

# Istvan Domonkos

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Budapest

Hungary

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Date of interview: December 2004 – January 2005



Istvan Domonkos is a skinny, strong-minded, accurate gentleman, who lives in his inherited house in Rakospalota.

The house is in need of a little reparation both on the inside and outside; it can be seen that its owner has never considered money the most important, but principles.

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## **My family background**

My paternal grandparents, Mor Fleischmann and Rozalia Kalisch, got married on 2nd April 1889. The wedding was in Vagvecse [today Slovakia] where my great-grandfather Gyorgy Kalisch and his family lived. I don't know when my grandmother was born; I only know that she died in 1942. The Fleischmann family lived in Zsambek at that time, where my other great-grandfather, Joachim Fleischmann was a rabbi. Mor was born in Abony in 1858, and he was a child when the family moved to Zsambek. His marriage to Rozalia Kalisch was his second marriage, because earlier he had married Kati Rosenberg with whom he had a son, Miklos. He divorced her, and Miklos stayed with his mother. Then sometime, I don't know when, Miklos magyarized from Fleischmann to Meszaros. I don't know anything else about my father's stepbrother.

Mor Fleischmann was a merchant, but they lived among really modest circumstances in Budapest. One year after the marriage, in 1890 my father Miksa was born. The marriage of my grandfather and grandmother only lasted for eight years, because my grandfather died at the age of 39 in 1897.

I barely know anything about the maternal branch, because after the three children were born our parents divorced. The two boys [i.e. the interviewee and his brother] stayed with Father, and my sister stayed with our mother. As far as I know my mother didn't remarry. She lived with my younger sister at her parents', with the Rozsa family. They had a tin-wear factory, which prospered

quite well. The Rozsa family was wealthy. So I didn't even know my maternal grandparents, I don't know when my mother was born either. After they divorced I never met my mother. I did meet my sister. We started getting together with my sister when I was a teenager. But she never told us anything about that family, and we didn't ask either. I only know that my sister felt good at home. As far as I know my father didn't have to pay alimony, probably because they split the burden, since the two boys remained with him.

My father went to a Jewish elementary school, and then he graduated from middle school, and then the Commercial Academy. The Commercial Academy was a school of high standard, it gave a high school diploma, they taught several languages, and they put the emphasis on practice. So the smart Jewish parents sent their children to study there with pleasure. My grandmother already raised him alone at that time; I don't know what they lived off. I know that they lived among moderate means, and that my grandmother managed a kosher household. She was religious, too. My father wasn't religious at all.

I think my father got a scholarship from some kind of a Jewish organization. I suspect this from the fact that he got very valuable books on Jewish topics and an 11-volume Goethe series in Gothic type. Besides that he also got a 5-6 volume Heine in Gothic type. After my father graduated from the Commercial Academy he spent two years in Germany at a technical college. That's how he became entitled to be an artificer officer and to get a civil job.

He spoke German perfectly, he was absolutely fluent and he was handsome, perhaps this also played a role in the fact that the Caterpillar made an arrangement with him to introduce the caterpillar tractors in Middle Europe, which was a great novelty at that time. And my father played an important role in the entire Middle European propagation. He magyarized his name to Domonkos at this time, sometime around 1910, because the name Fleischmann bothered him. [Editor's note: The Caterpillar Company was established in 1925, but the Holt caterpillars were already used by the Entente forces during World War I.]

In the meantime, in 1911 he had to join the forces for the one-year volunteer service as an officer. He was assigned to a technical formation, to the 'Kraftfahrtruppe' [German for 'motorized unit'], even though there weren't any caterpillars, those were only introduced during World War I by the British. But he wasn't only a specialist in caterpillars, he was specialized in motor-cars, too, and he spoke fluent German, which counted very much in the army of the Monarchy, so they entrusted a formation to him.

From 1912 he was at the Caterpillar company again, he had his own office and he got a good salary. When World War I broke out they called him up immediately with the stock of cars and other means of transportation that he had been responsible for, i.e. with the unsold caterpillars and motor-cars he had. The authorities collected the available means of transportation and gave them to the body of troops he belonged to. The Caterpillar company couldn't do anything, it was wartime. It didn't matter that the USA wasn't at war yet. They entrusted to him a supplier mechanized troop. He joined the forces as an officer, but he soon became an ensign, and he demobilized as first lieutenant at the end of the war.

He was at the Italian battlefield [1](#), too, and his troops mainly dealt with transportation on the battlefield. Since they had to work on a very difficult mountain ground and they were shot at, many got killed. My father was injured several times, and he demobilized at the end of the war with

a lot of decorations.

He already played sports before the war. He learned with a fencing master called Lovas, and he became an excellent fencer. He played at smaller competitions, and he dueled several times. Once when we were going somewhere with my father he showed me a man on the street who held his left arm in a funny way. He told me that he had cut it. He learned the elbow cut from Master Lovas. During the war he wanted to remain in training, so he exercised fencing steps and fencing there, too. I have a picture of this, too.

## Growing up

My father got married for the first time right after World War I. When the front folded up at Piave, in Italy in 1918, my father managed to escape from being taken as a prisoner. He came home and married my mother, Gabriella Rozsa, immediately. She must have been around 18 years old at that time. She was a beautiful woman. The first child, Peter, was born in 1919, I was born in 1921, and my little sister, Anna, was born in 1923. By that time the marriage had gotten bad, and they divorced. I sometimes heard my father saying that my grandmother always set the heather on fire between him and the young woman. That's why their marriage might have got ruined.

They pulled through the revolutions, even though my father was called in once to the Hungarian Red Army, too. [Editor's note: The establishment of the Hungarian Red Army, the armed force of the Soviet Republic was ordered on 22nd March 1919 and it was dissolved on 6th August.] He didn't want to go, and then two red soldiers with bayonets came for him and took him to Godollo, to the headquarters. There they set him in front of a committee saying that he was a specialist and that he had to serve at technical formations. He backtracked by saying that he couldn't be there permanently because of the little child, and he asked them to allow his wife and child to be there with him. They gave him their permission, and he got an officer's room in the Godollo royal castle.

As he told me, he served and did his duty, because he couldn't do anything else, but he never wore the uniform of the Hungarian Red Army. After the revolutions he got honorable mention from the War Office, from Horthy's [2](#) bureau, and he was admitted to the reservist officer force, which was sometimes called in for practice. I remember that he was called in several times. In 1935 he obtained his captaincy from Miklos Horthy. So by the time anti-Semitism broke out he was relieved of all kinds of measures, because he had such prestigious decorations, and had this promotion from Horthy. So he was on the list, which was called Horthy exemption [3](#) at that time. But this didn't apply to his children. So regardless of that we had to go in for forced labor.

After they divorced, my mother worked at the factory owned by the family, she did the paperwork. I don't know whether she continued her education or not. My sister Anna finished the four years of middle school, but as far as I know after that it wasn't possible for her to study. The family wasn't that well off anymore because of the restrictions of the anti-Jewish laws [4](#).

My sister Anna worked at some paper factory, where she glued bags or did some kind of primitive work like this. She was there until in 1944 they started to gather the Jewish women from Budapest, too [5](#). Then she was deported together with my mother. But maybe it was her luck that they were separated. As far as I know my mother wasn't appointed to the death march [6](#), but she was put on a barge, which was going to take them up the Danube. Allegedly this barge sank. I don't know whether that was on purpose or it was hit. All the women on it perished. [Editor's note: In literature

there is no mention of any sunken barges. The Arrow Cross men drove about 30,000 Jews from Budapest and about 50,000 forced laborers to the western border from 6th November until the end of November, mainly on foot. According to the report of one of the leaders of the International Red Cross some of those deportees who were driven from Budapest to Hegyeshalom were lodged in four barges anchored in Gonyu. Many fell in the icy water of the Danube because of complete exhaustion, and others were pushed into the water by the Arrow Cross men. (Source: Jenő Levai: Zsidósors Magyarországon. Budapest, 1948)]

In 1925 my father remarried. The name of his second wife was Stefania Szabo. I don't know when she was born, because she kept that in secret. As far as I know they met through a newspaper ad. My stepmother was a widow at that time. Stefania Szabo didn't have any children from her first marriage, and in the second, they didn't want to have any. Her first husband was an offspring of the Herzl family, if I remember correctly, he was called Fulop Herzl. [Editor's note: Tivadar Herzl, the famous member of the Herzl family was the founder of Hungarian Zionism.] He got very rich on the stock market, and when the stock market in Budapest failed he committed suicide because of his losses.

When they got married my stepmother still had some assets, she had an apartment house on O Street. Most likely it was her who put an ad in the paper, and that attracted the attention of my father, they got to know each other, and my father saw her wealth. The first story of the house on O Street was my stepmother's, she rented out the rest. This was a four or five-bedroom apartment with beautiful chandeliers. I remember the chandeliers, because my father took the two of us by the hand to introduce us to our mother-to-be, to see what her opinion was. We had to be very orderly.

We got along with our stepmother very well, we never had any conflicts. She was a provider, she could care for the sick children superbly, and she took good care of us. We called her 'mother.' My father cared for us much less, his work called him off, too. I don't know what kind of education my stepmother had, but she was a housewife throughout. My grandmother lived with us at that time, too, but with the second wife she didn't set the heater on fire. By the time the second wife arrived my grandmother had probably learned from the previous case. Because when the first marriage fell apart, she saw that partly she had caused it.

At the beginning everything was nice and good. Then worse times came, the world economic crisis [7](#) started, and the house had to be sold. At that time my father hadn't gotten another commission from the Caterpillar company, but he worked at an oil trader company as an engineer, for quite a small salary. The contact with the Caterpillar company had stopped during World War I. Then the Americans were mistrustful, and they only returned at the beginning of the 1930s, but only so that they needed a company with capital. This was the Steyr Works from Austria. So my father's employer was the Austrian Steyr Works. Until that time, in the period between 1918 and 1930, so at the beginning of the second marriage, he had a very small income. And moreover we, the two growing boys were also there; we were sick quite often, and that cost a lot of money.

My father started to deal with Caterpillar from 1930 on behalf of the Steyr Works. He held tractor presentations on large estates and agricultural fairs. There is a picture in which he is presenting one of the machines with big capacity, the 'Twenty,' at the Budapest Cattle-Show. He always had a big public and he was always brilliant in front of them: he made a small hill, went up on it, turned

around. Basically the machine had the same capabilities as a combat car only on a smaller scale. At that time he was doing a lot better financially, too, he could buy a small summer cottage in Rakoscsaba.

They bought the summer cottage in 1933 or in 1934 on hire purchase. A baron family parceled out nice big plots of 320 square feet. The construction of the small house cost 1000 pengoes. There was a bigger room, of about 4 by 4 meters. My father made a bunk- bed for us, two boys, and they slept on a normal bed. In front of the cottage there was a porch with a roof and open on the sides. We could eat there. Behind the house there was a small home-made bathroom, there was only a basin there of course. There wasn't any water conduit, but a well, from which we pumped the water by hand. It's interesting that in all of our apartments we had a bidet. Here in Rakoscsaba we also had a mobile one.

My father could afford to buy a car, too, and he could send us to school. That wasn't a piece of cake at that time either, because tuition had to be paid. My father had a passion for motoring, he bought used cars and he and his mechanics repaired them beautifully. He had some kind of an English car, a strong jeep, he drove that. He used it on weekdays, too, he went to work with it or he went on his work related trips in the country or abroad. This gave some kind of a prestige to someone, and that was a big thing at that time. Perhaps it would have been more reasonable to go abroad by train, but he liked to drive very much. We went to many places with the family, too, but I can't think of any of these trips right now.

In the meantime there were always some kinds of short marches, time by time there was some festivity, inauguration or things like that. At these occasions my father always put on his officer's uniform, he pinned on all his decorations, and sometimes he took us along, too. I remember a case like this well. He took us to the inauguration of the Rakoczi statue on Kossuth Square. [Editor's note: The Rakoczis were a noble family in the Kingdom of Hungary between the 13th century and 18th century. The most famous member of the family was probably Francis II Rákóczi (1676-1735), who was elected prince sovereign of Hungary and as Prince of Transylvania from 1703-1711 was the leader of the Hungarian uprising against the Habsburg during that time.] We stuck a crane feather in our scholar cap, and so we stood next to our father, and he stood there in his dress uniform. He introduced us there to a general for the first time in my life. I don't know who he was; I only saw that there was a red stripe on both sides of his trousers.

My father had his connections. There is a picture of him talking with Archduke Frigyes [Archduke Frigyes Habsburg (1856-1936): serviceman, marshal, member of the upper house from 1927 until 1936.] But he was in such a relationship with Istvan Bethlen, too. [Count Istvan Bethlen de Bethlen (1874-1946?) was a Hungarian aristocrat and statesman and served as Prime Minister from 1921 to 1931. Bethlen stood out as one of the few voices in Hungary actively opposed to an alliance with Nazi Germany. As it became apparent that Germany was going to lose World War II, Bethlen attempted, unsuccessfully, to negotiate a separate peace with the Allied powers. When Budapest fell to the advancing Soviet troops in April 1945, Bethlen was captured and taken to Moscow, where he was murdered with other Hungarian patriots on or around 5th October 1946.] This was a business contact, because only the bigger farms could buy this expensive machine, but these grand seigneurs valued Miksa Domonkos, even if they knew at all that he was a man of Jewish origin, because his bearing and his behavior was just like any Hungarian army officer's.

In the meantime we grew up. We didn't go to nursery school. The first child community was the school; it was the Szent Istvan Square public elementary school, right next to the Basilica. I have very good memories of that school. The beginning was already very pleasant. In first grade there was a schoolmistress, who was very nice and started us well. In third and fourth grade a schoolmaster took us over, who was also very nice and fair. I had all excellent grades in elementary school; there weren't any problems with me. I studied easily.

This school was in Lipotvaros, so approximately one third of the class was Jewish. But there weren't any conflicts between Jewish and Christian children. The education at school was pronouncedly of Catholic spirit. For example, around Christmas the entire class learned the Christmas songs, the Jewish children sang them the same way. Most of the families in Lipotvaros didn't celebrate Chanukkah, but they put up a Christmas tree. I must add we didn't. My father didn't allow that, we didn't have a Christmas tree.

Anyhow, my father's principle was that one doesn't only have to give gifts when there is a holiday, but when he can afford it. If we took fancy of something, let's say a toy-railway, he bought it. Close to us there was a toy-dealer, Uncle Liebermann's toy-shop. We always looked at the toys in the display window and asked our parents to buy this or that for us. We got Märklin, too, we had a very nice kit. [Editor's note: Märklin is a metal construction toy known all around the world, manufactured in Göppingen since the end of the 19th century]. First there was the MATADOR, that was a do-it-yourself wooden toy, and we got the Märklin later. I used this for a long time, until the age of 12-13.

After the four classes of elementary school both of us went to an eight-grade science secondary school [8](#), to the Kemeny Zsigmond Science Secondary School. My brother, Peter was always one class ahead of me. But only one class, because he was born in November, and he lost a year. He was a very diligent student; he was a much better student than I was. This was a big advantage for me, because I got his used books, and moreover I could get a lot of help. He was an excellent mathematician, and I wasn't that good at that subject. Though later, owing to my technical studies at the university I learned many things.

