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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

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DOCUMENT 3-3: Minister of the Interior's Confidential Decree no. 6163/1944 on designating the residence of Jews, April 7, 1944, USHMM RG 52.001M, reel 11 (HNA I).²⁰

Hungarian Royal Minister of the Interior
Number: 6163/1944. res.

Re: Designating residences for the Jews

The Hungarian Royal government will within a short period of time cleanse the country of the Jews.²¹ I order the cleansing by regions, as a

19. Government measures and decrees containing information the authorities wished to keep clandestine were labeled confidential. They were not published in any official journal or other media.

20. It was first published in Benoschofsky and Karsai, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen*, 1:124–26. The USHMM RG 52.001M collection contains extensive material from what is sometimes referred to as the “I collection,” which was compiled from archival material acquired from both national and regional archives throughout Hungary; cf. Tim Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust: Journeying in and out of the Ghettos* (New York: Continuum International, 2011), 144n22–23.

21. Since at this point no final decision had been made about the deportation of Hungarian Jews, Eichmann and Endre used “cleansing” to mean the transfer of Jews into camps and ghettos.

result of which the Jews, regardless of sex and age, will have to be transported to designated collection camps. In towns and in larger villages, some of the Jews will subsequently be placed in Jewish buildings designated by the law enforcement authorities, as well as into ghettos.

Exemptions are granted to those Jews who are employed at plants, mines, major companies, or estates that are of military importance, and whose immediate replacement would hinder production at the plant. In plants, mines, and companies that are not of military importance, replacement of the Jews must be executed immediately, and the most suitable person from the staff is to be appointed to head the given company, plant, etc., and is to be given full power. These will be determined by the committees appointed by the local governments.²² But as soon as the possibility of replacement is secured—and regional public administration authorities must strive to make this happen as soon as possible—a custodian, preferably a trained one, shall be selected immediately and appointed to head the plant, factory, etc., and shall be given full responsibility.

[. . .] The collection of the Jews will be conducted by the police with regional authority and the Hungarian royal gendarmerie.

The gendarmerie will provide armed assistance to the Hungarian royal police in towns, if needed. The German security police will be present on the scene as an advisory agency, and smooth cooperation with them must be accorded special importance.²³

The regional local governments will establish collection camps based on the number of Jews, deciding on appropriate locations and on how many camps should exist. They must report the location of these camps to the state secretary for public safety.²⁴ [. . .]

In each town and major municipality in which the number of Jews calls for the establishment of separate Jewish buildings, the police authorities should within their own jurisdiction designate these buildings immediately, because only those Jews who are threats to state security will be left behind in the collection camps, while the others will be moved to Jewish houses. Those buildings in which large numbers of Jews live should

22. That is, the designations of the new company directors.

23. The Ministry of the Interior issued a decree that ordered the administrative and law enforcement apparatus to cooperate fully with the Germans. Minister of the Interior's Decree 6000/1944 VII. res. on the principles of the cooperation between the Hungarian authorities and German armed forces, April 19, 1944, in Benoschofsky and Karsai, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen*, 1:187–90.

24. That is, László Baky; see the glossary.

be the ones designated as Jewish buildings. Of these, residents of non-Jewish ancestry should be moved into apartments—of comparable value and rent—which Jews have vacated. The relocations should take place within thirty days after completion of the cleansing campaign so that Jews moved out into collection camps can at that time be immediately moved into Jewish buildings. [. . .]

As the Jews are collected and transported off, local authorities should at the same time appoint committees that will, together with those police and gendarme units present, immediately close and seal each of the apartments and shops of the Jews. The keys will be handed over in a sealed envelope, together with the name and exact address of the Jew in question, to the command of the collection camp. [. . .]

Money and valuables (gold, silver, bonds, etc.) should be confiscated by the aforementioned agencies present, which should turn them over to town authorities and municipal councils in exchange for a short inventory that lists the items, along with a countersignature. The municipal councils must within three days ship these valuables to the branch of the National Bank located in the center of the region being cleansed. These centers are established on a case-by-case basis by the security forces heading the cleansing campaign.

