

#### IV. Excursus

Szabó Róbert: *A kommunizmus és a zsidókérdés az 1945 utáni Magyarországon* Gondolat Kiadó, 2009

Extract (the references are those of the author)

In Hungarian public opinion, several opinion streams co-exist about the Jewish question after 1945. According to some, there was no Jewish question after 1945 because the survivors of the Holocaust either did not even come back home or assimilated into Hungarian society. However, in other people's opinion, the Jewish question did exist and they considered the communist regime to be the era when Jews seized power. According to an extremist wording of this group, Christian Hungary did everything to save the Jews, but Communist Hungary did not requited this effort. Those sympathizing with the Jews insist that the persecution of Jewish people did not come to an end after 1945. The Rákosi regime discriminated negatively against Jews until 1956. Reality, compared to these fairly generalizing attitudes, is much more complicated.

The Hungarian Councils' Republic, The Horthy regime (1919-1938)

In public opinion, the topos of identifying communism with Jews took root during World War I and in the era finishing it, the Hungarian Councils' Republic (1919). For the first time in history, in the Hungarian Councils' Republic, a large number of people of Jewish origin got into top positions of the administration and into political power. Public opinion tended to blame them for poor public supply as well as the lost war. Besides the Communist agitators the country was overrun with, a big part of the political police terrorizing the citizens and the commando unit called Lenin-boys were also of Jewish origin. The fixation of the topos, that communist power equals Jewish power, was not even hindered by the fact that the "red terror" struck every group regardless of their denomination, Christians, denominational Jews as well. According to the *Zsidó lexikon*, 13,5 % of the martyrs were Jewish. Since the nationalization carried out by the Hungarian Councils' Republic hit hard on Jewish capitalists, it was in their vital interest to control the Communists. As Róbert Szabó aptly states, in this respect, it was exactly the Hungarian Councils' Republic, which was the most anti-Semitic of all the Hungarian political systems.

What can account for the large number of Jews in the Hungarian labour movement? Jews were overrepresented in the European labour movement<sup>1</sup> from the outset, nearly 60 % of the Hungarian Communist Party's membership were Jewish. 10 out of 17 members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party elected on November 24, 1918 were Jewish.<sup>2</sup> These people got rid of their attachment to their denomination, did not have a Jewish identity, and did not set a high value on their descent. Kun Béla said, "My father was Jewish, but I did not remain Jewish because I became a Socialist, a Communist." For young people who break with both their own roots and the traditions of the recipient country, the promise of the communist society meant new opportunities to assimilate.

The majority of Jews passively watched what was happening, and though they might not have felt guilty, but might have felt embarrassed in the markedly anti-Semitic atmosphere of the first period of

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<sup>1</sup> According to Krajewski, 75% of the Bolshevik leaders were Jews in 1921. cf. Erényi, Tibor. 1992. "A zsidók és a magyar baloldaliság" *Világosság* no. 2.

<sup>2</sup> No minutes remained. The estimate is a figure based on 17 recollections.

the Horthy regime (1919-1944). During the white terror, in more than 50 settlements altogether, atrocious acts took place against people suspected of being Communists. The majority of victims were of Jewish origin. On several occasions, religious Jews spectacularly separated themselves from Jewish Communists, who, according to Lajos Szabolcsi, "due to changing faiths, have fallen out not only of the Jewish framework but also of the racial framework of the Jewry." They emphasized that a smaller part of Jews supported the counter-revolution and also took part in the Anti-Bolshevik Committee as well as the National Army led by Horthy (21% of the 72 persons of the early stage were Jewish), but they also protested against anti-Semitism. The leaders of Jewish communities visited Horthy, who was the leader of the National Army, and offered him a 100,000-crown fund as well as the loyalty of the Jewish community in Hungary and later supported his being elected Governor. Horthy – supposedly thanks to the unfavourable international reaction- publicly condemned the excesses, the persecution of Jews committed by "irresponsible elements." Later a "jovial gentlemanly abusing Jews", the regime tolerated the left wing, took a neutral position on Jews, by the second half of the 1920s, the religious equality of the Jewish Denomination had been restored. Bethlen refused to limit rights. It was not due to "matter of principles", but to the role played by Jewry in economy. After 1920, the regime let Jews have the chance to make a career in economy and they could keep their positions gained, though they were seriously hindered in making a career in public life. In the background of the stereotype existing in public opinion, that is capitalism equals "Jewish capitalism", the facts are the following. After the Trianon Treaty, in the 1930s, one third of the bankers and big industrialists belonged to the Jewry accounting for 5% of the post-Trianon population of Hungary. Half of 700 big industrial companies and 79 % of 152 wholesalers had owners of Jewish origin.<sup>3</sup> Many thought that finding a solution to the burning social questions (the country of three million beggars, a wave of immigration to America) was only possible against Jewish capitalism. The Numerus Clausus Law, which was passed due to the powerful anti-Semitic atmosphere in higher education, was in force between 1920 and 1928 and was essentially directed against the Jewry, though it was not made explicit in the text. While between 1867 and 1918, 25% of the students in higher education were of Jewish origin, the percentage has dropped to 8-10 % between 1920 and 1928. (The law states that it should be 5 %, but universities in the country, for the lack of students, did not comply with the quota. By 1930, 26 % of the students leaving secondary school and 17 % of university graduates were Jewish.<sup>4</sup>

