

S.J. Magyaródy: GUILTY NATION?

A segment of western historians, journalists, politicians and diplomats still, to this day, continue to judge Hungarians based on their own propaganda of the Second World War. They hold that the conservative (right-of-center) elements of the nation are extremists and anti-Semites, and make no secret of their opinion - based on biased and/or malicious information - to the extent where Washington's (lady) ambassador to Budapest openly supported the neo-Communist party during elections and was first to congratulate them at their unexpected victory.

The time has come to dispel certain unfounded myths and put Hungary's tragic role in World War II into a European context. Hungary's constrained situation can be fairly evaluated only when compared to other countries, both European and world wide.

During the decades of Communist rule, Hungarian history was simply excised from European consciousness. Browsing through history texts of the period, one must come to the conclusion that Hungary must exist on an island in the middle of a dried out sea on Mars. If we were thought of in Europe at all, or mentioned, it was to our detriment as everyone seemed to be superior, better looking and more honest than us. At least, according to them. Unfortunately, the majority of foreign historians still cling to these views.

Let us then try to examine, what really is the truth?

We never waged war against the Western Powers. Even after the Hungarian government declared a "state of war" with the US, president Roosevelt understanding our situation, never really took it seriously enough to reciprocate. Only after some hard prodding by "Uncle Joe" did he finally declared war on Hungary. Although the US Air Force frequently flew over Western Hungary, never bombed Hungarian soil until after Hitler decided to occupy Hungary and install a Quisling government.

We had an understanding with the British and US governments that if the Western forces reach our borders, we either lay down our arms, or join them against the Nazis.

Teheran and Yalta changed everything. As opposed to the Romanian and Bulgarian situation, Hitler never trusted us and kept Hungary under strict military control. When regent Horthy decided to quit the war, the Germans instantly withdraw some divisions from the front, swiftly moved them to Hungary to squelch any attempt of lay down our arms to the Soviets.

Of the countries of Europe occupied by the Germans during WWII, all - **without exception** - cooperated with them. Collaborating politicians were labelled as quislings, after the prime minister of Norway (Vidkun Quisling), who voluntarily served the Reich. The spy networks of the Gestapo worked faultlessly, from Athens to Narvik; Jews were handed over to the Germans with great enthusiasm by every country.

Anti-Semitism was not a Hungarian invention. It is difficult to believe but President Roosevelt was no great admirer of them either. The noted American historian-writer, Joseph E. Persico, writes several heretofore unknown facts in his book 'Roosevelt's Secret War' (Random House, New York, 2002, ISBN 0-375-76126-8). Among them:

1. page 218: In May of 1939, the Hamburg-America Line ship, St. Louis, carrying 930 Jewish refugees, was denied permission to dock and discharge its passengers in any American port, as well as in Canada and Cuba. The telegram sent to President Roosevelt was not answered. In the end, the ship had to return to Europe where many of its passengers perished in the Holocaust.
2. page 218: FDR suggested to Morgenthau the possibility of settling the Jews in Cameroon. "The country has excellent flat highlands and grass(!). The entire country has been explored and surveyed (ready for settlement)."
3. page 219-220: After the conclusion of the North African campaign, he made the following statement in Rabat to the French commanding general: In the professions (lawyers, doctors), the numbers of the practicing Jews should be restricted to their relative percentage of the population. This plan would circumvent the 'German problem', where Jews make up only a few percent of the population yet half of the doctors, lawyers and professors are Jewish said Roosevelt.

These are incredible - but true - facts; not a comfortable fit into the image we created of the western world. Compared to them, Hungary's *numerus clausus* and the II. Jewish law seem like mere pocket change.

In the book, the president and others deride the infamous Morgenthau Plan, as well. The President was quoted as saying: "Publishing this plan was equal to the strength of 10 new German divisions." At the same time, he refused to recognize that the principle of 'unconditional surrender, as announced in Casablanca, needlessly extended the length of the war, causing the deaths of millions - among them Jews, British, American and Canadian troops - and immeasurable amounts of damages.