Transfer of prisoners should be carried out on trains and, if needed, by carts provided by order of the town and municipal councils. Jews to be transported can take along only the clothes they are wearing, at most two additional sets of underwear, and at least fourteen days' worth of food per person and, in addition, luggage weighing at most fifty kilograms [110 lbs.], which includes the weight of bed sheets, blankets, and mattresses. Prisoners may not take along money, jewelry, gold, or silver. Collection of Jews should be carried out in the following order: Kassa, Marosvásárhely, Kolozsvár, Miskolc, Debrecen, Szeged, Pécs, Szombathely, Székesfehérvár, and the Budapest gendarmerie districts, as well as the areas within these districts that are under the control of the police authorities, and finally, in the capital Budapest. [. . .]

I have imposed on the Budapest-based Central Jewish Council a requirement to set up immediately, using their own doctors and equipment, auxiliary temporary hospitals in Nyíregyháza, Ungvár, Munkács, and Máramarossziget.²⁵ These doctors will also be in charge of health services at the collection camps.

25. This clause of the decree was never implemented.

In addition, I call the authorities' attention to the fact that all Jewish refugees from foreign states without exception fall in the same category as communists in terms of treatment and must, therefore, without exception be placed in collection camps.

Dubious Jews are also to be transported to collection camps,²⁶ and their assessment will take place there.

My present decree should be handled with strict confidence, and the authorities as well as those in charge of commanding headquarters are responsible for making sure that no one finds out about the cleansing campaign before it starts. [. . .]

Budapest, April 7, 1944.

László Baky²⁷

The decree contained only sparse directions about how and from what sources transportation, food, health care, and securing and processing of Jews' valuables might be covered. The state secretaries' verbal remarks did little to clarify these details.²⁸ According to one postwar testimony, Endre responded to the concerns of officials participating in the process by saying, "A principle in carrying out the decree is that everything that facilitates the goal is good and everything that hinders it is bad. Nothing should stand in the way or hinder this process. Everything has to be resolved within one's own sphere of authority."²⁹

Based on the April 7, 1944, decree, Hungarian authorities began rounding up and concentrating the Jewish population of the northeastern part of the country on April 16. Ten days later, at the April 26 meeting of the Council of Ministers, a new decree was issued regarding the ghettoization process. (This became Prime Minister's Decree no. 1610/1944, effective as of April 28, 1944.) The government had more than one reason to issue a new regulation. First, the April 7 decree did not fulfill the formal legal requirements and also failed to include what definition of the term "Jew" should be used. The April 26 regulation remedied these formal problems, thereby "legalizing" the ghettoization. Second, the new decree stipulated the creation of ghettos instead of ghettos and

26. That is, Jews whose legal status was unclear.

27. Since the official appointment of Endre had not yet arrived from Regent Horthy, Baky signed the document.

28. Memorandum prepared by Géza Halász, leading government official in Carpatho-Ruthenia, regarding "the April 7 meeting conducted in the small council room of the Ministry of the Interior concerning the Jewish question," May 27, 1944, HNA, series I, reel 11.

29. Record of Jenő Péterffy's testimony, November 22, 1945, USHMM RG 25004M, reel 87, 40029, vol. II.

collection camps.³⁰ Third, in contrast to the April 7 confidential regulation, this one was public. It served as a cover-up for the ghettoization process, camouflaging the operation as a measure aimed merely at easing the dire apartment shortage among non-Jews. Therefore an odd charade unfolded at the April 26 meeting of the Council of Ministers. Minister of the Interior **Andor Jaross** justified the necessity of concentrating the Jews in designated settlements by pointing out that the allocation of apartments was unfair and that Jews lived in more favorable conditions than Christians. The decree before the ministers facilitated the authorities' confiscation of Jewish apartments, while Jaross claimed that "no Jew will become homeless as a result of implementation of the decree."³¹ One might have added to this: because they will be rounded up in ghettos and "**yellow-star houses**," and later in collection camps set up in mills, barns, brick factories, and pigsties.

DOCUMENT 3-4: Prime Minister's Decree no. 1610/1944 on the regulation of certain questions concerning the apartments of the Jews and the designation of their residence, Budapesti Közlöny, April 28, 1944, 2–3.³²

On the utilization of the Jews' apartments

[. . .]

1. §

For the purpose of assigning apartments and the accommodation of public offices and institutions serving the public interest, one may utilize:

1. the apartment of a Jew who has another apartment either in that same municipality (town) or in another one;

[. . .]