### The Holocaust (1938-45)

The first two Jewish Laws cannot be considered racist laws by Nuremberg standards yet, only the third Jewish Law serves as the basis for racial discrimination. Naturally, that does not alter the case in the least that the first two Jewish Laws hit Hungarian Jewry very hard. As a consequence, approximately 60-70,000 Jews lost their jobs, which shook the conditions of existence of 250,000 people. The measures did not distinguish between Jews from an ideological point of view. Until 1944, the lives of Jews who were Hungarian citizens were not in danger in large numbers, they stood a strong chance of survival. However, everything changed after March 19, the German occupation of Hungary. A casualty list taking into account the whole archives has not been drawn up so far. The figures of the 1941 national census and according to Professor Brahm's calculations (of those leaving their religion), in post-Trianon Hungary, 491,000 and in the area of the enlarged country,

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<sup>3</sup> Zeke, Gyula. "Statistikai mellékletek." In vol. II of *Hét évtized a hazai zsidóság életében*. 192.

<sup>4</sup> Karády, Viktor. 1992. "Egyetemi antiszemitizmus és érvényesülési kényszerpályák." *Levéltári Szemle*. 21-40.

825,000 people of Jewish religion or according to regulations of the time, people counted as Jews lived. According to the most accepted estimates in specialist literature, out of them, about 300,000 in post-Trianon Hungary and 569,500 within the 1944 borders of Hungary were killed. In 1946, The Hungarian Central Statistical Office estimated the number of survivors to be 220-260,000.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Coalition Period (1945-48)

Between 1945 and 1948, in the coalition period, the Jewish question was constantly before the public eye. Some of the conflicts of the era could not be explained by racial incitement as earlier, they were produced by the conditions of post-war Hungary. The Jewish question was politicized and became a tool in the fight of political parties.

Several laws condemn what happened during the Holocaust, but nobody has raised the idea of individual and moral responsibility and the government itself have not posed the question of collective examination of conscience. Workers and peasants did not actively assist in deportations, but most of them passively watched what was going on. Anti-fascist forces could not mobilize masses to prevent deportations. Indifference and fear of the Gestapo was widespread. The activities of the rescuers of Jews was only a drop in the ocean of indifference and unwillingness to help. (Bibó) Hungarian society would not believe the news about concentration camps. Later, Jews had the feeling that the whole society hushed up the crimes committed against them and put the blame on some politicians and hangman's assistants.

After World War II, Hungarian Jewry shifted to the left markedly and orientated themselves either towards Zionism or the Communist Party. In the first general elections, every fourth or fifth Jew voted for the Communist Party.<sup>6</sup> After 1945, 6 out of the 11 members of the Political Committee, the general staff of the Communist Party, had Jewish roots.<sup>7</sup> The Jewish concentrated in the capital joined the Communist Party in large numbers and - as it was usual in Eastern European party-state dictatorships – undertook roles in law enforcement agencies, later, during the development of the dictatorship, in the ill-famed State Security Department (ÁVO).<sup>8</sup> Jews living in the countryside were almost totally annihilated due to deportations. On the rate of Jews, sources of specialist literature differ enormously. According to some researchers, up to 1949, 70-80 % of the officers of this organisation while according to more moderate calculations, 10% of the officers were Jews.<sup>9</sup> Left-wing radicalism had been present and developing in the views of Jewry since the end of the 19th

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<sup>5</sup> Szabó, Róbert. *ibid.* 52-55.

<sup>6</sup> Szabó, Róbert. *ibid.* 88. The author's calculations are based on the materials in the Archives of the Institute of Political History. It became clear from the documents of the Communist Party that the party leadership considered this rate to be shockingly low.