Commenting on it, General Eisenhower said, "If forced to choose between the gallows and charging 20 bayonets, the bayonets are preferable." [Meaning that a fight to the bitter end is preferable to giving up to a certain fate-*ed*.] This I only mention to try and explain the dilemma faced by the leadership of Hungary. At the time - to quote an American saying - Hungary had to make a choice between two evils. Still, it is faint excuse for the horrors of National Socialism and the Iron Cross Party.

Now, let us examine some of the glorious actions of the neighbouring "victorious" countries.

Slovakia

The country, under the leadership of Father Tiso, accepted the German ideology with enthusiastic servility and placed Slovakia under the protection of the Third Reich. They allowed complete Wehrmacht access to the rail and road

systems during the attack on Poland. (This was denied by Hungary, to Hitler's apoplectic rage.) Slovakia, in tandem with Germany, attacked the Soviet Union only a few days later.

Romania

The collection and annihilation of Jews was begun by the Iron Guard and continued by the Romanian army. It has been documented that between 250,000 and 400,000 were killed - in horrific circumstances. All this without the least German urging or assistance. (The Germans only got involved in the Romanian 'Jewish question' toward the end.) This was vehemently and consistently denied until 2004 when, under pressure from Jewish organizations, they finally admitted their guilt and the head of state asked for forgiveness from world Jewry. This voluntary ethnic cleansing was recounted by Matatias Carp in his book, 'The Romanian Holocaust', which has been translated into English. Also dealing with the same topic, the writing of American professor Randolph Braham, and many others.

Romania attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, in concert with Nazi Germany. However, when Romania was unequivocally told during secret peace negotiations that she must seek terms from the Soviet Union, the country suddenly switched sides in July of 1944. As a reward, they received the northern half of Transylvania, too.

The members of the Maniu Guard, flooding in behind the Red Army, carried out a bloodbath among the Magyar minority population. It was too much even for the commanders of the Red Army who banished Romanian government from Transylvania for several months, setting up, instead, a Romanian-Magyar government under Soviet military control. (Between 1942-1944, Britain and the United States supported the creation of an independent Transylvania.)

Serbia

Tito's partisans: Let us stop here for a moment and examine how and why Communists make use of this totally inhumane form of war.

After regaining possession in 1941 of Bacska [a southern county of Hungary, awarded to Yugoslavia in 1920 at Trianon-*ed.*], the local Serbs, the imported (in contravention of the terms of the peace treaty of Trianon) settlers, the Titoist partisans and the royalist Chetniks began an orgy of killing.

According to old legal precepts, complete responsibility lies with the instigator for such acts. But no one demands culpability from the winner, only from the loser.

Since the Ukraine [during WWII-*ed.*] and the Vietnam war, we know firsthand how guerilla wars are organized and run, where the terrain offers good opportunities for concealment. The organization of the partisans is begun by several well trained soldiers, tough locals disposed to killing and brutality. They slip into a village under the cover of night, awaken a few chosen men and announce to them that, as of now, they are members of the partisan army; that they had better execute any order without hesitation, else they will be shot for

failing to execute an order. Very few will resist this 'draft notice'; those that do are shot, there and then, in front of their families. Word of this, of course, gets around and the next 'draftees' are now too frightened to offer resistance. 'Patriots' recruited in this manner go about their regular work during the day; at night, they unearth their weapons and tend their second line of work, even if with no great enthusiasm.

Firstly, those are called to account who have official contact, or are 'collaborating', with the occupiers: judges, clerks, mailmen, teachers, etc., followed by gendarmes, policemen and soldiers. As an opening, one policeman is killed one night, his body - on orders - mutilated, disfigured and dishonoured, to cause the greatest possible anger and reaction among the victim's friends and comrades.

In response, the officer / official responsible for public order begins an investigation. His enraged men begin a 'thorough' investigation to avenge their comrade's death. Someone, of course, confesses as a result of the interrogation and torture, or accuses someone else of having committed the crime. In the best case, they are handed over to the investigators; in the worst case, they are 'shot while escaping' or 'hung himself in his cell.'