3. the apartment of a Jew whose apartment exceeds the professional and personal needs of those who live there; in case of such utilization, an apartment should be secured for the subject of the utilization that suits their apartment needs, living circumstances, and permanent salary;

[. . .]

30. Based on the experiences of the first concentration phase, as of May 9 a specific ban on the placement of Jews directly into collection camps went into effect (radio news file no. 2848, May 9, 1944, HNA K148, fascicle 1200). Henceforth Jews were first placed in ghettos, and they were transported to collection camps only during the concentration phase, prior to deportation.

31. Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, April 26, 1944, HNA K27, box 260.

32. The document was published in Benoschofsky and Karsai, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen*, 1:244–49.

Designating residences for the Jews

8. §

(1) The chief executive of a local government may order that in municipalities with populations under ten thousand people, Jews are required to move by a fixed deadline to another municipality or town designated by the chief executive.

(2) For those Jews who are required to move under paragraph (1), accommodation in a new place of residence is arranged by the chief constable or the mayor.

(3) A Jew cannot settle in municipalities that fall under paragraph (1).

(4) The present article does not affect the residence of a Jew in a municipality if residence is based on labor service or some other official order.³³

9. §

(1) The chief executive of the local government may order that in municipalities that do not fall under Article 8, and in towns, Jews may only live in specified parts of the town or municipality, or in specified streets, even in designated houses.

(2) In the case mentioned in paragraph (1), the apartments needed to accommodate the Jews are arranged by the chief constable in municipalities and by the mayor in towns.

10. §

When enforcing Article 9, the chief executive of the local government may also order, in connection with the accommodation of Jews in specified parts of town (streets, houses), that non-Jewish persons vacate the part of the town or municipality (street, house) that has been assigned to the Jews. But non-Jewish persons can only be required to move out if an apartment is available that is appropriate for their living circumstances and permanent salary.

11. §

(1) During the enforcement of the present decree, in cases when Jews have a business, a lease, or any other venture, which as a result of these Jews' removal they cannot continue to personally manage or liquidate, the

33. This applied primarily to doctors and pharmacists practicing while they were labor servicemen in small settlements.

head of the municipal council (the mayor) will make a submission to the court of guardians to have a custodian assigned. A designated custodian's duties and rights must conform to the rules laid down in § 28, provision (d) of Act XX of 1877, regulating affairs concerning custody and guardianship.³⁴

[. . .]

The process of physically isolating the Jews, launched on April 16, 1944, rested on the two governmental decrees quoted above. It was concluded in late June, with completion of the forced removal of the Budapest Jews into "yellow-star houses." During these two and a half months, the implementation of the process underwent many changes. In the first phase, mainly collection camps were set up. From early May onward, at approximately the same time throughout the entire country, the creation of ghettos became dominant, and their residents were transferred to collection camps just a few days prior to their deportation. Both decrees offered a very broad framework for their practical implementation, which local authorities could fill as they saw fit. For this reason and despite extensive governmental control, ghettoization followed a varied pattern depending on local circumstances. No central orders prescribed how to create the enclosed area, allowing local forces much leeway in carrying out the process.

What followed was like a blitzkrieg against the Jews: between April and June, in only ten weeks, the Hungarians organized 215 ghettos and collection camps. This number does not include approximately 100 to 150 temporary collection sites (typically synagogues, schools, and other community buildings) where Jews were moved for a few days before their transfer to camps or ghettos. During the concentration phase prior to deportation, people were taken from ghettos to collection camps. However, in Carpatho-Ruthenia, Northern Transylvania, northeastern Hungary, and the southern border areas, these

34. Initially the government tried to create the legal framework for confiscating Jewish wealth by handling it as a guardianship issue for the property of "absent" citizens. The first step was issuing a decree that concerned the assets of Jews who were "absent" for at least one year. It appointed orphans' courts to manage such property, justifying the decision by saying that "uncertainty about whether the individual who is absent is still alive does not prevent taking [the assets] into custody." See Minister of Interior's Decree 230.900/1944 on the asset management of the wealth of absent Jews, April 10, 1944, in Benoschofsky and Karsai, *Vádirat a náczizmus ellen*, 1:141–42. Article 11 of the above decree was in line with this concept, which the government later dropped. For details, see Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Hullarabíás. A magyar zsidók gazdasági megsemmisítése* (Budapest: Jaffa, 2005), 222–23.