Sometime in fourth or fifth grade I got out of hand a little bit, I even had to take a make-up exam in mathematics. Somehow I didn't get a good start with trigonometry. In my opinion our teacher did well when he said, 'I will flunk this boy, because he is able to learn. Let him learn it in the vacation.' In that vacation I did have to study hard to pass the re-take exam. But I passed with no problems.

At the science secondary school there wasn't any Greek or Latin, the foreign languages were French and German, German from first grade throughout, French from third grade throughout. When we were older, I might have been around 16-17, my father employed a young Swabian boy, so that he would refine our German. From this tutor we mainly learned intonation. It lasted for two or three years, then the world with anti-Jewish laws came, and we couldn't afford it financially either. But I did learn, I could read literature well, and when I got to Germany on an official trip when I was around 50, I could get by fine. Even now if I turn on a German channel on television, I understand most of it, but I have forgotten a lot. I'm not as good at French, though I was very interested in it and I liked French very much. There are poems which I still know.

At the science secondary school the Jewish and non-Jewish children were on good terms at the beginning. Even though everyone knew who was Jewish and who wasn't. They strictly enjoined us

to go to the Friday evening worship service, and the Christian children to go to church on Sundays. But around 1938 or maybe a little bit earlier, when this instigation went on, a small group of anti-Semitic boys was formed. We didn't come to blows, at most they found fault with us. By graduation the thing deteriorated. So when we had to go to have our picture taken for the class photograph, I was shocked to see a Hungarian jacket on the sofa at the photographer's, which the Jewish children weren't allowed to put on. This was an astounding shock. This happened in 1939, by that time they had already enacted the first anti-Jewish law.

There is a bad photocopy of the graduation class picture, but one can see in it, that the children in the first row are wearing normal jackets, and the others are in Hungarian jacket. There are 12 children in jacket and there are 19 in Hungarian jacket, but there was a Christian child who didn't want to wear the Hungarian jacket. There was one such Christian child, so in the class of 31 there were 11 of us Jews. They put the Jews in the lower row, and our religion teacher is in this row in the middle. This perfidy first affected me personally at the age of 18. So when our class teacher who had been appointed to Leva, which was reannexed to Hungary together with the Felvidek [Upper Northern Hungary], as a school principal [9](#), invited the entire class to Leva to a banquet, everyone went happily, but me. I said and made common that I wouldn't sit at a white table with a company like this where there is such parting. This was my first collision like this.

My father was always very busy. There were a few occasions for him to educate us. But he did consider one thing important: to give us a good start in literature suitable to our age. So when we were small we had to read story-books, later Jules Verne. He felt some kind of aversion to Karl May, and he didn't let us read his books, but he let us read Jokai [10](#) early. He brought the Jokai books one after the other. As a matter of fact I got my grounding in literature through Jokai and Mikszath. [Kalman Mikszath (1847-1910) was a great Hungarian novelist and politician. Many of his novels contained social commentary and satire, and towards the end of his life they became increasingly critical of the aristocracy and the burden that he believed it placed on Hungarian society.] About Ady [11](#), for example, I didn't hear much at home, but I heard a lot about Janos Arany [12](#) and Petofi [13](#), I got these in due time. And this led to the fact that in high school I was very interested in Hungarian literature.

My father always read, too. There was always some kind of book on his night-stand. And he read very much in German. I don't remember what. Really strange names come to my mind. I'm sure that he liked Rilke. He had Thomas Mann as well as Hansheinz Eberts, who wrote horror stories. My father had a big library. He only subscribed to Pesti Hirlap [Pest Journal, daily].

We went on a holiday every summer. Before having the summer cottage in Rakoscsaba we went to Pomaz, to Torokbalint, so to the environs of Pest. Somehow we never got to the Balaton or abroad. When we had the summer cottage in Rakoscsaba already, we moved out there before the school vacation started and moved back after school started, so when we were at the science secondary school both my brother and I had commutation ticket.

We didn't go to the theater with the family, but at high school we could buy a cheap season ticket, and I used to go to the National Theater. I remember one occasion when we went together. Mihaly Erdelyi had a theater at the edge of the City Park where they played light opera. [Erdelyi, Mihaly (1895-1979): actor, actor-manager, light opera composer, he organized an independent company in 1934, and he managed several small theaters]. I think he got a ticket from someone for the light

opera 'Erzsebet.' I don't remember them taking us to a recital and we didn't learn music. This was somehow left out from our life.

My father's days passed so that he went to work in the morning and came home late. He was at home at weekends, but...it's interesting, I don't actually know what he did at weekends.

My father had very few friends, mainly people who survived World War I, officers as well. But they got together mostly at official places, so when there was some kind of a ceremony, some commemoration. These weren't friends who would get together all the time and play cards. My father didn't play cards and didn't drink. He never got together with anyone as a family. My stepmother had old Jewish friends, not many, two or three. Sometimes they visited each other, they went somewhere. For example, I remember, that usually during the summer vacation, which we spent at our small estate in Rakoscsaba, one or the other of her old friends came there for one or two days. One was called Aunt Paula. She was a Jewish woman. But my father didn't really chime in these women conversations, and he didn't go out with my mother either.

My father was a tough man, but he never beat me. When we were small it happened that my stepmother spanked us, but otherwise she didn't. They were exceptionally progressive. Of course we were quite obedient. What also contributed to this was that the Zsigmond Kemeny science secondary school was a very good school. Schools at that time competed with one another. Each of them had their own uniform cap. That meant very much, because they told us already there at school 'look out, because even if you mess about on the streets, they can see it on you...' This was just as if we had been marked.

I remember a case when we shot out one of the windows of a house vis-à-vis and we hid the sling-shot behind a cupboard. But the aggrieved party was a detective and he found out where the shot must have come from, and went to my father and told him what his sons had done. 'My sons don't do such things,' my father said. The man left, and years later the sling-shot was found at a housecleaning. Otherwise my father was permissive; he bought us an air-gun already when we were teenagers.

During the years at the science secondary school a group of friends was formed, we visited each other, but one of them attracted attention, Miklos Hajdu. I knew that his father was of Jewish origin, he just got baptized in time. He married a very nice, honest Christian maid in 1916. She was a simple woman, but very nice, honest and kind. Miklos Hajdu and I were really good friends all our lives, until four or five years ago, when he died. I went to their place regularly; I ate lunch there several times, not because I was hungry, but because his mother loved me very much. He also used to come to our place; they treated him as if he were my brother. We were best friends through fire and water.

Besides this there was the circle of friends, but its members changed, they were never as stable as this one was. This friendship never took a break. When I was in the forced labor camp he helped me countless times, either by sending me some kind of a package or in another way. He was a regular soldier, at a lucky place, because he was an anti-aircraft artillerist, which meant that he didn't have to go to the front, but they were here in Budapest. He didn't only help me, but the extended circle of friends, too. He saved one of our friends from being deported to the West, because they recognized each other by accident. That poor thing crept about totally ragged and broken, and my friend Hajdu, risking his life took him from the line and to his commandant, telling

him that this was his old friend and that he wanted to save him. The commandant permitted him to dress in soldier uniform, they fed him up, fixed him and he was saved.

### During the war

When my brother Peter graduated from high school in 1938 the first anti-Jewish law was enforced immediately. As a consequence, however talented he was, university was out of the question. First they wanted to get him some kind of paperwork, but in that world with the anti-Jewish laws one couldn't get a decent job, and then they devised, not only our parents, but the other Jewish parents, too, that one should learn some kind of industrial trade. He became an apprentice at an electrical company, at the Neumann Company. One year later I got to Baumgartner and Co., where the Co. was the old Neumann's son, through the Neumann Company. I also went there as an electrician. In these industries they acknowledged the previous studies of these young graduates, and one only had to spend one year as an apprentice.

In 1940 Peter was called up, and then they reassigned him as forced laborer [14](#). He joined up in 1940 as an officer, but in 1941, if I remember correctly, they took off their uniforms. [Editor's note: The War Department issued an order in March 1942 according to which the Jewish forced laborers had to wear their own civil clothes, and they had to sew a yellow armband on it. However, at many formations they already took the uniform from the Jews at the end of 1941. The wearing of the yellow armband wasn't general until the spring of 1942, but depending on the commandant they introduced it at many formations. (Source: R. L. Braham: A nepirtas politikaja. A holokauszt Magyarországon, Budapest, Új Mandatum Publishing House, 2003, p. 31)].

In the summer of 1942 he announced to us that they were being put on trains and taken to the front. They took them directly into the perdition at the Don. I could speak with him for the last time in 1942, before the journey. From the border he sent us a postcard, saying that they were doing well. We never got any more letters from him, only my father got a notification of a couple lines: 'We inform you that Peter Domonkos, forced laborer, who was born in 1919 in Budapest, mother's name Gabriella Rozsa, died in January 1943 at Marki [today Ukraine] and was buried on the site.'

It never occurred to my father to convert to Catholicism, on the contrary. During conversations he said countless times, that he wasn't willing to compromise, just because there was anti-Semitism. If there wasn't anti-Semitism, then perhaps it would have been considered. That was my opinion, too. He counted the anti-Semitism from the White Terror [15](#), the *numerus clausus* [16](#), the beating of the Jews at university [17](#).

He told me several times about the battle at the so-called Klub café. There was a very nice old café on Szent Istvan Avenue, very close to the theater. Many people from among the Jews in Lipotvaros and Újlipotvaros used to go there, my father, too. During the White Terror once he was sitting at the Klub café and a press-gang burst in with black-jacks and sticks and they started to beat the people sitting there, saying that they were only Jews. My father told me this several times. He said that from then on he never went to public places; he never sat with his back to the entrance, only facing the entrance. It was also known that after the *numerus clausus* there were still some young Jewish people at the universities, and atrocities were regular. They thrust them down the stairs.

When my father got married for the second time, we moved to O Street, to my stepmother's nice big apartment. I don't remember this apartment exactly, but that there was everything, and that

there were many rooms. My grandmother didn't come with us. In the meantime the financial situation of the family slowly deteriorated. At the beginning of the 1930s we had to sell that apartment, and they rented another quite nice apartment overlooking the street at the corner of Kazar Street and Paulay Ede Street, on the third floor. There wasn't a lift there. This was a three-bedroom apartment, and grandmother came here with us. There was a kitchen, a bathroom and a maid's room in it. There was a maid, too.

From there we moved to a worse apartment, to Hernad Street. This must have been around 1934, because in the meantime the job at the Caterpillar discontinued. It didn't prosper for a long time, among the bad economical circumstances in Hungary there weren't buyers for these machines. My father tried everything. I remember that he canvassed with a heater which functioned with kerosene and heated cars. At that time cars didn't have internal heating. He took those over from some kind of a western company on commission. He canvassed with this, but it didn't work. So we had to give up luxury things and got among worse and worse living conditions. We didn't have a car for a long time either.

From Kazar Street we moved to Hernad Street and spent a couple years here. It was a two-bedroom apartment with an alcove, and my grandmother lived in the alcove. The next apartment was on Lovolde Square, a worse one, on the ground floor overlooking the courtyard. The courtyard was shared with a movie theater on Rottenbiller Street, so when they showed the 'Meseautó' we listened to it several times a day. [Editor's note: Director Béla Gaál's film, which premiered in 1934, the love story of a general manager and a shorthand typist, was the cinema hit of the year]. This was a two-bedroom apartment and there wasn't a maid, and there wasn't room for Grandmother either, so she moved to a related family to Sziv Street. She died there. At that time I was already a forced laborer, so I couldn't go to the funeral.

The maid and my stepmother were usually on good terms. At cooking and I think at shopping, too, my stepmother played the decisive role. The maids usually cleaned, washed, ironed or did tasks related to heating. Almost everywhere there was a stove heated with coal or wood, and to every apartment belonged a tray [in the cellar], and the fuel was in it. But by 1943 we almost ran out of fuel. I remember that my stepmother wrote me that they were cold many times.

At the forced labor camp I regularly got packages and money. Even though they were among very bad conditions, my father didn't have a secure job, canvassing sometimes paid, and sometimes it didn't. Besides the car heater there was another thing, a medical heater, which emitted reddish-purplish color, it was made by a company called George Sun. It was difficult for my father to send me the 20 pengoes each month, that was the amount allowed to be sent to forced labor camps.

They were living in such circumstances, when in 1942 my father met an old schoolmate, Sandor Eppler, who was an official of the Jewish community. Eppler discussed with the leaders of the Jewish community to employ this officer Domonkos, who was one of the prominent figures among the old, Jewish officers, ex-servicemen, with a modest salary. Namely the Jewish community had to care for the clothing, the provision with shoes, boots, clothes, underwear etc. of the Jewish forced laborers. The ex-servicemen Jewish officers set up a committee, whose task was to supply officially the Jewish forced laborer companies. The War Department greeted this initiative, because it wasn't their aim to have those children freeze there. So they employed my father at the Jewish community with a modest salary. He became one of the leaders of this action. He gave up canvassing, because

the two things weren't compatible.

Through my father's connections at the War Department they found a pensioner officer, Laszlo Ocskay [18](#), he was a handsome reserve officer, crippled in World War I, he walked with a limp, and he organized a forced laborer company which was officially called Clothes-Collecting Company [19](#) in 1944. Those who were in this company, got a paper, which allowed them to move around quite freely. This was in June, July and August. This possibility immediately ceased after the Szalasi takeover [20](#).

The Jewish community provided the company with place in the rooms of the Jewish Museum. It was furnished with bunk beds, so if they came on control from the War Department, they found a regular thing. There were some very decent soldiers, whom officer Ocskay had mustered, so if they needed to go and collect clothes they always went with a military escort. In this company there weren't young people, but serious, elderly man, whom their good connections helped to go where they were safe.

Of course, in order to be able to provide for a company of 150-200 military supply was needed. Through the bureau the company got regular military supply, but we had to maintain a canteen. Two of our experienced old men managed the kitchen. One of them was Zoltan Strausz, he was a wholesale butcher, and the other one was a catering specialist. The wholesale butchers were the richest people of Budapest, they ran the abattoir. Not the kosher, but the regular abattoir. My friend Zoli Strausz, whom I called Uncle Zoli at that time, told me sometime in August, 'Come, help us, we need a young man here, too, at least we will teach you how to make a good goulash.' I learned how to chop onions there.

From 1942 I was in the forced labor camp, and the first thing I did was that I got in touch with my father through letters, telling him what we needed. And we made this regular, so in my company we formed a Care Committee. There was such a thing at other places, too, but ours was so official that we had a stamp made 'Care Committee 12/3.' In the beginning I was the president of this. Later on I handed it over to another boy. The point is that we sent an application, which was sealed and signed by the commander, to the Committee of Ex-Servicemen of the Jewish community, and then after a while we got what we had asked for.

The committee raised the money for these supplies from the wealthy Jews. It wasn't easy. But there were wealthy Jews at that time, too, and later they made this a country-wide organization. The wealthy Jews raised money for all kinds of things anyway, for example for aid for the poor, the unemployed Jewish families, and children. Otherwise the Jewish religion has this great advantage that a Jewish man is not allowed to beg. This directly follows from the regulations of the Holy Scriptures. And it was also from this biblical viewpoint that the poor Jewish children who were forced into forced labor camps had to be aided.

