against Vašek. Vašek chose Jozef Mill'o, an old friend from the university, from a pre-approved SNR list of attorneys to represent him sixteen days prior to opening statements.⁴⁴⁸

The trial took place in the Judicial Place in Bratislava between 25 June 1946 and 26 July 1946. The domestic and international press covered the daily proceedings. Survivors and family members formed a majority of the audience members and vocally challenged testimonies. The Senate president Daxner constantly reminded spectators to stay silent and threatened to remove them from the courtroom if their antics continued. Four interpreters translated the proceedings into German, English, Russian, and French for the international correspondents.⁴⁴⁹

The prosecution did not charge Anton Vašek with illegal actions surrounding Slovak independence in March 1939 or the failed Slovak National Uprising in August 1944. The prosecution acknowledged that Vašek did not participate in either of those events and framed the trial around the 1942 deportations of Jews and 1943 corruption. The indictment's detailed discussion of the wartime Slovak state created a historical record for the court that served for subsequent trials and the public. The prosecution named Interior Ministers Mach and Prime Minister Tuka as the main collaborators of Nazi Germany because they directly influenced policies and benefited at the highest levels. The prosecution cited Law 33/45's Paragraph 3B, in addition to sixteen others, to illustrate Vašek's role in the Interior Ministry. The document defined a collaborator as someone who: "ordered, organised, and diligently pursued the persecution of democratic and anti-fascist individuals and organisations for their political activities... who caused unlawful injury to others based on racial, national, religious or political affiliation and anti-fascist beliefs... or who ordered the eviction or early transfer of Slovak people to concentration camps abroad or to work in favour of German warfare..."⁴⁵⁰ Prosecutor Šujan argued that Vašek's overzealousness and participation in the Slovak political scene led to the racial persecution of more than 57,000 citizens of Jewish origins to concentration camps abroad.⁴⁵¹ Šujan also claimed that the defendant partially admitted to

⁴⁴⁸ USHMMA, RG.57.004, 57/285-286.

⁴⁴⁹ USHMMA, RG.57.004, 59/113 -115.

⁴⁵⁰ BEŇA, Š. *Slovensko...*, p. 200.

⁴⁵¹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/92.

his guilt during initial interrogations and assured the National Court that he would be convicted after all witness testimonies.⁴⁵²

Prosecutor Šujan grouped criminal charges against Vašek into the broad category of racial discrimination. This tactic allowed him to address all charges concurrently, but made court proceedings more difficult to follow. These charges ranged from specific instances of the defendant's involvement in state-sponsored and institutionalised anti-Semitism, systematic marginalisation of Slovak Jewry, and deportations to concentration camps abroad. These charges compounded the defendant's three primary responsibilities as head of the Department of Jewish Affairs: coordination of deportations, supervision of the Jewish forced labour system and the issuing of anti-Jewish directives.

Vašek's first duty included the coordination of 57 transports to Auschwitz and Lublin-region concentration camps between April 1942 and October 1942. The prosecution reiterated that only 252 out of more than 57,000 Slovak Jews survived in these concentration camps.⁴⁵³

Whether the decision came from Vašek's superiors or the defendant himself, the transports changed nature once Vašek assumed office. Whereas only "work able" Jews left Slovakia during Konka's time in office, the policy shifted to include entire families in April. Vašek was not present during all transports but trial minutes suggested that he directly supervised three Žilina trains. Vašek also kept meticulous records at the Interior Ministry, which helped the prosecution.

Several prosecution witnesses documented that the transports included "the elderly, even people in their 70s, along with children, the disabled and the mentally ill."⁴⁵⁴ It was not logical, the prosecution contended, that those Jews were going to work camps. Rabbi Frieder posthumously provided the most damning evidence against Vašek and personally blamed him for the deportations. In his deposition dated 20 April 1946, Frieder argued that Vašek could have stopped the transports and sabotaged the plans more effectively and without bribery. The rabbi's deposition also quantified the gross human rights violations and the list of alleged bribes that Vašek accepted from the Working group.⁴⁵⁵

Anton Vašek's second responsibility revolved around oversight of forced labour camps for Jews in the towns of Sered', Nováky and Vyhne. These workers lived in prisoner-like

⁴⁵² USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/101.