<sup>7</sup> However, they did not have a Jewish identity. They showed quite spectacular indifference towards the fate of the Jews who have survived. They were only interested in Jews because they could make them loyal party men. However, they were left unmoved by the fear of anti-Semitism that those Jews experienced who remained loyal to their identity, They subordinated the Jewish question to power tactics questions and if it was necessary, they did not have difficulty in generating anti-Semitism. Standiesky, Éva. 1982. "Antiszemita megmozdulások Magyarországon a koalíciós korszakban." *Századok*. no. 2. 298.

<sup>8</sup> According to Viktor Karády's calculations which contain a lot of elements of uncertainty, the Communist Party might have had about 10,000 Jewish members, which accounted for the tenth of the adult Jewish population. 1984. "Zsidóság az 1945 utáni Magyarországon." *Párizsi Magyar Füzetek*.

<sup>9</sup> Karsai, László. 1994. "Zsidók és kommunisták." *Kommentár*. no. 2. 6.

century. They considered labour movement to be powerful enough to stand against anti-Semitism effectively. The Holocaust gave the decisive push to the completion of this process. Jews could have been preferred to get civil servant positions because they had not compromised themselves in the previous regime before the war, there was no doubt about their commitment to anti-fascism as opposed to Christian middle-class intellectuals working in the apparatus of the previous regime, whom communist power wanted to get rid of. The Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) needed the expertise of the Jewish intelligentsia and could count on their loyalty. A large number of Jews did take advantage of the career opportunities created by this situation. As a result of this, Jews became heavily overrepresented in the apparatus of the state, which caused considerable dissatisfaction in various classes of society. This turn in public feeling was interpreted as evidence of the fact that anti-Semitism existed in Hungary. The overrepresentation of Jews in the apparatus of the state and in administration was fraught with danger. Some of the public considered party leaders the agents of the occupying power and seeing how civil service positions were filled, they identified communist power with Jewish power.

The Hungarian Communist Party subordinated the Jewish question to their own aspirations for power. They played a double game in terms of the Jewish question. On the one hand, they employed Jewish intellectuals, on the other hand, in order to counterbalance the political climate, they took the liberties with making anti-Semitic remarks. (The party leader, the Jewish Mátyás Rákosi, led the way in this respect.) Hungarian Communists were anti-Zionists, but before 1948, the great change, they did not insist on it for tactical reasons. In 1945-46, emigration was watched by the well-meaning neutrality of the bourgeois government. However, the parties of workers reacted with diatribe to Zionist recruitment which they thought to add fresh fuel to anti-Semitism, and Erik Molnár, one of the leading ideologues of the party, stigmatized Zionism as a "movement which wants to solve the Jewish question in a reactionary way." They made an effort to exercise as tight supervision as possible over Jewish organisations, especially Joint. They only managed to make it cease to operate in 1949. Total assimilation was the only solution offered to Jewry by the Communists.

After 1945, the most important conflict areas of reviving anti-Semitism were the responsibility for the property of deported Jews, the fear of "the vengefulness of Jews" and the role played by Jews in the cases of people's courts. What happened to the property of Jews during deportations can be regarded as institutionalised robbery. According to István Bibó, it was due to the Jewish Laws that Hungarians got used to the opportunity to make a living not only by working hard but also speculating in Jewish property. In 1944, the possessions of the deported were carried off by civil servants and private individuals together. This triggered the process of society's moral sinking. It was not by chance that Hungarians reacted sensitively to the claims for reparations by Jews. The country rang with property debates. As János Pelle puts it, the return of Jews created a greater stir among Hungarians than their deportation. The fear of atrocities to be committed by Jews having returned from deportation and labour service proved to be groundless except for the case in Gyömrő,<sup>10</sup> which caused a great stir. Covering up the case generated harsh reaction from public opinion. 60,000

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<sup>10</sup> In Gyömrő, former labour camp inmates who joined the police, which was under the authority of Communists, rounded up the members of public administration elite in office at the time of their being dragged away and tortured them. 23 people disappeared. Later, the corpses of 16 people were found in the lake nearby, Participants of the massacre were released, they disappeared and supposedly lived on by changing their names.

people were taken legal proceedings against because of activities during World War II and 40,000 were convicted and sent into internal exile.<sup>11</sup> A large number of Jewish lawyers who had survived the Holocaust eagerly participated in the work of people's courts and verification committees. The population interpreted it as the revenge of Jews and at the same time also saw it clearly that Communists wanted to get rid of their political opponents in this way. In several places, protest actions broke out and protesters demanded people's judges to be removed. By 1946, more than one instance, "spontaneous" mass demonstrations organized by Communists to serve the purpose of "the war against reactionary forces" had got out of control and turned into pogroms. In Ózd, the anger of workers taken to the streets turned with a touch of anti-Semitism against local party leaders. Similarly, the fight against speculators and black marketeers also ended in lynching in Kunmadaras and Miskolc. The mob tended to assault Jews at the market and let non-Jews escape. The Hungarian Communist Party made a grave political mistake when they did not realistically assess that masses organized by them could get out of control. Naturally, they did not admit their mistake in their political communication but blamed it on the "hiding fascism" in the ranks of their main political opponent, the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP).