From then on my father was at the Jewish community throughout, only they changed his function time by time. After 19th March 1944 [21](#) they immediately put him into a position where he had to make use of his command of German in the communication with the German authorities, and he could hold his ground especially in economical and technical matters. Namely on 19th March 1944 these hordes came in, and the first thing they did was that they collected all the Jewish fortune they could. But this wasn't enough, they also raised a demand. For example they wrote that they needed 100 blankets within 24 hours and that General X needed a piano within 24 hours, or that

they needed 50 typewriters within 24 hours. It was important for my father to be there, because if an arrogant Nazi leader came in personally and saw that my father spoke German and was a Hungarian lieutenant, he'd behave differently. They didn't even know that he was Jewish, he wore a lieutenant uniform, and he never wore a yellow star.

He had a serious crew among whom there were mostly people with experience in the economic sphere. Because when the task was, for example, to gather 100 blankets, or beds, these people knew where these were to be found in the warehouse, or where some Jews who had these things were and these things could be confiscated from them; because practically this is what they did. It wasn't a pleasant situation, because they had to confiscate things for the Germans. But someone had to do it.

I know that Eichmann [22](#) tried to step up with threats, with aggression time by time. They summoned one or the other leader of the Jewish Council to their place, to Svabhegy, and they threatened them by saying that they would deport them, if they didn't get this or that. It was before Szalasi [23](#) that Eichmann wanted to deport the Jews from Budapest, and Horthy stopped him. Eichmann started it, and tried to deport Jews in secret from where he could. He managed to set off a transport, and they noticed it too late. But they hadn't left the Hungarian border when they went after them and took the transport back to the internment camp.

It happened so that Wallenberg [24](#) got information from the Jewish Council [25](#) in Budapest that this and this many Jewish people had been deported from the internment camp. After this, Eichmann summoned three of the Jewish leaders, I don't remember who, to Svabhegy, they kept them there without food or soup, and while he kept the Jewish leaders in detention, he then deported a couple hundred people [26](#). Probably my father was also among these three, but I don't know. One didn't have to speak about everything, in fact it was best to not know about everything.

Then 15th October came. The Szalasi takeover was on a Sunday and the Jewry in Budapest already knew in the afternoon that there was big trouble, because tanks were going along the streets, and on the radio they had announced that Colonel-general Beregffy should go home immediately. My father managed to enter Sip Street, in a uniform, of course. Besides him nobody, not even Stockler [27](#), the president or the other members of the Jewish Council could. They didn't dare to go out on the street.

My father sat there alone by the phone and called Lieutenant-colonel Ferenczy [28](#). Ferenczy was the highest level leader of Jewish matters in the Hungarian government, he was an insincere man. Earlier he had a key position in the deportation of the Jews from the country. He oversaw the gendarmes, but when Horthy took his measures, and when despite the presence of the Germans the attitude against the Jews eased, Ferenczy felt that he should watch out, and he started to make approaches. He always told the Jewish leaders that they would look out and they wouldn't let any more people to be deported and they wouldn't be Eichmann's servants. But when my father called him after the putsch and told him that he was alone and that they were in very serious trouble, Ferenczy said that the Jews got what they deserved and hung up. My father told this in front of the People's Court, too.

So he sat there alone on Sip Street and the caretaker, who was a very honest, good Christian man, called him and told him, 'Sir Captain, a German sergeant is here, please receive him.' 'Ok, have him come up.' A young man went up, he had a submachine gun. 'Where are the Jewish leaders?' he

asked. 'See that they come forward.' My father suddenly took the submachine gun out of his hands and snapped at him, 'Stand at salute! You are standing in front of a Hungarian Royal Captain. You can only report to me.' And he threw him out. The caretaker just stood there trembling.

Then in a couple days the situation was stabilized, and the relationship with the Germans was also stabilized somehow. Next to Lieutenant-colonel Ferenczy they appointed a man called Leo Lullay, because Ferenczy didn't speak German. [Editor's note: Captain Leo Lullay led the delegation of the gendarmerie at the counsel held in Vienna at the beginning of May 1944, where they finalized the schedule and route of the deportations. After Szalasi's takeover he was Ferenczy's helper in the Hungarian aryanizing detachment.] He had been a clerk at the city hall, otherwise he was a reservist officer, I think a first lieutenant. As a matter of fact he didn't have any other job, but to interpret for the lieutenant colonel of the gendarmerie. He was reactivated and unluckily he got a commission. I say unluckily, because he was a very honest, good man. After the liberation he was caught, of course, and proceedings were taken against him, and he could not be saved.

My father had an office on Sip Street where he worked as the administrator of the Jewish Council. Then, when they decreed the setting up of the ghetto, he was the security officer of the ghetto, too. Because in the ghetto there was a ghetto police made up of Jews. There were many things to do. It was a small country that had to be organized. There were districts, medical offices, and institutional food. They had to organize some kind of administration. They appointed leaders for every block or part, possibly intelligent men, teachers or someone like that, whose task was to draw up a list of names. They had to provide medical care, so that a doctor would get everywhere as fast as possible.

They also had to deal with the deceased. These weren't handled by my father personally, but he had his men. In the beginning they took the dead to the cemetery, but they had to stop this, because once the Arrow Cross men caught a group together with the rabbi, who were arranging a funeral, and I think they even killed them. From then on the funerals were in the courtyard of the Dohany Street Synagogue [29](#). And later there were so many dead that the poor things were piled up in a room of the bath on Kazinczy Street. There were funerals on Kaluzal Square, too.

Then the water supply had to be started, which was quite a big problem, because after a while there wasn't enough water-pressure. They had to find the old wells. Fortunately, in these old houses of the Jewish district the old wells could be reopened at many places. The task of the doctors was to control the purity of the water. These were all, so to speak, the decrees of the local authority.

My father and his men had to come up with the system of decrees related to these issues, and besides that they had to activate a security team, into which they had to recruit, as far as possible, men that weren't too old. As far as I remember, they wanted to equip them with batons, but it didn't work out. But by the end of the ghetto times they managed to move in an armed group from the 7th district police to the basement of the Sip Street hall, which provided certain protection. [Editor's note: This happened because the Arrow Cross men broke into the ghetto and committed massacres several times. Then on 12th January 1945 they sent 100 policemen and a unit of 15 Arrow Cross men.]

As a matter of fact my father was like a mayor. The Jewish Council could be compared to the general assembly, which takes decisions, which the secretary general, who can be compared to the

mayor, enforces. My father was an engineer, and he was knowledgeable about public health, administration and security issues, so they could safely rely on him. Housing wasn't in his hands, a lawyer, Dr. Kurzweil, was in charge of this. [Editor's note: Dr. Istvan Kurzweil was only the administrator of the housing department of the Central Jewish Council.] A jurist was needed to administer justice among the people, to work out how to accommodate 20 people in an old two-bedroom apartment. There were often complaints, especially in these kinds of issues. The task of the housing department was extremely difficult; they had to manage the house-rooms in the yellow star houses [30](#). And their situation became even more difficult in the ghetto.

My father's office – because he had a hall and a secretary – was assaulted by the complainers and those who requested help. There were some who asked help for finding their siblings or similar things. Or: With Captain Ocskay's help they managed to accommodate almost 3000 people in the Jewish high school, outside the ghetto. Once the Arrow Cross men tried to go in, but Captain Ocskay was in contact with the German officers and told them, and the Germans drove away the Arrow Cross men. It was such a strange world.

Actually the ghetto was only set up by December, because they had agglomerated the people there, but we kept putting off the closing of the ghetto, the building of the planking and gates. At the main entrance of the ghetto, this was on Wesselenyi Street, there always sat an Arrow Cross man with a submachine-gun, whose main task was to not let anyone escape. And if someone came from the outside, he had to check that person.

In his officer's uniform my father could move about freely, he never put on the yellow star. A captain of the Hungarian royal army could go wherever he wanted. The authorities or Arrow Cross men, who came from the outside, didn't even know who he was. Otherwise many other people came to the ghetto, too, for example Friar Kohler came regularly, and he tried to help. The Arrow Cross men couldn't interfere. [Editor's note: Lazarist monk Ferenc Kohler followed the death march to Hegyeshalom many times with the safe-conducts of the papal nunciature to save people from the group.]

The next story is connected to this Arrow Cross bastard. In January, when the Soviet Army had already encircled Budapest, the leaders of the Arrow Cross Party from Pest escaped to Buda before the bridges were blown up. One morning we went into the ghetto. We arrived at the gate, and the Arrow Cross man was sitting there and greeted us. 'Your most obedient servant, Captain.' 'So what's up, my son?' 'Well, Captain, I would like to humbly report to you that there is a very big problem. Imagine, last night the entire district leadership escaped to Buda.' 'At least they are safe,' my father replied. 'But this is not the only problem,' said the Arrow Cross man. 'Look, here is my submachine gun, but they didn't give me any cartridges.' 'It's okay my son, we'll look after you.'

In the meantime, we saved my sister, too. When they put my mother on the barge, which sank, they assigned my sister to a death march, and sent them off to the West. This was already at the beginning of the cruelest Szalasi regime. Somehow my father managed to find out that the death march stopped in Borgondpuszta for a while. [Borgondpuszta is on the outskirts of Szekesfehervar.] My father had a couple of skillful men, and one of them, he was also a Jew, had very good contacts with the police from before. This young man was called Ronai. [Editor's note: Zoltan Ronai was active as a 'police communicant.' His firm and confident behavior (he wasn't willing to wear his yellow star either) made the police officers and Arrow Cross clerks believe that he was their man.

(Source: Braham. A magyar holokauszt, volume II., page 203.)] My father entrusted him with going to Borgond as a detective and arrest her. He went there and brought her out.

My sister was in an awful shape, famished and lethargic. Ronai took her into the ghetto. What could we do with her? My father and I took her in the middle, I was also wearing a military uniform as a simple soldier, and we walked out the ghetto with her. We had an apartment on Katona Jozsef Street, which we had got from the Swedish embassy, and we took her there. We handed her over to my stepmother, who fed her with bean soup. My stepmother wasn't in the ghetto; she was in the protected house [31](#).

My father was on good terms with Wallenberg, so the entire family got a Schutzpass [32](#). The Schutzpass was a document with a photograph, issued in our name, with the following text:

'The Swedish Royal Embassy from Budapest certifies that the afore-named is going to travel to Sweden with the approval of the Swedish Royal State Department. Until his departure the apartment of the afore-named is under the protection of the Swedish Royal Embassy. It will expire on the 14th day after his arrival in Sweden. Budapest, 26th September 1944.'

My father never mentioned his relationship with Wallenberg; I only know that in Wallenberg's short directory, which the Russians gave back a couple years ago, and a copy of which I got from Maria Ember, Miksa Domonkos's phone number is mentioned. I know this much, but nobody ever said anything about this. Wallenberg handled his affairs quite discreetly. He bought many houses in Ujlipotvaros. He bought warehouses. He had a lot of money on him, and this was his task.

In one of the houses on Katona Jozsef Street, which was under the protection of the Swedish Embassy, there was a sign on the entrance; my father got an apartment, too. This was before the Arrow Cross times. Immediately next to it and above it lived the leaders of the Jewish Council. This meant that they didn't have to go to a yellow star house. As far as I remember, this was a regular two-bedroom apartment where only my father, my stepmother, and later my sister Anna and I lived. We even managed to take furniture there from the old apartment on Lovolde Square. We had special alimentation, too. The Stocklers had Swedish connections that brought good quality food from the cannery. I explicitly remember when a man gave us big tin cans.

I have to mention Pal Szalai here, who was the communications officer between the Arrow Cross Party and the Budapest Police Department. He was originally a bookseller by profession, he was an intelligent young man, who got crazy sometime in the 1930s and joined the Arrow Cross Party. As a consequence of this when Szalasi was imprisoned he also got caught and was sent to prison in Szeged.

The point is that after getting out of prison this Szalai didn't go back to the Szalasi party, he was smart enough to be through with it. But Szalasi and his party didn't know that in the meantime his mentality had changed, so after 15th October they summoned him and told him that he was going to be the communicant between the Arrow Cross party and the Budapest Police Department. Because of this he entered into relations 'ex officio' with the Jewish Council, with my father, and told him openly that he was going to use his communicant position to help.

For example it frequently happened that an Arrow Cross company attacked a house. They informed Pal Szalai, and he arranged with his friends at the police to send a police van, and the Hungarian

policemen drove away the Arrow Cross men who worked there absolutely illegally. They usually operated illegally, those for example, who pushed the Jews into the Danube [33](#). They didn't do it based on some kind of a sentence, but only for amusement. So Szalai helped a lot.

## Post-war

After the war they tried to take proceedings against him twice, but he could be defended. There were documents which proved that he had helped, and the People's Court didn't condemn him. [Editor's note: Pal Szalai ordered the assignment of 100 policemen to the ghetto, and he undertook to control them; as a matter of fact he was the one who interfered so that the Germans and Arrow Cross units wouldn't annihilate the inhabitants of the ghetto two days before the liberation of the ghetto.]

My father mainly had to keep in touch with officials who dealt with provisioning from the mayor's office and military leaders. There were two field-officers at the War Department, one of them was a colonel, and it could be arranged with them that the Jews were turned into a unit to deal with the defense of Budapest, and the digging of entrenchments. They took the women, too. This was very important, because they worked under Hungarian military supervision, so basically they were safe. My father could discuss things with these field-officers, and they were very nice.

In January 1945 we were running out of food, and once my father told me, 'Come, we are going to go over to the city hall, where one of the counselors can apportion some oil and some food, beans, flour etc. to us.' We went over to the city hall, which was already in a very ruinous state. Next to it the Adria Palace was ablaze. We got in the city hall, which has a two-story cellar. There was the German headquarters, the Hungarian headquarters, there were the offices of the mayor's office, and there was the counselor, who gave my father a paper: he apportioned this and that from the stocks of the Kobanya Brewery to us.

I couldn't go in to join the talk, but I patiently waited in the hallway of the cellar. When my father came out, three men were coming from the opposite direction, two armed Arrow Cross men with armband, and between them first lieutenant Leo Lullay, bereft of all his insignia. My father stopped them, 'Stop, please! I must speak with this man.' The two soldiers stood aside, and the two captains spoke with each other. Lullay told him, that the Arrow Cross men had noticed that he tried to get away from the Ferenczy matters, they caught him and degraded him. He didn't know what was going to happen with him, and asked my father to inform his wife, if we survived. Later he escaped during a bombing, he survived the war, was taken prisoner of war, the Russians took him, and when he returned from there he was unjustly tried and imprisoned. He died in the prison.

After the liberation my father remained at the Jewish community and he became the secretary general of the Jewish community. The general assembly elected him correctly. Jewish life started to revive, the provision and aid of the people who returned from the deportation had to be organized, they had to keep in touch with Joint [34](#), the Hungarian Red Cross, and the National Committee for the Treatment of Hungarian Jewish Deportees [35](#). These were all important organizational tasks. Besides these there were representative functions, where he had to be present. So he was the secretary general and above him was the president, Lajos Stockler. They were already on good terms in the ghetto. Stockler also got an apartment from Wallenberg in the same Swedish protected house on Katona Jozsef Street.

I was against my father's involvement in Jewish life after 1945. Partly because in denominational life there was always envy and conflicts, and when the war ended my father was lauded by the officials, but some from the religious side didn't like the fact that a Hungarian officer was leading them. They brought up against my father – from their viewpoint with good reason – that he didn't go to the synagogue and that our entire life was Hungarian civil life, we children were expressly brought up in a nationalist way. They didn't like this at all. And they were right.