⁴⁵³ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/100.

⁴⁵⁴ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/71, 59/55.

⁴⁵⁵ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/480.

conditions in the so-called self-sufficient administrative units and also included economically important Jews who obtained papers from various ministries and exemptions from deportations. The Interior Ministry officials and the Jewish Centre leadership tasked camps with various industries: Sered' forced labourers produced furniture, Nováky's labour force specialised in tailoring, and Vyhne labourers constructed public works projects. Nováky, as the largest forced labour camp, housed approximately 1800 prisoners while 300 people worked in Vyhne, the smallest camp. The camp commanders kept Jews in relatively "friendly" living conditions – relative to other labour camps outside of Slovakia – not out of humane reasons, but to maximise their productivity. The prosecution indicted Vašek for the false imprisonment of more than 3,500 Jews in these labour camps.⁴⁵⁶

During the trial, the prosecution showed that Vašek was not a low-level functionary who simply "followed orders." Vašek maintained a cautious equilibrium in corresponding with local officials. On one hand, he reaffirmed his absolute authority as the department's top official and placed personal responsibility on local HG commanders. On the other hand, Vašek also knew that local officials' and commanders' cooperation was vital in the successful implementation of deportations.

The prosecution contended that Vašek personally ordered the deportation of Jews after he arrived in his position and drew from forced labour camps to complete quotas when necessary. Rudolf Marček, the former Žilina concentration centre commander, testified "I received orders from the Interior Ministry, signed by Vašek. In the order, it said: Gather people necessary for transport which is leaving then and then."⁴⁵⁷ He continued, "In all the orders I received, Vašek was always signed as the representative of the Interior Ministry."⁴⁵⁸ Imrich Vašina, the commander of the Bratislava- Patrónka, and Sered' concentration centres, echoed Marček's sentiments. He stated, "When I asked the defendant what was happening with the Jews in Germany, he told me that he did not know and that I should mind my own business. The defendant treated us sharply and told us we had to produce these people and if we didn't, he would send us to Ilava."⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ NIŽNANSKÝ, Eduard a kol. (eds). *Holokaust na Slovensku 5*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2004, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁷ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/852.

⁴⁵⁸ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/745.

⁴⁵⁹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 58/361; 57.004M, 58/437. 219/98

The Slovak Railroad Company provided the National Court with a list of detailed correspondence between Vašek and Žilina's camp commander Rudolf Marček. A transport left Žilina on 16 April 1942, consisted of 988 Jews, and arrived at Čadca train station at 4,28 a.m. The night transports always reached the Polish-Slovak border in the middle of the night so the local populations would not know about transport conditions, physical violence against Jews, or deportation policies in general. These supplementary sources not only painted Vašek as the enemy of the Jews, but also documented the Slovak Jews in Slovakia and abroad.⁴⁶⁰

Anton Vašek had all of the necessary information about Slovak Jewry in 1942 when he summarised the so-called Jewish Question in Slovakia in a status report to Interior Minister Mach on 25 June 1942. He wrote, "Up to today, approximately 53,000 Jews have been transported from the total number of 89,000 from the last census. From those, at least 10,000 fled to Hungary or abroad, or they are at an unknown location. Baptised Jews, Jews in mixed marriages and their family members consist of about 8,000 Jews."⁴⁶¹ Vašek's signature on these policies, as well as on dozens of others, suggested that he agreed with the content of these directives.

In addition to the damning evidence in these directives, several witnesses spoke about Vašek's character as well as his conduct in the Department of Jewish Affairs. They presented Vašek as a phlegmatic egomaniac who created a hostile work environment for everyone.⁴⁶² They testified to Vašek's exercise of power and claimed, for example, that no one could be released from labour camps without Vašek's approval or knowledge. Ján Bučenec, an Interior Ministry employee, stated, "the defendant gave commands about who has to be imprisoned or released."⁴⁶³ Former Jewish Centre member Alfred Soldin described the pervasive fear: "it remains a fact that everyone who worked with the defendant or interacted with him shook in fear. Not only did Jews fear the defendant but also gentiles, because he would incarcerate them on Göring street [...] I remember when the defendant told us that if we did not work, he would send us to a camp."⁴⁶⁴ In short, the prosecution's witnesses presented Vašek as a feared

⁴⁶⁰ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/521.