#### The Rákosi Era (1948-1956)

The leaders of the Communist Party monopolizing power occupied the key positions of governmental leadership. The new power closed traditional channels of mobility for Jews, but also opened up new channels of mobility for them. Communists fought a ruthless war against the bourgeois way of life in order to eliminate, as they put it, "the bourgeois survival", which also hit hard on the social status of Hungarian Jewry, who developed a bourgeois mentality more than the majority of Hungarians. The party's struggle against capitalism also came with the abolition of Jewish trade and industry. 88% of 1721 retail shops nationalised in 1949, 75% of the blocks of flats nationalised in 1952 were owned by Jewish people and 64% of 687 lawyers removed from office were Jewish.<sup>12</sup> "Class-alien" people (among them the majority of Jews) were deprived of the opportunity to continue their university studies. However, the fact that the rate of Jewish people in communist leadership and in public administration positions was the highest in Hungary, considering the countries in the region, indicated new opportunities for mobility. The Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP) bureaucracy and public administration had urgent necessity for intellectual cadres about whose reliability there was no doubt. A part of Jewry could take advantage of the opening up opportunities. The party expected these people to assimilate totally, which often gave them the chance to get rid of the historic burden of their descent too. For them, the party leaders who got rid of their being Jewish were the examples of the most successful version of assimilation. This might explain why many of them trusted Rákosi's regime blindly to the very last and executed the orders given by those in power unconditionally. Naturally, all these cannot lead to the simplified notion of Jews' being the unconditional servants of power while Hungarians suffered under foreign power. Such a simplification would be a stereotypical exaggeration, which is characteristic of ideology not of science. However, in the artificially suppressed anti-Semitism of the era, the following element appeared: some people thought the Jewish-Communist power to be responsible for the oppression of the

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<sup>11</sup> Gyurgyák, János. 2001. *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*. Osiris. 583

<sup>12</sup> Karády, Viktor. 1984. "Szociológiai kísérlet a magyarországi zsidóság 1945-1956 közötti helyzetének elemzésére." In *Zsidóság az 1945 utáni Magyarországon*. Párizs: 146-147.

population.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, they did not attach importance to the fact that the events in Hungary were controlled by Moscow. They only saw the remarkably high rate of Jews in power organs and they did not notice that the terror against the population equally hit Jews and non-Jews. It also escaped their attention that the Communist leaders of Jewish descent who had got rid of their earlier identity, at times, pursued a definitely anti-Semitic policy. This approach was suitable for transforming the essence of totalitarian dictatorship into a Jewish versus non-Jewish conflict and gives a false picture of the essence of communist political power.

Communists in power declared the Jewish question to be non-existent, the terms referring to it had disappeared from political terminology. The Holocaust became a taboo and could not be such a theme of discourse as it was in the period between 1945 and 1948. Jewish religious life lost its autonomy, it was brought under the control of culture and non-governmental organizations - as all the other organisations in the country which were able to offer a political alternative - were suppressed. Internal exiles in 1951 were directed against the former ruling classes, but at the same time affected Jews to a great extent as well. The actions did not take on anti-Semitic edge, they were carried out in the spirit of class war. For instance, in 1951, there were Jews both among those who sent others into internal exile and among those who were sent into internal exile. However, it does not alter the fact that those who had been evicted from their earlier homes, felt that they were experiencing deportation again. From a human destiny's point of view, the only difference was that they were threatened by terror not as Jews, but as class aliens. The leaders of Jewry-collaborating with the Communists-gave such an interpretation to deportations which supported the political ambitions of the Hungarian Workers' Party and they strove to disarm international public outcry. The Zionist movement was finally suppressed at the beginning of 1949 as it also took place in the whole Soviet bloc. In the Hungarian Zionist suit, the organizers of illegal emigration were charged. In the press, the suit was accompanied by harsh anti-Zionist attacks, which were not devoid of anti-Semitic overtones either. The trial was originally organized to be a large-scale anti-Israel show trial, in which emigrants were charged and the aim was to prove their disloyalty to Hungary, but the Rajk trial, which was launched in the meantime, overshadowed the trial of the Zionists. They were only charged with assisting in unauthorized crossing of the frontier and the sentence itself can be considered relatively light. In 1950, the states of Hungary and Israel agreed on the emigration of 3,000 people. It is not only a shockingly small number compared to the 20-25,000 people, who emigrated between 1945 and 1949, but the emigration process itself progressed quite slowly and the last group only set off in November, 1953.