In fact he got in the Jewish community by accident. During the war he was needed, because since he had a rank and an officer's demeanor he could help very much in the ghetto, but he didn't behave like a Jew at all. Really, he never went to the synagogue, not even on the High Holidays, we didn't observe the kashrut, neither Chanukkah, nor seder, or anything. My stepmother was religious in her own way, she always lit the two candles on Friday evening, but she didn't go to the synagogue either, not even on the High Holidays, and she didn't have a kosher kitchen, because my father was absolutely against it. But I don't remember seeing a mezuzah in her apartment on O Street either.

I also objected to my father's involvement because in a Palestinian Hungarian newspaper they attacked my father, saying that he had shown favor towards the persons close to him, and, as they said, the Jewish aristocracy. But even the president, Lajos Stockler, was a big business man [lance-maker]. Then they also brought up that the Jewish leaders must have known about Auschwitz, and that they didn't act on time, to save at least the Jews from the countryside from going there like cattle to the abattoir. This isn't true of course, since nobody could know in advance about the appearance of Eichmann's crew and about the actions of the authorities, because they deported the Jewry from the countryside so quickly, that it was astonishing in Europe. Even Westerners were surprised that this could be done in such a manner in Hungary.

In 1947 my father was decorated. It can be read in the 183rd issue of the Magyar Kozlony [Hungarian Bulletin] published on 13th August 1947:

On the recommendation of the premier, I award Lajos Stockler, the president of the National Bureau of Hungarian Israelites, and Miksa Domonkos, the managing director thereof, the silver grade of the Hungarian Freedom Order for their work in saving the Budapest Ghetto.

Date: Budapest, 5 August 1947

Zoltán Tildy      Lajos Dinnyés

In 1950 my father retired. He got a nice dismissal wage, he bought this house in Rakospalota from that. This is a three-bedroom apartment with a hall, a big kitchen, a big pantry, and two bathrooms. There is an attic story, too, there is a bathroom there, too, and a small room. The house has 90 square meters; the plot is 100 square feet.

From then on he held off from public life. He did gardening. Despite of this on 7th April 1953, so after Stalin's death, the AVO [36](#) caught him. They kept him in for more than half a year, and on 13th November 1953 they took him to the Istvan Hospital. When they took him, he was a well-built man, weighing some 100 kilograms, and they took him to the hospital a wreck of 45 kilograms. They took him to the hospital during the night, and they didn't want to tell them who it was. When the physician in attendance told them that he would not take him over, they phoned their headquarters, and finally they told him his name. But they interdicted them to notify the family, and they called us on the next morning from the AVO.

My father was unconscious for days. He was in the hospital for two months, and then he could walk again. Later he told us, that they had taken him to the prison on Fo Street, stripped him to the skin and he had to make a confession. He lay on a concrete bed, they flashed reflectors in his face day and night, took blood from him after each interrogation, to weaken his resistance. He got to the hospital so that his erythro count was 800,000. With transfusion they raised it to 1.5 million in six days, and according to his final report when he came out it was 3.490.000. He died soon after he came out of hospital, on 25th February 1954.

Then I tried to find out what had happened and why. When I asked the answer was, 'You will never find out what happened here.' But I did find out by accident.

Pal Szalai was taken to the AVO in the summer of 1952 from in front of his house. With all kinds of tortures they made him confess that he had seen that the Jewish leaders, Miksa Domonkos among them, killed Raul Wallenberg for his money. When they had this confession they arrested the Jewish leaders, Stockler, too, who came out just as miserable. This happened after Stalin's death, so it didn't have to do anything with the Zionist matters which had been stopped in the meantime. It turned out that this wasn't a Hungarian initiative, but a Russian crew was controlling the entire action. They could not account for Wallenberg towards the West, and they devised to blame it on the Jews.

Then they gave it up after all. Poor Szalai was also released. They threatened him saying that if he would ever tell anyone, anywhere, anything about what had happened, they would find him. To be sure, he immigrated to South America in 1956 and changed his name. He dared to come home after the change of the regime, and he told me the story at that time. Then I introduced him to Maria Ember, and he told it to her, too, and it was published. [Editor's note: Maria Ember (1931-2001): Hungarian writer, journalist and editor. In her most famous book, the documentary novel entitled 'Hairpin bend' she describes the fate of Hungarian Jewry in 1944 through her own experiences but in an objective way.]

Back to my life...So in 1939 I got to the Baumgartners as an electrician apprentice. It was a one-year apprenticeship, because the high school graduation made this possible. But I worked independently quite a lot even in the first year, because I learned the profession very fast. I mainly had to learn the professional tricks: how to carve a wall to the wall-tube, how to position the boxes, how to plaster, how to make a chandelier work with two circuits, how to wire a subalternate switch. At that time there were several kinds of bells in a better house, a door bell, and a bell for the maid. When I had served this one year, there was an end of the apprenticeship exam in front of a committee. I passed this exam with excellent result, and in October 1940 I got my assistant certificate. The master's examination in 1946 was a little bit more difficult; I had to take it in front of the leaders of the trade-corporation.

I remained at Baumgartner's as an electrician for quite a while. As far as I remember, when I started to work as an assistant my salary was 20 pengoes a week. Before that, as an apprentice I earned 10 pengoes a week. But the salary was supplemented nicely with tips. When I worked at houses there I regularly got tips from the milords and miladies. I worked there until 1941, because Baumgartner couldn't give me any work in the winter. In winter the entire building trade is on hold a bit. He told me to try to find some other job.

I found a Christian company called Galambos, I worked there until October 1942. I got along very well with Galambos, too. That was a different world, because I had to work in Buda and its environs. He could give me work during the winter, too, probably because he had better connections. There were a couple buildings in course of construction, some villas in the Buda Mountains, which I remember because at that time I rode a bicycle. All the wires were hung on the side, and at the back there were the tools. Up on Budakeszi Street I pushed the bicycle, and on the way back I didn't even need to pedal, I just flew along. At that time there weren't many cars, and there weren't any buses at all.

Besides there were smaller or bigger jobs close to the workshop, too. If there is an electrician nearby, people usually call him if the lamp doesn't work, if the fuse melts or if the iron breaks down. Galambos also had a small workshop where these small reparations could be done.

I gave my income to my parents, and if I needed money for something, my mother gave me some. I also had pocket money when I was at the science secondary school, I don't remember how much, but I went to the movies and bought sweets for it.

## War memories

Then, in October 1942 I had to go in for forced labor. First they took me to Bereck [today Romania], it is in Transylvania [37](#), in Haromszek county, near Sepsiszentgyorgy [today Romania] and Kezdivasarhely [today Romania], close to the Ojtoz defile [today Romania]. They were waiting at the Ojtoz defile for the country to be attacked by the Romanians. Things like this always happened at the defiles. We had to fortify there. We had to dig and cut wood. Besides digging there were finer jobs, too, for example the completion of a machine-gun emplacement, which meant that one had to dig a round hole, so that on one side of it, which looked in the direction of the enemy there was a tongue-like part, on which the machine-gun could be hung, and next to it, to the right and left the helpers could stand. One gave the ammunition, the other one took it, and the one in the middle shot.

When I joined up they gave us neither equipment nor clothes anymore, one had to go with his own equipment and clothes. They only gave us a cap. We were especially short on shoes. Very many poor children joined up in simple shoes. I joined up with good equipment. My father and my brother gave me advice. My brother had been there since 1940. We had to bring two blankets, a backpack, a foot-locker, boots, and at least one change of warm underwear. It couldn't be seen from the outside that those boots were of a very bad quality and because of over-use they broke very soon. Then my father got hold of a pair of ski boots, which were used but were in a very good shape. They had a thick, strong sole, and that lasted throughout.

This Bereck was only our station, we went from here to the places in Haromszek County where an attack of the enemy was expected, so where trenches had to be dug or machine-gun emplacements had to be built. We left Bereck quite soon and moved to Kilyen [today Romania], next to Sepsiszentgyorgy. We stayed there for a long time. Here was the so-called infantry basic training. Right turn, left turn, instead of rifle exercise we did shovel exercise: shovel on the shoulders, salutation with shovel. Besides this there were physical condition exercises: creeping, duck walk, running up the hill etc. I endured all this very well.

I never did any sports, once I tried ice-skating, but I fell and said that I wasn't going to do this. I must have been around ten when they took me to the bathing attendant at the pools in

Rakoscsaba. He dangled me into the water on a pole, I learned quickly. I learned to ride a bike when I was at high school; there was a bicycle rental close to us. I didn't own a bicycle. Anyway, I got used to physical labor, while working as an electrician I had to climb ladders very much and carve, and that made me strong, too. Otherwise I was good at physical education at high school.

Besides the basic training we still had to dig and cut wood, and the norm was quite demanding. It wasn't a simple ditching, but we had to dig quite big and deep trenches, into which the supposed enemy tank would fall and not be able to come out. It was a difficult job, because we had to throw the earth upwards from within. Luckily there weren't many roots or stones where I worked. Food was still quite good and quite generous at that time. We got meat, too.

From Kilyen we had to go to the post office in Sepsiszentgyorgy. Originally a buck sergeant went to the post office to pick up the letters and packages. And there was a farmer with a carriage who helped with the packages. The captaincy wasn't really satisfied with the buck sergeant's intelligence, and they wanted someone to go with him, who could read what had to be read and could count the remittance. I became this attendant. This is how the thing started up, but after a while the captain realized that I didn't need any attendant. So he issued me a clearance pass for these places.

This was a very good deal, because among the Jewish families in Sepsiszentgyorgy I found myself a suitable place. There were even one or two girls I could court. Then they were deported, too. This job was also important for me, because there was a typewriter there, and I liked to type my letters. I had learned to typewrite at home, we always had a typewriter at home.

In the summer of 1943 they took us from Haromszek County to the environs of Voloc [today Ukraine] by train. Voloc is a bigger town in Carpatho-Rus, they took us off the trains there, and our abiding place was in Podoboc [today Ukraine], which is a couple kilometers away from there in the mountains. This was an isolated, small, scabby village, which was inhabited by Ruthenians and Jews, all lived in terrible poverty and filth. It was very difficult to find a quarter that wasn't full with lice. The old Jews had made a mikvah in Podoboc, but we found it in such a bad shape, even the stove-pipe was missing. And the cleanliness... Allegedly there had been a doctor there, who examined it, and said that it wasn't healthy and that it shouldn't be used. But some used it. I never went into that dishwater, but as soon as snow fell, I could have a wash with snow.

The ground was really bad in Podoboc, and as a result of the hard work the axes and the hackers became jagged. Then I came up with the idea that these tools should be repaired time by time. There weren't any new tools, we couldn't throw them away. A couple kilometers away from Podoboc there was another small village, Pilipec. Ruthenians and Jews lived there, too. They liked my idea, and the captaincy sent a sergeant over there to take a look at the place, because they had heard that there was a Ruthenian smith there. And really the smith had quite a nice little workshop. They agreed that the treasury would pay something to this smith, who could barely speak any Hungarian. They allowed us to go there.

I had a comrade, a real Jewish peasant, his name was Andor Polak Klein, who couldn't write or read, which is very rare among Jews. He was a stoutly built, strong man. He became my helper. We collected the broken tools every week, as many as we could hold, walked over to Pilipec, and went to the master who showed us how to repair the tools. He gave us the proper equipment for that, and showed us how to handle the bellows. And what is the most important: we could warm up next

to the fire. That winter of 1943-1944 was very harsh. Many froze or got chilblain, and there were many accidents during the work. But thanks to this smith job we were warm twice a week. The smith brought bacon; he took out the flat lever-grip, heated it up, put the bacon in it and pressed the fat on bread for us.

In 1943 my father was notified that his son Peter had died. At the morning briefing the company commander, Dezso Vertan, told me to step forward and told the others, that Istvan Domonkos's brother had died a heroic death, even though the official notification avoided the word heroic in case of Jews. From then on, after Peter's death, I kept begging my father to do something, because we knew that the front was going to reach us sooner or later. He wrote an official plea, which didn't really have any result.

My father had connections at the War Department and in April 1944 the order came that I was reassigned to Budapest, to the Hungarian Royal Military Railway and Bridgework Depot, which was on Timot Street. Timot Street was right next to the arsenal, and not far off was the oil-refinery. So that my reassignment wouldn't be conspicuous they reassigned five persons, saying that they all had some kind of trade. There were other forced laborers there besides us as well. It was known that Timot Street was a good deal, because it was in Budapest.

Our first job was to clean the sewer of that huge territory. There was quite a strict military order, we couldn't really move around, and they didn't like us very much either. The thing is, that in the first days of April, perhaps on the 5th was the first big air-attack on Budapest. [Editor's note: The first (British) air-raid hit Budapest on 3rd April 1944. From then on the air-raids became regular.] Besides the attack was especially on the arsenal and the oil-refinery nearby. When we arrived there we saw already on the first day, that the Jewish forced laborers were making ditches, but not the kind we had made in Transylvania, but saps. These were so deep that they could be covered with sleepers, pieces of rail, with all kinds of things which were at hand.

The order was that in case of an air-attack Jews should hide wherever they could. The real air-raid shelters could only be used by the soldiers and the officers. There was a huge hall, in which a sawing-machine functioned, and the best shelter for soldiers was under its concrete base. A couple days passed and other air-attacks came, and we squat in that lousy trench and we survived. But almost all the officers and the soldiers died at the big shelter, because the sawing-machine was hit and it fell on them.

The situation got worse and worse, there weren't any conduits, there weren't any sewers anymore. Then they allowed those who were from Budapest to go home to take a bath. After a while they realized that this was such an important target, that the situation was unmaintainable. The army occupied a textile mill in Budakalasz, this might have been in May, and we had to take all the equipment that remained from the military plant there. There were turning-mills, drills among these.

In Budakalasz we had to build a new factory. We had to make a huge wire system, make a base for the machine-tools, so it was like starting up a new factory. This factory repaired and made bridge pieces, and moreover it had to repair train cars, too. We had to work very hard, and once the liberators appeared. They knew very well that the new factory, which was very close to the Danube, was there, and they started to bomb it. There wasn't any shelter, everyone hid wherever he could. I discovered a monitor on the river bank, and I always hid in that. I even hid my food

supply there. At that time the alimentation was very bad, and my friend Miklos Hajdu smuggled in sausage and bacon for me.

Then the revered captaincy realized that the factory couldn't operate in Budakalasz either. Then on a nice day they pushed in a train on the side-track and the orders came that we were going to start to load the equipment on the next day. To go where? To the West. I said that I wouldn't do it, and some agreed and we left. I went home to Lovolde Square.

They established that certain clothes-collecting company at that time. There were only a few young forced laborers in it beside me, the majority were elderly, wealthy civil Jews from Pest. I got to the kitchen, but I did many things. I was young, so I was the one they always asked to run here and there, do this and that. I didn't really take part in collecting clothes; I mainly did jobs for which I needed to use outside connections.

Since I had a uniform, I could move around safely. The uniform was my poor brother's, because when he left with the 2nd Hungarian army in 1942 he had to go in civilian clothes. He left a worn military uniform at home and I put that on and I wore it until the end. Under the cloak I wore a drabber summer uniform, it was quite worn out. The cloak was also quite shabby, which was good because the Arrow Cross men didn't check soldiers like this, they weren't interested. They thought the ones like this were probably coming from the front. They were more interested in those who were dressed well.