The partisans now raise the stakes. In 'retaliation,' an entire squad of gendarmes is massacred, with the help of the local 'volunteers.' From this point, all hell breaks loose - an avalanche no one is able to stop. In those mixed settlements, where people have lived in relative peace for centuries, hate and antagonism now rule. In one stroke, no one trusts their neighbour.

With the mounting number of victims, fear, anger and reprisal fuels every member of the security forces. During the official 'pacification' process, fury and revenge come to the surface and indiscriminate killing begins. This is what happened in Újvidék /now Novi Sad/, too. Thus, the partisan action has reached its political goal. In a few short days, the entire world was told of the atrocities committed by the Hungarian armed forces, during which approximately 3,200 people (Serbs, Jews, Magyars and Communists) were killed. Naturally enough, the provocations that sparked the atrocity were not mentioned.

Militarily, guerilla warfare only causes minor inconvenience in densely populated, flat terrain. A well organized sabotage action against factories, power stations, bridges and transportation hubs is more effective and claims fewer victims. But the goal is primarily non-military. Tito's partisans excelled in retreating from, or avoiding, German forces; in open terrain, fighting classical infantry engagements, they not worth much.

After the war was over, though, the partisans came on the heels of the Soviet army. They threw themselves on the unarmed and, feeling safe in their sense of innocence, abandoned Magyars, Croats, recently transplanted Csangos, Rusyns, Germans and chetniks of general Mihailovich. Indiscriminate slaughter began - true to their national character and Communist principles. According to several similar sources (Tibor Cseres: Bloody revenge in Bacska; Szilveszter Matuska: Retribution, etc.), approximately 40,000 Magyars were murdered, amid indescribable circumstances.

These victims were rehabilitated in April of 2006 by the Serbian government and compensation was promised for the living successors. Nota bene: The memorials and crosses raised to the memory of the victims are regularly disfigured by the Serbs, knocked over and broken. At the same time, a memorial was raised near the bridge of Újvidék /Novi Sad to the victims of the Hungarian atrocity, which is shown to every foreigner. Their own act of genocide, greater by a magnitude of ten, is conveniently forgotten.

Although, the situation in Vietnam was, in many respects, different, the organization and recruitment of guerillas functioned in the same manner. The terrain was excellent to organize ambushes, furnish hiding places and the homogeneous, foreigner hating population ensured a high degree of effectiveness. The commanders of the Viet Cong knew that they could not wage a classic war, hence, deciding to carry out partisan acts against the Americans. They made use of Mao's principles and experiences in terror. The poor peasant, whose major wish was peace and tending his fields, had no real choice. Either the guerillas killed him for not fighting or the Americans, if he did. The majority of the 58,000 American casualties were killed by peasant guerillas who neither wished to fight, nor die.

The true war criminals were not the Magyar Sgt. Kovacs of Újvidék /Novi Sad or the American Lt. Calley of Mi Lai. There are no excuses for their horrific actions, only explanations. Yet, we must not forget the terrible ordeal they had to endure: the instant, futile death lurking behind every hut and bush, which, perhaps came as salvation; the daily maiming and injury, perhaps at the hand of a Vietnamese girl who was forced into this terrible position by the guerillas.

According to international law, war is a pointless horror. A guerilla war is the hell of hells. Who bear responsibility for it? They who made a cult of it: Stalin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Tito and their partners-in-crime, who forced this horror on humanity 'with malice aforethought.'

Czechs

In spite of the fact that the Czech armed forces were equipped with more, and more modern weapons than the Germans, they surrendered to the Germans without firing one shot. They weathered the entire war - compared to the other combatant countries - without significant losses. They supplied the Nazi military machine with armaments and ammunition, reliably and without protest. Czech factories poured forth tens of thousands of trucks, armoured cars, cannons and artillery pieces, and millions of rounds of ammunition for the Wehrmacht.

When the Red Army arrived, they were greeted as brothers - the only such reaction in Europe - and, under their protection, began the massacre and expulsion of the German minority. **They did an extremely thorough job.** Anyone interested in the magnitude and cruelty of the supposedly 'cultured' Czechs in this matter can easily find data over the Internet on Sudeten German organizations' home pages.