Show trials belong to the darkest pages not only of Hungarian political history but also of Jewish history after 1945. In the beginning, the selection of the accused was not based on their descent, whether they were Jews or not. However, when the trials were being made, the Jewish question played an important role, that is the Hungarian Workers' Party used the latent anti-Semitism in Hungarian political culture of the time in their political tactics. This was common in Soviet bloc countries (in the Slansky trial, eleven defendants were Jewish, preparation of a Zionist "Doctor's Plot" in the Soviet Union). Totalitarian states had to produce enemies to make the system work. Rákosi and his circle, seeing the preparations for the Zionist trial in the Soviet Union, could have thought with good reason that Stalin would need new Jewish people from Hungary as well and he

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<sup>13</sup> Márványi, Judit. 1991. "Köszönet helyett." In *Bibó emlékkönyv*. (ed. Pál Réz) Századvég. 243.

would show a preference for selecting from them. That is why they found it advisable to select in time themselves.<sup>14</sup> Because of this consideration, they launched a new wave of anti-Zionism in Hungary too. The leaders of the State Security Authority (ÁVH) as the accused seemed to be ideal scapegoats as they knew too much and their conviction would probably be met with society's enthusiastic reception. The leaders of the State Security Authority, high-ranking police officers, "Zionist" doctors and leaders of the Jewish denomination, arrested at the beginning of 1953, were nearly 100. Next to the names of the accused, their Jewish names were also indicated. At the same time, the revision of the membership of those members of the Communist Party who were of Jewish descent and the expulsion of "Zionist" university students from higher education started. Not even this terror could abolish Zionist organizing, the membership of the remained "buds" emigrated to Israel during the 1956 revolution.

### On the Way to Revolution (1953-1956)

The decree of amnesty issued by the Imre Nagy Government in the summer of 1953 extended to 748,000 people not including 44,000 people who had been interned and forced to work in labour camps, and thousands who had been deported, but this figure includes those on whom a fine had been imposed.<sup>15</sup> Not a small number of Jews were affected positively by it. In the period between 1953 and 1955, the matters of Jews were typically dealt with more flexibility. Religious life could live up, Secours, a Swiss relief organization was admitted to Hungary, small articles about Jews were allowed to appear in newspapers. The power took firm measures against anti-Semitic comments all the more so since the remarks generally had an anti-communist overtone. Some of the Jewish cadres of the Communist Party set the intellectual stage for the 1956 revolution, they became the anti-Stalinist critics of the system, they made unlawful actions public and took part in organizing the Petőfi Circle, which became one of the forums of the opposition. Their number and rate within the opposition can only be estimated. They supported the revolution which broke out in 1956 and they were on the list of the executed, the imprisoned and among those who were forced to emigrate. However, Jews were on both sides of the barricade. For other Jews, Stalin's death was traumatic, they identified emotionally with communism and went on undertaking the role of cadres. They inevitably considered 1956 to be a counter-revolution. Religious Jews supported the revolution since they hoped that the atheist dictatorship would come to an end.

The events after October 23 did not prove the fear of the revival of anti-Semitism right. It played a much less important role than it could have been expected on the basis of earlier Hungarian history. In the Rákosi era, apart from anti-Zionist measures taken by the power, there were not open anti-Semitic public actions. They were inconceivable under the circumstances of totalitarianism.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, in Hungarian political culture, latent anti-Semitism as a legacy from the past partly lived on and, as we saw, it was partly enriched with new features too. However, by 1956, people had already understood how Stalinism worked so during the revolution, when for the first time after a

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<sup>14</sup> Kiszeli, Gábor. 2000. *Az AVH- egy terrorszervezet története*. Korona. 286-315.

<sup>15</sup> The accurate figure is from an account done by Rákosi in October, 1953. published by Pünkösti, Árpád. 2001. *Rákosi bukása, száműzetése és halála 1953-1971*. Európa. 93.