So I was never checked by any Arrow Cross men. And that was good, because I didn't have the appropriate paper. The Swedish and Swiss safe conduct didn't go with the worn uniform. I had an old mercenary book, which I had got as a forced laborer, but there was a ZS on it. [Editor's note: On the mercenary book they wrote a ZS (The Hungarian term for a Jew is zsidó, hence the letters ZS) with big red capitals, so that they would know at once who the person was.] If anyone had looked at it carefully, I could have been caught.

I met my future wife, Katalin Schwartz here. She was from Miskolc and she ran away from the ghetto in Miskolc with young Zionists. She went through many things, she ran away several times. For the last time she hid at the Technological University with Zionist kids. It was in the summer, it might have been July or August. There was a very nice assistant and he made room for them in the attic. There weren't many of them, there were five to ten young people, and they hid there. But the darkness, the deprivation, and the fact of being locked up was very nerve-wrecking, and she ran away from there.

At that time she still had some fake papers; she got hold of a room and lived there under the name of Maria Toth. The police was looking for a child kidnapper with the same name. She was registered, and the policemen thought that it was her. Luckily she wasn't at home when the detectives went there, and her resettler, who suspected who she was, waited for her at the entrance and warned her that the cops were there. So she cleared off from there only with the clothes she had on her. An elderly cook, Uncle Zoli Strausz, saw her browsing about, took her in and gave her room in a closet. Since there weren't other young people there, it was my task to take care of her a little bit.

It also occurred that they summoned me to the offices on Sip Street to keep order. Sometimes very many petitioners and complainers appeared. For example people went there to complain that the

Arrow Cross men had broken into their apartment. They already played the wild at that time. They caught someone, they hurt or robbed someone. Such things happened. But there were also many housing problems because they had agglomerated the Jews into yellow star houses. My main task was to stand in the hall and let people in gradually. At another time I had to escort a young woman with a baby to the Red Cross station on Amerika Street [38](#). We went by streetcar, and we had to be very careful so that the baby wouldn't cry, because it didn't wear a yellow star either. And I escorted them as a soldier.

This clothes-collecting company functioned until the Szalasi putsch. At that time I already had the Wallenberg Schutzpass and I lived in the apartment on Katona Jozsef Street. We managed to lodge Katalin [the interviewee's wife-to-be] at the Jewish high school on Abonyi Street. Then we lost touch with each other.

Right on the day after the putsch they enacted many orders. A ghetto had to be built. They agglomerated there the people from the yellow star houses, too. The alimentation of the ghetto had to be organized. We had to protect ourselves from possible robberies, and the affray of the Arrow Cross men. We had to keep in touch with the authorities. We went in and out the ghetto freely during the Arrow Cross times, too, and we lived on Katona Jozsef Street. I never slept in the ghetto.

I mainly did physical labor, I had to pick up sacks, take them into the warehouse, take them home. The heaviest bag of flour weighed around 80 kilos, which I could carry at that time. But it also happened that I accompanied my father to meetings at the city hall, or I got a special task. For example: This young Jewish man came; he was desperate, saying that the caretaker kept threatening his mother and father to give them away to the Arrow Cross men. This was already after the Szalasi putsch, but the ghetto wasn't established yet. These two old people had to be taken from there, because they didn't dare to set off on their own. I went there by bicycle. I was wearing a uniform. I went in to the caretaker: 'Long live Szalasi! I have orders from the army corps headquarters to arrest these two people. Please bring them downstairs.' He brought them down and I took them to another yellow star house. Of course they didn't know anything about all this. They came down trembling, and not until we got out on the street could I tell them that their son had told me about them. They kept trembling until then.

There was another case. I had to take a letter to Jozsef Cavallier and bring an answer from him. Jozsef Cavallier was a Christian journalist, whom the primate had appointed as the secular leader of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association. The main task of the association was the protection of baptized Jewish people. Their office was on Muzeum Street and I went there unseeingly. I went in and the janitress greeted me saying: 'Oh, oh, Sir, it's very good that you didn't come earlier. The Arrow Cross men were here an hour ago and they shot the president.' 'Did he die?' 'Fortunately not, luckily the ambulance saved him and took him home.'

His apartment was in Buda, I went there and rang the doorbell. They were scared to death when they saw someone wearing a uniform again. His wife took me inside, Cavallier lay in bed, I don't remember where he was wounded, where he was bandaged, but he could speak. I gave him the letter, and as far as I remember he told me that there was no need for a reply and that I only had to tell them that he was doing better and that there wouldn't be any problem. But afterwards, before letting me go he made a little speech: 'Good job, my son, an honest, kind, Hungarian

Christian soldier has to behave the way you do.’ He asked me where I served. I told him that I served in a Jewish forced laborer battalion, because I was familiar with that.

There was a terrible incident when the Arrow Cross men herded the people gathered from the yellow star houses into the big synagogue on Dohany Street. They kept several hundred people there without food or soup. We couldn’t go in to see them. Practically I was the only one who could communicate with them, but I didn’t go in there as a soldier, or as a Jew, but as an employee of the Electric Works. I went to the switchboard, I fussed about, and in the meantime I could talk with the people, I calmed them and told them that it was going to be over soon. It came to an end so that on the second day a group of ten to fifteen Arrow Cross men came in. They put up a big table in front of the altar, and the Jews had to pass by the table all in row and leave all their money and property there.

Then one day at dawn the guard at the entrance of the house on Katona Jozsef Street, because we always had a guard, reported that the Russians were coming. They came house by house. We hid the military uniforms and a man who had learned some Russian in World War I and in captivity met them and greeted them with great joy. The first thing the Russians did was to take his gold watch. Then they looked all over the house, they were looking for Germans and weapons. They didn’t hurt any of us. They took what they could, they especially liked watches. This was our liberation.

My wife-to-be went to the ghetto after the liberation, at that time everyone was looking for someone, and in the commotion of the ghetto she reunited with her father. Her father survived the forced labor, her mother and siblings were deported to Auschwitz and died.

Two days after the liberation, my father and I went into the ghetto. We saw that awful chaos. My task was to protect a food storehouse, because they had broken into a storehouse where oil was kept. They started to scoop out the oil with bowls, and in the end in the big tumult all the oil wasted away. And then they sent me to guard another storehouse. I was in civilian clothes then of course, because the Russians would have caught me in uniform. They deported all the young men. They caught me twice, but I ran away both times [39](#).

At that time the Jewish community still supported the alimentation system of the ghetto. I had to help with carrying the food apportioned from the Red Cross or other places. We had a man with a carriage with a garron, which suddenly fell and died. I found a four-wheeler handbarrow somewhere in the snow. I simply took it and I could carry food with that handbarrow. Several times we had to take bags of beans or peas from the food distribution center, which was at the outer tracks of the Nyugati railway station. Two or three people came with me. With my handbarrow I could take on smaller transports, too, for which I mainly got food in exchange. I didn’t go back to my parent’s apartment, who lived on Katona Jozsef Street for a while with Anna, then they went back to the apartment on Lovolde Square.

## **Married life**

In the ghetto I met Katalin and her father. With the marriage we had to wait for me to attain my majority, that was the age of 24 at that time, and my parents weren’t happy at all about me wanting to get married, because they wanted me to continue my studies. At that time I still had university ahead of me. I couldn’t go to university before, because of the anti-Jewish laws, I was a simple electrician, and my father thought, of course, that I would go and study right after the war.

He simply told me that he didn't agree with this marriage, and as long as he was the head of the family, he wouldn't give his consent.

We didn't quarrel, we had already been living separately; we lived in rented rooms. After August 1945 we got married, we did it then because I turned 24 in August. We went to the local board, we addressed two servants or deliverers in the hallway and asked them to be our witnesses, and that was the marriage procedure. There wasn't any celebration; there were no relatives, nothing.

My wife's name is Katalin Schwartz. She was born in 1925 in Miskolc. She was in Palestine as a child with her parents sometime in the 1930s. They were there for a couple years, but her mother was in a very bad health and the circumstances were adverse. They lived in a kibbutz where her father did earthwork. He was a qualified locksmith, but that wasn't needed there. After a couple years they came home at the doctor's advice who said that it would be better for the mother to go back to her former environment. My wife's mother is a Groszman girl and that family had an ironworks in Miskolc. Her father worked there. They were poor. My wife finished four classes of middle school, after that she learned the seamstress trade. She started to work in Miskolc at a quite young age.

In 1947 the first child, our daughter Judit, was born. Then we had to work hard to get a normal apartment as soon as possible. I got hold of an apartment, because I met an elderly house owner on Gyarmat Street, who had a small storied villa, which had been destroyed by the war. I made a deal with her that I would contribute to the reparation. I helped the way I could, with my own hands, too. And as far as I remember I had 1000 pengoes, too, since I had a job. We could only move in in 1948. This was a rental, a small one-bedroom apartment with a hall, a bathroom and a kitchen. It had one disadvantage: it was half-basement. If one looked out the window the ground was right there. Regardless of this it wasn't unhealthy, it had normal windows and there was a good tile stove in it. I remember that I carried home the fuel in 50 kilogram bags on my back many times.

We lived plainly, but we had everything we needed. My wife helped in our financial life very skillfully. She was a trained seamstress, but she had a specialty, knitting. And at that time, when we got married, the nice hand-knit pullovers were highly popular in Hungary. I had a circle of friends from the forced labor times, and one of those had a shop. They took over the things my wife knit. She couldn't only knit, but she could also assemble the pullovers.

She didn't get a job for a long time. She sewed and knit at home. Then, in the 1950s they employed her at the Ration Card Office, because she had nice handwriting. Later she worked at the Hungarian Advertisement Company. My sister Anna got her that job. Besides this she always did this and that, not only knitting. She learned leather-work very well, too.

After 1956 [40](#), when many people left Hungary, an engineer colleague of mine emigrated with his family and because they wanted to sell everything they had, I bought a very good sewing machine. This was such a strong machine that one could sew leather with it, too. My wife made purses, belts, and that also brought money. But we were never that well off to buy a car. We never had a car. We didn't go on holiday either; the summer cottage in Rakoscsaba wasn't ours anymore. Some people moved into it during the Arrow Cross times and we couldn't make them leave, so at the beginning of the 1950s my parents sold it inhabited for 10,000 forints. We never went abroad together either. I was in the GDR a couple times in the 1970s on business, but never in the West.

At the age of 54, after her second heart attack, my wife was pensioned off, and she got disability pension. She smoked very much. But as a pensioner she was very active, and here in the 15th district the district organization of the Popular Front and the Red Cross started a charity association. As far as I remember they called it Humanist Club. The Popular Front provided the space for it. Its aim was to collect clothes and money at the time when many people emigrated from Transylvania; that was already in the 1980s. The leader of this local movement was a Lutheran pastor, with whom my wife was on very good terms.

My wife died in 1990 and she wasn't buried in a Jewish cemetery. She wasn't religious. She said what many other Jews also did, that how could the Almighty let this happen. She was unwilling to go to the synagogue and she wanted the Lutheran pastor to bury her. The ceremony wasn't Lutheran, only the pastor did the memorial. I was on very good terms with the pastor. Unfortunately he immigrated to South America for some reason. We wrote each other one of two letters, and then I found out that he had died at a relatively young age.

We lived on Gyarmat Street until 1957. When my sister Anna got married they moved to my mother's, the house in Rakospalota. Anna married Ferenc Bolmanyi, an artist, in 1954. He was an excellent artist, originally a great portrait painter, and at the beginning he was getting on, even the royal British family ordered from him. Then in the Rakosi regime they didn't let him get on, partly because his non-figurative style was opposed to the socialist realism of that time, and partly because he was a very religious Jewish man. [Bolmanyi, Ferenc (1904–1990): A successful portrait painter at the beginning of his career. From 1938 he was drafted into forced labor regularly, but he survived the war. He was a member of the European School and, along with the other members of this school, was excluded from the public for a decade. His first exhibition was in March 1966 in the Fenyves Adolf Hall, and in March 1973 an exhibition on his life-work was shown at the Ernst Museum. On his 80th birthday a jubilee exhibit was organized at the Ernst Museum, where they presented 160 of his paintings. (Katalin S. Nagy)].

I don't know whether they got married in the synagogue or not, but I wasn't at their wedding. They didn't have any children. My sister didn't graduate from high school, but she learned to do paperwork well. She could typewrite and she knew stenography. Last she was an office worker at the Hungarian Advertisement Company. When Anna and her husband moved here my mother was already in bad health. Anna and her husband couldn't maintain this big house financially. At that time there wasn't gas heating but there were tile stoves. And for the upkeep of a big house like this one needs technical skills, too. They simply couldn't take it. They always complained that the conducts froze in the winter. Then we offered them to change apartments. I told them that I would give up the small apartment on Gyarmat Street they could manage that much easier, and that I would take care of this apartment. Unfortunately, they weren't lucky there either, because in a heavy summer shower the drains in the house got clogged and they got flooded.

While I lived in that house it never happened that the sewer didn't work. Perhaps they thought that I had kept it a secret before the exchange. Bolmanyi had submitted an application for a studio earlier, and luckily he got a beautiful studio apartment on Bartok Bela Street in 1965. It used to be a sculptor's, the one who made this Eve sculpture, I have here. Originally it was a couple. Adam was bought by the pharmacy on Kigyo Street, and I got Eve as a gift from a friend. So they got that studio apartment, and their life became settled. After the change of regime his paintings were sought after. Bolmanyi died in 1990, and Anna remained in that apartment until her death. She

died in 2002 and we buried her in the Jewish cemetery.

## Post-war events

When the war was over, my friend Hajdu, who worked in a film studio, and I decided to start a small company together. I had another forced laborer comrade, who was rich enough, and he could equip a small film laboratory. Then they realized that it would be more interesting to make sound recordings. There was once a company in Budapest, which had the motto 'Take home your voice!' [Editor's note: The Scheiber sound recording studio, where the 'Take home your voice!' recordings were made, operated in the 1930s. A sound recording studio with the same motto operated in the 1960s as well. (Gyula Kozak: Labjegyzetek a Hatvanas evek Magyarorszaga monografiahoz, Manuscript)].

We obtained at a discount price a device with which we could make sound recordings, and we thought that we could make a fortune out of this. But we didn't. Our company was called Gong Recording Room. The company was in my name, because I had a good profession. When we started the company, I had already taken my master's examination, so I was an electrician master, and I got a license. I got my certificate of mastership on 8th October 1946 and I got my license on 18th December 1946. In the end we switched over to be an electrician, and I could employ one or two people, because I had my old connections.

There was a lot of work at that time, after the war the destroyed houses had to be repaired. We rented a small room on Deak Ferenc Street, which meant that we were in the center of the city, and at that time shops were being reopened that needed to be wired. Besides this the sister of my friend Hajdu worked at the Metropolitan Public Project Council [which carried out the preparation and authority control of the metropolitan public constructions]. This was good because while I worked as an electrician, I got smaller and bigger jobs from the Public Project Council. I could get hold of material at the old wholesale traders. Before the war, when I was an electrician assistant I used to go to these wholesale traders, they knew me, and there were some who had hidden material.