⁴⁶¹ HUBENÁK, Ladislav (ed.) *Riešenie židovskej otázky na Slovensku 1939 – 1945: dokumenty*. Bratislava : Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum židovskej kultúry, pp. 124-125.

⁴⁶² USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/770-729

⁴⁶³ USHMMA, RG.57.004, 59/162.

⁴⁶⁴ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/114.

boss who threatened individuals frequently to achieve desired results. He had the power to confer the ultimate sanction upon those who incurred his disfavour.

According to these witnesses, Vašek allegedly substantiated his threats by invoking unrestricted access to Interior Minister Mach. Vašek met with his boss several times each week and had significantly more access to him than did any other department head.⁴⁶⁵ Vašek's blatant disregard for the established hierarchy likely angered Presidium chief Izidor Koso whom Vašek frequently bypassed and ignored. Evidence indicated that Vašek became one of Mach's most trusted advisors in the years 1942 and 1943. Very few people had the same access to Minister Mach as Vašek. His seemingly unlimited access to the minister gave the defendant a seat at the table for Jewish-related discussions.⁴⁶⁶ Therefore, he had – or could easily obtain – vital information.

Some of the key questions to emerge in the first stage of the trial are simply stated: What did he know and when did he know it? When did he have direct knowledge of the nature and the operation of the extermination camps? At the beginning of the trial, Vašek claimed that he only learned about the deportations and conditions in the death camps during his trial in June 1946.⁴⁶⁷ He quickly realised that this defence lacked credibility and modified his testimony to say that he did not learn of the death camps until September 1943. He knew of evidence in the court's proceedings that proved his perjury. Former Jewish Centre functionary Kováč testified that he brought him two letters on 14 August 1942, one in Hungarian and one in Slovak, which documented the absolute terror in the concentration camps. Vašek ignored the timeline inconsistencies. He asserted that such letters compelled him to request an immediate meeting with Minister Mach to urge him to create a commission to investigate these charges. Yet this assertion is probably perjury as well since Vašek's Interior Ministry co-worker Pavol Maľa testified that the defendant knew about the death camps by autumn 1942 at the latest.⁴⁶⁸ Rudolf Marček also testified to Vašek's knowledge of the murder of Jews in August 1942 as it coincided with Vašek's visit to the Žilina concentration camp. When Vašek arrived, he questioned an escapee named Junger.⁴⁶⁹ Furthermore, former Nováky labour camp inmate Juraj Spitzer testified about a conversation he overheard between Vašek and the camp commander on 22 September 1942: "We found out that the Jews were systematically

⁴⁶⁵ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/741.

⁴⁶⁶ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/743.

⁴⁶⁷ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 58/171.

⁴⁶⁸ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 58/487.

⁴⁶⁹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 58/488.

murdered and that it was impossible for them to survive more than one year. From the conversation, I could only get two or three sentences. He said, ‘Even if God intervened, this transport has to go.’”⁴⁷⁰ Clearly the defendant knew of the true nature of the sites such as Auschwitz as early as summer 1942.

Vašek’s first defence, a defence often used in post-war collaboration trials across Europe, focused on his alleged small role in the greater state machinery. In other words, Vašek only followed his superiors’ orders. The defendant claimed that he had no choice but to accept Interior Minister Mach’s employment offer for the position of the head of Department 14 even though he had several reservations.⁴⁷¹ Vašek’s defence relied on the fact that transports began prior to his arrival. In 1946, Vašek maintained that, “I was subject to Mach. I gave orders that I received from the Interior Minister.” While he continued, “I did not order the deportation of the elderly, the mentally disabled, or mentally ill. Mach gave me this order, but on the contrary I procured medical supervision for them.”⁴⁷² In other words, Vašek deflected blame onto his predecessor and his superior. Alexander Mach confirmed that he pressured Vašek to accept the appointment and dismissed his fears. Mach testified, “Initially he was against it, but then he reluctantly accepted it at my insistence [...] I assured him that he would not do anything on his own initiative, but would receive orders directly from me or with my permission.”⁴⁷³ This damning admission of guilt should have reappeared in Mach’s trial six months later but it did not.