<sup>16</sup> The only incident happened in Sátoraljajhely in 1949. A police investigation against Jews whipped up the anti-Semitic general public feeling. However, atrocities did not take place. cf. Pelle, János. 1990. "Sarkba szorítva. Zsidó alternatívák 1945 után 3 dokumentum tükrében." *Világosság*. no. 5.

long time, there would have been opportunities for anti-Semitic actions, anti-Semitism was not of frequent occurrence. The reason for this is partly that 1956 was about the issues raised by the system and not about the Jewish-Hungarian relationship. It was about the crimes committed in communism, to which the Jewish communism stereotype could have been attributed, but the official organs of the revolution did not do so. Rebels carefully avoided even the appearance of attempting to restore the regime between the two world wars so as not to be stigmatized as reactionaries.

According to the figures of the National Office of Hungarian Israelites, 24 bigger and smaller incidents occurred, but except for 2, the lives of Jews were not in serious danger. In Budapest - where the majority of Hungarian Jewry lived - there was one incident and a few verbal atrocities and they were generally interwoven with anti-communism. The Oral History Archive of the 1956 Institute holds a recollection of a Jewish interviewee, according to which, there was no mention of anti-Semitism during the revolution. However, in the east of Hungary, which was inhabited by poor people, atrocities took place and anti-communism took on a definite anti-Semitic overtone. People tried to take revenge for their alleged or actual damages on Jews.<sup>17</sup> Later, it was in the interest of the Kádár propaganda to label "the counter-revolution" as anti-Semitic. David Irving, the Holocaust denier, known for his extreme views, is of similar opinion, that is 1956 was an anti-Semitic and anti-communist uprising and if it had lasted longer, it would have ended in serious pogroms.

#### The Jewish Question and the Kádár Regime (1956-1989)

It can generally be said that during the retaliation after the 1956 revolution, from an ethnic point of view, the sentences passed did not have either a positive or a negative bias. Participation in an armed uprising and being a political leader carried a death sentence or a sentence of life imprisonment. Nevertheless, several researchers have raised the question about the death sentence of Miklós Gimes, who was of Jewish descent and did not play a determining role in Imre Nagy's circle, that it was necessary for the new power to demonstrate that not a Jewish-communist power was in the making in Hungary. However, when intellectuals playing a role in revolutionary ferment were called to account, writers of Jewish descent suffered heavier reprisals than populist writers of Hungarian descent. Some find it to be discrimination on ethnic grounds, while according to others, double standard was about distinguishing between communist renegades as well as unreliable elements due to their "class origin" and the new cadres from working and peasant classes produced by the communist power. In the latter, the new power would have liked to see its intellectual basis. Besides, when creating the intellectual background, not in one case (setting up the Literary Council, when selecting the editorial crew of *Népszabadság*, the new party newspaper and *Élet és Irodalom*, a weekly intellectual) naturally, they relied on intellectuals of Jewish descent as well. That is why

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<sup>17</sup> It was the case for example in Hajdúnánás, where locals believed that former Jewish labour camp inmates - who infiltrated into the local police during communism - were the ones who made the men of Hajdúnánás to be dragged away to do forced labour (*malenkij robot*) to the Soviet Union, from where only one or two men came back home. Spontaneous manifestations were forced back by revolutionary organs in a few days. However, local Jews except for a few fled the country. Völgyes, Iván. 1993. "Helyi forradalom. Hajdúnánás 1956-ban." *Nánási Füzetek*.



numerous researchers think that in connection with punishment and creating the intellectual basis, the power both "struck" populist and urban (Jewish) intellectuals and oriented itself towards them.<sup>18</sup>

It was in the Kádár leadership's vital interest to be able to differentiate itself from the Rákosi leadership. In the years of retaliation right after the revolution when trials and executions were on the agenda, it was not an easy task to do. Changing cadre policy was one of the instruments of differentiation. Kádár did not consider it "healthy" to have Jewish overrepresentation among the leadership and he was careful not to give occasion for the accusation of "Judeo-Bolshevism". Among the new leadership there were much fewer Jewish members than in the preceding period. Specialist literature adopts a point of view that in the period, it became a criterion which cadre was of Jewish descent and which cadre came from working or peasant classes. However, this statement cannot be documented with proper sureness.