Everything would have been all right, but then the Rakosi caprice [41](#) came, when they didn't want to allow even the tradesmen to work, and as far as I remember in 1948 they imposed very high taxes, which were unbearable [42](#). So on 7th January 1949 I gave up my license and I asked for a hire-purchase discount. The Rakosi change of regime destroyed the Public Project Council, too, and Hajdu's sister was transferred to the Structural Engineering Office, which replaced the Public Project Council, and she arranged two jobs for us there.

So in 1949 I got into the Structural Engineering Office. At first I was employed as an administrator. Soon after, the Structural Engineering Office became the General Building Design Company, where I got a key position because they entrusted me with economic work. Besides this I became the secretary of the trade union committee, which was called secretary of the works committee at that time. This was quite an important position at that time, because I was always in the so-called factory triangle: the director of the company, the party secretary, and the factory committee secretary. But this was one of the reasons why soon after I got into a conflict, which can be seen in my file, too. So I dropped out of the factory committee secretariat soon, and after that I never did anything like that. The personnel manager there noted about me that I was aggressive. In 1956 I got my file.

From 1950 I attended extension courses, and in 1954 I got my mechanic engineer degree. In the meantime I acquired complex practice in construction at the construction company, because besides the designing of electrical installations, I could take part in the construction work of central heating, water conduct, sewer installation and gas-fitting. Later they made it possible for me to learn and practice the designing of bonts and conveyors at the lift designing department of the Apartment Planning, then at the Public Building Construction Institute for about two years. From 1955 until 1957 I mainly designed electrical installations at the building modernization department of the Budapest Town Planning Institute [BUVATI].

In 1956 they elected me into the Revolutionary Committee at BUVATI. I was definitely a moderate person. For example, when we took the files from the personnel department, there were some who got really angry and blustered out threats. As far as I remember the personnel manager was a small Jewish red-haired man, and we defended him. We didn't let him be fired or hurt, because the Institute functioned throughout. On the one hand the salaries had to be paid, on the other hand there were projects in progress, since the renovation of the ruined buildings in Budapest belonged to us. Then, in 1956 I didn't join the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party [43](#) and so I managed to be out of this.

I have to mention here, that in 1945 I joined the Hungarian Social Democratic Party [44](#). At that time it was almost natural that everyone joined one of the parties. The Social Democratic Party suited my taste, my earlier mind, and the expectations of the family. When the two parties joined, I saw what it was about, but I didn't dare to leave. In 1948 it might have been very dangerous to quit, and after that it was even more dangerous, since in 1953 they caught my father, and they said that they would catch me, too. I knew that they were inquiring about me, because the caretaker told me that they had been there and had been asking about me.

By accident I became very good friends with Alajos Fischer, who was much older than me. This started so that we had common projects. He designed the building, and I designed the building engineering part. His brother, Jozsef Fischer was minister of state in Imre Nagy's [45](#) government for two days, between 2nd and 4th November 1956. There were many troubles around them, they were old social democrats. [Editor's note: Jozsef Fischer (1901-1995): architect, politician, one of the reorganizers of the Social Democratic Party during the 1956 revolution.]. And this friendship made me even more convinced that I wouldn't join the party again.

When in 1957 they formed the party organization again, people were very difficult to move [to join the Party again]. The consequence of this was that in the summer or fall of 1957 they sent Valentiny from the Building Ministry to talk us, old members into joining again. [Editor's note: Agoston Valentiny was a social democratic politician, who was imprisoned in 1950-1955 as the accused of a show trial. The interviewee is referring to his son.] He held a big speech. In the end they asked who wanted to make a comment. I was one of these, and Alajos Fischer was the other one. Both of us told them to get lost. At that time they held Imre Nagy and his companions captive in Romania, and we both came out strong against it. We brought up especially those arguments, that it was a shame that they were holding captive the legal premier of Hungary. And we also asked them about the journalist who had been caught. We brought these things up, and told them that it was out of the question for us to join a party again, which was just like Rakosi's party.

There was a big scandal, they dissolved the meeting, and a couple days later we were summoned to the directorate, where there were two people from the Department of the Interior. It was quite a harsh argument. I told them: 'You don't know, but I will tell you that my father was beaten and tortured to death at the AVH. When I tried to find out what had happened and why, I was told that I would never find out what had happened there. And nobody has given me any kind of explanation ever since. What would you think if after all this I had taken a couple men with machine guns and gone to Fo Street to find the ones who were responsible for this? Would that have been alright? Isn't it a better solution that I try to change things in a peaceful way, so that I can live in a regime, where things like this cannot happen? I insist that Imre Nagy and his companions are the legal leaders of the country.'

The reaction was that they immediately pensioned off Alajos Fischer. And they told me: 'We accept your story, but if you ever open your small mouth again – this is how they said it, one remembers such things – then you'll see. Your name will be mud. You won't be able to take part in anything.' I answered, 'At the meeting where Valentiny held a speech, we were all asked to give our opinion because there would be democracy from now on. It seems that what they said then wasn't in Hungarian, but in Russian. The opposite is true. What you tell me now is at least in Hungarian. I will not open my mouth.' And that's what happened. I was very careful. Of course they fired me at once, for the sake of the precedent, so that people would know.

And then again my friends from the old engineer brigade got me a job within a couple days at the Metropolitan Fitter Company. Of course that wasn't to my liking. I looked in the newspapers every day; I was looking for another job. I would have wanted two kinds of jobs. One was the theater, because when I worked at the Public Building Construction we worked for theaters, too, and one of my last jobs was the construction of a lighting effects mobile bridge at the Operetta Theater. The other one was the public health sector. And guess what, in 1959 I found an ad that a health institute in Budapest was looking for a building engineer. I applied and I succeeded. This was the National Oncology Institute. And nobody from the Department of the Interior interfered; they kept their promise as long as I kept my mouth shut. From 1959 I was the head of the technical department at the National Oncology Institute, and I worked there until my retirement.

From 1960 besides my main job I took on a part-time job at the technical department of the Hungarhotels Company, where I worked as a building engineering advisor next to the technical inspector for ten years.

In 1964 I applied at the Labor Department to be admitted in the directory of professionals, which happened on 25th February 1964. From then on I gave consultative assistance in construction, engineering and operating issues, especially for health institutions. The new anatomical building of the Sports Hospital and the epidemiological pavilion of the Cardiological Institute were constructed with my collaboration. I also contributed to the complete rewiring of the main building of the Neurosurgical Institute on Amerika Street, and I engineered the program of the rehabilitation building of the National Jozsef Fodor Health-Resort. Several statements of mine related to the technical equipment and professional requirements of health institutions were published in the professional magazine called Health Economic Review. I participated in the work of the Hospital Construction Committee. In 1971, at its congress, I held a presentation on the building engineering concerns of the use of light structures.

I was a member of the Hungarian Electrotechnical Association, and I was the president of the Medical Standardization Committee. Besides this I participated in the work of the technical group of the Popular Front, in which there were mainly engineers and technicians. This was social work, for example the renovation of old buildings. There was an old museum in the district, and they had its complete survey made, I made some proposals, I made a calculation. I did it with pleasure.

In the 1970s I broke my promise to be quiet that I had made to the people from the Department of the Interior. The local secretary of the Popular Front invited me to introduce me to the council president of the district. I couldn't say no, since I had done this and that as a technical professional. We went up to the council president, and the district party secretary was also there. They seated us, gave us a coffee, and soon after they said what they really wanted: they wanted to nominate me as a council member at the next elections, because I was a good specialist, and I was young etc.

At first I burst out laughing. I said that I wasn't willing to do something like that, and that we shouldn't even talk about it. But they started trying to convince me. In the end I told them that they should acknowledge the fact that in 1956 I was on Imre Nagy's side and that I still was at that moment. I also told them that I didn't consider their regime a legitimate one and that I would never enlist to this regime. I told them that I never agreed with what they said, that there was a counter-revolution in Hungary. They were very astonished, but nothing happened after this.

My wife never joined the Party. After the war she only kept her Zionist connections for a short time. As far as I remember she was in touch with the Klal [Zionists]. [Editor's note: Klal – Hebrew term for General, cf. General Zionism [46](#)]. Since she had been in Palestine for a couple years she spoke Ivrit well, and there she taught Hebrew for a while, too. And there were some friendly get-togethers, and sometimes I went as well, because I was interested. But we were out of it very soon, perhaps already in 1946. Then she only lived public life in the Popular Front from the beginning of the 1980s.

As far as friends are concerned, I have already mentioned the Hajdu couple. We kept seeing each other throughout, we went on trips together. There wasn't any other friendship as old and as close as this one was, but there were many others, too. At my workplaces I always made new friends, not only family friends, but also some with whom I sat down by a glass of wine to talk, and with whom we did things together. My wife also had her own circle of friends. For example, she had friends with whom she sometimes played cards. And she also had friends from the charity work. In fact nothing changed after I buried my poor wife. The good friendly relationships with those whom we kept in touch with endured.

## Political activities

I got involved in political activity again in 1986, with the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society. I got here, so that when I was the senior engineer of the Oncology they assigned me to the Sports Hospital, too, where the senior engineer had been caught with corruption and someone had to arrange their things. I became very good friends with the finance director there. He was called Karoly Novak; he has since died, I gave the address at his funeral. He had been at the front, he got home safely and wrote his memoirs, 'My Encounter with History' was the title.

At first we only talked on a professional level, then about other things, too, and a very close friendship developed between us. He told me that he had known Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky in person, and that he was a member of the small society whose aim was to erect his statue in 1986, on the 100th anniversary of his birth. It had already been ordered, it was being done. They were registered as Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendly Society. He told me that I should take part in it, that they needed people like me.

I joined, and in 1987, 1988 and 1989 I worked very actively. I wasn't afraid of the Department of the Interior anymore. I didn't care. Interestingly, they only started keeping me under observation sometime in 1988. Because in my files that I got from the Historical Bureau there are mainly those things when I was a strike organizer, when, for example, I held a presentation and held a memorial in the cemetery. So my political activity started with this, and it continued so that this friendly society was completely reorganized into a political society, and we had a secret place, a book stack on Akacfa Street, where we got together if we wanted to discuss a more delicate matter.

The Popular Front had a beautiful room, with seating room for about 50-60 people, and we regularly organized presentations there. We invited people like Istvan Eorsi, Gaspar Miklos Tamas, Sandor Csoori, Istvan Csurka. I mainly took on organizational tasks; I was in charge of the member registering and handled the correspondence. By the time we had 1000 registered members there wasn't enough room, and then someone introduced me to the director of the Jurta Theater. They entrusted me to negotiate with him. I offered a cheekily small amount of money, and he accepted it. In a couple months the Jurta Theater became a famous institution. The culmination of this process was that the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society took part in the work of the Opposition Round-Table. I was one of the delegates of the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society at the meetings of the Opposition Round-Table, so I actively took part in the change of regime.

I am a founding member of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, and in 1990 I got into the deputy representation of the 15th district, and I was its member for a term, until 1994.

## My children

In short about my children. Judit was born in 1947. When she graduated from high school I had already been working in the public health sector, and I took her into our hospital. She studied there in the laboratory for a while, then she got to the Public Health and Epidemics Institute by her own efforts, and by completing different courses she acquired specialized assistant's qualification. She still does this until this day, only in the meantime the name of the KOJAL [Public Health and Epidemics Institute] became ANTSZ [Public Health and Medical Officer Service]. She married a military officer at the age of 19, in 1968. When her husband was assigned to Kaposvar she went with him, and she found a job there at the KOJAL and did the same work. She had a son who now lives in Germany. I don't really know anything about him; I don't know what he does. Unfortunately my daughter's marriage didn't work out, and after ten years they divorced. Later she remarried, but in 2000 she became a widow. She has lived alone since then.

Peter was born in 1959. He graduated from I. Istvan High School [presently Szent Istvan High School] then he got a meteorologist degree at the ELTE TTK [Eötvös Lorand University, natural sciences faculty] in 1984. He took his doctor's degree in 1999. He deals with climatology; he regularly publishes articles in international and national journals. He was married, but then he divorced. He doesn't have any children.

We were very happy about the forming of the State of Israel, we kept our fingers crossed for the Jews, and we didn't keep this a secret.

## Glossary

### **1 Italian front, 1915-1918**

Also known as Isonzo front. Isonzo (Soca) is an alpine river today in Slovenia, which ran parallel with the pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian and Italian border. During World War I Italy was primarily interested in capturing the ethnic Italian parts of Austria-Hungary (Trieste, Fiume, Istria and some of the islands) as well as the Adriatic littoral. The Italian army tried to enter Austria-Hungary via the Isonzo River, but the Austro-Hungarian army was dug in alongside the river. After 18 months of continuous fighting without any territorial gain, the Austro-Hungarian army finally succeeded to enter Italian territory in October 1917.

### **2 Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957)**

Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary. In foreign policy he tried to attain the revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty on the basis of which two thirds of Hungary's territory were seceded after WWI - which led to Hungary entering WWII as an ally of Germany and Italy. When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, Horthy was forced to appoint as Prime Minister the former ambassador of Hungary in Berlin, who organized the deportations of Hungarian Jews. On 15th October 1944 Horthy announced on the radio that he would ask the Allied Powers for truce. The leader of the extreme right-wing fascist Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, took over power. Horthy was detained in Germany and was later liberated by American troops. He moved to Portugal in 1949 and died there in 1957.

### **3 Horthy exemption**

The so-called Horthy exemption was an order (issued on 21st August 1944) authorizing the Regent Miklos Horthy to declare people who contributed to the progress of the nation in the arts, sciences or economy, exempt from anti-Jewish legislation upon the proposal of the Council of Ministers. Miksa Domonkos (a reservist captain, leader of the Jewish Council [Judenrat] and head of the Budapest Ghetto administration) was exempted earlier as a highly decorated WWI hero.

### **4 Anti-Jewish Laws in Hungary**

The first of these anti-Jewish laws was passed in 1938, restricting the number of Jews in liberal professions, administration, and in commercial and industrial enterprises to 20 percent. The second anti-Jewish Law, passed in 1939, defined the term "Jew" on racial grounds, and came to include some 100,000 Christians (apostates or their children). It also reduced the number of Jews in economic activity, fixing it at six percent. Jews were not allowed to be editors, chief-editors, theater directors, artistic leaders or stage directors. The Numerus Clausus was introduced again, prohibiting Jews from public jobs and restricting their political rights. As a result of these laws, 250,000 Hungarian Jews were locked out of their sources of livelihood. The third anti-Jewish Law,

passed in 1941, defined the term "Jew" on more radical racial principles. Based on the Nuremberg laws, it prohibited inter-racial marriage. In 1941, the anti-Jewish Laws were extended to North-Transylvania. A year later, the Israelite religion was deleted from the official religions subsidized by the state. After the German occupation in 1944, a series of decrees was passed: all Jews were required to relinquish any telephone or radio in their possession to the authorities; all Jews were required to wear a yellow star; and non-Jews could not be employed in Jewish households. From April 1944 Jewish property was confiscated, Jews were barred from all intellectual jobs and employment by any financial institutions, and Jewish shops were closed down.

## **5 Calling up of women after the Arrow Cross takeover**

After the Arrow Cross takeover in October 1944, approx. 10,000 women were drafted, organized into forced labor units and ordered to work in fortifications and to dig trenches. At the beginning of November, when Soviet troops initiated another offensive against the capital, those who survived the inhuman treatment and conditions were taken to a brick-yard in North Budapest together with Jewish women who had been given special mobilization orders a few days earlier. From here they were directed on foot toward Hegyeshalom at the Austrian border and handed over to the Germans who ordered them to build the "Eastern wall" defending Vienna.