Vašek ensured that the National Court justices heard about his attempts to improve conditions in labour camps in Slovakia, his attempts to increase medical assistance to the Jewish elderly before their deportations, and his close relationship with former Jewish Centre functionaries Rabbi Armin Frieder and Andrej Steiner. Vašek claimed that he wanted to resign on numerous occasions but former Jewish Centre functionaries convinced him to stay. He focused on deportations of individual Jews that he stopped to illustrate that his replacement would have most likely resumed deportations. Understandably, Vašek chose to highlight his alleged benevolence towards individual Jews and ignored the alleged corruption charges.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁰ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/233-234.

⁴⁷¹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/632.

⁴⁷² USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/95-98

⁴⁷³ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 58/98.

⁴⁷⁴ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/554

Anton Vašek claimed that he acted as a double agent as both a government official and a friend of the Jews. In his opening statement he claimed, “I was against deportations from the beginning. It was my intention to stop the transports as soon as possible. I have Aryan witnesses as well as my colleagues the (former) Jewish Centre functionaries. I first attempted to stop the transports and then at least to slow them down.”⁴⁷⁵ It allegedly took Vašek six months to accomplish this policy. He offered an explanation, “I could not impact policy at that time because I did not have any influence. It was necessary for me to gain confidence from the Germans, the Interior Minister, and other radical groups.”⁴⁷⁶ When he found out that Steiner and Frieder had testified against him, he felt betrayed. Vašek claimed that he felt sadness when Frieder died. “I told my attorney,” Vašek claimed, “that it was the saddest event that could happen to me because my crown witness had died. When I heard Frieder’s testimony against me, I was horrified at what he said about me.” He then theorised that Frieder and Steiner had conspired against him and presented him in an unfair light.⁴⁷⁷ According to Vašek, the corruption charges were only included in order to destroy him.

From his testimony, it is apparent that not only did Vašek have the ability to disagree with Mach; he could do so on major domestic policies and without fear of retribution. He was not as powerless as he presented himself to be. Second, Vašek could clearly choose whether to stay in the position or resign, without fear of imprisonment or death. Vašek countered this assertion in two ways. First, he challenged the concept of individual choice in Slovakia in 1942, especially considering Mach’s power. He stated, “I received an order and I would like to see a person who in the spring 1942 stood up to Tuka or Mach.”⁴⁷⁸ Vašek allegedly thought he would be deported to Ilava, a concentration camp for political opponents of the regime. At the same time, his earliest testimony revealed that he had already gained Mach’s full confidence. He himself declared, “I had Mach’s trust if he appointed me to such an important function.”⁴⁷⁹ Vašek did not see a contradiction between these two statements. Perhaps he attempted to construct at least reasonable doubt if he could not claim complete innocence.

The second main group of charges surrounded corruption and bribery, more specifically A. Vašek’s acceptance of between 2,500,000 Ks and 3,000,000 Ks.⁴⁸⁰ He was not the only

⁴⁷⁵ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/551.

⁴⁷⁶ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/553

⁴⁷⁷ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/552

⁴⁷⁸ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 58/336

⁴⁷⁹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 58/985

⁴⁸⁰ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/101-102.

Slovak official who accepted bribes between 1939 and 1945. The so-called Jewish question created countless opportunities for personal enrichment for Slovak collaborators. Prominent Slovak historian Ivan Kamenec noted that bribery for exemptions became a tolerated norm. Aryanisers extorted primarily thriving Jewish-owned businesses and housing. Various norms, and later on the so-called the Jewish Codex, also banned Jews from owning “luxury items,” including radios, watches, cameras and other valuables.⁴⁸¹

Anton Vašek stood to gain the most as head of the Department of Jewish Affairs because his office created and implemented all aspects of the deportation process of Jews. Vašek had the access, the opportunity, and the motive to gain personally from the exploitation and destruction of the Jews. He created a successful enterprise that allowed him to profit in exchange for doing his job less successfully and zealously. Former illegal Jewish Working group allegedly paid Vašek to be derelict in his duties; bribes could moderate his desire for fame and quest for power within the Slovak domestic scene.