Kádár's consolidation, which started at the beginning of the 1960s, meant that the political system remained the same, but the state party's policy towards society had undergone a substantial change. Kádár thought – events proved him right- that the policy of raising living standards may not only legitimize the system, but also solves problems which had been thought to be insoluble, so the Jewish question too. Due to the lack of political publicity and freedom of speech, it became easy to suppress the Jewish question as well as nationalism, which became a taboo. Only ecclesiastical questions were acknowledged as Jewish issues, but aside from this, total assimilation was offered to the Jewry. The one who does not choose this route, "with his principles, he chooses Hitler and his gas chambers" – wrote György Száráz, one of the leading ideologues of the system in 1976.<sup>19</sup> According to minutes, the Political Committee as one of the top leading organs of the system did not even deal with the Jewish question as an internal affair, they only discussed the relevance it had to foreign affairs.

Anti-Semitism disappeared from everyday life as well. The power took firm measures against the smallest atrocities and the ethnic composition of the party and state leaders was not an issue. Similarly, nobody thought of keeping in mind the intellectual elite based on their descent. However, behind the scenes of public silence, presumably a kind of latent anti-Semitism remained, whose rate is impossible to estimate. Yet, the relatively permissive cultural policy of the system in the 1970s (the system of the "three Ts": officially supported (támogatott), tolerated (tűrt), banned (tiltott) made it possible for a kind of latent pluralism to be formed on the level of political thinking. So the representatives of intellectual life, so to say unnoticed, recreated the differences between populist and urban points of views and later by the middle of the 1980s, the opposing intellectual camps themselves too.<sup>20</sup> Hidden filo-Semitic and anti-Semitic attitudes lived on in the way of thinking of the intellectual lobbies. According to András Kovács, the camps were mutually suspicious of each other and justified their activities on the grounds of either justifiable self-defence against anti-Semitism or justifiable self-defence against Jewish unity.<sup>21</sup> Stating that cadres coming from working and peasant classes were jealous of Jewish intellectuals and were (without exception) anti-Semites could be

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<sup>18</sup> Stadiesky, Éva. 2000. "Értelmiségi antiszemitizmus a Kádár-korszakban." In vol. VIII. *Évkönyv 1956-os Intézet*. 35-36. , Erényi, Tibor. 1996. *A zsidók története Magyarországon*. Útmutató. 113., Gyurgyák, János. *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*. *ibid.* 524.

<sup>19</sup> Száráz, György. 1976. *Egy előítélet nyomában*. Magvető. 265.

<sup>20</sup> Fritz, Tamás. 1997. *A népi-urbánus vita tegnap és ma*. Napvilág.

<sup>21</sup> Kovács, András. 2005. *A kéznél lévő idegen- antiszemita előítéletek a mai Magyarországon*. PolgArt. 254.

considered sweeping. However, secret service records on tapping serve as proof of supporting the view that such a group existed among populist intellectuals.<sup>22</sup> According to documents, this group believed that all key positions were still occupied by Jews, public life had become dominated by Jews and "80% of even the Catholic St. Stephen Association (publishing house of the Holy See) were Christianized Jews."<sup>23</sup> These anti-Semitic evaluations of the situation were given by intellectuals who attributed their dwindling career opportunities to racial grounds and the dominance of Jewish intellectuals. The more moderates acknowledged that the situation was better in the Kádár era than in the previous one, but thought that Jewish intellectuals clustering round the party leader prevented development in a full-fledged way.<sup>24</sup>

Those who were employed by the system to avert internal reaction infiltrated into bigger and smaller groups of society and into the life of the Jewish denomination as well. The President of the Central Board of Hungarian Jews (MIOK) himself was a recruited agent. (It is obvious that the system only tolerated servile leaders in any key position). The network swelled from the second half of the 1960s on and one of the central issues it worked on was Zionism. The term Zionism as it was used by the power could have at least 5 different meanings. It could have been used for real political Zionism, a national minority opinion, a cultural attitude, an aspiration to autonomy or as a manifestation of sympathy for the State of Israel.<sup>25</sup> Israel attached to the Western Bloc became an enemy for the socialist camp. The Kádár system adjusted to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and condemned the State of Israel when they evaluated the 1967 Arab-Israeli War although they knew that it might cause tension not only in the country but also in the ruling party itself. The Political Committee itself dealt with the issue separately. Kádár made it clear that the power would take firm measures against everybody who would oppose the official position.<sup>26</sup> However, the anti-Zionist manifestation was not followed by any anti-Semitic policy on the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP)'s part. According to a part of specialist literature, there was an anti-Zionist wave of purges of the party apparatus at that time, but other authors deny its existence. There are not currently any documents known that could support this unambiguously.<sup>27</sup> It does not preclude the possibility that the events appeared to Hungarian Jewry that anti-Semitism had strengthened. Manifestations of anti-Semitism of such proportions as took place for example in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Romania after the Six Day War, definitely cannot be talked about in Hungary. Later, during the 1973 war, Kádár did not allow such manifestations either and he simply took no notice of smaller anti-Semitic statements, disecrations of tombs occassionally arising among the people. Time has proved this policy right in that respect that by the time of the political system change, anti-Semitism among common people of Hungarian society essentially ceased to exist.