## **6 Death Marches to Hegyeshalom**

After 15th October 1944 the German occupation of Hungary and the Arrow Cross takeover, even Jewish women were ordered to work in fortifications around Budapest. At the beginning of November the Soviet troops initiated another offensive against the capital. In the changed situation the deportation plans 'had to be sped up' and many transports were directed on foot toward Hegyeshalom at the Austrian border. These marches were terribly cruel and resulted in an unprecedented high death rate. Until the Soviet occupation of Budapest (18th January 1945), about 98,000 of the capital's Jews lost their lives in further marches and in train transports, as well as at the hands of Arrow Cross extermination squads, due to starvation and disease as well as suicide. Some of the victims were simply shot and thrown into the Danube.

## **7 Great Depression**

At the end of October 1929, there were worrying signs on the New York Stock Exchange in the securities market. On 24th October ('Black Thursday'), people began selling off stocks in a panic from the price drops of the previous days - the number of shares usually sold in a half year exchanged hands in one hour. The banks could not supply the amount of liquid assets required, so people didn't receive money from their sales. Five days later, on 'Black Tuesday', 16.4 million shares were put up for sale, prices dropped steeply, and the hoarded properties suddenly became worthless. The collapse of the Stock Exchange was followed by economic crisis. Banks called in their outstanding loans, causing immediate closings of factories and businesses, leading to higher unemployment, and a decline in the standard of living. By January of 1930, the American money market got back on its feet, but during this year newer bank crises unfolded: in one month, 325 banks went under. Toward the end of 1930, the crisis spread to Europe: in May of 1931, the Viennese Creditanstalt collapsed (and with its recall of outstanding loans, took Austrian heavy industry with it). In July, a bank crisis erupted in Germany, by September in England, as well. In Germany, in 1931, more than 19,000 firms closed down. Though in France the banking system

withstood the confusion, industrial production and volume of exports tapered off seriously. The agricultural countries of Central Europe were primarily shaken up by the decrease of export revenues, which was followed by a serious agricultural crisis. Romanian export revenues dropped by 73 percent, Poland's by 56 percent. In 1933 in Hungary, debts in the agricultural sphere reached 2.2 billion Pengoes. Compared to the industrial production of 1929, it fell 76 percent in 1932 and 88 percent in 1933. Agricultural unemployment levels, already causing serious concerns, swelled immensely to levels, estimated at the time to be in the hundreds of thousands. In industry the scale of unemployment was 30 percent (about 250,000 people).

## **8 Secondary education**

Secondary education: The first Act on Secondary Education in 1883 under Minister of Public Education Agoston Trefort, classified two types of secondary education: the grammar schools with emphasis on ancient languages and culture preparing the students for any high school, and modern schools with an emphasis on modern languages, mathematics and the sciences, preparing students for technical high schools in particular. From 1924 three types of secondary schools were distinguished by law: grammar school (Latin, ancient Greek and German), modern school (Latin, German and another modern language - either French, English or Italian) and the third type into which the majority of secondary schools were transformed (only modern languages and greater emphasis on mathematics and the sciences).

## **9 First Vienna Dictate**

On 2nd November 1938 a German-Italian international committee in Vienna obliged Czechoslovakia to surrender much of the southern Slovakian territories that were inhabited mainly by Hungarians. The cities of Kassa (Kosice), Komarom (Komarno), Ersekujvar (Nove Zamky), Ungvar (Uzhorod) and Munkacs (Mukacevo), all in all 11.927 km<sup>2</sup> of land, and a population of 1.6 million people became part of Hungary. According to the Hungarian census in 1941 84% of the people in the annexed lands were Hungarian-speaking.

## **10 Jokai, Mor (1825-1904)**

Romantic novelist, playwright and journalist, the founder of the national romantic movement in Hungarian literature. After the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1848, he became a fugitive of the Austrians. He was a very prolific writer, his complete works fill 100 volumes. Among his well-known works are Weekdays (1845), A Hungarian Nabob (1894) and Black Diamonds (1870). His work has been translated into over 25 languages.

## **11 Ady, Endre (1877-1919)**

One of the most important Hungarian poets, who played a key role in renewing 20th century Hungarian poetry. He was a leading poet of the Nyugat [West], the most important Hungarian literary and critical journal in the first half of the 20th century. In his poems and articles he urged the transformation of feudal Hungary into a modern bourgeois democracy, a revolution of the peasants and an end to unlawfulness and deprivation. Having realized that the bourgeoisie was weak and unprepared for such changes, he later turned toward the proletariat. An intense struggle arose around his poetry between the conservative feudal camp and the followers of social and

literary reforms.

### **12 Arany, Janos (1817-1882)**

Outstanding Hungarian epic poet, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is considered one of the founders of modern Hungarian poetry. He participated in the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence but he didn't play a significant political role; it was much more through his works that he supported revolutionary democracy. He was born in a village but he became a true urban person, who knew and bore witness to big city life in the new metropolis, Budapest. Rustic and urbane life form an inseparable unity in his oeuvre.

### **13 Petofi, Sandor (1823-1849)**

Outstanding Hungarian poet who expressed the sentiments and way of thinking of the folk in his poetry. He was contributor and editor of various publications in Pest. Petofi organized and led a circle of young radical intellectuals and writers and participated in the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence as a leading revolutionary. His poem, The National Song, became the anthem of the Revolution. He joined the Hungarian army as captain in the fall of 1848 and he went to fight in Transylvania at the beginning of 1849. During his time in the army in Transylvania he wrote military reports and inspiring and glorifying poems. He disappeared in 1849.

### **14 Forced labor**

Under the 1939 II. Law 230, those deemed unfit for military service were required to complete "public interest work service". After the implementation of the second anti-Jewish Law within the military, the military arranged "special work battalions" for those Jews, who were not called up for armed service. With the entry into northern Transylvania (August 1940), those of Jewish origin who had begun, and were now finishing, their military service were directed to the work battalions. A decree in 1941 unified the arrangement, saying that the Jews were to fulfill military obligations in the support units of the National Guard. In the summer of 1942, thousands of Jews were recruited to labor battalions with the Hungarian troops going to the Soviet front. Some 50,000 in labor battalions went with the Second Hungarian Army to the Eastern Front - of these, only 6-7,000 returned.

### **15 White Terror**

After the failure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, commandos linked with the army started to force people to account for their participation in the revolutionary movements, and retaliation began. Members of directorates, communists, social democrats and those actively engaged in politics, were the focus of the atrocities. The cruelest groups were those led by Ivan Hejjas, Pal Pronay and Gyula Ostenburg-Moravek. Irrespective of their political activities, Jews were considered guilty in general. Count Pal Teleki, PM, disbanded these commandos ending the period of White Terror in 1920.

### **16 Numerus clausus in Hungary**

The general meaning of the term is restriction of admission to secondary school or university for

economic and/or political reasons. The Numerus Clausus Act passed in Hungary in 1920 was the first anti-Jewish Law in Europe. It regulated the admission of students to higher educational institutions by stating that aside from the applicants' national loyalty and moral reliability, their origin had to be taken into account as well. The number of students of the various ethnic and national minorities had to correspond to their proportion in the population of Hungary. After the introduction of this act the number of students of Jewish origin at Hungarian universities declined dramatically.

## **17 Anti-Semitic public sentiment at the beginning of the 1920s**

Anti-Semitic public sentiment at the beginning of the 1920s: After the failure of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and that of the brief Bolshevik regime (Hungarian Soviet Republic), a political and economic crisis emerged in Hungary, which had lost two thirds of its territory as a result of the Trianon treaty. Hungarian Jewry was considered to be generally culpable by the new regime for playing a disproportionately large part in the upper ranks of both revolutions, especially Kun's. Though the reign of 'White Terror' was not aimed at the Jewry overtly, characteristically it did not distinguish between communists and Jews. After a chaotic period, the acts of violence abated and the situation improved while Istvan (Stephen) Bethlen was prime minister (1921-1931).

## **18 Laszlo Ocskay (1893-1966)**

Born into a prominent Hungarian family in 1893, he served as an officer in World War I. He was the Commanding Officer of the 101/359 Labor Service Battalion in Budapest. Illegally, and against government policy Captain Ocskay was able to issue 'official' identification documents to his unit members, most of whom were survivors of anti-Semitic rampages, AWOL members of labor camps, children rescued from orphanages and other victims of Nazi persecution. Captain Laszlo Ocskay and his loyal staff were also able to obtain food, medicine and other items. Built to house a few hundred men, this unit, when liberated by the Soviets, housed approximately 2300 men, women and children. Not one person was lost to the Nazis. After 1945 Ocskay was arrested several times by the communists and accused of being an American spy. After recurring harassment he fled to Austria and then followed his son to the USA, where he died in poverty in 1966. He was honored post mortem with the Yad Vashem Medal of Honour in 2003.

## **19 Clothes-Collecting Company**

From 1942 the Jewish forced laborers weren't allowed to wear military uniforms, according to the orders of the War Department they had to wear civilian clothes, a yellow armband and military cap without a cap button. Although the Jews who didn't have normal civilian clothing could get uniforms which had been taken from the Czechoslovakians and the Yugoslavians, and they had to be supplied with military boots, too, according to the orders, in reality from the beginning of 1942 most of the forced laborers wore their own clothes. From 1942 Jewish organizations organized garment collecting actions to help the forced laborers. At the end of 1944 they organized forced laborer company 101/359 to provide for the forced laborers; its commandant was first lieutenant Laszlo Ocskay. The company had about 2000-2500 members, they were mainly families, children saved from the orphanages, and runaway forced laborers, who all survived the war. (Source: [http://isurvived.org/Righteous\\_Folder/Rescue\\_by-DanDanieli.html#II](http://isurvived.org/Righteous_Folder/Rescue_by-DanDanieli.html#II); Jenő Levai: Fekete könyv: a magyar zsidóság szenvedéséről. Budapest, Officina, 1946. Jenő Levai: Szürke könyv: magyar zsidók

megmenteseröl. Budapest, Officina, 1946. Braham, R. L.: A nepirtas politikaja: A Holocaust Magyarországon. Budapest, Belvarosi Publishing House, 1997.)

## **20 Arrow Cross takeover**

Arrow Cross takeover: After the failure of the attempt to break-away (see: Horthy's proclamation) on 15th October 1944, Horthy abdicated, revoked his proclamation and appointed the leader of the Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, as prime minister. With his abdication the position of head of state became vacant. The National Council, composed of the highest public dignitaries, delegated the position to Szalasi, as "national leader," a decision approved by both houses of Parliament in the absence of a majority of members. Szalasi ordered general mobilization in territories not yet occupied by the Soviets, increased the country's war contribution to Germany, and after Adolf Eichmann's return, they renewed the program of the extermination of the Hungarian Jewry.

## **21 German Invasion of Hungary [19th March 1944]**

Hitler found out about Prime Minister Miklos Kallay's and Governor Miklos Horthy's attempts to make peace with the west, and by the end of 1943 worked out the plans, code-named 'Margarethe I. and II.', for the German invasion of Hungary. In early March 1944, Hitler, fearing a possible Anglo-American occupation of Hungary, gave orders to German forces to march into the country. On 18th March, he met Horthy in Klessheim, Austria and tried to convince him to accept the German steps, and for the signing of a declaration in which the Hungarians would call for the occupation by German troops. Horthy was not willing to do this, but promised he would stay in his position and would name a German puppet government in place of Kallay's. On 19th March, the Germans occupied Hungary without resistance. The ex-ambassador to Berlin, Dome Sztojaj, became new prime minister, who - though nominally responsible to Horthy - in fact, reconciled his politics with Edmund Veessenmayer, the newly arrived delegate of the Reich.

## **22 Eichmann, Adolf (1906-1962)**

Nazi war criminal, one of the organizers of mass genocide of Jews. Since 1932 member of the Nazi party and SS, since 1934 an employee of the race and resettlement departments of the RSHA (Main Security Office of the Reich), after the "Anschluss" of Austria headed the Headquarters for the Emigration of Jews in Vienna, later organized the emigration of Jews in Czechoslovakia and, since 1939, in Berlin. Since December 1939 he was the head of the Departments for the Resettlement of Poles and Jews from lands incorporated into the Reich. Since mid-1941, as the Head of the Branch IV B 4 Gestapo RSHA, he coordinated the plan of the extermination of Jews, organized and carried out the deportations of millions of Jews to death camps. After the war he was imprisoned in an American camp, he managed to escape and hid in Germany, Italy and Argentina. In 1960 he was captured by the Israeli secret service in Buenos Aires. After a process which took several months, he was sentenced to death and executed. Eichmann's trial initiated a great discussion about the causes and the carrying out of the Shoah.

## **23 Szalasi, Ferenc (Kassa, 1897 - Budapest, 1946)**

Ferenc Szalasi was the leader of the Arrow-Cross Party, prime minister. He came from a middle class family, his father was a clerk. He studied at the Becsujhely Military Academy, and in 1915 he

became a lieutenant. After WWI he was nominated captain and became a member of the general staff. In 1930 he became a member of the secret race protecting association called Magyar Elet [Hungarian Life], and in 1935 he established his own association, called Nemzeti Akarat Partja [Party of the National Will]. At the 1936 interim elections his party lost, and the governing party tried to prevent them from gaining more ground. At the 1939 elections Szalasi and his party won 31 electoral mandates. At German pressure Horthy appointed him as prime minister, and shortly after he got hold of the presidential office too. He introduced a total terror with the Arrow-Cross men and continued the eradication of the Jewry, and the hauling of the values of the country to Germany. He was arrested by American troops in Germany, where he had fled from Soviet occupation on 29th March 1945. He was executed as war criminal on 12th March 1946.

## **24 Wallenberg, Raoul (1912-1947?)**

Swedish diplomat and businessman. In 1944, he was assigned to Sweden's legation in Budapest, where he helped save approximately 100,000 Hungarian Jews from Nazi extermination. He issued Swedish passports to approximately 20,000 Jews and sheltered others in houses he bought or rented. Adolf Eichmann, heading the transport of Jews to concentration camps, demanded that Wallenberg stop these activities and ordered his assassination, but the attempt failed. In 1945, the Soviets, who had just entered Budapest, imprisoned him, possibly because of work he was doing for the U.S. secret service. In 1957 the Soviet government announced that he had died in prison of a heart attack in 1947, but he was reported seen at later dates. In 1991 Soviet authorities released KGB records that, although they did not contain proof that Wallenberg was dead, appeared to confirm that he had died in 1947, most likely by execution. He was made an honorary U.S. citizen in 1981. (Source: The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001)

## **25 Jewish Council/Judenrat**

Jewish councils appointed by German occupying authorities to carry out Nazi orders in the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. After the establishment of the ghettos they were responsible for everything that happened within them. They controlled all institutions operating in the ghettos, the police, the employment agency, food supplies, housing, health, social work, education, religion, etc. Germans also made them responsible for selecting people for the work camps, and, in the end, choosing those to be sent to camps that were in reality death camps. It is hard to judge their actions due to the abnormal circumstances. Some believe they betrayed Jews by obeying orders, and others think they were trying to gain time and save as many people as possible.