But they did not only kill and expel their Germans, they also did the same to their Magyar minority. It is unfortunate that, even to this day, the only

atrocities documented are the 90 teenage Transylvanian Magyar cadets massacred in the ditches outside Pozsonyigetfalu /now Petržalka/ and the killing of the German and Magyar males of the town of Dobsina. The suspected extermination of several thousand Magyar men still awaits investigation. It is also instructional to read tsarist general Konstantin Sakharov's WWI book regarding the Siberian activities of the Czech Legion. Apart from appropriating a good portion of the gold reserves of the Russian state treasury, stealing everything movable of value they came across, they also had a fondness for murdering Magyars.

The portion of the infamous Benes decrees of Kassa /now Kosice/ laws, on which the collective guilt - rejected by international law - of the Magyar and German minorities were based, still form a part of the constitutions of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The European Union conveniently overlooked this "minor" detail when these two countries were accepted for membership.

What, then, did the Hungarians do to deserve the title: GUILTY NATION? Yet, this is the tag most fondly used by both local and foreign politicians and historians.

Hungary's entry into the war against the Soviet Union had several reasons. A few are:

1. The Romanians and Slovaks joined Germany in the first days of the attack. In light of that, Hungarian leadership did not wish to risk the possibility of being excluded from the potential victory or suffer negative consequences for not having taken a side.
2. Hitler made it known to general Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, that whoever made the greatest effort in the Russian war would receive the other half of Transylvania.
3. Hitler had ready plans for the occupation of Hungary (initially using Slovak and Romanian troops), if it did not take part in the campaign. This would have taken place in the fall of 1941 when it became obvious that the Red Army could not be annihilated.
4. At the time, it was unclear who would win the war. In 1940-41, England stood alone against Germany. Popular sentiment in the United States showed no inclination to intervene until after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941).
5. Regent Horthy's advisors, operating under fear of German occupation, recommended taking part - but with minimal strength, which could also potentially save the lives of the Hungarian Jews. Remember that Regent Horthy was not indicted to face the Nurnberg tribunal and lived out his life in exile, in Estoril, Portugal, financed through a foundation by Ferenc Chorin, Maurice Kornfeld and associates.
6. The Hungarian people had ample experience, what to expect from the Red Army. There were very few families, who did not have a son, father, brother friend with the Army in the Soviet Union. They were aware, what to expect. Unfortunately, they were right....

What was not taken into consideration later?

1. Close to 200,000 Polish refugees were accepted and their travel to other destinations made possible so that they were able to join the ranks of the British organized Anders army and fight against Germany. Those who elected to stay were able to do so. The sole Polish middle school [outside Poland-*ed.*] at the time operated in Balatonboglár.
2. Thousands of French, Italian (!) and Jewish refugees were accepted and protected up until the German occupation (March 19, 1944) and even later, too, most often with the tacit agreement of the authorities.
3. Hungarian anti-aircraft and airforce units did not take action against British and American warplanes crossing its air space until the day of the bombing of Hungary (April 3, 1944).
4. Captured British and American air crews were not handed over to Germany but were housed in castles in western Hungary, making their escapes possible.
5. The tortured path for the Jews of Hungary began after the German occupation of the country on March 19, 1944. However, when the bulk of the German army withdrew, Regent Horthy stopped the deportations.
6. Adolf Eichman, the executor of the 'Final Solution', said at his trial in Israel that, in all of occupied Europe, only Hungary and Horthy dared to expel him from the country.
7. Why did we not unilaterally withdraw from the war? Among other facts mentioned earlier, a recently declassified memo from the British Foreign Office may offer a clue. An apparently highly placed official, Mr. Randal reported:

“1943, October 14

At the request of the Jewish Agency, Professor Namier asked that we not force the Hungarian government to abandon hostilities too soon as it could lead to occupation by Germany. And that could lead to the extermination of 800,000 Jews, who currently live in Hungary in relative safety.

Mr. Randal mentioned that this could be a reason why the Hungarian government has made no overture to the Allies.

Dr. Namier expressed hope that the Hungarian government will not make a move while the Germans could retaliate [to an attempted truce].

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I ask you, then, who were the truly guilty ones?

(Translated by Peter Csermely)