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<sup>22</sup> The phone calls of certain anti-communist, rightist persons connected with the circle of populist writers were tapped between 1957 and 1963. cf. Standiesky, Éva. "Értelmiségi antiszemitizmus a Kádár-korszakban." *ibid.* 26.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* 31-32.

<sup>24</sup> The analysis of tapped phone calls of Jewish intellectuals would definitely be desirable to be added to this material, but it is currently not available.

<sup>25</sup> It was the tradition of Hungarian Jewry to be connected with state authority. 1996. *Szombat*, no. 5. 29-30.

<sup>26</sup> Kovács, András. 2003. "Magyar zsidó politika a háború végétől a rendszerváltásig." *Múlt és Jövő*. no. 3. 35.

It actually happened in 1968, when the activities of youth religious education groups led by Artúr Geyer, Chief Rabbi and Tamás Ray, a rabbi from Szeged were revealed. Fostering Jewish identity and distribution of Israeli press were qualified as a crime of anti-state organizing. *ibid.* 25.

<sup>27</sup> cf. Kovács, András. *ibid.* 23. , dr. Kende, Péter. 1989. *Röpirat a zsidókérdésről*. 159-160. , Erényi, Tibor. 1996. *A zsidók története Magyarországon*. Útmutató. 116-117.

By the second half of the Kádár regime (1970s-1980s), transformation of the social structure in Hungary made social inequality of opportunity between Jewish and non-Jewish groups cease to exist or at least had reduced it. While earlier, the Jewish stratum of society, who were more educated from the outset, had a bigger chance of setting off in the channels of social mobility, towards the end of the Kádár era, these differences had dissolved.<sup>28</sup> Some of the taboos in connection with the Jewish question had dissolved, research into subjects related to Jews was started. During the period of the erosion of the regime, among intellectuals criticizing the system, both intellectuals of Jewish descent and of non-Jewish descent can be found. The activities of populist and urban groups intensified. From the members of the urban group, the so-called "democratic opposition" was formed, among whose members, the rate of Jews was undeniably higher. Their approach, their dispositions differed fundamentally<sup>29</sup> from the world of the peoples. Despite this fact, at the beginning, the two groups were not dominated by the views emphasizing divisions, but by the interest of the war against the common enemy, socialism. This attitude dominated till 1987, but it may be said with certain restrictions that till 1989. As Viktor Karády puts it (after the 1948 burgeoise revolution, the 1956 anti-Stalinist revolution), this period was the third great moment when Jews and non-Jews found each other. However, under the circumstances of increasing political competition accompanying the process of the formation of parties, this relative harmony was definitely doomed to dissolve. The core of the political parties were organized along different ideological views held by opposition groups comprising intellectuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds. An increased political role of the intellectuals was one of the characteristics of the system change. Since the Jewish question was latently present in the intellectual circles of these groups all the time (Jews themselves were members), it is not surprising that under the circumstances of the press getting free, it came to light. The media war for example, the debates aroused by Sándor Csoóri and István Csurka's articles were episodes of this. The rapprochement between the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), the latter having been harshly anti-communist in the 1990 election campaign (Democratic Charter, then government coalitions) resulted in the left wing getting connected with Jewry in public opinion more intensively. On the one hand, right-wing groups created the stereotype of the "Judeo-Liberal –Bolshevik" by projecting the images of their two enemies on top of each other. On the other hand, the anti-Semites hiding in the ranks of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) were criticized with an "anti-fascist" overtone by the Hungarian Socialist Party-Association of Free Democrats alliance and later they directed their criticism against the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ), which changed to a center-right political position, and extremist right. The stereotype of communist power equals Jewish power, which was born in 1919 and became fixed in the Rákosi regime, did not play a determining role at the time of the system change. The stereotypes which were being formed after 1994, however, were already closely connected to the legacy of the political socialization of the 40-year-long socialism.

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<sup>28</sup> Erényi, Tibor. *ibid.* 117. Karády, Viktor. 2001 *Önazonosítás, sorsválasztás. A zsidó csoportazonosítás történelmi alakváltozásai Magyarországon*. Új Mandátum, 71.

<sup>29</sup> Karády, Viktor. *ibid.* 75-80.