## **26 Kistarcsa Internment Camp**

This internment camp served as place of imprisonment for those held for political reasons before the German occupation. After the occupation of Hungary by the German army on 19th March 1944 1500-2000 Jews were transported here. Most of these Jews were then deported to Auschwitz.

## **27 Stockler, Lajos (1897-1960)**

The lace-maker Lajos Stockler played an active role in the shaping of the fate of the Budapest Jewry from the end of July 1944. From 15th October 1944 he was the vice president of the Jewish Council, and then from 28th October he became the president and the leader of the ghetto. He

remained an active leader of the Hungarian Jewry even after the war: the Pest Jewish Community was reorganized under his leadership. He was the president of the National Office of the Hungarian Jews, the National Association of the Hungarian Jews, and the Central Council of the Hungarian Jews. According to many opinions he gradually became an instrument of the communists.

### **28 Ferenczy, Laszlo (1898-1946)**

A gendarme officer, Laszlo Ferenczy was the communicant of the gendarmerie at the German Security Department from 28th March 1944. He played an important role in the planning and winding up of the deportation of the Hungarian Jewry. From 17th October 1944 he was the authorized administrant of Jewish matters, later he became the leader of the central gendarme investigation department. In 1945 he fled to Germany, but he was caught and the People's Court in Budapest sentenced him to death in 1946. (Source: UMEL)

### **29 Dohany Street Synagogue**

Europe's largest and still functioning synagogue is a characteristic example of the Hungarian capital's Romantic style architecture and was always considered the main temple of Hungarian Jewry. The Jewish Community of Pest acquired the site in 1841 and the synagogue was built between 1854 and 1859, designed by Ludwig Foerster (who also designed the synagogue of Tempelgasse in Vienna, Austria). Using the biblical description of the Temple of Solomon as a model, he developed his peculiar orientalist style while using the most modern contemporary techniques. The Hall of Heroes with the monument to Hungarian Jewish martyrs, set up in 1991, and the Jewish Heroes' Mausoleum built in 1929-1931 are next to the main building while the Jewish Museum is in an adjacent building.

### **30 Yellow star houses**

The system of exclusively Jewish houses which acted as a form of hostage taking was introduced by the Hungarian authorities in June 1944 in Budapest. The authorities believed that if they concentrated all the Jews of Budapest in the ghetto, the Allies would not attack it, but if they placed such houses all over Budapest, especially near important public buildings it was a kind of guarantee. Jews were only allowed to leave such houses for two hours a day to buy supplies and such.

### **31 Protected house**

In November 1944, the International and Swedish Red Cross, as well as representatives of the consulates of neutral countries came to an agreement with the Hungarian foreign minister, Count Gabor Kemeny, to concentrate the Jews holding safe-conduct passes in different parts of the city until the time of their transportation to neutral countries. The zone of these protected houses ('international ghetto') was formed in the Ujlipotvaros district of Budapest, since the majority of residents living there had been sent, in marching companies, toward Austria. In practice, the protected houses weren't a secure refuge. There were often raids for various reasons (fake papers etc.) when many residents were dragged off and shot into the Danube. In January 1945, the Arrow Cross started transporting protected house residents to the large Budapest ghetto, but the determined protests and threats of the ambassadors eventually stopped the emptying of these

houses.

### **32 Document emitted by the diplomatic missions of neutral countries, which guaranteed its owner the protection of the given country**

Theoretically this document exempted the Jews from several duties such as wearing the yellow star. Most of the free-passes were emitted by the Swiss and Swedish Consulates in Budapest. The Swiss consul Karl Lutz asked for 7,000 emigration permits in April 1944. The emission of the Swedish Schutzpass for Hungarian Jews started with Raoul Wallenberg's assignment as consul in Hungary. Free-passes used to be emitted also by Spain, Portugal and the Vatican. Although the number of free-passes was maximized to 15,600 in fall 1944, the real number of free-passes in circulation was much higher: 40-70,000 emitted by Switzerland, 7-10,000 by Sweden, 3,000 by Spain, not to mention the fake ones. Beginning in mid-November 1944 and citing as a reason the high number and the falsification of passes, Arrow Cross groups started to also carry off those people who had a pass. During raids of Jewish houses, Arrow Cross groups shot all the tenants into the Danube.

### **33 Executions on the Danube Banks**

Executions on the Danube Banks: In the winter of 1944/45, after the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian fascists, came to power, Arrow Cross militiamen combed through the 'protected houses' of Ujlipotvaros, a bourgeois part of Budapest, collected the Jews, brought them to the bank of the Danube and shot them into the river.

### **34 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

### **35 DEGOB (National Committee for the Treatment of Hungarian Jewish Deportees)**

founded in Budapest in March 1945, DEGOB joined the OZSSB (National Jewish Aid Committee) in August of that year (the latter coordinated the work of aid organizations). It helped deportees who were stuck abroad with getting home and gave widespread assistance during the critical years of 1945 and 1946. Last but not least it also documented data on the dead and those who survived. (DEGOB's information branch was co-opted by the relevant department of the World Zionist Congress in 1946.) DEGOB continued its social and aid activity until April 1950, at which time the

OZSSB ceased to exist. The task was taken over by the central social committee of the National Bureau of Hungarian Israelites.

### **36 AVH (and AVO)**

In 1945, the Political Security Department was created under the jurisdiction of the Budapest Police Headquarters, and directed by Gabor Peter. Its aim was the arrest and prosecution of war criminals. In October 1946, the Hungarian State Police put this organization under direct authority of the interior minister, under the name - State Defense Department (AVO). Although the AVO's official purpose was primarily the defense of the democratic state order, and to investigate war crimes and crimes against the people, as well as the collection and recording of foreign and national information concerning state security, from the time of its inception it collected information about leading coalition party politicians, tapped the telephones of the political opponents of the communists, ...etc. With the decree of 10th September 1948, the powers of the Interior Ministry broadened, and the AVO came under its direct subordination - a new significant step towards the organization's self-regulation. At this time, command of the State Border, Commerce and Air Traffic Control, as well as the National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH) was put under the sphere of authority of the AVH, thus also empowering them with control of the granting of passports. The AVH (State Defense Authority) was created organizationally dependent on the Interior Ministry on 28th December 1949, and was directly subordinate to the Ministry council. Military prevention and the National Guard were melded into the new organization. In a move to secure complete control, the AVH was organized in a strict hierarchical order, covering the entire area of the country with a network of agents and subordinate units. In actuality, Matyas Rakosi and those in the innermost circle of Party leaders were in direct control and authority over the provision of it. The sitting ministry council of 17th July 1953 ordered the repeal of the AVH as an independent organ, and its fusion into the Interior Ministry. The decision didn't become public, and because of its secrecy caused various misunderstandings, even within the state apparatus. Also attributable to this confusion, was the fact that though the AVH was really, formally stripped of its independent power, it remained in continuous use within the ranks of state defense, and put the state defense departments up against the Interior Ministry units. This could explain the fact that on 28th October 1956, in the radio broadcast of Imre Nagy, he promised to disband that State Defense Authority, which was still in place during his time as Prime Minister, though it had been eliminated three years earlier.

### **37 Transylvania**

Geographical and historical region belonging to Hungary until 1918-19, then ceded to Romania. Its area covers 103,000 sq.km between the Carpathian Mountains and the present-day Hungarian and Serbian borders. It became a Roman province in the 2nd century (AD) terminating the Dacian Kingdom. After the Roman withdrawal it was overrun, between the 3rd and 10th centuries, by the Goths, the Huns, the Gepidae, the Avars and the Slavs. Hungarian tribes first entered the region in the 5th century, but they did not fully control it until 1003, when King Stephen I placed it under jurisdiction of the Hungarian Crown. Later, in the 12th and 13th centuries, Germans, called Saxons (then and now), also arrived while Romanians, called Vlachs or Walachians, were there by that time too, although the exact date of their appearance is disputed. As a result of the Turkish conquest, Hungary was divided into 3 sections: West Hungary, under Habsburg rule, central Hungary, under Turkish rule, and semi-independent Transylvania (as a Principality), where Austrian and Turkish

influences competed for supremacy for nearly two centuries. With the defeat of the Turkish Transylvania gradually came under Habsburg rule, and due to the Compromise of 1867 it became an integral part of Hungary again. In line with other huge territorial losses fixed in the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Transylvania was formally ceded to Romania by Hungary. For a short period during WWII it was returned to Hungary but was ceded to Romania once again after the war. Many of the Saxons of Transylvania fled to Germany before the arrival of the Soviet army, and more followed after the fall of the Communist government in 1989. In 1920, the population of Erdély was 5,200,000, of which 3 million were Romanian, 1,400,000 Hungarian (26%), 510,000 German and 180,000 Jewish. In 2002, however, the percentage of Hungarians was only 19.6% and the German and Jewish population decreased to several thousand. Despite the decrease of the Hungarian, German and Jewish element, Transylvania still preserves some of its multiethnic and multi-confessional tradition.

### **38 Columbus Street Asylum**

Fleeing Jews, mainly from the countryside, were gathered in the back wing and the yard of the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb on Columbus Street. There they waited for emigration passes, pending the outcome of negotiations between Zionist leaders and the SS, in the Zuglo District (Budapest). Only one group of emigrants left the asylum in June 1944. First they were transported to Bergen-Belsen, but later allowed to immigrate to Switzerland upon the order of Himmler (see also Kasztner-train). By the time of the Arrow Cross takeover, several thousand people were crowded into the asylum. The elderly were transferred to the ghetto while those of working age were transported to Bergen-Belsen.

### **39 Malenkiy robot**

This was the term used for forced labor of the women, children and men who were deported from Hungary by the Soviet army to forced labor camps and prison-camps. About one third of the Hungarian prisoners were civilians. The deportation of the civilians happened in two waves. First they deported people right after the operations under the pretext of having to clear away the ruins, and 1-2 months later they gathered the civilians with a carefully planned action. In the background of the deportations, besides the need for man-power, there was the intention of collective punishment as well. In the first wave the Soviet soldiers mislead the civilians, telling them that they would have to do urgent road reparation and ruin clearing labor service, and encouraging them saying 'malenkiy robot,' which means small job. This term first became a household word, and then entered the academic terminology. In principle the deportations only concerned the Germans in Hungary, but in fact most of the deportees were Hungarian. The deportees were put in concentration camps, where they spent about 1-2 months, and from there they were transported to transit camps which were on Romanian territory. They got to one of the Soviet camps after several weeks of traveling in cattle cars. Most of the Hungarian prisoners of war and internees got to the GUPVI camps. They only took those to the GULAG who were condemned because of war crimes at the Soviet court-martial with the contribution of the Hungarian authorities. Those who returned from Soviet captivity were registered from 1946: about 330-380 thousand returned, and about 270-370 thousand died in the camps and during transportation. The labor camps were usually just like prisoner of war enclosures. The prisoners worked at the mines in Donetsk [today Ukraine], lumbering and turf-cutting places in Siberia [today Russia], in collectives and bigger constructions. They usually got back to Hungary after several years. (Source: Magyarország a második

világhaboruban, Lexikon A-ZS, Budapest, 1997; Tamas Stark: "Magyarok szovjet kenyszermunkatáborokban", Kortárs, 2002/2-3).

#### **40 1956**

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November, and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

#### **41 Rakosi regime**

Matyas Rakosi was a Stalinist Hungarian leader of Jewish origin from 1948-1956. He introduced a complete communist terror, established a Stalinist type cult for himself and was responsible for the show trials of the early 1950s. After the Revolution of 1956, he went to the Soviet Union, where he died in 1971.

#### **42 Nationalization of retail trade**

In February 1948 the HCP published its principles on the 'further socialist development' of the country with the aim of the 'total purging of plutocrats from the economy.' Subsequent measures in the first round targeted wholesale merchants. Since there was no definite distinction between wholesale and retail trade, as there is between large- and small-scale industries for example, the nationalization process was characterized by a high level of chance. Parallel to the elimination of private trade, state trading companies were founded. From 1950 private wholesale trading could even be punished. In the fall of 1952, all still existing retail businesses were nationalized through the withdrawing of licenses for market vending, catering and food trade.

#### **43 Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP)**

Hungarian Workers' Party (Magyar Dolgozók Partja), the ruling Communist Party formed in 1948 with the merger of the communists and social democrats. Renamed MSZMP in 1956.

#### **44 Hungarian Social Democrat Party (MSZDP)**

Established in 1890, it fought for general and secret suffrage and for the rights of the working class, as a non-parliamentary party during the dualistic era. In October 1918 it took part in the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the cabinets that followed. In March 1919 the unified MSZDP and HCP proclaimed the Hungarian Soviet Republic. After its failure, the party was reorganized. Its leaders entered into bargain with PM Bethlen in 1921, according to which the free operation of the party and that of the trade unions was assured, while the MNDSZ renounced the organization of

state employees, railway and agricultural workers, political strikes and republican propaganda, among others. In the elections of 1922, the MSZDP became the second largest party of the opposition in Parliament, but later lost much of its support as a consequence of the welfare institutions initiated by the Hungarian governments in the 1930s. After the German occupation of Hungary the party was banned and its leaders arrested, forcing the party into illegitimacy. In the postwar elections it gathered the second most votes. As member of the Left Bloc created by the communists it took part in dissolving the Smallholders' Party. At the same time the HCP tried to absorb the MSZDP as directed from Moscow, not without success: in 1948 the name of the two united parties became the Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP). After the instatement of a single-party dictatorship, social democratic leaders were removed. Under the leadership of Anna Kéthly the party was renewed in 1956 and participated in the cabinet of Imre Nagy.

#### **45 Nagy, Imre (1896-1958)**

As member of the communist party from 1920, he lived in exile in Vienna between 1928 and 1930, then in Moscow until 1944. He was a Member of Parliament from 1944 to 1955, and the Minister of Agriculture in 1944-1945, at which time he carried out land reforms. He became Minister of the Interior in 1945-1946. He filled several high positions in the party between 1944 and 1953. After Stalin's death, during the period of thaw, he was elected PM (1953-1955). As prime minister he began to promote the so-called July program of the party from the year 1953. Accordingly he stopped jailings, police kangaroo courts and population displacements, initiated the investigation of trial proceedings. He also promoted changes in agriculture. He was forced to resign, and later expelled from the HCP by party hardliners, in 1955. On 24th October 1956 he was once again elected to the position of prime minister. On 22nd November 1956 he was arrested by Russian soldiers and subsequently jailed in the Snagov prison in Romania. In April 1957 he was taken to Budapest, where he was given the death sentence in a secret trial. The sentence was carried out on 16th June 1958.

#### **46 General Zionism**

General Zionism was initially the term used for all members of the Zionist Organization who had not joined a specific faction or party. Over the years, the General Zionists, too, created ideological institutions and their own organization was established in 1922. The precepts of the General Zionists included Basle-style Zionism free of ideological embellishments and the primacy of Zionism over any class, party, or personal interest. This party, in its many metamorphoses, championed causes such as the encouragement of private initiative and protection of middle-class rights. In 1931, the General Zionists split into Factions A and B as a result of disagreements over issues of concern in Palestine: social affairs, economic matters, the attitude toward the General Federation of Jewish Labor, etc. In 1945, the factions reunited. Most of Israel's liberal movements and parties were formed under the inspiration of the General Zionists and reflect mergers in and secessions from this movement.