

■ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies

**Documenting Life
and Destruction**
Holocaust Sources
in Context

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DOCUMENTING LIFE AND DESTRUCTION

HOLOCAUST SOURCES IN CONTEXT

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Documenting Life and Destruction
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THE HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY

Evolution of a Genocide

Zoltán Vági, László Csósz, and Gábor Kádár

Foreword by Randolph L. Braham

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DOCUMENT 2-15: György Ottlik's report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 10, 1942, HNA, Series K 64, fascicle 96, item 41, file 437/1942.¹¹⁰

[. . .]

On the first day, straight away, I spent three hours at Mr. Ambassador Sztójay's. The main topics of our conversation were the following: I told him about my impressions, consulting with him about what I should tell the German gentlemen I would be meeting, and how I should put what I was to say; after this, he told me about his understanding of the military and the political situation, all in a spirit of optimism, of course, and he spent a long time dwelling on the Jewish question. He pointed out that the Germans have shifted away from their original standpoint that they would solve this problem after the war. Their reason for this, according to him, is that they do not want to carry the burden of resettling the Jews into the peace negotiations. For this reason, they want to make the Jews vanish from Europe. Beyond this, they have two further reasons for this radical "solution": the Jews are enemies with whom one cannot make a peace agreement—a peace agreement and coexistence are conceivable with the English or the Americans (a German diplomat told me the same thing), but the Jews remain mortal enemies, so it is "us or them." The other reason is that the Jews, with their mentality and network, are everywhere friends of the enemy; during the war, they must therefore be removed from all occupied areas and allied countries. An ally or a friend who provides shelter for Jews and protects them is not a friend but should be regarded as an enemy. This approach has now been launched in France as well. Soon, they will pose a question for us as well, for there are just two problems weighing down on Hungarian-German relations, heavy burdens indeed. One is our treatment of the German *Volksgruppe*¹¹¹; this has been improving for now, and grievances have been pushed into the background.¹¹² The other problem is far more severe: the great influence and

110. First cited in Karsai, *A budai vártól a gyepűig*, 203–6.

111. This refers to ethnic Germans living in Hungary.

112. Sztójay's remark refers to constant tension caused by the pro-Nazi movements and elements of the German minority in Hungary who wished to gain independence from the Hungarian state and increase the influence of Nazi Germany. The government warded off these attempts with ever-decreasing success. For a detailed account, see Loránt Tilkovszky, *Ez volt a Volksbund. A német népcsoport-politika és Magyarország* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1978); Loránt Tilkovszky, *Hét évtized a magyarországi németek történetéből. 1919–1989* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1989).

role of the Jews in Hungary. As long as these continue, the Hungarians cannot be trusted. Sztójay would therefore consider it appropriate for Hungary to stop waiting until confronted with the question in a harsh manner. The country must speed up its changing of the guard and resettle a large portion of the Jewish population into occupied areas of Russia.¹¹³ At first our Ambassador talked about 300,000 individuals, but then he lowered his estimate to 100,000. In response to my interjection, he made no secret of the fact that this move would not mean resettlement but murder.

During my response, I pointed out that we are not yet in a situation to take over the positions held by the Jews. In many places, in companies of varying sizes, I have an insider's perspective on what the real results of ary-anization have been, and I must regrettably state that when it comes to intellectual productivity and diligence, Christian Hungarians, and especially the Hungarians of Hungarian origin, cannot, and perhaps do not even want to, keep up with the competition. They like income that requires no work and therefore favor the convenient position of a *Strohmann*.¹¹⁴ To this Sztójay responded that if we do not make a move by ourselves, then the Germans will take the matter into their own hands after the war, remove the Jews, and put Germans in their places, and will do this even if "they perhaps win only a 75 percent victory, or a 50 percent one."

For my part, I emphasized that thinking about matters soberly, the takeover of the position of the Jewish capital, and economic replacement of the Jews would require at least a generation, thirty years—thirty years during which today's strong political and moral pressure would be maintained throughout. It is, so to speak, impossible to follow mobile capital, and it would simply disappear if there were threats and persecution. Forcing that solution would therefore lead to a rather severe economic crisis at a moment, during the last two or three years of the war, when we are supposed to be doing all we can to lift our economic, moral, and physical strength to the highest degree. If the Germans win—a total victory, not a 50 percent one, and I do not know what the latter is supposed to mean—then they will do whatever they please, and it will make no difference to what extent we try to please them beforehand. In terms of banishing 100,000 or 300,000 Jews, sentencing them to death, that would certainly be a fine gesture toward Germany. But it would not solve the

113. In Hungary the "aryanization" of Jewish property was widely called the "changing of the guard."

114. See the introduction to document 1-4 and the term *stróman* in the glossary.

Jewish question and would therefore do no more than impose the burden on the Hungarian state and its people of having used unprecedented brutality against its own citizens. This would lead to Hungary's inner disruption, while yielding no more than a 10 or 30 percent improvement. This is no way to rescue a nation. His Excellency the ambassador was shaking his head quite a bit as he acknowledged this argument of mine, which I supported with the claim that, to a reasonable extent, I myself do everything in my power to replace the Jews with genuine Hungarians, but I had never gone so far (nor would I be willing to) as to endanger the quality and therefore the very existence of the *Pester Lloyd*,¹¹⁵ that is to say, incurring the loss of a Hungarian value, a Hungarian weapon. One can, and can only, replace one value with another. Only a revolution can go further than this, by destroying blindly at first, so it can subsequently build things in their place.

[. . .]

Ottlik's notes show that Sztójay was aware of the change in the Reich's Jewish policies after the turn of 1941–1942 and the motivations behind it. He thought that the rational move would be for Hungary to anticipate the Germans' demands, which were likely to grow stronger, and initiate the deportation of its Jewish citizens. Sztójay also made clear that participation in the pan-European solution in practice meant collaboration in a systematic genocide.

Following the 1943 turn in the war caused by the German defeat at Stalingrad, Hungary became an increasingly important component in the Reich's strategy, not because of its army, which was of modest combat value, but because of its geostrategic position and economic resources. Through its intelligence service, Berlin had precise information about the leading circles' diminishing enthusiasm for the German alliance. On April 16–17, 1943, at the German-Hungarian negotiations taking place at the Klessheim castle in Austria, Hitler and German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop personally confronted Horthy about his government's "defeatist" behavior and "moderate" Jewish policies. Unprepared to counter these attacks, the regent did not give a substantive response at that time.¹¹⁶ He did so three weeks later in the form of a letter, after he had consulted with the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

115. This is Ottlik's newspaper. See note 108 above.

116. For minutes of the meeting between Hitler and Horthy, see Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry: A Documentary Account* (New York: Pro Arte for the World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1963), 1:218–28.