

■ 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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THE HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY

Evolution of a Genocide

Zoltán Vági, László Csősz, and Gábor Kádár

Foreword by Randolph L. Braham

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Dear Sztójay!

With German troops marching in two and a half months ago and the well-known events limiting Hungarian sovereignty, I wished to retire from exercising the regent's powers entrusted in me by the nation. Although from my own perspective this would have been the most natural solution, after thinking things over a bit, I had to set aside my plan. First and foremost, I had to appoint a government that enjoyed the trust of Germany, so that—in accordance with their promises—we could be freed from the occupation. In addition, I also felt it was a responsibility I had toward my nation that I persevere in my position. Had I done otherwise, the situation thus ensuing would have had unforeseeable consequences, given the extraordinarily difficult circumstances that the country is in today. But I was also aware that this government—having been forced into a situation that leaves no alternatives open—must implement various measures that I do not consider right and for which I cannot take responsibility.

These measures include the handling of the Jewish question in a manner that does not fit the Hungarian way of thinking, Hungarian circumstances, and with respect to these, Hungarian interests.

First and foremost, it is clear that I was in no position to stop either German activities in this regard or steps by the government that were prompted by German wishes; thus, I was forced not to intervene in this matter.³³ I was not informed beforehand about the measures about to be taken; nor did I receive full information afterward about what had

31. See Veesenmayer's report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 6, 1944, in Juhász et al., *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország*, 874–76.

32. Cf. the English-language collection, Miklós Szinai and László Szűcs, eds., *The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy* (Budapest: Corvina, 1965), 301–3.

33. Horthy conveniently “forgets” that—not wanting to be involved in the anti-Jewish campaign—he explicitly gave a free hand to the Sztójay government in Jewish matters in the days following the establishment of the cabinet.

occurred. Still, information I have lately been receiving indicates that what has been happening here on this issue has in many respects exceeded what was happening in Germany itself; the activities have been carried out in ways that are brutal and occasionally inhumane to an extent that is unmatched even by the measures carried out by the Germans. Due to past mistakes, we have a greater proportion of Jews, incomparably more than in Germany, and their share in the economy far exceeds that in the German Reich—in terms of their participation in industry, commerce, and especially in engineering, and, moreover, in medical work, which is especially needed in the present war situation. Despite all this, here in Hungary we have had more extreme measures in excluding the Jews from all sorts of participation in the economy than in the German Reich, where shutting them out was accomplished through a process lasting several years. Moreover, in executing these measures, unjustifiable forms of cruelty and inhumanity were often employed that were even unlike the attitude in the German Reich toward especially those Jews who were still of economic use or still needed for indispensable professional work.

[. . .]

It is therefore my express wish that [. . .] in those professions [. . .] where the work of Jews is indispensable and cannot be performed by others at this time, or is needed either in order for the economy to carry on smoothly and without coming to a halt, or to prevent a drop in the desired level of industrial production, no measures be taken against these Jews that would disrupt their work, and these Jews should not be hindered in their work. I wish also that fair distinctions be drawn among Jews in favor of those Jews who have by now converted to the Christian religion. It is also my desire that all steps be taken that are necessary for my exercising—in accordance with my general power to grant clemency, with countersignature from the Hungarian Royal Minister of the Interior—my ability under my right to grant clemency to exempt certain individuals from measures pertaining to Jews in exceptional cases. I have in mind here individuals of special economic value, Jews who earlier had already converted to Christianity, or—while of Jewish ancestry—were already born as members of a Christian denomination, and who have in addition shown significant achievements in the past that make their exemption exceptionally justifiable for reasons of fairness and Christian humaneness.

In order to avoid the continuation of unwarranted excesses, especially cruel and frequently inhumane actions, I also wish that in the Hungarian Royal Ministry of the Interior, supervision of Jewish affairs be taken away

from State Secretary Dr. vitéz László Endre and my preliminary approval be sought in the selection of a reliable, suitable person as his replacement. Further, it is my wish that a proposal to remove from his post State Secretary László Baky—who has up to now been in charge of issuing the relevant orders to law enforcement—be submitted to me as soon as possible. These steps are important, for a significant portion of the public views the aforementioned two men responsible for the excessive measures.

[. . .]