The prosecution focused on corruption and bribery charges to illustrate Vašek’s primary motivations and moral failings. Vašek allegedly established a hierarchy of fees which varied from 5,000 Ks for minor exemptions (travel, employment, etc.) to 20,000 Ks for exemptions from deportations. Since Vašek determined who was deported and who stayed in domestic labour camps, it is probable that he included rich Jews on exemption lists because he knew he could extort financial compensation and valuables from their relatives in exchange for their freedom. In some instances, as witnesses testified, Vašek allegedly accepted payments from relatives and deported the Jews in question anyway.⁴⁸²

The prosecution established through various documents that Anton Vašek earned 1,500 Ks per month as one of the highest ranking officials in the Slovak government.⁴⁸³ He not only created a successful system of bribery, he also arrived at new methods to obtain desired results. The prosecution also introduced a series of anecdotes that showed Vašek’s cleverness and his desire to avoid paper trails. In 1943 Vašek’s daughter purchased a spacious apartment in a prime Bratislava location for a very low price. Soňa Vašeková was seven years old at the time. Naturally, her father served as her legal representative.⁴⁸⁴ Samuel Dvorín testified that he purchased 500 copies of Vašek’s books (equivalent to 20,000 Ks) to obtain travel

⁴⁸¹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/71.

⁴⁸² USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/73.

⁴⁸³ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/256-287.

⁴⁸⁴ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 62/15-17.

exemptions for his family.⁴⁸⁵ Former Jewish Centre leader Tibor Kováč testified that Vašek participated in high-stakes card games where players allowed the defendant to win in exchange for political favours.⁴⁸⁶ Ján Belán, Vašek's personal chauffeur, recounted a number of times that he waited for the defendant outside of the Hotel Carlton for hours while his boss consumed substantial amounts of alcohol and engaged in card games. The chauffeur admitted that curiosity got the best of him on several occasions and he looked into his boss' briefcase that Vašek carelessly left open in the backseat. Ján Belán testified that Vašek screamed at him to mind his own business when he tried to tell his boss to more careful with unmarked envelopes containing large sums of money. Vašek did not challenge Belán's testimony with a confrontation.⁴⁸⁷

Even Vašek's former boss, Alexander Mach, knew about Vašek's "extracurricular activities" although he tried to downplay them during Vašek's trial. Perhaps Mach's indifference stemmed from the fact that he also accepted bribes. Perhaps he wanted to help a friend. The prosecution introduced a letter that Mach dictated to his secretary in December 1943. In this letter, Mach chastised Vašek for his unethical behaviour and expected his subordinate to change his behaviour immediately. In the letter, Mach also noted the increasing number of complaints and anonymous tips in regard to Vašek's gambling. Mach explained to Vašek that it was only a matter of time before he could not protect him from an official investigation. Mach used the "informal thou" to address Vašek, which demonstrated the closeness of their relationship. The Interior Minister's handwritten comments "Do not send, I will deliver personally" also signified his protection of his friend and his willingness to go through unofficial channels to deliver his letter.⁴⁸⁸

Anton Vašek's gambling addiction was one of the worst kept secrets in Bratislava in 1942 and 1943. A number of his former colleagues testified that he allegedly used his powerful position to demand payments for his behaviour. Many people claimed that Vašek's lifestyle was unsustainable on his relatively meagre monthly salary. Andrej Steiner and Rabbi Armin Frieder attempted to document all of the exchanges as much as they could. These former Jewish Centre functionaries insisted that they paid Vašek 100,000 Ks each month not to resume deportations between October 1942 and December 1943. The total sum of these

⁴⁸⁵ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/262.

⁴⁸⁶ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 61/212-213.

⁴⁸⁷ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/1021.

⁴⁸⁸ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 62/12-14.

encounters, according to Steiner, equalled well over one million Ks. Steiner could not provide paper documentation for obvious reasons but named several people who also knew about the interactions between the him and Rabbi Frieder. Vašek challenged Steiner's recollections and neither man altered his original testimony.⁴⁸⁹

Anton Vašek's strategy against the corruption charges featured denial and numerous confrontations with witnesses in attempts to discredit them and their testimonies. The former Jewish Centre functionaries posed the greatest problem for Vašek because their unified testimonies presented the defendant as a money-hungry, power-seeking degenerate. Vašek's confrontations lost their luster over time as both sides clung to their perceived versions of the truth. The more witnesses who testified for the prosecution about their interactions with Vašek, the less effective Vašek's denials became. When denial failed, Anton Vašek designed a second tactic that presented him in a positive light. Vašek outlined what in his mind was a close relationship and even a friendship between himself and several former Jewish Centre functionaries. Vašek claimed that he risked his life and violated dozens of his own directives to help Jews for no apparent reason.

Vašek erroneously assumed that his remarks would be broadcasted on live radio and prepared his dramatic entrance accordingly. Instead of addressing the presiding judges and the court's audience, he chose to address the entire Slovak nation, "Slovak towns, villages, hamlets, and streams, listen to the voice of Dr. Anton Vašek from Lamač. I did not want to write my defence, I came to the microphone so I could express what is in my heart [...]"⁴⁹⁰ In a four and a half hour speech, he also historicised the "worldwide Jewish Question" as "a long-lasting problem for each nation where Jews settled."⁴⁹¹ He subsequently reverted to his original defence: he allegedly never concerned himself with the so-called Jewish Question until Mach forced him to become the head of Department 14 on 3 April 1942. In his final public appearance, Vašek presented himself as a martyr for the Slovak nation and a good citizen who had the great misfortune of being appointed as the head of Department 14. In other words, it could have happened to everyone. He maintained that history would judge him differently once the political scene cleared and that people would look at his "crimes" differently.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 59/97-102.

⁴⁹⁰ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 61/550-553.

⁴⁹¹ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 61/574.

⁴⁹² USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 61/552.

According to the prosecution's arguments, the defendant not only participated in the state's crimes against the Jews, he also benefited financially from them. The prosecutor successfully demonstrated that careerism, materialism, and the quest for fame motivated Vašek's actions. Though anti-Semitic rhetoric appeared in many of Vašek's publications, the ideology did not appear to rank highly in Vašek's motivations. He provided ample evidence against Vašek, "The defendant had to live on the moon" Šujan continued, "if he did not know what happened with the Jews until 1943."⁴⁹³ He painted Vašek as a high-ranking politician who retained his voice and individual agenda in wartime Slovakia - not a passive bureaucrat who only "followed orders." He also demonstrated that Vašek not only influenced policies, he also took advantage of Jewish suffering for his benefit.

The Slovak National Court sentenced Anton Vašek to death by hanging on 25 July 1942 at 11,15 a.m.⁴⁹⁴ Vašek and his attorney immediately formulated a plea for clemency because the Retribution Law 33/45 only allowed 48 hours to stage a successful appeal. Prosecutor Šujan opposed Vašek's last minute attempt to secure a lesser sentence, contributing to the National Court's negative verdict. Vašek's defence attorney Jozef Mill'o claimed that his client deserved leniency due to the National Court's alleged political nature, prearranged and prejudicial verdict, and unfair proceedings. Had the defence's witnesses been allowed to testify, Mill'o argued, Vašek's sentence would have been imprisonment and not the death penalty.

The National Court seemingly sentenced Vašek to death and immediately turned its attention to the next trial – the proceedings against former Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka. One of the main representatives of the Slovak *Ludák* regime faced the seven member Senate for the first time on the day of Vašek's execution. The National Court achieved its primary goal of prosecuting Anton Vašek. The prosecution informed the public about the anti-Jewish laws between 1942 and 1945. The National Court labelled Vašek as the primary culprit of racial discrimination and hanged him for his crimes.

The unknown bureaucrat Anton Vašek first rose in the Interior Ministry ranks quickly, and once in power, employed incredibly arrogant and indiscriminate policies to promote his own predatory and monetary interests. As head of Department 14, the ministry office responsible for the so-called Jewish Question in Slovakia, Vašek single-handedly decided on the fate

⁴⁹³ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 61/1089.

⁴⁹⁴ USHMMA, RG.57.004M, 60/1071.

of thousands of people and robbed them of their property, valuables, and money. He became one of the most powerful men in the Slovak *Ludák* regime and at times exercised near absolute power as one of the closest associates of the Interior Minister Alexander Mach. Although this inconspicuous bureaucrat's political career was brief, his actions affected the lives of tens of thousands, if not more, of his countrymen. Fuelled by ambition and his good political connections, Vašek manoeuvred Slovak anti-Semitism and wartime politics for personal gain, for which he paid the ultimate price.

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